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**A CONTRAPUNTAL EXAMINATION OF SELECTED WORKS BY ROGER
VAILLAND AND OUSMANE SEMBÈNE, 1950 - 1960.**

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Abstract

This project, born out of interests in socialist realist texts of the 1950s and in the West African novel in French, takes works by the French journalist and author Roger Vailland and by the Senegalese writer and filmmaker Ousmane Sembène as its focus. Rather than adopting a conventional comparative approach to these writers, the thesis seeks to apply to their works the theory of contrapuntal reading proposed by Palestinian-born, American-based academic and writer Edward Said in his 1993 text *Culture and Imperialism*.

Said has elaborated his theory of counterpoint in response to his own dissatisfaction with traditional comparativism, which attempts, in his view, to consider works against the hierarchical background of the Western canon. Counterpoint has been devised in order that comparative readings be divested of that hierarchical influence. The term 'counterpoint' is a borrowing from musical terminology and reflects not only Said's interest in music, but also his ideal that textual readings should take account of all the circumstances which have produced them, however conflicting, rather than focus solely on those elements which appear to offer a harmonious reading; for Said, this often means reading aspects of imperialism in texts which do not appear ostensibly to address empire.

Several reasons may be offered for the adoption of Saidian counterpoint in this project: the first is that, while Said's books have attracted much criticism, positive and negative, no sustained critique of his theory of contrapuntal reading has yet been advanced; the second is that critics of Said frequently labour under the delusion that his observations are applicable only to English-language texts and that his rightful place is in the English Literature department, notions that this francophone-focused (in the term's most inclusive sense) thesis seeks to dispel, citing Said's clearly-stated interest in francophone culture and his avowed debt to francophone thinkers, particularly Foucault.

The francophone writers considered in this project are Roger Vailland and Ousmane Sembène, the former a metropolitan French author, the latter a non-metropolitan from the former French colony of Senegal, a country just gaining independence from France in 1960, at the closing moments of the period this thesis considers. Each of these writers is working against a background of two continents recovering from the Second World War and of increasing resistance in the colonies to being identified with the periphery. The project will consider Vailland's and Sembène's works as it reconfigures and redefines 'centre' and 'periphery'.

Works by Roger Vailland and Ousmane Sembène have been selected to fulfil Said's condition that contrapuntal readings should be undertaken of chronologically equivalent texts. By cutting across a chronological moment, the reader is able to consider the influences operating in and on given texts at the given historical moment and to read apparently disparate texts, linked only by chronology, against each other, determining whether silences and absences in one text may be rendered audible and present by elements of the other. In this way, Saidian counterpoint – proposed as a new praxis of comparativism – seeks to highlight an insufficiently acknowledged and more culturally, geographically and historically complex *champ littéraire* of 1950s literature in French.

In addition to attempting to highlight Said's right to a place hitherto denied him in francophone studies, this project will also undertake an evaluation of his theory of counterpoint, and in doing so will compensate for the gap left in Saidian studies by those critics who mention and criticise contrapuntal reading, but offer no working model of it.

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List of Abbreviations

The following are abbreviations of frequently-cited texts by Roger Vailland and Ousmane Sembène:

B = Boroboudour

BBD = Les Bouts de bois de Dieu

BPBO = Bon Pied, bon œil

CVE = Choses vues en Egypte

DN = Le Docker noir

JHS = Un Jeune Homme seul

OPMBP = O Pays, mon beau peuple

R = La Réunion

Introduction

and Review of Literature

*What to read and what to do with that reading, that is the full form of the question.*¹

¹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p.70 (first publ. London: Chatto & Windus, 1993).

The title of this project points clearly to the author's desire to undertake research focused on more than simply the work of a single writer. What is less immediately obvious, perhaps, is that the thesis is not a comparative one, in any conventional sense. This avoidance of the traditional comparative model is deliberate, since that model often depends on the assumption of a specific literary canon for its yardstick and is, besides, usually self-fulfilling in nature. Rather, this is a piece of research which seeks to consider works by two authors in the light of a theoretical model – 'counterpoint' – offered by the Palestinian intellectual Edward Said in his book *Culture and Imperialism* as an alternative to the hierarchical modes of comparativism which he identifies as the norm. Further, this research is not intended as an end in itself: it aims not only to examine the efficacy of Saidian contrapuntal reading in general, but also to consider Said's place, hitherto inadequately recognised, in French and francophone Studies.² This is not, therefore, a traditional French Studies thesis, as it has recourse to a breadth of reference which exceeds the confines that a traditional project would imply. In this, it owes a great deal to Said, whose own fields of reference are vast and often seemingly disparate; Said has adopted a nuanced version of Goethe's *Weltliteratur*, in that he champions the selection of intellectually valuable texts from a range of contexts, but does not favour the Eurocentric nature of that selection as it was made early in the twentieth century.³ In order, then, that Said's theory of contrapuntal be evaluated, something of the same breadth of reference has been retained in the preparation of this project.

² The distinction between 'Francophone' and 'francophone' is understood as follows: the former is an exclusive term, pertaining to postcolonial literature in French; the latter, an inclusive term, pertaining to the French-speaking person or to French-language texts in general.

³ Said writes: 'Goethe's ideas of *Weltliteratur* – a concept that waffled between the notion of "great books" and a vague synthesis of *all* the world's literatures – was very important to professional scholars of comparative literature in the early twentieth century. But still, as I have suggested, its practical meaning and

Before an explanation may be undertaken of the theory of counterpoint and of what it entails, the unorthodox pairing of authors must be situated contextually and the particular reasons for their selection elaborated. It is important, in terms of this project, that Roger Vailland and Ousmane Sembène share a chronological moment: the texts selected for discussion are largely drawn from their output in the 1950s and 1960s. There are other similarities: each addresses questions of race and class, for instance. As has been suggested, however, mere comparativism of this kind is not the principal interest of this thesis.⁴ Vailland and Sembène have been chosen, in addition to reasons of personal taste, because they write of the same moment from alternative perspectives, the former writing largely from the metropolitan viewpoint, from what is conceived of as the 'centre', the latter from the non-metropolitan stance, the so-called 'periphery': one of the aims of this project is to contribute to dissolution of this artificial division. It is hoped, furthermore, that the invocation of Saidian counterpoint will prove helpful in allowing the reader of Vailland and Sembène to perceive absences or gaps in each work which conventional comparativism, focusing upon textual similarities, would have left unhighlighted. Thus, the new praxis of comparativism which Said's work appears to herald will be tested and evaluated.

operating ideology were that, so far as literature and culture were concerned, Europe led the way and was the main subject of interest' (Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.52).

⁴ Traditional scholarship on the works of Roger Vailland and Ousmane Sembène is not in short supply, though in the latter's case, much of the more recent criticism centres on his cinematic, rather than his textual output. Vailland scholarship continues to benefit from the existence of the *Société des Amis de Roger Vailland*, whose annual conference and periodical series, *Cahiers Roger Vailland*, provide a forum for established scholars, as well as for less experienced researchers, and its founder, René Ballet, friend of Vailland, has written extensively on the latter's work. Reference will be made in the thesis to works of criticism which are found to be indispensable to arguments being advanced, but, given the contrapuntal project being undertaken, these references to traditional Vailland scholarship will clearly not be exhaustive. Similarly, research on the novels of Ousmane Sembène has been vast, if rather more limited in scope. Much of this research, as we shall see, has been devoted to detecting traces of French naturalism, as exemplified by Zola, in Sembène's own work, resulting in a hierarchical mode of comparativism which it is this project's intention to challenge. Other dominant research interests have included work on Sembène's female characters and on his role as African committed writer in an African society. Once again, these areas have been comprehensively investigated by other researchers, and it is not my intention simply to attempt to emulate that scholarship.

A second objective of the project is, as has been mentioned, a reassessment of Edward Said's position *vis-à-vis* French and Francophone Studies.⁵ The thesis will discuss Said's avowed debt to francophone thinkers and will seek to suggest that his work on postcolonial and literary issues should not remain solely within the confines of a monolingual English-language enclave, as it has been until this point.

This dual ambition, then, will lead, it is hoped, to the highlighting and more inclusive understanding of a hitherto divided *champ littéraire* in 1950s French-language literature, at the same time as evaluating the theory which will bring us to that new field.⁶

I. The 1950s: the Status Quo and the Tradition of the Novel

Any reader making a first foray into the vast body of criticism of 1950s fiction in French could be forgiven for thinking that the conventional novel form had been comprehensively taken over by that most challenging of innovations, the *Nouveau Roman*. Existentialism had been superseded by early novelistic hints of Structuralism, and the initial championing, by the *Nouveau Roman*, of the active reader dictated a recasting of reader-text and reader-author relations. The critical bias in favour of the *Nouveau Roman* is testament to the ground shift it provoked, but is detrimental to a panoramic view of mid-century literature and, by extension, to an informed understanding of French and francophone cultures of the period. An erroneous impression has been left of the ubiquity

⁵ The debt of postcolonial theory to French thought is a subject of some debate at the present moment: Graham Huggan's most recent book, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), makes explicit the link, and it is clear from such collaborations as that between Sartre and Léopold Senghor (see footnote 23) that French intellectuals have long been involved in issues of concern to postcolonial theorists.

⁶ Bourdieu's notion of the *champ littéraire* allows precisely the kind of unorthodox pairing made in this project, since his view is clearly that it is not necessary, in order that subjects be constitutive of a field, for those subjects to be related in any conscious way, but rather that even subjects which seem fundamentally opposed to one another may constitute a *champ littéraire* purely by dint of being allied in that opposition (Pierre Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l'art: genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1992), pp.214-58).

of the *Nouveaux Romanciers* – particularly striking given the extremely low sales of, for instance, Robbe-Grillet's *Les Gommages* – and the result is that other French-language texts have been overshadowed in criticism. This is especially problematic for the non-professional or recreational reader, whose introduction to literature in French might be a general guide, such as Valerie Worth-Stylianou's, the index of which devotes more page references to the *Nouveau Roman* than to any other use of the form from mediæval times onwards,⁷ but misleading, too, for any student of literature.

This project originated from existing interests in the construction of socialist realism in literature and in the West African novel in French;⁸ the thesis, while taking as its focus the literature of the 1950s, is not intended to be either devoted to the *Nouveau Roman*, or to an examination of metropolitan postwar fiction. It has, rather, developed into a project which seeks to take into account a literary culture which saw two continents, Europe and Africa, recovering from the second of the World Wars and preparing for the imminent process of decolonisation. A project such as this could not have been undertaken very much earlier than this: decolonisation had to be left behind before a reader could have sufficient perspective to be able to examine the ways in which social realities in Africa and in France are reconstructed in the intertwined literary histories of metropolitan and non-metropolitan fiction, and to consider how those reconstructions challenge the perceived dominance of the *Nouveau Roman*.⁹ Since, by the late 1990s, only a handful of European dependencies still remained, the time seemed ripe to initiate this project, and it is hoped that it will illuminate the neocolonial aspects of the postcolonial era. Through the reading of metropolitan fiction against postcolonial texts, of 'centre' against 'periphery', this

⁷ *Cassell Guide to Literature in French*, ed. by Valerie Worth-Stylianou (London: Cassell, 1996), p.271.

⁸ The distinction between social realism and socialist realism is an important one, and is discussed on p.10. The progress and revolution characterising the socialist realism of the 1930s finds itself codified in the 1950s.

⁹ It should be acknowledged that there is some critical support for the view that these issues are, precisely, inscribed in the *Nouveau Roman*, as is evidenced by Lynn Higgins, whose work will be discussed later in this introduction.

project will try to avoid the metrocentric bias which has proved the flaw of much centripetal criticism of non-metropolitan fiction.

The two authors selected for analysis are Roger Vailland and Ousmane Sembène: this pairing, though novel, is not arbitrary, but is designed to assess the utility of what Edward Said casts, in his 1993 text, *Culture and Imperialism*, as a 'contrapuntal' approach to intertwined literary histories. Vailland and Sembène are ideal candidates for such a test, sharing, as they do, a chronological context, but emerging from different, often conflicting, historical and cultural contexts which nevertheless are contingent, both ideologically and historically. Much of their writing occurs at the same chronological point, a fact which facilitates a contrapuntal reading, since Saidian counterpoint depends upon chronological cross-over, even collision.

The purpose of this approach is to address questions of reading practice at the present moment: the thesis will probe issues of how the *contemporary* reader might productively consider metropolitan and non-metropolitan fictions of the 1950s and 1960s. Vailland and Sembène are writers whose works have, for different reasons, been marginalised from the canon in the years following publication: Sembène, being a non-metropolitan writer, was never a canonical author, never likely to enjoy the same commercial success as a metropolitan author, and this is especially true in his own country of Senegal, where the predominantly oral cultures of small communities, allied with the expense of books and minority knowledge of French, dictated a sociology of literature which meant that he would be less read there than in the metropolitan centres. Vailland, though more commercially successful in his day than Sembène, has nonetheless been marginalised subsequently, his position as *écrivain engagé* being too overtly political for some people's taste, and his fiction has often found itself relegated to university booklists for courses on Resistance Literature, making few appearances elsewhere. This project will make no

attempt to restore either of these writers to the canon, even were such a move to be thought desirable. Rather, it will seek to demonstrate that important debates were going on outside the elite orbits of the retrospectively-created canon, and that these debates may be usefully teased out with the aid of Saidian counterpoint.¹⁰

Saidian counterpoint is used to perceive traces of one text in another: to render textual 'silences' audible; a great deal more will be said about this in the following chapter. This thesis seeks to discover to what extent the novels of Roger Vailland and Ousmane Sembène can be said to inform one another and to consider whether, for example, issues of empire crucial to West African culture at this time can be said to be present as traces in apparently 'purely' metropolitan fictions. Since the project is designed as an evaluation, related questions to which it will address itself are those of the utility of counterpoint itself, and the prospect of the refinement of the polemic from which it derives into a praxis of literary critique.

The 1950s occupy a special place in the tradition of literature in French. In contrast to the claims made by various post-war critics that French literature was suffering a further *crise du roman* at this specific point in its history, it might more usefully be thought that the novel has been and remains in perpetual crisis - as Pierre de Boisdeffre would have it, '[l]a "crise du roman" ne date pas d'hier.'¹¹ Inherent generic instability situates the fiction of the 1950s and 1960s in an evolving literary tradition, tracing the novel's progression through Existentialism, post-Existentialism, the *Nouveau Roman* and *divertissement*. Vailland's and Sembène's fictions could be considered both in terms of the inter-war socialist realist tradition, as represented by Eugène Dabit, and of the Existentialist novel, but this project

¹⁰ The canon of the 1950s would have been, arguably, composed of Existentialist texts, but the *Nouveau Roman* has been privileged in retrospect, thanks largely to attention devoted to it on North American university campuses.

¹¹ Pierre de Boisdeffre, *La Cafetière est sur la table* (Paris: Editions de la Table ronde, 1967), p.31.

will instead seek to *resituate* those authors' works in the course of elaborating what it is hoped will prove a new and valuable literary praxis which, in turn, will highlight a new *champ littéraire* of 1950s writing in French in which the (post)colonial concerns of the West African novel and of the French novel are no longer subject to the artificial divisions imposed by notion of centre and periphery.

There was a time in criticism in the twentieth century when the function of the novel in its relation to socialist realism was straightforward, when the balance between art and life appeared finely struck. Rima Reck, in the preface to her 1969 publication, *Literature and Responsibility*, states: '[a] writer must mediate between his inner needs and the actual historical world in which he lives. The choices he makes bear fundamentally upon the literature he creates. The novel reflects and deals with these choices in sensible form.'¹² The task Reck has set herself is to examine the relationship between literature and social or political responsibility; however, in recent times, parameter shifts have contrived to complicate the issue. Could any critic now use Reck's phrase, 'the actual historical world', without feeling pressurised painstakingly to define and redefine his or her terms? Reck's vision of history is of its time: hers is effectively a centripetal focus which inevitably contributes to the colonial discourse of her generation, since the centre, which already dictates much of what 'history' is recorded, is continually reinscribed. In the current climate, however, when representations of history – indeed the very nature of history – are at issue, any notion of direct, objective representations of reality is precarious and liable to attack. Indeed, since the dawn of post-modernism, readers have questioned the ability of any discourse to represent culture, becoming particularly suspicious of master narratives. The concept of history as a plural entity has gained currency since Reck's time of writing, being propagated by Foucault, whose ideas Edward Said himself may be found frequently to reinscribe.

¹² Rima Drell Reck, *Literature and Responsibility* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), p.vii.

Neither is the relationship between literature and art any less complicated in the 1950s than the criticism which seeks to evaluate it. The advent of the *Nouveau Roman* is altering French literary tastes: Realism, ubiquitous in the 1840s to 1860s – and, according to Robbe-Grillet, still holding sway, albeit in a parodic version – is becoming the movement that dares not speak its name. The *Nouveaux Romanciers* are keen to disparage this trend which invites the reader to place naïve trust in an ostensibly impartial vocabulary, a vocabulary which has no hope of achieving objective representation. In its stead, of course, the *Nouveaux Romanciers* install *chosisme*, the next best hope of an approximation to objective reconstruction, yet at the same time its collapse. When Michel Raimond, in his text, *La Crise du roman*, opines that Realism has become a ‘drame intellectuel [qui] a consisté à poser les éléments d’une tension entre la réalité et la beauté, c’est à partir de [Flaubert] que le roman apparaît comme le lieu de conflit de l’art et de la vie’,¹³ he acknowledges that representation has developed into a battle between aesthetic and moral considerations. Some remaining proponents of realism, however, remain vocal at this time, albeit that they extoll the virtues of a somewhat diluted movement: realism has lost its capital ‘R’. In 1952, Louis Aragon writes of the crucial function of art as depicting life and insists upon the continuing belief in the *réel* as the justificatory basis for art.¹⁴

What is actually at issue in the discussion of realism in the 1950s is not always absolutely explicit. Several critics, for the want of making it so, have found themselves employing the terms ‘social realism’ and ‘socialist realism’ interchangeably. Social realism, it may be argued, is a point of moderation between the purely aesthetic observational realism of ‘painting after nature’, on one hand, and the incitement to revolutionary action which is the import of socialist realism, on the other. Aragon and Sartre seem to occupy this middle ground, Aragon believing that nationhood is dependent upon the mix of the elites

¹³ Michel Raimond, *La Crise du roman* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1966), p.64.

¹⁴ Louis Aragon, *L’Exemple de Courbet* (Paris: Editions Cercle d’art, 1952), p.15.

and the masses,¹⁵ and Sartre disavowing his bourgeois background in favour of the study of real people, enduring real crises.¹⁶ Sartre is here acknowledging that it is in working-class experience that life finds its most dramatic illustrations: we shall be considering a rail strike in Sembène's fiction, for instance, set against the background of French colonialism, and the exoticism of the working classes, as it is perceived by the middle classes, will be highlighted in Vailland. In post-war literature, this social realism very often translates into a focus upon industrial disquiet and in Francophone literature into a focus upon racial disharmony and rebellion to the point of revolution against the oppressive, often imperialist, force.

European social realism has often inclined too far towards socialist realism often without any reference being made to distinctions between the two. Criticism of metropolitan proletarian fiction of this period tends, therefore, to highlight the links between its writers and the *Parti Communiste Français*, whereas a wider understanding of the proletariat as the collective of wage earners without capital, would preclude this. This can be unhelpfully reductive, especially when reinforced by errors of fact in relation to writers' political orientations. For instance, David Caute writes of Vailland that '[a]mong other things, Vailland saw in communism an escape from solitude. Yet he did not join the party until 1952'.¹⁷ Caute's implication seems to be that Vailland *chose* not to enter the fray until this time. It is a matter of history, though, that Vailland was not *accepted* as a party member until July 1952, after several applications. One must consider the possibility that Vailland's fiction leading up to 1952 could have been constructed in such a way as to impress upon the communist leadership the author's suitability for party membership. This need not, of course, be anything more than a distracting detail for most readers of Vailland and of

¹⁵ Louis Aragon, *La Culture et les hommes* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1942), p.15.

¹⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1960), p.23.

¹⁷ David Caute, *Communism and the French Intellectuals: 1914-1960* (London: André Deutsch, 1964), p.99.

committed literature in general, but it does tend to detract from the bigger picture of the Cold War and its implications, as well as seriously misrepresenting Vailland, who asked of an interviewer in 1963, 'Pourquoi voulez-vous que l'écrivain soit toujours engagé? L'écrivain bataille comme l'escrimeur; il engage, il dégage, il engage.'¹⁸ In the socialist realist tradition, in which a representation of a given individual is intended to apply to all members of the same class, race, culture etc., there is no room for anything other than universality of application. This is problematic and, it may be argued, unrepresentative of what Vailland and Sembène were trying to do in their work.

One of the most valuable tasks undertaken by John Flower's *Literature and the Left in France* is the collation and careful analysis of distinguished opinions on the nature and purpose of proletarian literature from Henry Poulaille, Pierre Daix, Jacques Larnac and others. There is no need for this project to attempt to emulate the scope of work already done. It is crucial to note, though, that frequently the working classes are engaged in a single battle, as one entity, *le peuple*, and the inevitable conflict between essentialism and solidarity which this image conjures will be important later in this project. John Flower is rightly suspicious of this broad-brush approach, saying that 'the kind of normative criticism favoured by the proponents of socialist realism is severely limited, if not worthless, when an attempt to evaluate a work as literature has to be made'.¹⁹ This project will seek to move on from this debate into a wider one, drawing into the discussion the view expounded by Edward Said in his book *Culture and Imperialism* that attempting universality of application is not only fraught with intellectual difficulties, but is also ideologically unsound, in that it artificially normalises cultural difference. The reader is ultimately faced with the dichotomy between art and representation, the dilemma of considering whether the relationship between the real and the fictional is a symbiotic one, or whether it necessarily involves compromise in

¹⁸ Pierre Dumayet, *Un Siècle d'écrivains: entretien avec Roger Vailland* (France 3: 11 February 1998). This interview was recorded on 16 March 1963.

¹⁹ John E. Flower, *Literature and the Left in France* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p.145.

both areas, leaving the reader with the worst of both worlds. A solution will be sought in Saidian counterpoint.

The study of social and socialist realism, as has already been suggested, takes its place alongside other literary interests of the 1950s, relegated in recent times to low rank, subjugated by an overarching focus on the *Nouveau Roman* as the sole arena in which the novel is now seemingly believed to have been operating at this time. The throwing into relief of the *Nouveau Roman* has obscured traces of the evolution of the twentieth-century novel. Proletarian metropolitan novels and postcolonial Francophone novels all occupy positions on this developmental curve.

The novel's evolution towards *divertissement* could be construed as symptomatic of the need to expunge postwar trauma: *divertissement* can represent a refusal to *engagement*, though of course this is not an all-enveloping scheme, with the satirical bent of Vian, for example, sitting uneasily in it. Lynn Higgins articulates the general disturbance of the postwar moment: 'The war's immediate aftermath, characterized by purges, amnesties, and internal division, paralyzed a nation incapable of dealing with the trauma, desiring only to forget and to heal.'²⁰ Yet forgetting and healing are not achieved by immediate immersion in *romans à l'eau de rose*. Rather, the need to excavate and exalt nationalistic pride comes to the fore. The effect of such nationalistic fervour upon literary endeavour immediately after the war was decisive: the Comité des Ecrivains de la Résistance produced its four blacklists of non-*résistants* and writers such as Robert Brasillach, executed in Paris in 1945, were made an example of. The *épuration* was particularly ruthless with regard to intellectual traitors. The nationalist cause had new life breathed into it after the war, yet with acute prescience, in 1924, Pierre Drieu la Rochelle wrote of its bloody demise in *Plainte contre inconnue*.²¹ As

²⁰ Lynn A. Higgins, *New Novel, New Wave, New Politics: Fiction and Representation of History in Postwar France* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), p.144.

²¹ Drieu La Rochelle, Pierre, *Plainte contre inconnue* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1924).

Rima Reck observes, 'Drieu had decided that nationalism was above all a continuation of the cult of individualism.'²² Small wonder, then, that Sartre and Existentialism captured the *Zeitgeist* so effectively.

The grassroots novels of proletarian fiction writers in the 1950s and 1960s might appear a world away from the philosophical treatises of Sartre, yet what the latter lend the former is a sense of communion with the readership. This is perhaps especially true of Sartre's involvement with *Négritude*, and his preface to Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*,²³ and it further reinforces Sartre's centrality to the French and Francophone literary scene in the middle part of the century. Nathalie Sarraute's observation, in *L'Ere du soupçon* in 1956, that 'le lecteur, aujourd'hui, se méfie de ce que lui propose l'imagination de l'auteur',²⁴ is, in fact, foreshadowed by Sartre's defence of the Existentialist philosophy a decade earlier: 'nous entendons par Existentialisme une doctrine qui rend la vie humaine possible et qui, par ailleurs, déclare que toute vérité et toute action impliquent un milieu et une subjectivité humaine.'²⁵ In this declaration can be perceived the stirrings of a philanthropic Existentialism, and this is particularly noteworthy because it contradicts our received notions of Existentialist popularity. Existentialism does have an attraction for the doggedly individualistic reader – one need only read Sartre's refutations, in *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, of the criticisms levelled at the philosophy to realise that – but it is also a reliable point of reference for the eupractic writer and reader: 'quand nous disons que l'homme est responsable de lui-même, nous ne voulons pas dire que l'homme est responsable de sa stricte individualité, mais qu'il est responsable

²² Rima Drell Reck, 'The Crises of French Nationalism in the Twentieth Century', in *The Cry of Home: Cultural Nationalism and the Modern Writer*, ed. by Ernest H. Lewald (Knoxville: Tennessee University Press, 1972), pp.133-52 (p.149).

²³ Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Orphée noir', in *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*, ed. by Léopold Sédar Senghor (Paris: Presses Universitaires Françaises, 1948).

²⁴ Nathalie Sarraute, *L'Ere du soupçon* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1956), p.59.

²⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* (Paris: Editions Nagel, 1946), p.23.

de tous les hommes.’²⁶ In a stark way, then, Existentialist writing eases the passage of two diametrically opposed traditions: its insistence that ‘l’homme n’est rien d’autre que ce qu’il se fait’,²⁷ fits comfortably with the unsentimental attempts at objectivity made by the *Nouveau Roman*, yet its emphasis upon mutual responsibility paves the way for the flavour of solidarity in the proletarian fiction of the two decades which follow.

Aware that the literature in French of the 1950s should not be considered without reference to Sartre and Existentialism, given their profound impact in their own era and, indeed, their lasting effects, let us spend a little time considering *La Nausée*. There are other reasons, specific to this project, for examining, briefly, one of Sartre’s novels: first, Sartre addresses questions of history and the flaws inherent in recording history; second, *La Nausée*, with its malaise regarding travel, is linked to anxiety over empire in the period; and third, Sartre is known to have opposed French colonial policy in Indochina and North Africa during the 1950s, a fact which bears on the present study of metropolitan and non-metropolitan texts of the period, and which is not lost on Edward Said.²⁸ This 1938 Existentialist novel revives the conundrum, as yet unresolved, of the utility and value of art. A conversation between the narrator, Antoine Roquentin, and an acquaintance known only as l’Autodidacte, illustrates issues of access and education:

L’Autodidacte: J’ai vu des jeunes gens qui ne savaient pas la moitié de ce que je sais et qui, placés devant un tableau, paraissaient éprouver du plaisir.

Antoine: Ils devaient faire semblant.

L’Autodidacte: Peut-être.²⁹

²⁶ Ibid., p.30.

²⁷ Ibid., p.30.

²⁸ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.292.

²⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Nausée* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1938), pp.143-44.

The question of cultural access is reinforced by l'Autodidacte's probing of Antoine's creative motivation: 'Monsieur, en dépit de vous-même, vous écrivez pour quelqu'un.'³⁰

Issues of target audiences and cultural limits are integral to both the *Nouveau Roman* and to more mainstream proletarian fiction in French in the 1950s and 1960s; in this sense, the Existentialist novel fuels both movements. It travels further along both paths, however, than might initially be obvious. With respect to the *Nouveau Roman*, Existentialist fiction lays the foundations for a revision of what construction of character involves. Early in *La Nausée*, it is hinted that character is, when viewed in proper light, no more than two-dimensional: '[l]e soleil était clair et diaphane: un petit vin blanc. Sa lumière effleurait à peine les corps, ne leur donnait pas d'ombres, pas de relief: les visages et les mains faisaient des taches d'or pâle.'³¹ This notion is confirmed by the manner in which characters view each other. Antoine says of l'Autodidacte, 'il a été prisonnier de guerre...je ne puis l'imaginer autrement qu'autodidacte,'³² and of his former lover, Anny, that she 'ne change guère d'expression; elle change de visage; comme les acteurs antiques changeaient de masque: d'un coup'.³³ L'Autodidacte is criticised by Antoine for the lack of holism in his approach to strangers: 'Ce ne sont que des symboles pour vous. Ce n'est pas du tout sur eux que vous êtes en train de vous attendrir; vous vous attendrissez sur la Jeunesse de l'Homme, sur l'Amour de l'Homme et de la Femme, sur la Voix humaine;'³⁴ yet Antoine himself talks of the salvation of 'le juif et la Négrresse', essentialising each as he goes.³⁵

In the Existentialist novel can also be perceived a tentative dalliance with *chosisme*: the

³⁰ Ibid., p.155.

³¹ Ibid., p.74.

³² Ibid., p.141.

³³ Ibid., p.187.

³⁴ Ibid., p.157.

³⁵ Ibid., p.227.

objectivity of objects is frequently at issue. Antoine's concern is that the object might suddenly turn subject:

Les objets, cela ne devrait pas *toucher*, puisque cela ne vit pas. On s'en sert, on les remet en place, on vit au milieu d'eux: ils sont utiles, rien de plus. Et moi, ils me touchent, c'est insupportable. J'ai peur d'entrer en contact avec eux comme s'ils étaient des bêtes vivantes.³⁶

Before the brave new world of *chosisme* heralded by the *Nouveau Roman*, the Existentialist novel continues to debate the personification of the object:

Tous ces objets...comment dire? Ils m'incommodaient; j'aurais souhaité qu'ils existassent moins fort, d'une façon plus sèche, plus abstraite, avec plus de retenue;³⁷

Et le galet, ce fameux galet, l'origine de toute cette histoire: il n'était pas...je ne me rappelais pas bien au juste ce qu'il refusait d'être. Mais je n'avais pas oublié sa résistance passive.³⁸

Notwithstanding its dilemma over objectivity, not to mention the prioritisation of the subject in its driving philosophy, the Existentialist novel takes a decisive stride towards the *Nouveau Roman* in that it approves the notion of intellectual detachment: 'Et l'IDÉE est là, cette grosse masse blanche qui m'avait tant dégoûté alors: je ne l'avais pas vue depuis quatre ans;³⁹ 'J'ai besoin de me nettoyer avec des pensées abstraites, transparentes comme de l'eau.'⁴⁰

Yet this quest for a cerebral void is not sanctioned; in *La Nausée* we see foreshadowed issues which are brought into sharp focus in postcolonial fiction later in the century. Antoine's strolls through the municipal park, for instance, set up for the remainder of the novel a sense of the ease with which a self-appointed figure of authority can retain a demagogic and apparently benign grip of a given society:

³⁶ Ibid., p.23.

³⁷ Ibid., p.167.

³⁸ Ibid., p.170.

³⁹ Ibid., p.54.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.80.

[les deux femmes] jettent de côté des regards de jeunes filles, furtifs et satisfaits, sur la statue de Gustave Impétraz. Elles ne doivent pas savoir le nom de ce géant de bronze, mais elles voient bien, à sa redingote et à son haut de forme, que ce fut quelqu'un du beau monde...c'est un peu comme si leur grand-père était là, sur ce socle, coulé en bronze. Elles n'ont pas besoin de le regarder longtemps pour comprendre qu'il pensait comme elles, tout juste comme elles, sur tous les sujets...elles n'ont plus la responsabilité de les défendre; un homme en bronze s'en est fait le gardien.⁴¹

It is just such absorption of authority which Antoine derides in Monsieur Achille: when Docteur Rogé calls him 'le vieux toqué', 'il se détend, il se sent protégé contre lui-même; il ne lui arrivera rien aujourd'hui.'⁴² Knowing his 'place' has lent Achille a security which can be compared to that of certain of the characters in, say, Sembène's *Le Docker noir*, or in Vailland's *Un Jeune Homme seul*: accepting being taken over, colluding with one's fate, means not having to fight.

Passivity does not always accompany takeover, though. In *La Nausée*, for example, there are two instances of the victimisation of children: the first by the Corsican librarian; the second by l'Autodidacte. The first example will resonate in the postcolonial novels of the 1950s:

Le Corse aime bien les élèves du lycée, parce qu'il peut exercer sur eux une surveillance paternelle. Il les laisse souvent, par plaisir, s'agiter sur leurs chaises et bavarder, puis, tout à coup, se placer derrière eux et les gronde [...]. Et s'ils protestent, il les regarde de ses yeux terribles: 'Donnez-moi vos noms.'⁴³

Antoine's subsequent defence of l'Autodidacte, and tacit sanction of his pædophile activities, is, if not quite a paradigm for French subjugation of their colonies, certainly redolent of it. The paternalistic attitude exists in tandem with a simultaneous exploitation of the vulnerable party in both cases.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.45.

⁴² Ibid., p.92.

Sartre, as we have said, is keen to expose the vagaries of recorded history, and this, too, has implications for the present study. 'History', as Sartre knows it, entails distillation and sanitisation of experience. Sartre renders this suggestion by describing the common self-justification of middle-age:

Vers les quarante ans, ils baptisent leurs petites obstinations et quelques proverbes du nom d'expérience, ils commencent à faire les distributeurs automatiques; deux sous dans la fente de gauche et voilà des anecdotes enveloppés de papier d'argent; deux sous dans la fente de droite et l'on reçoit de précieux conseils qui collent aux dents comme des caramels mous.⁴⁴

Edward Said has said that '[a]ppeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations';⁴⁵ this is also Antoine's view:

Ces historiens qui font de Lénine un Robespierre russe et de Robespierre un Cromwell français: au bout du compte, ils n'ont jamais rien compris du tout...derrière leur importance, on devine une paresse morose: ils voient défiler des apparences, ils baillent, ils pensent qu'il n'y a rien de nouveau sous les cieux.⁴⁶

Clearly, it is not only the official recorders of history whom he does not trust; neither does he have confidence in his own accounts of his own life: as Rima Reck has pointed out, 'Roquentin marvels at the men in the cafés who are able to talk about "what happened to them" with confidence. He realizes that his own existence has no form, is not a story he can tell.'⁴⁷ This is a sentiment repeated by Edward Said in interview with Jacqueline Rose, in which he says that he must tell his story 'in pieces, as it is', but he expresses what Antoine cannot, namely that experience is multi-stranded, and not a *tangible* whole.⁴⁸ Antoine considers his literary future, and thinks that he might like to write again,

[m]ais pas un livre d'histoire: l'histoire, ça parle de ce qui a existé – jamais un existant ne peut justifier l'existence d'un autre existant [...] Une histoire, par exemple, comme il ne peut pas en

⁴³ Ibid., p.210.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.94.

⁴⁵ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.1.

⁴⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Nausée*, p.95.

⁴⁷ Rima Drell Reck, *Literature and Responsibility*, p.33.

⁴⁸ Jacqueline Rose, 'Interview with Edward Said', in *Edward Said and the Work of the Critic: Speaking Truth to Power*, ed. by Paul A. Bové (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), pp.9-30 (p.9).

ariver, une aventure. Il faudrait qu'elle soit belle et dure comme de l'acier et qu'elle fasse honte aux gens de leur existence.⁴⁹

For Antoine, history as he knows it is something of a sham. He clings to the value of the aesthetic and the imaginary, yet still wishes to instil in 'real people' a sense of shame. This is profoundly connected to Edward Said's accusations against work perceived to attempt expiation for empire.⁵⁰ In Antoine Roquentin, the social realist and the artist merge. This will be an important point to consider in Said, whose appreciation for the canon is undiminished by social and moral reservations, but whose awareness of those reservations is nonetheless keenly and persistently felt.

The link between Existentialism and the *Nouveau Roman*, then, is crucial to the overview of 1950s literature in French. That link consists in what has been argued to be the dilemma over character and the subject. The more vehement critic of the *Nouveau Roman* perceives another association; Pierre de Boisdeffre invokes Gracq to suggest the inferiority of both disciplines: 'Ce que Julien Gracq écrivait naguère de l'Existentialisme est encore plus vrai du *Nouveau Roman*: son succès est directement proportionnel à l'abdication du goût.'⁵¹ Both writer and reader are implicated in this pact, each, it seems, accused of shirking any moral sense in favour of immersion in the new innovations. Indeed, 'immersion' is almost too redolent of earnest study, for de Boisdeffre claims: "Le Robbe-Grillet" n'est pas un *produit* que l'on *consomme*, c'est un *vêtement* que l'on *porte*. L'essentiel n'est pas de le *lire*, c'est de pouvoir *en parler*.'⁵² For some commentators – especially those with the conservative ideological context of Pierre de Boisdeffre – public interest in the *Nouveau Roman* is nothing more than a superficial commodification.

⁴⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Nausée*, p.228.

⁵⁰ Said writes of the need to avoid 'the rhetoric and politics of blame' and recognises that 'we are all taught to venerate our nations and admire our traditions [and to] pursue their interests with toughness and in disregard for other societies' (Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, pp.19-21).

⁵¹ Pierre de Boisdeffre, *La Cafetière est sur la table*, p.9.

Behind such cynicism lie more important implications for the question of why the *Nouveau Roman* remains ubiquitous in contemporary criticism of mid-twentieth-century fiction. Firstly, de Boisdeffre's *La Cafetière est sur la table* proffers an explanation of the death of the subject:

L'apparence d'objectivité, le soin avec lequel l'action se trouve extériorisée, la précision minutieuse et dérisoire des descriptions... ne sont là que pour souligner l'absurdité d'une représentation qui ne peut que trahir la réalité qu'elle nous cache.⁵³

Secondly, de Boisdeffre recognises the *Nouveau Romancier's* desire to involve the reader in the creative process, claiming, 'l'auteur exige la collaboration – il faudrait même dire la COMPLICITÉ intellectuelle – du lecteur qui préférera, longtemps encore, les séductions d'un art mieux accordé à la nature et à la vie;⁵⁴ and, thirdly, he makes his most crucial assertion, that 'le roman abstrait et parfois difficile à lire de M. Robbe-Grillet [...] ne plaira sans doute qu'à un petit nombre de lecteurs. Mais en littérature aussi, l'avenir appartient au petit nombre.'⁵⁵ This resonates immediately with the earlier views of Louis Aragon about art's responsibility to depict the full spectrum of life, not simply portions of it.

That the *Nouveaux Romanciers* see art as being without revolutionary responsibility is generally conceded, though clearly their sense of *engagement* is important. Celia Britton has commented on the *Nouveau Romancier's* paradoxical tendency to conflate notions of commitment:

There is something rather disingenuous about the *Nouveau Roman's* habit of mentioning them both [Sartrean engagement and socialist realism] in the same breath: as in Robbe-Grillet's formulation, for instance, that 'le réalisme socialiste ou l'engagement sartrien sont difficilement conciliables avec l'exercice problématique de la littérature'.⁵⁶

⁵² Ibid., p.9.

⁵³ Ibid., p.13.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.14.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.14.

⁵⁶ Celia Britton, *The Nouveau Roman* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p.15.

This is, indeed, an unhelpful habit, implying, as it does, that Sartre approves the notion of depicting every member of a class as a representative of that class and reinforcing, as it does, the misapprehension that the *champ littéraire* of 1950s literature is a monolithic one. Ironically enough, the *Nouveau Roman* itself has suffered enough latterly from precisely this mistaken opinion.

The 1950s literary scene was a far broader church than its often believed, with Sartre's sense of the utilitarian sitting cheek-by-jowl with the avant-gardism of the *Nouveau Roman*, and both of these proposing entirely different literatures of commitment from that offered by socialist realist writers. We ought to seek, with Lynn Higgins,

to cross borderlines between aesthetic and political concerns and to hear echoes reverberating between fiction and history. In the words of M.M. Bakhtin [...], 'The internal politics of style (how the elements are put together) is determined by its external politics (its relationship to alien discourse). Discourse lives, as it were, on the boundary between its own context and another, alien context.'⁵⁷

In fact, strides have been taken towards that very ideal: Barthes has said,

[o]n peut même dire que la littérature de gauche affermit et développe en elle tout ce qui n'est pas littérature, qu'elle vise ce degré ultime où la littérature ne serait que la *forme* rituelle de sa propre mise en question et passage direct du domaine de l'expression dans le monde réel de l'Histoire. Si ce moment vient jamais, il est possible que la littérature meure. Mais c'est parce qu'elle se sera transformée en histoire.⁵⁸

John Flower, at the conclusion of his essay, 'Socialist Realism without a Socialist Revolution: the French Experience', proposes a similarly inclusive attitude to socialist realist texts:

Beyond its relatively easily defined historical parameters [...] socialist realism does offer a number of problems of a theoretical nature. Some of these, notably structural in kind, have been examined [...]. Equally instructive for an evaluation of socialist realist works would be such matters as

⁵⁷ Lynn A. Higgins, *New Novel, New Wave, New Politics*, p.15.

⁵⁸ Roland Barthes, 'Oui, il existe bien une littérature de gauche', in *Œuvres complètes*, 3 vols, ed. by Eric Marty (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1993), II, 191-94 (p.192) (first publ. in *L'Observateur*, 15 January 1953).

common sources of imagery, registers of language, the use of authorial voice, the role given to hero (Stalin) figures, the use and accuracy of historical material, and critical and public reception. Nor is there any reason to limit such investigations to a single genre or national literature. In fact the possible perspectives are rather more complex than some of the authoritative statements about socialist realism might lead us to suspect.⁵⁹

II. Addressing the Postcolonial

Boundaries between cultural contexts are both excessively and insufficiently recognised: Edward Said would argue, as we shall see, that too much attention is paid to the subdivision of academic disciplines, for instance;⁶⁰ on the other hand, a dynamic of assimilation is often found to be at work in retrospective considerations of literary history, as outlined in our discussion of the 1950s French literary scene. 'French' is used advisedly, here, in that part of that dynamic of assimilation is the ignoring of the dialogue between contexts; even though it was 1959 before the first *Oxford Companion to French Literature* was published, it was still 1995 before Peter France took up the challenge of revising the work and renaming it *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French. Francophonie* now has an established place in anthologies of and guides to French-language texts (though even this act of appellation can be seen as a dismissive gesture); yet even now there exists a routine failure to examine the counterpoint between the literatures of metropolitan France and the (former) French colonies and dependencies.

In his 1955 text, *Discours sur le colonialisme*, Aimé Césaire asserts the responsibility of the Western world to address its own hypocrisy with regard to its colonialist past and present,

[d]e répondre clair à l'innocente question initiale: qu'est-ce en principe que la colonisation? De convenir de ce qu'elle n'est point; ni évangélisation, ni entreprise philanthropique, ni volonté de

⁵⁹ John E. Flower, 'Socialist Realism without a Socialist Revolution: the French Experience', in *European Socialist Realism*, ed. by Michael Scriven and Dennis Tate (Oxford, New York and Hamburg: Berg, 1988), pp.99-110 (p.110).

⁶⁰ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.13.

reculer les frontières de l'ignorance, de la maladie, de la tyrannie, ni élargissement de *Dieu*, ni extension du *Droit*, d'admettre une fois pour toutes, sans volonté de broncher aux conséquences, que le geste décisif est ici de l'aventurier et du pirate, de l'épicier en grand et de l'armateur, du chercheur d'or et du marchand, de l'appétit et de la force, avec, derrière, l'ombre portée, maléfique, d'une forme de civilisation qui, à un moment de son histoire, se constate obligée, de façon interne, d'étendre à l'échelle mondiale la concurrence de ses économies antagonistes.⁶¹

It is perhaps owing to disapprobatory suggestions such as this that the criticism of postcolonial literature is now a vast, and ever-burgeoning, specialism. There is a case, of course, that 'Third Worldism' and the validation of the study of (post)colonial literatures serve merely as expiation for empire, an attempt at ideological recompense for the hubris of colonial adventure. This is a distasteful impulse to some critics who believe, as Denis Ekpo does, that the so-called postmodern condition is largely the result not of Western guilt, but of a strangely self-congratulatory boredom:

[The European] is a post-man whose society, having overfed him and spoilt him, has delivered him over to irremediable boredom. Nothing, therefore, stops the African from viewing the celebrated postmodern condition a little sarcastically as nothing but the hypocritical self-flattering cry of the bored and spoilt children of hypercapitalism.⁶²

The question to which Edward Said addresses himself is why the reader so often ignores colonial or imperial contexts in the literature he or she reads. It is clear that Said believes that postcolonial literature may be approached positively, and that the impulse to do it can and should be born not out of the fruitless sentimentality and insincere guilt that Ekpo describes, but from a desire to acknowledge involvement in '[t]he great imperial experience of the past two hundred years [which] is global and universal [and which] has implicated every corner of the globe, the colonizer and the colonized together,'⁶³ and from the knowledge that '[i]t is more rewarding – and more difficult – to think concretely

⁶¹ Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme* (Dakar & Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1955), pp.8-9.

⁶² Denis Ekpo, 'Towards a Post-Africanism: Contemporary African Thought and Postmodernism', *Textual Practice*, 9 (1995), 121-35 (p.135).

⁶³ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.313.

and sympathetically, contrapuntally, about others than only about “us”.⁶⁴ It has not been an easy evolution, and it continues to be a challenge, even – or perhaps especially – when the Western urge to transform imperialism and colonialism in discourse from their raw states into apparently civilised and civilising processes has been so explicitly signalled by writers like Césaire: ‘les tortionnaires inventent, raffinent, discutent autour des chevalets.’⁶⁵

Said’s notion that no literature bears criticism in a cultural vacuum is not, in itself, a new one. A new generation has been spawned of writers who refuse to flatter our taste for *divertissement*. In the context of the British empire and its subsequent reinterpretations, the ‘universality’ of literary themes is challenged in favour of a recognition that such generic labels as ‘francophone literature’ or ‘Commonwealth literature’ give the lie to cultural difference, and acknowledging a shared global experience has been shown to be quite different from assuming a universality of human experience. As Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge put it,

Postcolonial(ism) has many advantages over the former term [Commonwealth literature]. It foregrounds a politics of opposition and struggle, and problematizes the key relationship between centre and periphery. It has helped to destabilize the barriers around ‘English literature’ that protected the primacy of the canon and the self-evidence of its standards.⁶⁶

It is ‘very easy’, say Mishra and Hodge, to relieve oneself of the responsibilities of readership in the mistaken belief that the act of reading is a neutral occupation (and the primacy of the canon is no more explicitly recognised or challenged in English Literature departments than it is in French). We must question, as Said does, for instance, the actual function of literature and divest ourselves of the notion that reading is an apolitical activity. It is not sufficient simply to acknowledge context and later disregard it; it must be integral to the function of criticism:

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.408.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp.11-12.

Most humanistic scholars are, I think, perfectly happy with the notion that texts exist in contexts, that there is such a thing as intertextuality, that the pressures of conventions, predecessors and rhetorical styles limit what Walter Benjamin once called the 'overtaxing of the productive person in the name of [...] the principle of "creativity"', in which the poet is believed on his own, and out of his pure mind, to have brought forth his work. Yet there is a reluctance to allow that political, institutional and ideological constraints act in the same manner on the individual author.⁶⁷

Such concerns permeate cultural life to such a degree that it becomes difficult to isolate those literatures which can be said to have infiltrated a given culture. Again, as Said has it: 'Who in India or Algeria today can confidently separate out the British or French component of the past from present actualities, and who in Britain or France can draw a clear circle around British London or French Paris that would exclude the impact of India and Algeria upon those two imperial cities?'⁶⁸ Still, though, there persists a belief that 'knowledge about Shakespeare or Wordsworth is not political whereas knowledge about contemporary China or the Soviet Union is'.⁶⁹

The reader may extrapolate from this view not only the critical split to which Said has referred, but also a Western denial of coevalness with the facts of empire; it is comforting to be able to confine one's interests to domestically produced, supposedly apolitical texts in the deluded belief that those very texts have done nothing to promote or to reinscribe the imperial mission. True, Said's examples on this occasion are China and the Soviet Union, but they might just as well have been India or Senegal or the Congo. The point is that the West has often viewed its own literature as edifying, recreational and entertaining, and refuses to see that literature as having a role in the subjugation of other cultures.

⁶⁶ Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, 'What is Postcolonialism?', *Textual Practice*, 5 (1991), 399-410 (p.399).

⁶⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1995), p.5 (first publ. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

⁶⁸ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.15.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.4.

In fact, this is ironically true, too, of current criticism of postcolonial theorists; Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak have, for some years, been considered the unsurpassable triumvirate of postcolonial critics – now all American-based – with much postcolonial criticism often excluding other voices, such as Edouard Glissant's, and offering conclusions which correspond to those omissions. This, of course, is a problem beyond the scope of this study and not one which can be blamed on Said; it is, however, a general flaw in a discipline trying so hard to eschew the centripetal focus to which it objects so vehemently in the canon and its adherents.

The question at stake in this project is one of the validity and/or efficacy of Edward Said's theory of counterpoint, and while it will be the task of the chapter which follows to outline that theory, it is important, at this stage, to try to offer a more general vision of Said's project, as set out in *Culture and Imperialism*, as it relates to postcolonial criticism. Said states, early in *Culture and Imperialism*:

[t]he tendency in anthropology, history, and cultural studies in Europe and the United States is to treat the whole of world history as viewable by a kind of Western super-subject, whose historicizing and disciplinary rigour either takes away or, in the post-colonial period, restores history to people and cultures 'without' history. Few full-scale critical studies have focused on the relationship between modern Western imperialism and its culture, the occlusion of that deeply

symbiotic relationship being a result of the relationship itself. More particularly, the extraordinary formal and ideological dependence of the great French and English realistic novels on the facts of empire has also never been studied from a general theoretical standpoint.⁷⁰

It is to be noted that Said does not refer, here, to the great 'realist' novels, but to the 'realistic' ones; moreover, he does not refer to 'empire', but to 'imperialism', the latter

⁷⁰ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.40.

being, for him, a system which is continually reinscribed and which 'lingers where it has always been' long after the dissipation of empire *per se*.⁷¹ The clear inference to be drawn is that all of the literature implicated in the colonial encounter, before, during and after – and this must mean virtually all literature, if 'most of us should now regard the experience of empire as a common one'⁷² – is to be considered as contributing to the debate, however inexplicitly. Hence, the works of Roger Vailland and Ousmane Sembène must be viewed not only on the basis of 'what went into [them]',⁷³ but also on what may be read into them on the (provisional) authority of other works.

Recent criticism of (post)colonial literature has tended to elide issues of metropolitan/non-metropolitan interaction or collision in favour of grappling with questions apparently 'internal' to the cultural context from which the texts emerge. Nicki Hitchcott's *Women Writers in Francophone Africa* (2000) is one such text, addressing as it does the 'tension between the individualistic act of writing and the collective tradition of African society',⁷⁴ and disclaiming – in the last few pages – the need to discuss the ideological implications of writing *in French* in an effort to 'privilege the act of writing over the politically loaded linguistic tool with which African women's texts are written'.⁷⁵

Clearly, practically speaking any text must be subject to curtailment of material, yet in the context of Saidian readings, we must be aware of the likelihood that Said would not sanction any such separation of 'the act of writing' and the 'politically loaded linguistic tool' to which Hitchcott refers. For him, these notions, once mixed, could not be extricated one from the other. It is a difficult task to treat Francophone literature in any

⁷¹ Ibid., p.8.

⁷² Ibid., p.xxiv.

⁷³ Ibid., p.79.

⁷⁴ Publisher's press release for Nicki Hitchcott, *Women Writers in Francophone Africa* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000).

⁷⁵ Nicki Hitchcott, *Women Writers in Francophone Africa* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000), p.156.

way other than that in which Hitchcott has done; Said would not dispute this, but he would, we must surmise, advocate trying.⁷⁶

Said does not consider it the aim of his project to exalt 'peripheral' texts for their own sake. His view, on the contrary, is that the kind of nativism attached to such an objective is self-destructive:

Irish people can never be English any more than Cambodians or Algerian can be French. This it seems to me was always the case in every colonial relationship, because it is the first principle that a clear-cut and absolute hierarchical distinction should remain constant between ruler and ruled, whether or not the latter is white. Nativism, alas, reinforces the distinction, even while revaluating [sic] the weaker or subservient partner. And it has often led to compelling but demagogic assertions about a native past, narrative or actuality that stands free from worldly time itself. One sees this in such enterprises as Senghor's *négritude*.⁷⁷

It is equally true that Western criticism has often sought to do nothing more with non-metropolitan literatures than to ally them to what are seen as their metropolitan inspirations.⁷⁸ This unsatisfactory situation is alluded to by Maryse Condé, in an article entitled 'Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer', in which Edouard Glissant's explanation for the perceived crisis in West Indian literature is dismissed:

In a recent interview, the Martinican writer Edouard Glissant declared: 'I don't believe that West Indian literature exists yet since literature supposes an action and a reaction between a public and an audience. I repeat that we West Indian writers, we are writing forewords to tomorrow's literature.' Last year when *Eloge de la Créolité* was published, two of his disciples, Raphaël Confiant and Patrick Chamoiseau, and a linguist Jean Bernabé repeated: 'West Indian Literature doesn't exist yet. We are in state of pre-literature. Ours is a written production without an audience at home, deprived of the interaction between writers/readers which is necessary for any literature to exist.'⁷⁹

⁷⁶ 'It is more rewarding – and more difficult – to think concretely and sympathetically, contrapuntally, about others' (Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.408).

⁷⁷ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.275.

⁷⁸ See, for example, Gilbert Darbouze, 'Les Bouts de bois de Dieu d'Ousmane Sembène: l'esthétique naturaliste d'Emile Zola dans un roman sénégalais', *Excavatio*, 11 (1998), 182-87.

⁷⁹ Maryse Condé, 'Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer', *Yale French Studies*, 83 (1993), 121-35 (p.121).

Condé accepts neither suggestion, saying instead that ‘we attribute [the crisis] to the very commands enumerated throughout the history of West Indian literature by the various generations of writers’.⁸⁰ Glissant, Confiant, Chamoiseau and Barnabé are here represented as believing that it is contemporary circumstances which thwart their efforts, whereas Condé blames a domestic literary heritage for the poor dissemination of West Indian literature among native readers. Both views lament this lack of a *home* readership. It is suggested in the article that, from the 1930s and Césaire’s *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, West Indian writers have been motivated by the social realist movement and by Sartre’s preface to Senghor’s anthology of poetry.⁸¹ Colonisation ensured that French culture permeated colonial life and aspirations. However, there is a resistance movement, an initiative of opposition; consider, for instance, Fanon’s *Les Damnés de la terre*, in which the desire to impress upon the French the existence of an indigenous culture in the colonies: ‘Si nous voulons répondre à l’attente de nos peuples, il faut chercher ailleurs qu’en Europe. Davantage, si nous voulons répondre à l’attente des Européens, il ne faut pas leur renvoyer une image, même idéale, de leur société et de leur pensée pour lesquelles ils éprouvent épisodiquement une immense nausée.’⁸²

One of the difficulties inherent in any attempt to consider colonialism retrospectively as part of Said’s project lies in finding an answer to the question: what does he hope to achieve? Certainly, expiation for empire is not a rational motivating factor and not one which he would own. He has never claimed that imperialism was an entirely ‘bad thing’ in terms of its results; rather, he has ventured simply that it *was*. Clearly, he is not ideologically sympathetic to the imperialist mindset, but he asserts that at the present moment everyone has a stake in the imperial experience, since ‘[i]mperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But its worst and most paradoxical

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.121.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp.122-23.

gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or black, or Western, or Oriental [...]. Survival in fact is about the connections between things'.⁸³ Indeed, this is a double-edged sword.

We arrive at the realisation, then, that the slippage between the necessary recognition of Francophonie in literary concerns, as exemplified by Peter France's *Oxford Companion*, and the assimilation of writings in French might as well be a yawning chasm, given the critical risk involved in addressing the two vast bodies of writing together. What Said calls 'oppositional criticism' is therefore at a critical stage in its evolution, confronting questions of cultural difference and questions of cultural holism with a burgeoning and disquieting awareness that recognising one set might well risk obfuscating the other.

III. The Canon, Comparativism and Edward Said

Traditionally, when two 'culturally different'⁸⁴ bodies of texts have been considered in tandem, it has been within the established framework of 'comparative literature'. Edward Said identifies the most significant difficulty with these comparative approaches to literature as being their characteristic tendency to generate hierarchies, since comparisons are usually drawn qualitatively: whenever the 'canon' is used as a benchmark for literary evaluation, texts being analysed are immediately relegated to higher or lower rungs of that well-established ladder. It cannot be surprising to find, therefore, that comparativism turns out to be something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. If a reader is truly interested in different

⁸² Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1991), p.376 (first publ. Paris: Maspéro, 1961).

⁸³ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, pp.407-08.

⁸⁴ For more on this term, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'How to Teach a "Culturally Different" Book', in *The Spivak Reader: Selected Writings of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, ed. by Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp.237-66 (first publ. in *Colonial Discourse, Postcolonial Theory*, ed. by Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen: Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993).

perspectives of a single moment in history, hierarchies must be eliminated as far as possible to facilitate that reading.

Susan Bassnett's 1993 text, *Comparative Literature: a Critical Introduction*, treats the genealogy of comparativism, beginning with the truism that '[m]ost people do not start with comparative literature, they end up with it in some way or other, travelling towards it from different points of departure'.⁸⁵ Bassnett acknowledges, at various points, that the Western reader is accustomed to thinking in terms of "great" literatures, of "majority" versus "minority" literatures', and that, gradually, other perspectives have been brought to bear on our concept of the canon.⁸⁶ She writes of Wole Soyinka's struggle to have African literature recognised by Western English Literature departments and of the tendency to consider all such literature in terms of its anthropological value, rather than its literary worth. (This tendency is still marked: the 1994 Bristol Classical Press edition of Camara Laye's 1953 novel, *L'Enfant noir*, makes much of the novel as anthropological glossary.⁸⁷) When Bassnett writes that '[c]omparative literary study in the 1990s will have to work with the recognition of colonialism and all its implications as having been, indeed, a two-way thing',⁸⁸ she not only introduces ideas that she will later develop (and which will be discussed later in this project) about the inherent defects of travel literature, but she also nods in the direction of Said's thesis about the problems of hierarchy implied in the traditional model of comparativism.

The question of what Said is railing against is relatively easy to answer. The canon has long been defended by renowned and vocal intellectuals against precisely the sort of revisionism which critics identify in Said's challenges. Of these intellectuals, Harold Bloom

⁸⁵ Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: an Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p.1.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.6.

⁸⁷ Camara Laye, *L'Enfant noir*, ed. by Joyce A. Hutchinson (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1994), p.19 (first publ. Paris: Librairie Plon, 1953).

is, perhaps, the best known. Bloom's 1994 text, *The Western Canon*, attempts to demonstrate the inalienable centrality of Shakespeare to the canon. Unfazed by complaints that Shakespeare is an undesirable literary oracle, given the irrefutable facts that '[he] is dead, white, English and male',⁸⁹ and intolerant of non-Westerners who wish to expunge Shakespeare from their literary histories,⁹⁰ Bloom laments the partial success of the canonical revisionists: 'Expanding the canon,' he says, 'tends to drive out the better writers.'⁹¹ He ventures further, saying that he has 'resisted the backward reach of the current canonical crusades, which attempt to elevate a number of sadly inadequate women writers of the nineteenth century, as well as some rudimentary narratives and verses of African-Americans'.⁹² The extent to which such conservative attitudes hold sway is, it seems, anybody's guess. Terry Eagleton, in his review of Bloom's 2000 text *How to Read and Why*, opens with the withering comment that 'Harold Bloom was once an interesting critic',⁹³ and Bloom himself apparently concedes his limited influence, disingenuously asserting that '[c]ultural prophecy is always a mug's game' and that 'critics do not make canons'.⁹⁴ If this is so, it would seem at odds with the observations of Joanne Coles, of *The Times*, who was despatched to interview Bloom at the end of 2000: she notes that,

[s]uch is his reputation, both as a first-class teacher and celebrity academic, that Bloom can handpick his students from a long list of supplicants. Each Wednesday afternoon, the chosen few arrive, at least 30 minutes early, to ensure a seat at 'the table'.

Such is the rush that those who arrive merely on time find themselves sitting on the floor.⁹⁵

Unlikely, then, that Bloom's influence, or that of the 'traditional' academy, is on the wane.

⁸⁸ Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: an Introduction*, p.91.

⁸⁹ Jennifer Wallace, 'Is all the world still his stage?', *The Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 11 September 1998, p.22.

⁹⁰ Bloom is not alone in this intolerance: Jennifer Wallace points out in the above-named article that, '[s]ome of the most vociferous are Hindu fundamentalists, who campaign for a return to India's cultural roots and to her vernacular writers. Ania Loomba is fearful of their influence, considering them conservative and "highly patriarchal". "They just want to replace Shakespeare by creating an alternative Indian canon"' (ibid., p.22).

⁹¹ Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon* (London: Macmillan, 1995), p.540.

⁹² Ibid., p.540.

⁹³ Terry Eagleton, 'The Crack of Bloom', *Observer*, 20 August 2000, p.30.

⁹⁴ Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon*, p.548.

Edward Said, one of the most controversial and respected theorists of the late twentieth century, hopes to open up new canonical perspectives with his theory of 'counterpoint'. Using this theory, he proposes a reading practice which permits one chronological moment to be viewed from alternative perspectives: in postcolonial studies, this often involves what is termed the 'reversal of the gaze', in which a colonising nation will be considered from the perspective of the colonised one. In a series of conversations with David Barsamian, Said has said, with reference to the role of his adopted country, the United States, in the Israeli peace process: 'It's no longer a bipolar world. There's only one pole. The U.S. sets the rules.'⁹⁶ This fundamental position holds for other contexts, for Said. He proffers his theory of counterpoint in order to allow understanding both of action and of resistance, of colonising and colonised, of strong and weak; in short, of both poles, whatever the context.

Comment upon Said's interaction with the canon has been relatively sparse, but Jonathan Arac's article in *Boundary 2* does engage with this issue, and does so with the aid of a term coined by Arac himself: 'hypercanonization.' Arac argues that hypercanonization came into being in the 1940s in the United States, with the distorted media identification of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* as quintessentially American and anti-racist, to the exclusion of all other literary qualities. This text is Arac's central example, but he offers others which also highlight the complacency he argues has been engendered in the American academy by such exaltation. This complacency has even extended, according to Arac, to academic deafness to those African-American voices which were raised in protest against what they perceived to be the racist elements of the text. He allies himself with Said and his notion of the secular intellectual in what he considers a battle to appreciate literature on its

⁹⁵ Joanna Coles, 'There are no great English novelists', *The Times*, 28 November 2000, p.26.

⁹⁶ Edward W. Said and David Barsamian, *The Pen and the Sword: Conversations with David Barsamian* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1994), p.151.

various merits and to offer an alternative, a counterpoint – should it be needed – to the consensus view. Even Arac, though, concedes,

In my book on *Huckleberry Finn*, I do refer to Said's contrapuntal criticism, but I did not write the book as a whole to illustrate his critical procedures. I am using this essay to think back over what I did to see how it may be illuminated by the suggestions Said makes. It is in the very last chapter that I invoke his notion of counterpoint. I do it to open the geopolitics of *Huckleberry Finn* to a perspective beyond that of American nationalism.⁹⁷

It is a function of this project to offer precisely the thoroughgoing evaluation of Saidian counterpoint eschewed by writers who otherwise 'use' his material.

It is, of course, an interesting irony that Said, having so long championed the cause of resistance of all kinds, should himself have become a lynchpin of the intellectual establishment. Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin have called this phenomenon 'this apparent contradiction – the success of an oppositional critic'.⁹⁸ Perhaps, though, this absorption into the mainstream was inevitable: Bayoumi and Rubin also note that

it is [his] quality of speaking out on the side of the oppressed that puts Said in the long tradition of engaged intellectuals, people like Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Angela David, Frantz Fanon, Noam Chomsky, C.L.R. James, James Baldwin, Malcolm X, and Huda Shaarawi, those who seek, as Marx once noted, not just to interpret the world, but to change it.⁹⁹

It is possible that the change in the world effected by Said and these others resides simply in the addition of their names to the critical lexicon. There is, however, another explanation, particularly in the case of Said, which is that, at root, his is paradoxically a rather conservative intellectualism. He has readily admitted in interviews to this characteristic, saying that,

With the emergence of fields like ethnic studies, gay and lesbian studies, with the rise of urgent political or identitarian political issues, [the idea that the classroom is a place where certain subjects

⁹⁷ Jonathan Arac, 'Criticism between Opposition and Counterpoint', *Boundary 2*, 12 (1998), 55-69 (p.62).

⁹⁸ Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin, *The Edward Said Reader* (New York: Vintage, 2000), p.xv.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.xii.

are studied according to prescriptions other than the investigation of knowledge or truth] has again become an issue. I have very old-fashioned ideas about these sorts of things [...]. Literary study entails a kind of rigor [*sic*]. There exists an old, interesting, and very rich tradition that doesn't have any value today. By tradition I don't mean only in the past, back in the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, but a tradition that continues through the work of the great philologists of the nineteenth century: Alexander von Humboldt, Silvestre de Sacy, Mommsen, and later, people like Curtius, Spitzer, and Auerbach, and the great French scholars like Massignou. I think that it is important to renew that tradition.¹⁰⁰

This urge to revive such tradition entails a concomitant distaste for current trends in education, which Said took the opportunity to denigrate in his capacity as President of the MLA. He wrote, in the Association's newsletter in Spring 1999 that 'departments [were] certifying students to be experts in English, French, and German literatures but actually giving them more Habermas, Derrida, and Hegel to read than Joyce, Flaubert, and Schiller'.¹⁰¹

It is partly due to his fears of a skewed educational programme that Said seems happy to profess himself a conservative:

It may seem odd, but it is true, that in such matters as culture and scholarship I am often in reasonable sympathy with conservative attitudes, and what I might object to in what I have been describing does not have much to do with the activity of conserving the past, or with reading great literature, or with doing serious and perhaps even utterly conservative scholarship as such. I have no great problem with those things.¹⁰²

In turn, Said's success as an oppositional critic must be explicable partly by a more general conservatism which renders more palatable the indisputable radicalism which surfaces in some areas of his work.

Said approaches, by degrees, his theory of counterpoint, elaborating first his concept of 'worldliness'. Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia have reduced this notion to first principles, saying that '[t]he intellectual's capacity to say anything relevant in his or her society cannot

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp.435-36.

¹⁰¹ Edward W. Said, 'Restoring Intellectual Coherence', *MLA Newsletter* (Spring 1999), p.3.

¹⁰² Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic* (London: Vintage, 1991), p.22 (first publ. London: Faber, 1984).

dispense with the concept of worldliness, for without worldliness the intellectual can have no world from which, and to which, to speak'.¹⁰³ It is the complex interrelation of writing and speaking with geographical location that informs much of Said's work and which has led to the decision to offer a chapter on each of the themes of 'place' and 'voice' in this project. Inextricably linked to these two, and forming the third element of what may be considered a tripartite structure of identity, is memory, another theme to which a chapter is devoted.

This attempt to examine identity is, perhaps, the most problematic question of all when it comes to tackling Said. He has, after all, claimed that '[i]dentity as such is about as boring a subject as one can imagine' and that he now, rather than clinging to what he sees as his identity, cherishes his 'perpetual self-invention'.¹⁰⁴ The reason that identity, as Said describes it, is problematic is that he can often be seen to contradict himself. From this last quotation, it may be assumed that identity, for him, is a wholly constructed idea, yet this fits neither with his concept of worldliness, nor with his theory of counterpoint, which we shall discuss in the following chapter. He does not claim, elsewhere, to be an independent, but instead asserts: 'I am affiliated. I am not afraid of publicly identifying myself.'¹⁰⁵

We must proceed, then, from the premise that identity is important – perhaps, paradoxically, even rendered the more important by Said's occasional refutation of its significance. It is arguably vital to his concept of worldliness, which, in turn, is the indispensable foundation for his methodology of counterpoint and for the contrapuntal study of Roger Vailland and Ousmane Sembène which we are about to undertake. It will be the task of this thesis to determine, via the consideration of place, voice and memory in

¹⁰³ Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, *Edward Said* (London: Routledge, 2001), p.29.

¹⁰⁴ Edward W. Said, 'Between Worlds', *London Review of Books*, 20 (1998), pp.3-7 (pp. 5-7).

Vailland and Sembène, whether there is any merit in Edward Said's contention – surely true of his own work – that '[c]riticism is primarily performance, not prescription'.¹⁰⁶ Said consistently laments what he perceives to be the academic miasma of separation, as colourfully expressed in the following extract from *Culture and Imperialism*.

In various academic departments – among them literature, philosophy, and history – theory is taught so as to make the student believe that he or she can become a Marxist, a feminist, an Afrocentrist, or a deconstructionist with about the same effort and commitment required in choosing items from a menu. Over and above that trivialization is a steadily more powerful cult of professional expertise, whose main ideological burden stipulates that social, political, and class-based commitments should be subsumed under the professional disciplines, so that if you are a professional scholar of literature or critic of culture, all your affiliations with the real world are subordinate to your professing in those fields. Similarly, you are responsible not so much to an audience in your community or society, as to and for your corporate guild of fellow experts, your department of specialization, your discipline. In the same spirit and by the same law of division of labour, those whose job is 'foreign affairs' or 'Slavic or Middle Eastern area studies' attend to those matters and keep out of yours.¹⁰⁷

It is this profound and persistent separation which Said addresses also in his article, 'Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community', in which he notes the insularity of academic discourse ('People who write specialized, advanced, i.e. New New, criticism faithfully read each other's books'),¹⁰⁸ but also highlights the redeeming potential of the

¹⁰⁵ Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin, 'An Interview with Edward Said', in *The Edward Said Reader* (New York: Vintage, 2000), pp.421-43 (p.439).

¹⁰⁶ Edward W. Said, 'The Franco-American Dialogue', in *Traveling Theory: France and The United States*, ed. by Ieme van der Poel and Sophie Bertho (Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1999), pp.134-56 (p.134).

¹⁰⁷ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.389.

¹⁰⁸ Edward W. Said, 'Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community', in *Modern Literary Theory: a Reader*, 2nd edn, ed. by Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (London, New York, Sydney and Auckland: Arnold, 1992), pp.248-58 (p.251) (first publ. in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. by Hal Foster (London: Pluto Press, 1985), pp.135-56).

fact that 'no one writes simply for oneself [...] [t]here is always an Other'.¹⁰⁹ Said's theory of counterpoint is designed, in part, as an alternative to this artificial categorisation and it will be evaluated through metropolitan and non-metropolitan francophone texts in order to eliminate as far as possible the maintenance of false division so detested by Said.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.250.

Chapter One

Edward Said and the Methodology of Counterpoint

My homemade resolution of the antitheses between involvement and theory has been a broad perspective from which one could view both culture and imperialism and from which the large historical dialectic between one and the other might be observed even though its myriad details cannot be except occasionally. I shall proceed on the assumption that whereas the whole of a culture is a disjunct one, many important sectors of it can be apprehended as working contrapuntally together.¹

¹Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.234.

I. Edward Said Today

Ato Quayson, in his recent text *Postcolonialism*, has written that Edward Said's work 'has impacted so widely on both individuals and disciplines that it can even be seen as having taken its place as a "cultural" product, spawning not just interdisciplinary appropriations but also a familiar usage in popular culture'.² Said has, in recent years, become an instantly recognisable media figure, one of the triumvirate of canonical postcolonial theorists which also includes Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha.³ His recent press has been at best superficial and at worst libellous. When Patricia Rozema's film adaptation of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* was released in 1999, reviews frequently invoked Said, largely, apparently, to lend weight to the review, rather than to cast any light on the film itself. Peter Bradshaw commented in *The Guardian*, 'Since Edward Said's writings on the subject, every wised-up Jane Austen fan knows that her decorous drawing room world was at least partly financed by the evil of slavery'.⁴ This uncritical and flattering invocation of Said's work is balanced, at the other end of the spectrum, by wholesale rejection of his claims to have been a refugee from Jerusalem in 1947.⁵ Reception of Said's memoir *Out of Place* in 1999 was at times so hostile that, as Gary Younge put it, again in *The Guardian*, 'the attack put Said in the Kafkaesque situation of brandishing documents to prove that he is in fact who he has always said he was'.⁶ None of this press is likely to have proved particularly helpful to anyone making a first foray into Said's work.

² Ato Quayson, *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice or Process?* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2000), p.4.

³ Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (London: Verso, 1997), for instance, focuses almost exclusively on these three theorists.

⁴ Peter Bradshaw, 'Licence Pays Off in Modern Look at Austen', *The Guardian*, November 16 1999, p.10.

⁵ Justus Reid Weiner, "'My Beautiful Old House" and Other Fabrications by Edward Said', *Commentary*, 108 (1999), p.1

⁶ Gary Younge, 'Struggles of the Artist', *Guardian*, 17 January 2000, p.14.

The first point of contact with Said's work is likely to be with his best-known and best-selling text, *Orientalism* (1978), which provoked a deluge of media interest and academic criticism, as it attempted to revise visions of the Orient by means of demonstrating that Western attitudes to and representations of Oriental cultures had in fact been instrumental in creating knowledge about them. Said proposed the idea that Orientalism as a notion was actually a Western construct, and that Western neuroses about, as well as infatuations with, the Orient were of the West's own making. Richard Lockett's review of *Orientalism*, upon publication of the British paperback edition in 1982, sums up Said's agenda thus:

To be an Oriental is to be imprisoned within the *idée reçue* of Orientalism, which starts with the writing down of grass and springs but is ultimately, for Mr Said, 'imaginative geography', operative philosophically as 'a form of radical realism', rhetorically as 'absolutely anatomical and enumerative', and psychologically as 'a form of paranoia'. The question most likely to exercise the reader of this book is whether Mr Said is himself paranoid and, beyond that, whether, in such a case as this, the terms of the diagnosis are not doomed to have the status and the taint of symptoms.⁷

Without entering too deeply into the debate on Orientalism, which is an adjunct – yet an inevitable pre-text – to the project in hand, one must nevertheless take note of the language in operation here: Said has long suffered from accusations of paranoia, and his work has been subject to the additional, more valid observation that 'the passions that are his unhappy (Oriental) birthright prevail over the falsified rationalities of his (Occidental) education'.⁸ The positing of the question of paranoia on Said's part has led to the more invidious allegations of outright lies which have been seen in the press since the publication of Said's memoir, *Out of Place* in 1999; as for the supposed cultural schizophrenia which some critics have claimed to detect in his work, and which Lockett outlines above, it is by no means certain that Said would not embrace such a notion. His work is undoubtedly polemic, and self-consciously so: it is arguable that Said would see his public literary presence as being, in large measure, symptomatic of his private cultural

⁷ Richard Lockett, 'On Inhumane Discourse', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 10.3 (1982), 271-81 (p.272).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.281.

complexity. Besides, Said does not proffer *Culture and Imperialism*, the text with which this project is concerned, as a perfect model of moderate scholarship: he calls it ‘a corrective’ to ‘[d]efensive, reactive, and even paranoid nationalism [which] is, alas, frequently woven into the very fabric of education, where children as well as older students are taught to venerate and celebrate the uniqueness of their tradition (usually and invidiously at the expense of others).’⁹ For this project, Said is invoked precisely to offer an alternative to the kind of conservative scholarship which has existed in French Studies, and which has largely excluded Saidian theory from its debates.¹⁰ So it is with an acceptance of the polemical nature – and, therefore, the marginalisation from some contexts – of Said’s work that this project proceeds.

It is also with an awareness of Said’s continuing scholarship that the project is undertaken. A proliferation of articles have emerged in the years following the publication of *Orientalism* which underline the primary position of that seminal work in postcolonial studies: ‘Orientalism and After’; ‘Orientalism Revised’; ‘After Orientalism’, to name but three.¹¹ For the ordinary reader, the popular distillation of *Orientalism* can be an alarming obstacle to a fresh and open reading: as Eqbal Ahmed comments in the introduction to David Barsamian’s transcripts of conversations with Said, ‘*Orientalism* is virtually a classic; its argument is learnt by osmosis and it is cited even by those who have not read it’.¹² This would be concerning enough in the non-professional reader, but it is also striking how few

⁹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.xxix.

¹⁰ There are some exceptions: the special issue of *Esprit créateur* on *Orientalism*, for instance, and the work of Azzedine Haddour both invoke Said in the Francophone context: John D. Erickson and Ali Behdad, eds, *L’Esprit créateur*, 34.2 (Baton Rouge: L’Esprit Créateur, 1994); Azzedine Haddour, *Colonial Myths: History and Narrative* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

¹¹ Anne Beezer and Peter Osborne, ‘Orientalism and After: an Interview with Edward Said’, *Radical Philosophy*, 63 (1993), 22-32; Nasrin Rahimieh, ‘Orientalism Revised’, *Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée*, 16 (1989), 154-60; Rosalind O’Hanlon, ‘After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism, and Politics in the Third World’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 34 (1992), 141-84.

¹² Eqbal Ahmad, introduction, in Edward W. Said and David Barsamian, *The Pen and the Sword: Conversations with David Barsamian*, pp.7-22 (p.7).

serious academics have publicly engaged with the work Said has published since, and especially with *Culture and Imperialism*.

II. Counterpoint: What it is and How it Works

In June 1992, before the publication of *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said granted an interview to Anne Beezer and Peter Osborne for *Radical Philosophy*. The interview, entitled 'Orientalism and After', retraced old ground and foreshadowed new, essentially in the form of discussion of *Culture and Imperialism*, which would be published for the first time in the United States in 1993. During the interview, Said said of his work:

The overriding of one discourse by another is what it's all been about. And I'm interested not only in the way the two co-exist, but the way in which you can read the works with these concerns in mind and, by a process of what I call contrapuntal reading, transform the works into the enabling conditions of a decolonising critique.

This is what I try to do more explicitly in my new book, *Culture and Imperialism*. It becomes possible, for instance, to read *Mansfield Park* from the point of view of the Antigua plantation of the Bertrams, instead of reading it from the point of view of Mansfield Park. And we can see in that reading the origins not only of the slave revolt in Santo Domingo, but the whole tradition of Caribbean writing that comes out of it: the work of C.L.R. James and Lamming and Eric Williams. At this point, in my opinion, *Mansfield Park* becomes an even more interesting novel, even greater for containing within itself this possibility of reaccommodating it to something else, to another kind of reading, to a different interest.¹³

Said conceives of a literary criticism which necessarily takes account of the chronological moment of writing and of reading, and of multiple possible visions of that moment. History and, especially, geography cannot be seen as somehow monolithic entities if reading is to be truly informative. This is Said's concept of 'worldliness', which will be discussed in due course.

¹³Anne Beezer and Peter Osborne, 'Orientalism and After: an Interview with Edward Said', *Radical Philosophy*, 63 (1993), 22-32 (p.23).

Said tells the reader of *Culture and Imperialism* that

[i]n practical terms, 'contrapuntal reading' as I have called it means reading a text with an understanding of what is involved when an author shows, for instance, that a sugar plantation is seen as important to the process of maintaining a particular style of life in England.

Moreover, like all literary texts, these are not bounded by their formal historic beginnings and endings. References to Australia in *David Copperfield* or India in *Jane Eyre* are made because they *can be*, because British power (and not just the novelist's fancy) made passing references to these massive appropriations possible; but the further lessons are no less true: that these colonies were subsequently liberated from direct and indirect rule, a process that began and unfolded while the British (or French, Portuguese, Germans etc.) were still there, although as part of the effort at suppressing native nationalism only occasional note was taken of it. The point is that contrapuntal reading must take account of both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it, which can be done by extending our reading of the texts to include what was once forcibly excluded - in *L'Etranger*, for example, the whole previous history of France's colonialism and its destruction of the Algerian state, and the later emergence of an independent Algeria (which Camus opposed).¹⁴

This early citation from *Culture and Imperialism* suggests that a *single* text is liable to contrapuntal analysis; by the end of the book, Said claims that texts ought to be read together, saying that 'if every American student were required to read Homer, Shakespeare, the Bible and Jefferson, then we would achieve a full sense of national purpose'.¹⁵ Said's thesis, in effect, has been to elaborate a new praxis of literary criticism which entails the excavation of a comparative approach without resort to notions of hierarchy; he may be seen, in this regard, as having taken his cue from the stirrings of self-awareness in the comparatists' school represented by Susan Bassnett. The starkest manner in which this theory is put to use is in comparative studies of colonial and metropolitan literatures. The reader may extrapolate from this a way of cutting across a chronological moment in literary history which ought to allow Said to highlight a more complex grasp of the *champ littéraire* which has hitherto been hidden from view, to begin to reassess the importance, even the content, of the canon and to resituate in different contexts some of the creative artists working within it.

¹⁴Ibid., p.79.

¹⁵ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.388.

While the consensus would appear to be that Said's work is not sufficiently explicit in its definition of what contrapuntal criticism *is*, a general consideration of texts he has written and interviews he has given at least yields a clear sense of the preoccupations which have led to the theory's elaboration. In their *Edward Said Reader* (2000), Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin, former doctoral students of Said, note that '[f]or Said, it was imperative that literary criticism not lose sight of its own conditions in the world and the political circumstances that demanded critical attention'.¹⁶ This notion reminds one of the vociferous debate undertaken in the *Times Literary Supplement* during 1993 between Said and the anthropologist Ernest Gellner, who had reviewed Said's *Culture and Imperialism* in the same organ. Further reference to the series of exchanges will be made later in the thesis, but for the moment let us turn to Gellner's review itself. His inflammatory parting shot was that '[t]he problem of power and culture, and their turbulent relations during the great metamorphosis of our social world, is too important to be left to lit. crit.'. ¹⁷ While subsequent exchanges degenerated into personal slights on the bases of scholarly inadequacy and questionable integrity, the question of the relationship between literary criticism and politics remains at issue. Said characterised the 'snide comment about lit. crit.' as symptomatic of 'patronizing bad faith and complicity with imperial power'.¹⁸ Gellner's response is sneering: 'Was it the exegeses of *A Passage to India* which brought down the Empire?'¹⁹ For the reader, there is an overwhelming sense of the unfairness of Gellner's specific comments here, even if other of his remarks can be seen to have some validity. Said's project has been to bring literary criticism out of its ivory tower, not to invite political debate into that tower, a crucial distinction to which Ernest Gellner has been, apparently, oblivious.

¹⁶ Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin, eds, *The Edward Said Reader*, p.xxvi.

¹⁷ Ernest Gellner, 'The Mightier Pen?', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 19 February 1993, p.4.

¹⁸ Edward W. Said, 'Culture and Imperialism', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 4 June 1993, p.17.

¹⁹ Ernest Gellner, 'Culture and Imperialism', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 11 June 1993, p.17.

Linked to this preoccupation with broadening the horizons of literary criticism is Said's desire for what might be described as literary transparency, or openness. Bayoumi and Rubin interviewed Said on many subjects for the conclusion of their reader: he told them that '[a]s a child, [he] had read a lot – Walter Scott, Conan Doyle, Alexandre Dumas, Dickens, Thackeray – and [he] had acquired a very strong background in what [he] would call not just novels of adventure, but *novels of openness* – novels where everything seems available to you'.²⁰ It is, arguably, just this kind of inclusiveness that he tries to discover in every reading of every text, and he seeks to establish, via counterpoint, a reading practice which will facilitate such inclusiveness.

Before Said's methodology of counterpoint reaches his literary study, his interest in it can be traced to an existing admiration for Glenn Gould, the Canadian pianist and conductor.

In *Vanity Fair* in 1983, Said wrote,

as you listen to his music, you feel as if you are watching a tightly packed, dense work being unfolded, resolved almost, into a set of intertwined links held together not by two hands but by ten fingers, each responsive to all the others, as well as to the two hands and the one mind really back of everything.²¹

Six years later, in 'Performance as an Extreme Occasion', Said added:

Gould extended the limited theatrical space provided by performance as an extreme occasion to one whose scope includes speech, time as duration, an interlude from daily life that is not controlled by mere consecutiveness.²²

It is this quite complex view of temporal concerns that is of interest, as far as counterpoint is concerned. Chronology, as we shall see later, is important, but in an untyrannical way. 'Mere consecutiveness' is to be abandoned in favour of a more

²⁰ Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin, eds, *The Edward Said Reader*, p.421.

²¹ Edward W. Said, 'Glenn Gould's Contrapuntal Vision', *Vanity Fair*, May 1983, p.98.

²² Edward W. Said, 'Performance as an Extreme Occasion', in *The Edward Said Reader*, ed. by Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin, pp.317-46 (p.339).

enlightening, albeit more problematised, notion of time. This idea, for Said, comes back to Gould and his ability to toy with dictated time. He comments, in an interview with W.J.T. Mitchell, that ‘the way Glenn Gould played Bach or some composer – you’re not only getting the music but also a kind of intelligent commentary on it’.²³ This is what Said has in mind, I think, for reading practice: that each reader should read every text in such a way as to elaborate, at the same time, his or her informed commentary on it, without slavishly following only its apparent structure and unquestioningly observing its apparent boundaries. As he says to W.J.T. Mitchell, ‘[t]he narrative [...] is a function of speaking from a place’.²⁴ Said’s own history, too, he is happy to relate in this way: Jacqueline Rose quotes his *After the Last Sky*, at the beginning of an interview with him, and reminds him of his fondness for being able to discard this kind of ‘mere consecutiveness’ in order ‘[t]o tell your story in pieces, as it is’.²⁵

Tracing Said’s *explicit* interest in literary counterpoint is not an easy task: even in *Culture and Imperialism*, in which this theory is offered as a serious alternative to more conventional ones which are heavily influenced by canonical concerns and where contrapuntal criticism is explicitly discussed more than twenty times, Said fails to list it in the index. The roots of Saidian counterpoint can be detected, though, even in Said’s first major publication: a book based on his doctoral thesis, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography*, published in 1966. In the preface to this text, Said addresses the question of why he has chosen to research the interplay between Conrad’s letters and his short fiction, writing that, ‘[i]n short, [he] found it difficult to believe that a man would be so uneconomical as to pour himself out in letter after letter and then not use and reformulate his insights and

²³ W.J.T. Mitchell, ‘The Panic of the Visual: a Conversation with Edward W. Said’, in *Edward Said and the Work of the Critic: Speaking Truth to Power*, ed. by Paul A. Bové (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2000), pp.31-50 (p.33).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.44.

²⁵ Jacqueline Rose, ‘Edward Said Talks to Jacqueline Rose’, in *Edward Said and the Work of the Critic: Speaking Truth to Power*, pp.9-30 (p.9).

discoveries in his fiction.’²⁶ Said claims that in the course of his research ‘[Conrad’s letters] appeared to form an organic whole and to fall naturally into groups that corresponded to stages in Conrad’s developing sense of himself as a man and as a writer’.²⁷ Though more akin to contextualisation, rather than to Said’s evolved theory of counterpoint – in that only a single body of texts is addressed – this analysis is one of the earliest clues a student of Said can find to the interdisciplinary tendency which would lead to counterpoint. Said goes further, though, claiming that ‘when [the letters] are considered as Conrad’s personal history [...] they coincided not only with the fulfillment [*sic*] of his desire for self-discovery, but also with the climax of an important phase of European history: this is the period of World War One.’²⁸ It is said of Conrad that ‘he was himself so many different people, each one living a life unconnected with the others: he was a Pole and an Englishman, a sailor and a writer’;²⁹ Said’s project is to *make* connections, in the hope that ‘[his] study of the letters and the shorter fiction together is sufficiently large in its major concerns to provide the outline for an integral reading of Conrad’s total *œuvre*’.³⁰ This reading is not explicitly described as contrapuntal, but is clearly the seed for such an approach which will germinate in Said’s later work: even at this early stage of his publishing career, Said realises that ‘[s]uch a reading not only gives new insights into and solutions for the difficulties of the fiction, but also accounts for much of the fiction’s success and power’.³¹

Throughout the Conrad project, Said hints at the essence of a contrapuntal theory: his reading of Conrad’s *A Personal Record* (1909-1912) yields the observation that ‘[a]

²⁶ Edward W. Said, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), p.vii.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.vii.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.viii.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.viii.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.viii.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp.viii-ix.

connection is established between writer and sailor that is economically expressed in the common pattern of rescue. The sailor rescues, the writer is rescued: the writer renders properly the fidelity and piety that the sailor has observed.³² Moreover, when Said considers the attitude of Conrad to the notion of truth, the reader perceives early traces of the ideological basis for the contrapuntal theory: Said asserts that 'truth for Conrad was [...] the negation of intellectual differentiation'.³³ Said himself arguably adopts this belief, albeit in attenuated form, for his ideal of literary comparativism divested of hierarchy, which he later will suggest that counterpoint facilitates.

Later in Said's *œuvre* – ironically, in his book *Beginnings* – further development of his (as yet unnamed) contrapuntal theory can be detected in the form of a link between text and historical or chronological moment: it is stated that

each historical moment produces its own characteristic forms of the critical act, its own arena in which critic and text challenge one another, and thereby its own depictions of what constitutes a literary text. Consequently, it is wrong to pretend that there is a single notion of text, constant for all literary criticism, just waiting to be discovered. There is definite value, however, in recognizing the philosophical prejudices that have operated, from antiquity to the present, when editors are 'establishing a text'. For there is an entire history and philosophy surrounding the notion of a reliable text, a history and a philosophy as varied as often as they are concealed, and the editor who takes the naively positivistic attitude that a text can be finally secured on the page does so in unjustified bad faith.³⁴

Said is resistant to textual objectivity, and sees a text as being, rather,

a multidimensional structure extending from the beginning to the end of the writer's career. A text is the source and the aim of a man's desire to be an author, it is the form of his attempts, it contains the elements of his coherence, and in a whole range of complex and differing ways it incarnates the pressures upon the writer of his psychology, his time, his society.³⁵

For Said, text cannot be divorced from context:

³² Ibid., p.123.

³³ Ibid., pp.137-38.

³⁴ Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p.195.

³⁵ Ibid., p.196.

The text acts in two directions: toward the past, which gains in actuality, and towards the present, which gains in knowledge. In these instances the material existence of a text, quite apart from its use or its interpretation, has a unique intellectual and historical value. Always this value derives from a text out of a past whose contemporary privileged relevance is derived from the enhanced or restored fact of its preservation in textual form.³⁶

Beginnings, though, edges still nearer to Said's (provisionally, for it could never be absolutely) final contrapuntal theory. He discusses Thomas Kuhn's characterisation of scientific texts, writing that

[t]he printed texts begin the act of defining a discipline by truncating history, by making it seem as if history begins from a discrete, determinable point and proceeds thereafter in a straight line. Such a presentation thus invents an image of history to which, in its neatly edged peripheries, the text corresponds.³⁷

Said's concentration, in the first chapter of *Culture and Imperialism*, on 'overlapping territories' and 'interwined histories' is integral to his contrapuntal theory, and is largely what sets it apart from other, more conventionally linear conceptions of history.³⁸ His awareness that '[e]very user of the text is caught within the net of relationships (which includes editors, scribes, traditions, and schools) that involves any instance of the text as a variant of any instance' and that '[t]he distinguishing mark of the critic is that he, more than the scribe, is aware of the *family* relationships between texts, whereas all other "consumers" are satisfied with a vague knowledge of kinship among versions of the same text' precludes the possibility of rigid histories or isolated texts.³⁹ Said's own awareness of these 'family relationships' stems, clearly, from the breadth of his literary education; it is this which allows him to elaborate a new genealogy of literature. Where once comparative studies of literature permitted only what might be termed 'first-cousin' relationships (for instance, the common comparison of Ousmane Sembène with Emile Zola which

³⁶ Ibid., p.198.

³⁷ Ibid., p.203.

³⁸ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, pp.1-72.

³⁹ Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, p.208.

identifies naturalism as its point of convergence),⁴⁰ they can now envelop apparently much more distant relationships, as this project will propose with Sembène and Vailland.

The last signpost offered by *Beginnings* to this contrapuntal theory is given in the concluding paragraph of the text, where Said suggests directions for further research for himself and for his readers:

In the course of studying for and writing this book, I have opened, I think, possibilities for myself (and hopefully for others) of further problematics to be explored. Some of them are: the question of language as an object of speculation, as an object occupying for the writer a privileged first place; the formal and psychological question of the interdependence of literary and sociological approaches in dealing with how English, for example, is at once a national and a world language (for some writers a first and for others a second language); the question of comparative literature itself, in terms of dispersion among themes, motifs and genres, in which beginning is an absolutely crucial step, the question of the cultural domination of one intellectual or national domain over another (one culture is more “developed” than – having begun earlier and “arrived” before – another; and the question of liberty, or freedom, or originality as they obtain in complex social and intellectual orders of repetition, These are studies to which I hope our moral will shall be equal – if in part *this* beginning has fulfilled its purpose.⁴¹

As has been signalled, Said’s efforts to broaden this perspective to include, for example, French and Francophone works have not always been rewarded with critical attention, leaving the long out-dated impression that the English-language context is the only one in which he is interested. The contrapuntal theory will indeed take into account the problematics highlighted by Said, as we shall see.

Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography and *Beginnings: Intention and Method* are not texts which could be identified as strictly contrapuntal, but they show early signs of the contrapuntal methodology, in that they begin to address Said’s concern with what might be called ‘worldliness’, the result of his anxiety to confront what he sees as a destructive

⁴⁰ See, for example, Gilbert Darbouze’s article, ‘*Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* d’Ousmane Sembène: l’esthétique naturaliste d’Emile Zola dans un roman sénégalais’, *Excavatio*, 11 (1998), 182-87.

⁴¹ Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, p.381.

tendency towards academic compartmentalisation. This ‘worldliness’ manifests itself in the elaboration of counterpoint in *Culture and Imperialism*.

Said is often attacked for exploiting his own position in the world, which he expresses as what many see as a pseudo-exilic stance, yet he is the first to acknowledge the relative strength of his position. He concedes, in *Culture and Imperialism*, that

while it would be the rankest Panglossian dishonesty to say that the bravura performances of the intellectual exile and the miseries of the displaced person or refugee are the same, it is possible, I think, to regard the intellectual as first distilling then articulating the predicaments that disfigure modernity – mass deportation, imprisonment, population transfer, collective dispossession, and forced immigrations.⁴²

This is an integral idea in his concept of worldliness and should not, therefore, be seen as merely a justification for a perceived reshaping of the truth. Among the more valid criticisms of Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* is that which suggests that the brilliance of his scholarship cannot obscure the fact that no working model for this contrapuntal approach is actually advanced. The most protracted of his exemplars, as has been suggested above, is his essay on Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, yet even this can be argued to have been dissected with nothing more than a merely deconstructive approach. Said does suggest that Albert Camus is a writer ‘[who] survives today as a “universalist” writer with roots in a now-forgotten colonialism’⁴³ and whose work benefits from a contrapuntal reading, and this section of *Culture and Imperialism* will prove interesting at a later stage of this project.

The genealogy of counterpoint is a topic from which many critics have shied away. Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, longtime students of Said, have recently produced a critical guide to Said’s writings, a guide which is, by its nature, often descriptive in nature, but which, nonetheless, offers clear explanations of Said’s efforts to highlight themes and

⁴²Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.403.

⁴³ Ibid., p.208.

discourses other than those which are dominant.⁴⁴ In their book, Ashcroft and Ahluwalia note that, for Said, '[c]ontrapuntality identifies the constant overlap and interchange, the continual counterpoint and contestation that occur within the actual domain of cultural resistance.'⁴⁵ It is to be supposed that, with Said's increasingly prominent role in cultural theory, more recent critics – who do make mention of his contrapuntal methodology – would be in a position to offer a more detailed and thoroughgoing critique of counterpoint. This has not always proved to be the case. Valerie Kennedy's book of 2000, *Edward Said: a Critical Introduction*, shows a sound understanding – hitherto undeveloped – of the rationale for Said's project, in that it makes reference to 'a community of readers' and to the necessary duality of his theory.⁴⁶ Kennedy recognises that 'Said does not explain in any detail what exactly the process involves', and goes further, to assert that 'his concept of contrapuntal reading is more successfully embodied in his textual analyses than in theoretical exposition',⁴⁷ and that Said provides a 'model of contrapuntal reading'.⁴⁸ The first of these opinions is, to some extent, valid: there is no absolute and comprehensive definition of what Said understands by counterpoint contained in *Culture and Imperialism*, however, the notion that his textual analyses make good this deficiency is erroneous. It is precisely Said's failure to offer a thorough working model of the methodology that is at issue. It is not only in this that Kennedy is mistaken. She tends to conflate notions of counterpoint and hybridity which, though they are intimately related, are not identical.⁴⁹ She also blithely reiterates a misapprehension of other students of Said, namely that it is merely the English-language canon that he seeks to reappraise.⁵⁰ It is partly due to this kind of misreading that Said is marginalised from French and

⁴⁴ Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, *Edward Said* (London: Routledge, 2001), p.93.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.106.

⁴⁶ Valerie Kennedy, *Edward Said: a Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p.97.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.107.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.122.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.106.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.108.

Francophone Studies, and it is not redeemed by a casual reference to Fanon in almost the same breath in which English novels, apparently in exclusivity, have been mentioned.

This thesis proposes the kind of working model of Saidian counterpoint that Said's own work fails to offer. It will also attempt to broaden the erstwhile narrow focus on Said's work as the only possible orbit for discussion of counterpoint. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, in their *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, acknowledge, to a point, the breadth of application of this reading practice, but their entry for contrapuntal reading still remains too focused on English-language texts and too close to a definition of deconstruction: '[t]he overarching implication is the extent to which English society and culture was grounded on the ideology and practices of imperialism.'⁵¹ By accepting Said's premiss – that considering a chronological moment can yield mutually informative readings of that moment from two cultural (often polarised) standpoints – the project will seek to move on from the narrow focus implied by earlier students of Said to evaluate the effects of a contrapuntal reading upon some of the works of Roger Vailland and Ousmane Sembène.

Edward Said wrote in his 1984 text *The World, the Text and the Critic*,

[l]ike people and schools of criticism, ideas and theories travel - from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another. Cultural and intellectual life are usually nourished and often sustained by this circulation of ideas, and whether it takes the form of acknowledged or unacknowledged influence, creative borrowing, or wholesale appropriation, the movement of ideas and theories from one place to another is both a fact and a usefully enabling condition of intellectual activity. Having said that, however, one should go on to specify the kinds of movement that are possible, in order to ask whether by virtue of having moved from one place and time to another an idea or a theory gains or loses in strength, and whether a theory in one historical period and national culture becomes altogether different for another period or situation. There are particularly interesting cases of ideas and theories that move from one culture to another, as when so-called Eastern ideas about transcendence were imported into Europe during the early nineteenth century. Such movement into a new environment is never unimpeded. It necessarily involves processes of representation and institutionalization different from those at the point of origin. This complicates any account of the transplantation, transference, circulation, and commerce of theories and ideas.⁵²

⁵¹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (London and New York, 1998), p.56.

⁵² Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, p.226.

This process of revision, continually renewed as theory travels from one location to the next, is actually *uniquely* complicated. For example, one of the interesting accompaniments to recent enthusiasm for postcolonial criticism has been its intimate, but contradictory, relationship with what has come to be known as 'political correctness'. In his review of Said's *Culture and Imperialism*, Timothy Reiss comments,

[t]he entire controversy about so-called political correctness and multiculturalism has been largely created by those who want to maintain the imposition of Western culture and its ethical, political, aesthetic and epistemological ideals and agendas, while pretending they are doing no such thing. It is no 'imposition,' they say, because it represents universal human nature, appealing to the permanent core of humanness.

For them, to historicize literature (or art in general) is to lose ideals, jeopardize absolute truth, and relativize (always a worthy red herring) knowledge and morality. Worse yet, it is to imply that there may be more than a single spectrum of standards and value - or that it may be far wider than the West's has recently been - and that each of them has first to be given an equal measure of attention.⁵³

The roots of Said's studies in counterpoint are terminologically musical, as we have seen - partly as a consequence of his role as semi-professional pianist, partly due to his admiration for Canadian musician Glenn Gould - but they can be argued, in reality, to lie in his interest in geography: the interrogation of culture in his works derives from an appreciation of the importance of place to creative endeavour. Thus, historicisation is entirely bound up with geographical concerns. When Timothy Reiss writes that nineteenth- and twentieth-century artistic works '[make] a new map of the cultural sphere to which they relate, one whose determinants are not to be found simply in - on - the territory of the colonized victim, but in the hegemonic needs of the imperial conqueror,' he is recognising the centrality of geographical manipulation to the imperial process; when he additionally reiterates Said's belief that '[t]here is no untrammelled map (there never was)', he is, paradoxically, acknowledging the ease with which such manipulation can be

⁵³Timothy J. Reiss, 'Cultural Hegemony or Cultural Exchanges? From Monody to Counterpoint', *Annals of Scholarship*, 10 (1993), 393-400 (p.393).

effected when these supposedly powerful geographical constraints are, in fact, found to have no real basis in history.⁵⁴

It is an interesting, if unfortunate, fact that there has been no *sustained* critique of Saidian counterpoint undertaken to date:⁵⁵ from a reading of *Culture and Imperialism*, several writers and theorists have borrowed the term and (mis)applied it to subject areas of their own choosing, certainly, but the substance of the theory has been left untouched, or, as John MacKenzie has it, Said's 'main fronts' have been left 'unmolested'.⁵⁶ The nearest approximation to a true engagement with contrapuntalism it has been possible to find has been Kadiatu Kanneh's article, "'Africa" and Cultural Translation: Reading Difference', which has more far-reaching implications than its African focus would suggest. In it, Kanneh notes that,

[r]eading Africa as a textual subject requires an awareness of how cultural interpretations inform one another: colonial anthropologies, travel narratives, ethnophilosophies and literary representations form a tissue of African narratives which often only make sense with reference to each other.⁵⁷

This question of 'making sense' involves more than mere syntactical comprehension: Said's quest for a cohesive academy, rather than one which is composed of sundry 'specialists', will entail the kind of breadth of cultural awareness to which Kanneh alludes

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.394.

⁵⁵ An article in *Theory into Practice* in 1998 attempts a working model of counterpoint in the classroom, supposedly in an effort to play a part in ridding the school environment of the remnants of imperialism. The writers suggest that '[t]o introduce contrapuntal pedagogy, teachers might first demonstrate the interpretive [*sic*] technique by sharing with students their own readings of an orientalist and a postcolonial text. Students could then be asked to write responses to the two texts they are reading in a split-page response log' (Michael Garbutcheon Singh and James Greenlaw, 'Postcolonial Theory in the Literature Classroom: Contrapuntal Readings', *Theory into Practice*, 37 (1998), 193-202, (p.201)). This would seem an excessively binary deployment of contrapuntal analysis and one which takes little account of the shift which has occurred from colonial discourse analysis to a more sophisticated consideration of chronology and geography.

⁵⁶ John MacKenzie, 'Occidentalism: Counterpoint and Counter-polemic', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 19 (1993), 339-44, (p.339).

⁵⁷ Kadiatu Kanneh, "'Africa" and Cultural Translation: Reading Difference', in *Cultural Readings of Imperialism: Edward Said and the Gravity of History*, ed. by Keith Ansell Pearson, Benita Parry and Judith Squires (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1997), pp.267-89 (p.267).

here. Further, Kanneh refers later to ‘the necessary gap between mysterious difference and the knowable familiar’ and claims that ‘the predication of mystery allows the obliteration of dialogue, placing interpretation only within the narcissism, of authority’.⁵⁸ This is one of Said’s own key concerns: if a certain reading practice does indeed predicate mystery, as has been the case in the past, and which Said discusses in depth in *Orientalism*, the Other is further marginalised from the self-regarding metropolis, or from the West, or from whichever power base it is that is constructing the mystery. The balance of power is already awry and this allows postcolonial studies to be viewed with suspicion as constituting a monolingual, anglophone enclave: hence, as Kanneh points out, ‘[c]ultural translations of “weak” by “strong” languages take place within an ideology which insists, not on a transference, but on a *conferral* of meaning from one to another. In this way, the object of translation offers up, not a text to be *read*, but latent significance to be *written*.’⁵⁹

Kanneh’s obvious understanding of Said’s position(s) does not preclude implicit frustration with the finished product. She discusses ‘narratives [which] explore the confrontation of colonial domination with indigenous social order where a simple choice between two monoliths – “the West” and “Africa” – are [*sic*] no longer possible. The conditions for *thinking* this choice are also the very conditions which create the ambiguity and nostalgia that profoundly complicate it’.⁶⁰ It is, perhaps, this stumbling block which has prompted Charles Forsdick to call Saidian counterpoint ‘a *potential* movement beyond restrictive binary versions of the colonial encounter’.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp.270-71.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.275.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.284.

⁶¹ Charles R. Forsdick, ‘Edward Said and the Limits of Counterpoint’, in *Post Theory: New Directions in Criticism*, ed. by Martin McQuillan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp.188-99 (p.194).

Kanneh implicitly wrestles with the three main themes which this project will examine in relation to two French-language authors, Ousmane Sembène and Roger Vailland, place, voice and memory: in her article, these are alluded to in terms of colonialism, dialogue and nostalgia. She leaves hanging one of the most challenging issues in Saidian studies:

If ethnographical knowledge, conditioned by colonial histories of domination, repeatedly translates otherness into its own systems of imposed meaning, would not an insistence on interrelatedness perform a similar movement?⁶²

Kanneh is hardly the first of Said's readers to ask, one way or another, how the theorist plans to rid criticism of one set of hierarchies without replacing it with another. This is an important question which in turn has bearing upon Said's own position as an intellectual: the once radical theorist must now face his status as establishment figure. These are issues to which this project will return.

III. Why French and Francophone Studies Need Said

The final question of why Edward Said has been invoked in this project is one which can be answered by resort to his intellectual formation: Said has acknowledged his debt to a number of francophone thinkers over the years, not the least of whom is Michel Foucault. The popular contemporary view of Said is as controversial political commentator, but even academic circles perceive his work in literary criticism as being rightly restricted to the confines of the English Literature department. Said asserts in *Culture and Imperialism*,

What I am saying about the British, French, and American imperial experience is that it has a unique coherence and a special cultural centrality. [...] Since narrative plays such a remarkable part in the imperial quest, it is therefore not surprising that France and (especially) England have an unbroken tradition of novel-writing, unparalleled elsewhere. [...] There is something systematic about imperial culture therefore that is not as evident in any other empire as it is in Britain's or France's and, in a different way, the United States'. When I use the phrase 'a structure of attitude

⁶² Kadiatu Kanneh, "'Africa' and Cultural Translation: Reading Difference', p.274.

and reference', this is what I have in mind. Second is that these countries are the three in whose orbits I was born, grew up, and now live. Although I feel at home in them, I have remained, as a native from the Arab and Muslim world, someone who also belongs to the other side. This has enabled me in a sense to live on both sides, and to try to mediate between them.⁶³

It would seem odd, then, that a thinker who arouses the strength of critical response, be it positive or negative, that Said does has only in the last few months seen his *Culture and Imperialism* translated into French, particularly when the earlier *Orientalism*, prefaced by Todorov, had already appeared in French.⁶⁴ When Said claims that '[t]he imperial conquest was not a one-time tearing of the veil, but a continually repeated, institutionalized presence in French life, where the response to the silent and incorporated disparity between French and subjugated cultures took on a variety of forms', he insists upon the continuing influence of empire on French literature, on any analysis of that literature and on the temporal and geographical histories which France shares with other cultures.⁶⁵ Said's positioning of himself as within the 'orbits' of France, Britain and the United States is crucial to an understanding of this point: his comprehension of literature, of politics and of life is predicated on the belief that all experience is hybrid. It is notable that even recent French postcolonial analyses have failed to engage to any great extent with Said's output: Jean-Marc Moura's *Littératures francophones et théorie postcoloniale* (1999), for instance, mentions *Orientalism*, but relegates *Culture and Imperialism* to a brief inclusion in the bibliography, despite the claim, on the cover of Moura's text, that

[c]e livre voudrait poser les bases d'une étude renouvelée des lettres d'expression française, à la lumière du vaste ensemble de recherches connu, dans le monde anglo-saxon, sous le nom de Postcolonial Studies.⁶⁶

⁶³ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.xxv-xxvi.

⁶⁴ *Culture et impérialisme* was heralded in *Le Monde des livres* as 'un livre magistral, à tous les sens du terme' (Daniel Vernet, 'De l'impérialisme culturel', *Le Monde des livres*, 24 November 2000, p.10).

⁶⁵ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, pp.39-40.

⁶⁶ Jean-Marc Moura, *Littératures francophones et théorie postcoloniale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), back cover.

The mere fact that Moura has an interest in Said at all, however, is unusual: of sixteen academic contributors to a 1997 collection of essays inspired by Said's work, none (though some reference is occasionally made to French-language material) is a specialist in any area of French Studies.⁶⁷

It has already been asserted that Said owes a debt to Foucault and it is notable that his admiration for this thinker lies in his tendency towards the theatrical as a means of achieving openness or transparency.⁶⁸ It might even be said that Said's love of Glenn Gould's particular performativity is linked to Foucault's theatricality. Said tells W.J.T. Mitchell,

[t]here is [...] a distinctly theatrical component in [Foucault's] work, as if epistemology were a theatrical instrument of some sort [...]. I recall, in particular, *Les Mots et les choses* – and I think I was was one of the first people to write about it after it came out in France – I remember reading it with tremendous excitement and realizing that Foucault's epistemology always had a kind of visual correlative, the notion of the table, or the tableau, the notion of the theme, the notion of transparency, and so on, which you couldn't always yourself visualize.⁶⁹

In this project, the contrapuntal approach advocated in *Culture and Imperialism* will be applied to the fiction of Roger Vailland and Ousmane Sembène, and to illustrate further the rationale behind such an approach, one can do no better than to quote Said's own citation from T.S. Eliot's *Critical Essays*: 'No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone.'⁷⁰ Thirty years later, Barthes was postulating much the same belief about the linguistics of narrative:

⁶⁷ *Cultural Readings of Imperialism: Edward Said and the Gravity of History*, ed. by Keith Ansell Pearson, Benita Parry and Judith Squires (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1997).

⁶⁸ An example of this admiration for Foucault's recourse to the theatrical may be found in Edward W. Said, 'Foucault and the Imagination of Power', in *Foucault: a Critical Reader*, ed. by David Couzens Hoy (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp.149-55, in which Said remarks that '[Foucault] gives voice to both [his discomfort with his own genius and with an anonymity that does not suit him] in the effacements of self that accompany the brilliant rhetorical display occasioned by his self-presentation (an inaugural *leçon* at the Collège de France) that opens *L'Ordre du discours*' (p.152).

⁶⁹ W.J.T. Mitchell, 'The Panic of the Visual: a Conversation with Edward W. Said', p.42.

⁷⁰ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.2, quoting T.S. Eliot, *Critical Essays* (London: Faber, 1932), pp.14-15.

Nous appelons 'sens' tout type de corrélation intra-textuelle ou extra-textuelle, c'est-à-dire tout trait du récit qui renvoie à un autre moment du récit ou à un autre lieu de cataphore, bref de 'diaphore' (si l'on me permet ce mot), toutes les liaisons, toutes les corrélations paradigmatiques et syntagmatiques, tous les faits de signification et aussi les faits de distribution. Je le répète, le sens n'est donc pas un signifié plein, tel fût-il du récit; c'est essentiellement une corrélation, un corrélat, ou une connotation.⁷¹

While one would imagine that the hierarchical structure of which Barthes writes would sit uneasily with Said's egalitarian view of fiction, it is clear that the Barthesian concept of mutual dependency of textual units finds a vocal supporter in Said. His conviction is that cultures and literatures inform one another as a result of a complex network of historical and geographical overlaps.

The glib assertions of literary criticism of old – for instance, that Shakespearean drama is as relevant for any audience today as it was at the time of writing because human nature transcends generational and cultural boundaries – provide scant enlightenment for Said. Universality of application is a concept, he appears to suggest, which derives from imperial arrogance and is propagated by 'totalistic theories of human history'⁷² that are shored up by educational processes, both formal and general, which teach us to value the merits of our own culture above any other. The salient point in Said's polemic, as regards literary criticism, is that while the reader believes that he or she is a neutral and competent assessor of the aesthetic product, there is, rather,

a quite serious split in our critical consciousness today, which allows us to spend a great deal of time elaborating Carlyle's and Ruskin's aesthetic theories, for example, without giving attention to the authority that their ideas simultaneously bestowed on the subjugation of inferior peoples and colonial territories.⁷³

⁷¹ Roland Barthes, 'Analyse structurale du récit', in *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. by Eric Marty, 3 vols (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1993), II, 839-59 (p.845) (first publ. in *Recherches de sciences religieuses*, 58 (1970); repr. in *Exegèse et herméneutique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1971)).

⁷² Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.4.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.12.

Said wishes to tackle the 'powerful if imprecise notion that works of literature are autonomous'.⁷⁴ The essence of counterpoint is that it is deemed to widen awareness of the influences of hegemony, and to assist with the identification of hegemonic discourse in a given literature:

[a]s we look back at the cultural archive, we begin to reread it not univocally but contrapuntally, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts.⁷⁵

Moreover, Said wishes to suggest that any unwittingly imperialist account of history must be considered as a reconstruction, rather than as a reflection, of events:

the power even in casual conversation to represent what is beyond metropolitan borders derives from the power of an imperial society, and that power takes the discursive form of a reshaping or reordering of 'raw' or primitive data into the local conventions of European narrative and formal utterance, or, in the case of France, the systematics of disciplinary order.⁷⁶

On this point, Said appears to concur with one of France's literary giants of the inter-war period: we see in the introductory chapter that Sartre's Antoine Roquentin, in *La Nausée*, recognises that any account of history, not simply an imperialist one, is fraught with difficulties regarding authenticity: this is at the heart of the problematic of social realism for the modern critic, and has been a preoccupation of the intellectual for some time, as evidenced by Barthes's notion that narrative has a function which reaches far beyond mere representation.

The question of what makes this project original can be answered by a glance at Said's grievance against contemporary cultural theory:

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.14.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.59.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.119.

The tendency for fields and specializations to subdivide and proliferate, I have for a long while argued, is contrary to an understanding of the whole, when the character, interpretation and direction or tendency of cultural experience are at issue.⁷⁷

This thesis constitutes, in part, a practical response to Said's call-to-arms to confront the hybridity of genre and historical and geographical contextual overlap, seeking to question along the way the disproportionate focus on the *Nouveau Roman* in modern criticism of the fiction of the 1950s and 1960s and to reinstate the significance of generic evolution. In the process, it will inevitably make a judgement on the value of the methodological tool offered to the reader in Said's counterpoint: it is for the reader to decide whether Said abrogates the unilateral investigations of past literary and cultural criticism or whether he simply proffers one of his own.

Ato Quayson has observed, in *Postcolonialism*, that

[m]ethodologically, there is a point when a firm wedge has to be placed between literature and real life, for though literature may disclose certain perspectives on reality, it is dangerous to see it as providing direct metaphorical or even allegorical correlatives. [...] It is always necessary to pay careful attention to the range of disjunctures that lie in the comparative transposition of art to life. We do not seek new forms of allegories from literature; what we seek is to grasp the complexity of both life and literature dialectically as well as materially, that is, in detail.⁷⁸

In that overlap between real-life experience and literary representation of experience is where Saidian counterpoint often may be located and analysed.

Said's own background dictates a move away from the conventional pigeon-holing of his work as purely political or as belonging exclusively to the literary criticism housed in English Literature departments; his attention to interdisciplinary projects would seem, moreover, to render churlish any attempt to identify him with a single discipline. The history of the institution where he has worked for the last three decades, Columbia University, is also of note in this regard: Antoine Compagnon tells us that the

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.13.

⁷⁸ Ato Quayson, *Postcolonialism*, p.183.

appointment as visiting professor of Gustave Lanson to the university in 1910 prompted a French cultural and linguistic renaissance there.⁷⁹ He also points out, though, that the study of French literature and culture in recent years has suffered a colossal demise in North America, as elsewhere, and he advances the observation that, because most people are

exceedingly likely to view French language and literature as the zenith of social hegemony, cultural elitism, and intellectual arrogance, which are all obsolete values [...] [s]ome institutions [...] have understood the futility of trying to rehabilitate the French of the *métropole* during the colonial era as an underdog culture, and have identified *la francophonie* [...] as the only hope for rescuing the study of French in American academia⁸⁰

Ever sensitive to the presence of hegemonic discourse, yet also temperamentally inclined to the conservative, Said would seem the ideal commentator on this moment of crisis. Furthermore, in spite of the polemical nature of his commentaries, he is often able to offer a more measured perspective than other commentators, including those responsible for the popular view, outlined by Compagnon, that French culture is synonymous with an outmoded hegemony. He has, after all, opined that ‘in the [French] culture at large – until after the middle of the [nineteenth] century – there is rarely that weighty, almost philosophical sense of imperial mission that one finds in Britain’.⁸¹ Said’s unusual sensitivity to nuance of this kind, his personal and institutional history, his international profile, and his acknowledgement of the influence of French culture on his work all combine to form the impression that the time is ripe to claim Said for French and Francophone Studies.

⁷⁹ Antoine Compagnon, ‘Why French has Become like any other Language’, in *Traveling Theory: France and the United States*, ed. by Ieme van der Poel and Sophie Bertho (Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1999), pp.29-38 (p.30).

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.35.

⁸¹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.74.

IV. Contrapuntal Reading: Approximations

It has been asserted more than once that no sustained critique of Saidian counterpoint has yet been advanced. It is true, though, that approximations to contrapuntal readings and writings, though not at all explicitly connected with Said's work, may be found. Two have been selected for comment, here, and will be invoked at subsequent points in this project: Fernando Ortiz's *Cuban Counterpoint* and Christopher L. Miller's *Nationalists and Nomads*.

Fernando Ortiz's 1947 text, *Cuban Counterpoint*, departs from the explanation of a neologism coined by him in an effort to counter the ethnocentrism inherent in many of the terms in popular anthropological usage: he uses the word 'transculturation' to describe cultural encounters and exchange. He writes,

[t]he word *acculturation* contains a number of definite and undesirable etymological implications. It is an ethnocentric word with a moral connotation. The immigrant has to *acculturate* himself; so do the natives, pagan or heathen, barbarian or savage, who enjoy the benefits of being under the sway of our great Western culture. The word *acculturation* implies, because of the preposition *ad* with which it starts, the idea of a *terminus ad quem*. The 'uncultured' is to receive the benefits of 'our culture'; it is he who must change and become converted into 'one of us'. [...] Unquestionably any group of immigrants coming from Europe to America suffers changes in its original culture; but it also provokes a change in the mold [*sid*] of the culture that receives them. [...] Every change of culture, or, as I shall say from now on, every transculturation, is a process in which something is always given in return for what one receives, a system of give and take. [...] To describe this process the word *trans-culturation*, stemming from Latin roots, provides us with a term that does not contain the implication of one certain culture toward which the other must tend, but an exchange between two cultures, both of them active, both contributing their share, and both co-operating to bring about a new reality of civilization.⁸²

Ortiz's sensitivity to the moral implications of hitherto accepted terminology is documented here almost half a decade before Said's notion of counterpoint is elucidated in *Culture and Imperialism*. *Cuban Counterpoint's* utopian vision corresponds to *Culture and Imperialism's* projection of an avoidance of the 'politics of blame' to which Said refers throughout his *œuvre*. The co-operation which Ortiz imagines in his contrapuntal universe is quite different from the reality perceived by many commentators on 'transculturation':

⁸² Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, trans. by Harriet de Onís (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), pp.x-xi.

Alec Hargreaves has noted, for example, that, for Algerian children being educated in the French scholastic system, 'though school and home were only a few hundred metres apart, each child migrated daily between profoundly different cultural universes'.⁸³ This idea is often supported by academic discourse: Christopher Miller has remarked that '[i]n current usage, "French" and "francophone" are often used in contradistinction to each other [...] as if French literature were not itself francophone.'⁸⁴ It could be said that Said's project is to revise or expand the Western canon to accommodate that which is Francophone in a manner which does not preserve the distinction in any negative sense, but which does not, either, synthesise French and Francophone in an arbitrary or artificial way. As Miller has it, '[it] should go without saying, but apparently doesn't, that the space between cultures is not necessarily a dangerous void.'⁸⁵

It is precisely that 'space between cultures' that informs much of what is behind Said's methodology of counterpoint. From Said's point of view, narrative is a spatial notion (see this chapter, footnote 24 and Chapter 3, footnote 4); in trying to explain how his methodology of counterpoint operates, he claims: 'although I proceed along generally chronological lines [...] I am not, in fact, trying to provide a consecutive sequence of events, trends or works.'⁸⁶

This is part of the justification, then, for considering Roger Vailland and Ousmane Sembène in tandem in this thesis. Their work occurs during approximately the same chronological period, but this point of convergence is merely a 'way in' to the more interesting features – yielded by a contrapuntal reading – relating to issues of metropolitan

⁸³ Alec Hargreaves, 'Algerian Immigrant Writing in France', in *Writing across Worlds: Literature and Imagination*, ed. by Russell King, John Connell and Paul White (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.89-100 (p.91).

⁸⁴ Christopher L. Miller, *Nationalists and Nomads* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p.55.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.57.

⁸⁶ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.134.

versus non-metropolitan writing, of French versus Francophone production. While it is true that Vailland's work was relatively popular at the time of publication, and that he remains a well-known literary name today, and that these remarks could not equally be made of Sembène, it is crucial to remember Edward Said's words as quoted in the epigraph to this chapter: 'whereas the whole of a culture is a disjunct one, many important sectors of it can be apprehended as working contrapuntally together.'

Chapter Two

Place

I have retained this unsettled sense of many identities - mostly in conflict with each other - all my life, together with an acute memory of the despairing feeling that I wish we could have been all-Arab, or all-European and American, or all-Orthodox Christian, or all-Muslim, or all-Egyptian, and so on. I found I had two alternatives with which to counter what in effect was the process of challenge, recognition, and exposure, questions and remarks like: 'What are you?'; 'But Said is an Arab name'; 'You're American?'; 'You're an American without an American name, and you've never been to America'; 'You don't look American!'; 'How come you were born in Jerusalem and you live here?'; 'You're an Arab after all, but what kind are you? A Protestant?'¹

¹Edward W. Said, *Out of Place: a Memoir* (London: Granta, 1999), p.5.

As we have seen, Said is unequivocal in his insistence that geography is an integral consideration in literary and cultural theory; it bears repeating that he believes that '[n]arrative [...] is a function of speaking from a place' (see Chapter 1, Footnote 24). That very notion of place, though, is fundamentally compromised for Said, as is evidenced by the epigraph to this chapter; he belongs everywhere and nowhere, possessed of a kind of internationalism that few legitimately could claim.²

In this chapter, we shall consider Said's 'place' in more detail, examining not only his personal background, but also his seminal ideas about overlapping territories and intertwined histories, upon which he insists in *Culture and Imperialism*.³ We shall use what we discover to begin to problematise notions of travel, considering traditional views of cartography, as depicted in Richard Phillips's assertions in *Mapping Men and Empire* – that '[m]aps possess what [S.] Alpers calls the "aura of knowledge"' and that 'it seems that they depict the world as it really is; as the author vanishes in the map, the map exudes authority'⁴ – alongside Susan Bassnett's contention that '[m]ap-making, travelling and translating are not transparent activities. They are very definitely located activities, with points of origin, points of departure and destinations'.⁵ We shall try to analyse if, how and why exile, migrancy and travel differ in nature, looking at Steve Clark's idea that '[i]f, as de Certeau insists, every narrative is a travel narrative, the ultimate outcome of those stories remains to be determined'.⁶

² This internationalism is a feature Said admires in others, and Hugo of Saint Victor's notion of belonging nowhere is discussed in the following chapter (footnote 46).

³ The first chapter of *Culture and Imperialism* is entitled 'Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories'.

⁴ Richard Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire: a Geography of Empire* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.14.

⁵ Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: an Introduction*, p.114.

⁶ Steve Clark, ed., *Travel Writing and Empire*, ed. by Steve Clark (London: Zed Books, 1999), (p.28).

Following these more general analyses of geographical concerns and writings about place, this chapter will offer close contrapuntal readings of some of Roger Vailland's *récits de voyage* with Ousmane Sembène's 1957 novel of – to use Ortiz's term – transculturation, *O Pays, mon beau peuple*, advancing arguments relating to the efficacy and value of Said's methodology of counterpoint.

I. Said's Place

Edward Said's 1999 autobiography, *Out of Place*, baldly underlines, from its title onwards, the significance of location in the life and work of one of the late twentieth century's foremost literary and cultural theorists. His view of himself as '[p]ermanently out of place [in] the extreme and rigid regime of discipline and extracurricular education that [his] father would create and in which [he] became imprisoned from the age of nine'⁷ highlights Said's conviction about the importance of physical location and of the emotional identity which is partly constructed by that location: 'Along with language, it is geography [...] that is at the core of my memories of those early years.'⁸ Bill Ashcroft and Pat Ahluwalia have recognised that '[c]ontrapuntality emerges out of the tension and complexity of Said's own identity, that text of self that he is continually writing, because it involves a continual dialogue between the different and sometimes apparently contradictory dimensions of his own worldliness'.⁹ That interrelation of language and geography is what produces the human collective – not for nothing did Homi Bhabha name his 1990 text *Nation and Narration*¹⁰ – and Said's recognition of this has considerable bearing upon his reflections on his place in the family:

⁷Ibid., p.19.

⁸Ibid., p.xiv.

⁹ Bill Ashcroft and Pat Ahluwalia, *Edward Said: the Paradox of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.92.

¹⁰ Homi Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990).

All families invent their parents and children, give each of them a story, a fate, even a language. There was always something wrong with how I was invented and meant to *fit in with the world* of my parents and four sisters. Whether this was because I constantly *misread my part* or because of some deep flaw in my being I could not tell for most of my early life (my italics).¹¹

Said's thoughts about the complexities of identity are elaborated in the course of his autobiography and they illuminate many of the ideas proposed in the body of his work. His admiration for Jean-Paul Sartre, for instance, is well documented.¹² It is no surprise, therefore, to read of Said's unease in situations which demand a definitive statement of his identity:

To say 'I am an American citizen' in the setting of an English school, with wartime Cairo dominated by British troops and what seemed to me a totally homogeneous Egyptian populace, was foolhardy, something to be risked in public only when I was challenged officially to name my citizenship; in private I could not maintain it for long, so quickly did the affirmation wither under existential scrutiny.¹³

We have seen already that, for Said, '[i]dentity as such is about as boring a subject as one can imagine' (see Introduction, Footnote 104). Much more appealing to Said is a nuanced understanding of identity, one which he explains with the aid of his own notion of counterpoint:

I occasionally experience myself as a cluster of flowing currents. I prefer this to the idea of a solid self, the identity to which so many attach so much significance. These currents, like the themes of one's life, flow along during the waking hours, and at their best they require no reconciling, no harmonising. They are 'off' and may be out of place but at least they are always in motion, in time, in place, in the form of all kinds of strange combinations moving about, not necessarily forward, sometimes against each other, contrapuntally yet without one central theme. A form of freedom, I'd like to think, even if I am far from being totally convinced that it is.¹⁴

¹¹Ibid., p.3.

¹²See Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, pp.219, 236, 237 292 and Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, pp.149, 284.

¹³Edward W. Said, *Out of Place*, p.6.

¹⁴Ibid., p.295.

Said's 'self' is not, for him, an organic whole, but an entity whose features ebb and flow in any number of configurations, depending upon the circumstances in which he finds himself at any given time. This will have implications for the way in which Said views exile, a state which he also identifies with a kind of freedom. It is notable that Said does not reserve solely for himself this way of conceiving identity. When questioned in the journal *Radical Philosophy* about his 'use' of Antonio Gramsci in his work, he is confronted with the notion that 'there have been at least two quite different uses of Gramsci. One based on a cultural reading of him, the other on what might call the Turin Gramsci, which is about organic intellectuals, working-class organisations.'¹⁵ Said agrees, and claims that one 'has to' draw on both of these identifications of the theorist. This view of the self as a composite of currents is one which Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia have made central to their work on Said. We are familiar with their claim that his theory of '[c]ontrapuntality emerges out of the tension and complexity of Said's own identity, that text of self that he is continually writing, because it involves a continual dialogue between the different and sometimes apparently contradictory dimensions of his own worldliness'.¹⁶ By this one may infer that the very counterpoint which exists between the discrete elements of Said's own life – his roles as exile, intellectual, darling of the lecture circuit – is the tool he uses to discern what Ashcroft and Ahluwalia term 'the ubiquitous presence of imperialism in canonical culture'.¹⁷ Further, it may be said that Said's contrapuntal identity is rendered yet more complex by opposing perceptions of his exilic status, for while he himself considers his exile from Jerusalem in 1947 a necessary safety measure, there have emerged conflicting accounts of the period which have accused Said of masquerading as a refugee.¹⁸

¹⁵ Anne Beezer and Peter Osborne, 'Orientalism and After: an Interview with Edward Said', p.25.

¹⁶ Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, *Edward Said: the Paradox of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.93.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.93.

¹⁸ In an article in *The Guardian* on 23 August 1993, Julian Borger reported on an article which had appeared in the right-wing American periodical *Commentary* in which it was claimed that Said's family was a wealthy one, and that his claims to have been driven out of Jerusalem as a child by Jewish forces were false (see Chapter 1, Footnote 5).

It is no easier to define Said as a critic: as Jan Gorak has commented,

it is often far from clear where [Said's] work fits in a line of critical descent. In fact, it is tempting to argue that the term 'Edward Said' collapses into two discrete entities: the *Raritan* Said who composes eulogies on Foucault, leisurely meditations on R.P. Blackmur, and stately, diffuse appreciations of Kim; and the *Critical Inquiry* Said who discusses the politics of interpretation and the status of disciplinarity to an audience at the leading edge of theoretical discourse.¹⁹

Perhaps even the perception Said has of his own writing is at odds with how others view it: after all, in spite of his avowed admiration for Erich Auerbach, the latter's son refused Said access to his father's papers after his death, claiming that Said's political views were wholly unacceptable to him, as they had been to his father. Moreover, Said's view of his own status as an exile is not always understood by those who write about his work. Iain Chambers, for instance, notes that 'to come from elsewhere, from "there" and not "here" and hence to be simultaneously "inside" and "outside" the situation at hand, is to live at the intersections of histories and memories'.²⁰ This observation could have been lifted straight from Said's autobiography. However, Chambers comments elsewhere that '[m]igrancy and exile, as Edward Said points out, involves a "discontinuous state of being", a form of picking a quarrel with where you come from. It has thereby been transformed "into a potent, even enriching motif of modern culture"'.²¹ This has all the appearance of a straightforward paraphrase of Said's contradictory attitude towards the state of exile, yet it blithely conflates the notions of 'migrancy' and 'exile' to make of them a single subject requiring only a singular verb. But migrancy and exile are not synonymous and Said does not treat them as such. One need only glance once again at the epigraph to this chapter to see that he is careful to attenuate the concept of 'travel': he feels keenly the contradictions

¹⁹Jan Gorak, *The Making of the Modern Canon: Genesis and Crisis of a Literary Idea* (London: Athlone, 1991), p.190.

²⁰Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.6.

²¹*Ibid.*, p.2.

imposed by ‘this sense of many identities – mostly in conflict with each other’, and this chapter must be equally careful to make such distinctions.²²

Among the principal complexities liable to contrapuntal analysis in Said’s life is a geographical complexity, and in his work, ‘Said’s own sense of the contrapuntal process is that it is a way of “rethinking geography”’.²³ By highlighting Said’s ‘dislocation’, ‘exile’ and his recognition of ‘the urgency of geographical veracity’ (a somewhat cumbersome term), Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia justify in advance his belief that ‘[m]ost cultural historians and literary scholars [...] have failed to note the geographical notation, the theoretical mapping and charting of territory, in Western fiction, historical writing and philosophical discourse’.²⁴ This is one of the gaps for which this chapter is intended to compensate. Ashcroft and Ahluwalia rightly emphasise in their book, *Edward Said: the Paradox of Identity*, the crucial role played by literature in the justification of geographical covetousness and anxiety related to the Other’s monopoly over geography which fuelled imperialism; rightly, too, they write of non-Europeans as being ‘shadowy absences’ to which contrapuntal reading gives presence.²⁵ However, they do not probe the discrepancy between Said’s concept of a totally fluid self, on one hand, and his desire for the recognition of strict geographical delineations, on the other. Valerie Kennedy’s recent book, *Edward Said: a Critical Introduction* largely fails, in spite of its title, to proceed beyond the merely descriptive in this respect. This discrepancy in Said’s work is another issue this chapter will confront.

The importance of the relationship between narrative and geography is self-evident to Said, as we shall see. It should be equally apparent to any reader: as Douglas Pockock

²² Edward Said, *Out of Place*, p.5.

²³ Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, *Edward Said: the Paradox of Identity*, p.95.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.96.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.96.

reminds us, 'events "take place"'²⁶. It is partly for this reason that the current project is viable. In considering novels by Roger Vailland and Ousmane Sembène in the light of Edward Said's theory of counterpoint – a theory which depends for its sustenance on notions of fictive geographies – one is acutely reminded of J. Hillis Miller's adjuration: '[t]hose who seek to assimilate a foreign theory and put it to new, indigenous uses may have imported something like a Trojan horse or something like one of those computer viruses that turn resident programs to their own alien and disruptive uses.'²⁷ Clearly, there must exist some rationale for bringing Vailland and Sembène together, a rationale which has been outlined in the Introduction and in Chapter One. It is gratifying to note, furthermore, that John Leonard, in his review of *Culture and Imperialism*, directs readers towards additional writers, not mentioned by Said, whose work may help to evaluate Said's criticism: among these writers is Ousmane Sembène.²⁸ It is hoped that this chapter will avoid unhelpful distortion of Vailland and Sembène, and instead that, by illuminating the crucial role of place in their work, it will serve to point out the *champ littéraire* inclusive of French and Francophone literatures which Said's contrapuntalism highlights.

II. Said and Topographical Insights

The interdisciplinarity now written about between literature and geography is attested to by a burgeoning bibliography: of particular interest is J. Hillis Miller's *Topographies*.²⁹ This text grapples, initially, with the question of what is meant by 'topography':

At first the word meant just what it says: a description in words of a place. That meaning became obsolete. The word then came to mean the art of mapping by graphic signs rather

²⁶Douglas C.D. Pocock, ed., *Humanistic Geography and Literature* (London: Croon Helm, 1981), p.12.

²⁷J. Hillis Miller, *Topographies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), p.320.

²⁸ John Leonard, 'Novel Colonies', *The Nation*, 256 (1993), 383-90 (p.388).

²⁹ It is notable that Miller was Said's editor for the 1971 text *Aspects of Narrative* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971) in which Said's article 'Molestation and Authority in Narrative Fiction' appeared.

than words. [...] By a further sideways slippage 'topography' has come to be the name for what is mapped, apparently without any reference to writing or other means of representation.³⁰

Subsequent questions are yet more complex:

How do topographical descriptions or terms function in novels, poems, and philosophical texts? Just what, in a given text, is the topographical component and how does it operate? The other topics in the cluster include the initiating efficacy of speech acts, responsibility, political or legislative power, the translation of theory from topographical location to another, the way topographical delineations can function as parable or allegory, the relation of personification to landscape, or, as Thomas Hardy puts it, 'the figure in the landscape.' There is always a figure in the landscape.³¹

This last observation brings us closer to the true relevance of place, which is that, while there may indeed always be a figure in the landscape, this is only interesting or useful if one recognises that within that landscape, there exist boundaries or peripheries. A figure in the landscape is worthy of attention purely by dint of his or her position relative to those boundaries; and these positions are less and less mappable. Consider the observation of Iain Chambers:

In the endless interplay between *ethos* and *topos* we are forced to move beyond rigid positions and locations, beyond forms of judgement dependent upon the abstract identification of values that have already been decided and legislated for in advance. Criticism involves a perpetual departure [...]. In movement we recognise the impossibility of completing the journey.³²

This sense of a lack of a journey's end can be linked to Caren Kaplan's acknowledgement that there are no fixed, impermeable centres from which or to which to travel:

In most theoretical accounts, the influx of immigrants, refugees, and exiles from the 'peripheries' to the metropolitan 'centers' [sic] both enriches and threatens the parameters of the nation as well as older cultural identities. Yet definitions of locations as 'centers' and 'peripheries' only further mystify the divides between places and people. Centers are not impermeable, stable entities of purely defined characteristics that come simply to be contaminated or threatened by 'others' from

³⁰ J. Hillis Miller, *Topographies*, p.3.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.4.

³² Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, p.42.

elsewhere. Rather, the large metropolises that draw waves of new populations are dynamic, shifting, complex locations that *exchange* goods, ideas, and culture with many other locations.³³

Within this fallacy of the fixed centre (an idea which is, in any case, ideologically suspect), it is, of course, the torpor of critical devotion to canons which Said fears, the inertia of the academy. Movement is all-important, and it is this notion of the dynamic which contributes to the redefinition of the *champ littéraire* which this project seeks to effect. Jan Gorak's claim that '[Said's] personal history points to a chance encounter between radically distinct traditions and identities rather than to the long, Eurocentric continuities felt by Auerbach, Frye and Gombrich'³⁴ serves as a reminder that counterpoint is a logical and legitimate strategy, entirely consistent with Said's refusal to dissemble in the face of traditional academic discourse and of resisting pressure to excise himself from his criticism. The notion of the 'chance encounter' is not necessarily an appropriate one, though; while it *enables* the use of Vailland and Sembène in the elaboration of a praxis of comparativism, it does not *explain* such a use. All points of comparison between the two authors cannot be attributed to mere fortuitousness in the fact that Vailland and Sembène are chronologically coincidental. Rather, it is their shared chronology which will be seen, via contrapuntalism, to highlight the *champ littéraire* we have been discussing which has always existed, but which has hitherto been divided and largely ignored.

The principal aim of this project is to put to the test Edward Said's theory of counterpoint, and in the context of place it would not be accurate to mention Said's recognition of 'Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories' as a quantum leap in cultural studies. It will prove more informative to view his consideration of geography and

³³ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1996), p.102.

³⁴ Jan Gorak, *The Making of the Modern Canon: Genesis and Crisis of a Literary Idea*, p.191.

literature as a radical step on the contemporary trajectory, which was gaining in currency, established by geographers and literary critics alike. Let us consider, for instance, the views of Douglas Pocock:

There is no intention of suggesting that there is a distinctively geographical approach to literature which literary critics ignore at their peril [...]. At the same time, however, it must be emphasised that the geographer cannot avoid bringing, even subconsciously, his or her own particular academic experience into the realm of imaginative literature, and that in this process the aim is in fact akin to that of literary criticism, in that any analysis is for the ultimate benefit of greater synthesis. To reiterate, the difference between the literary critic and geographer is that the former is ultimately concerned with the totality of the literary work, the geographer with his particular theme of study.³⁵

It is clear that certain elements of Pocock's writing would attract Said: the notion that each of us is bound, to a degree, by his or her environment, intellectual formation, and so on, is seemingly pure Said. However, the assertion that 'any analysis is for the ultimate benefit of greater synthesis' can sit uneasily with a Saidian view of criticism: after all, it is precisely because so many syntheses are erroneously identified in literary criticism (particularly the comparative variety) that Said has felt the need to analyse them. Moreover, when Pocock claims that, '[i]t is the deliberately cultivated subjectivity of the writer which makes literature literature and not, say, reporting,'³⁶ he strikes at the heart of the socialist realist problematic that Said is keen to highlight, but Pocock's yoking of the terms 'mirror, reflection or microcosm of reality'³⁷ to describe literature contains no recognition of the fact that the last of the three is minimising and not necessarily representative.

Glossings such as this lead us to the fundamental dichotomy between mainstream writings on geographical-literary relations and the more searching dialectic of Said. Among Pocock's many apparently uncontroversial statements on literature are to be found the following: 'The truth of fiction is a truth beyond mere facts'; '[l]iterature yet possesses a

³⁵Douglas C.D. Pocock, ed., *Humanistic Geography and Literature*, p.10.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p.10.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p.10.

peculiar superiority over the reporting of the social scientist'; '[l]iterary truth has a universality: it evokes a response in Everyman's breast while apparently concerned with the particular. Again it is a truth that is more humanly significant'; '[l]iterature, then, is both a source for new insights and a testing ground for hypotheses in exploring 'the experiential foundation of our world.'"³⁸ The notion of 'literary truth' must be anathema to Said, as indeed 'universality', as it is conventionally understood, to be.³⁹ The question of identity being a composite of currents, which has previously been raised, must immediately rule out Said's concurrence with these views, since anything relating to 'the experiential foundation of the world' would have to take into account the multiple experiences dictated by multiple identities. Further, if literature has its own truth, and can be considered sufficiently solid and immutable to be a 'testing ground', the only way on which we may glean from it 'new insights' is by calling into question the 'truth' hitherto taken for granted. It is to these comfortable, non-exacting observations of the symbiotic interaction of geographer and literary critic that Edward Said responds.

The most cursory glance at Said's output will yield the assurance that no work can be fruitfully excised from its geographical circumstance. In his introduction to the blockbusting *Orientalism*, Said discusses the European propensity to render antithetical that which is not easily synthesised with European experience:

Unlike the Americans, the French and the British - less so the Germans, Russians, Spanish, Portuguese, Italians, and Swiss - have had a long tradition of what I shall be calling *Orientalism*, a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience. The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's

³⁸Ibid., p.10-15.

³⁹ The view that Said is a proponent of 'universalism' is a popular misconception which derives, presumably, from his vociferous and numerous objections to separatism. In fact, his assertions stop short of the universalist, being much more concerned with the idea that *access rights* to culture are 'universal' than with the idea that every form of culture has universal application or relevance. The former notion is satisfactorily expressed in the following quotation from *Culture and Imperialism*. 'I have no patience with the position that "we" should only or mainly be concerned with what is "ours", any more than I can condone reactions to such a view that require Arabs to read Arab books, use Arab methods, and the like. As C.L.R. James used to say, Beethoven belongs as much to West Indians as he does to Germans, since his music is now part of the human heritage' (Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.xxviii).

greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European *material* civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.⁴⁰

In this elementary guide to the concept of Orientalism, Said introduces the reader to two alternative, if not quite conflicting, notions of place: firstly, the process of exoticisation inherent in the portrayal of Eastern locations and cultures; and secondly, the element of competition involved in considering those locations and cultures juxtaposed with one's own, an opposition which identifies the Other as what Said terms a 'cultural contestant'.

These are only two strands of the place problematic; in his 1983 book, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, Said outlines another: exile. He quotes Erich Auerbach's own comments on

Mimesis:

'I may also mention that the book was written during the war and at Istanbul, where the libraries are not equipped for European studies [...] On the other hand, it is quite possible that the book owes its existence to just this lack of a rich and specialized library. If it had been possible for me to acquaint myself with all the work that has been done on so many subjects, I might never have reached the point of writing.'

The drama of this little bit of modesty is considerable, in part because Auerbach's quiet tone conceals much of the pain of his exile. He was a Jewish refugee from Nazi Europe, and he was also a European scholar in the old tradition of German Romance scholarship. Yet now in Istanbul he was hopelessly out of touch with the literary, cultural, and political bases of that formidable tradition. In writing *Mimesis*, he implies to us in a later work, he was not merely practicing [*sic*] his profession despite adversity: he was performing an act of cultural, even civilizational, survival of the highest importance [...]. And in so losing the authentic presence of the culture, as symbolized materially by libraries, research institutes, other books and scholars, the exiled European would become an exorbitantly disoriented [*sic*] outcast from sense, nation, and milieu.⁴¹

What is fascinating about this passage of Said's is the assumption of an 'authentic presence of the culture' which is 'symbolized materially': this implies an independent, pre-existing, contingent entity which is not created, but merely reflected by human literary endeavour.

⁴⁰Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, p.1.

⁴¹Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, p.5.

This notion counters much of what Said asserts elsewhere in his textual output, and creates a dichotomy to which we shall return, especially in Chapter Four: *Memory*. The question of the exilic status of the writer abroad, though – along with the issues of the exoticisation of, and competition with other cultures which have previously been mentioned – contributes to a general sense that literary geography is more often concerned with distance than with proximity, with dislocation rather than with belonging. For Roger Vailland, this is a complex notion, since travel – often related to his work as a journalist – is predicated on a continued assumption of return; for Ousmane Sembène, travel is the first stage of migration, a process necessary for his living as stevedore and novelist. Vailland pursues the exotic as part of what is arguably a more general quest for knowledge; Sembène, the semi-voluntary exile, pursues not exotica, but a market, and must effect geographical relocation to do so. Complex situations will emerge, clearly, from this dichotomy.

Said's *Culture and Imperialism* elaborates the question of the importance of place in literature, with particular emphasis on imperialism as interpreter of geographical boundaries:

The world has changed since Conrad and Dickens in ways that have surprised, and often alarmed, metropolitan Europeans and Americans, who now confront large non-white immigrant populations in their midst, and face an impressive roster of newly empowered voices asking for their narratives to be heard. The point of my book is that such populations and voices have been there for some time, thanks to the globalized process set in motion by modern imperialism; to ignore or otherwise discount the overlapping experience of Westerners and Orientals, the interdependence of cultural terrains in which colonizer and colonized co-existed and battled each other through projections as well as rival geographies, narratives, and histories, is to miss what is essential about the world in the past century.⁴²

It is also in *Culture and Imperialism* that Said focuses upon his notion of counterpoint, and this, it seems, has not only literary, but also geographical resonance. Geographical

⁴²Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.xxii.

counterpoint can be viewed through two lenses: one is migrancy; the other, travel. The slippage between these two provides the aperture needed for the growth of divaricate understandings of what place means to literature. That slippage is also home to the problem of exile: this chapter will consider where exile should be situated on this continuum with regard to the work of Vailland and of Sembène. If one considers counterpoint between cultures as being manifested by travel, it is simple enough to consign the significance of place to the realms of exoticisation (of the alien culture) and idealisation (of the native culture left behind). It is perfectly possible, in this mindset, to feel a sense of identity with the home culture, and of refuge in that which has been newly discovered. The dominant impression is of cosmopolitanism. If, on the other hand, it is migrancy which is seen to be symptomatic of that geographical counterpoint, one cannot avoid the confrontation of exile, dislocation, deracination and marginalisation. In these circumstances, by contrast, the dominant impressions are of alienation, at one extreme of the spectrum, and of miscegenation at the other.

From these literal interpretations of geographical counterpoint, then, can be derived an allegorical or metaphorical understanding of literary counterpoint. This is the kind of lateral thinking Said exhibits in his (ubiquitously cited) examination of Austen's *Mansfield Park*, in which he demonstrates that Fanny Price's meteoric ascension from orphan to mistress of Mansfield Park is dependent upon the economy of the Bertrams' estate in Antigua. Said identifies the novel as being very precisely about a series of both small and large dislocations and relocations in space that occur before, at the end of the novel, Fanny Price, the niece, becomes the spiritual mistress of Mansfield Park. And that place itself is located by Austen at the centre of an arc of interests and concerns spanning the hemisphere, two major seas, and four continents.⁴³

⁴³Ibid., p.101.

Said's view of geographical-literary relations, it may therefore be argued, stands in contradistinction to that which we heard Douglas Poccock expound earlier. It is not literature which is the fixed reference point, but geography. In this connection, let us return briefly to J. Hillis Miller's *Topographies*:

Topography is a logocentric practice through and through. It depends, for example, on the law of non-contradiction. A place is either there in a given place or not there, and no thing, a building, for example, can be in more than one place at once.

A crypt, says Derrida, upsets all the logic of this mapping. It is there and not there, neither inside nor outside, or both inside and outside at once. It cannot be located on any map. The avenues by which it might be approached confound the protocols of mapping.⁴⁴

Here, the only exception to geographical fixity is the crypt. It could be argued that Derrida's crypt is Said's 'arc of interests', a complex construction of economic and political influences which cannot easily be located, but which, at the point of convergence of those interests, Mansfield Park, can be seen to produce an immovable geographical manifestation of imperial processes. This is arguably entirely consistent with Said's sense of self; he would identify himself as several people – secular intellectual, oppositional critic, political activist among them – but always with an awareness that the composite of currents which serves for his identity is constantly subject to alteration. Similarly, Mansfield Park can be seen, touched and lived in as though it were an immutable thing, but the moving arc of interests which constructs it belies such apparent fixity.

In an attempt to elaborate a new praxis of comparativism through geographical and ideological foci, Said has won admirers and critics alike. Some critical objections to his work are justifiable, but other objections derive, it must be suspected from the tone of many dismissive critical appraisals of his work, from a weariness of Said's lengthy and frequently parenthetical sentences. It is hoped that this project will move beyond those barriers to demonstrate that Said's interest in the literature of opposition is central to his

⁴⁴ J. Hillis Miller, *Topographies*, p.303.

contrapuntal theory, and that despite his status as a member of the critical avant-garde, Said has not manufactured the concept. In his book, *Counterpoints*, philosopher Rodney Needham discusses the importance of opposition of all kinds, arguing that it 'is one of the oldest concepts in logic and epistemology, not the invention of a fashionable anthropology':⁴⁵ Said is importer, not inventor, of this philosophical notion.

Said is known, above all, as an oppositional critic, and it is this acknowledgement of the need for resistance, for reading and acting against the grain, that informs his theory of counterpoint. It is also integral to his understanding of literature and geography, and the student of Said is often obliged to sense the nuance which may be detected in his work when he writes about the relationship between these two. An idea which Said attributes to Gramsci is that literary and cultural investigation is 'a constant re-excavation of public space', and Said's own honing of the notion resides in his concept of 'the space of history'.⁴⁶ There is continual conflation of the historical and the geographical, and the coincidence of these two usually disparate concepts illuminates, it may be argued, a genuine *champ littéraire*, divided prior to Said's theoretical interventions. It is important to introduce the geographical into the realm of the historical because, as Richard Phillips has put it, '[t]he hegemony of a historically situated text is derived not only from an ability to block alternative narratives – a power to which Said draws attention in *Culture and Imperialism* – but also from an ability to dictate its meaning, power to block alternative

⁴⁵ Rodney Needham, *Counterpoints* (London: University of California Press, 1987), p.2.

⁴⁶ Anne Beezer and Peter Osborne, 'Orientalism and After: an Interview with Edward Said', p.29.

readings.’⁴⁷ The by now familiar assertion that ‘narrative [...] is a function of speaking from a place’ (see Chapter 1, Footnote 24) further reinforces the idea that Said’s elaboration of a new praxis of comparativism – counterpoint – is designed to highlight this *champ littéraire*.

III. Said and Lévi-Strauss: Attenuating Notions of Travel

We have seen that, for Said, the notion of place is a complex one, and that his identification of himself as an exile colours his view of what might be his *own* place. This is not, of course, a wholly negative experience for him. He has commented:

Exile means that you are always going to be marginal, and that what you do as an intellectual has to be made up because you cannot follow a prescribed path. If you can experience that sort of fate not as a deprivation and as something to be bewailed, but as a sort of freedom, a process of discovering in which you do things according to your own dictates: that is a unique pleasure.⁴⁸

This sense of liberty is not lost on Said’s critics; Caren Kaplan has written: ‘the term [exile] has different uses in Said’s work, signifying both cataclysmic loss and critical possibility. [...] Exile, then, functions as a reading strategy, a definition of a historical condition, a precept, a political or cultural program, and a specific zone for the exploration of the relationship between nation, identity, and location.’⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Richard Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire: a Geography of Adventure*, p.113.

⁴⁸ Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (London: Vintage, 1994), p.46. It should, of course, be noted that Said elsewhere describes exile as being ‘terrible to experience’ (Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin, eds, *The Edward Said Reader*, p.xxviii).

⁴⁹ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*, p.117.

It is here that one might begin effectively to problematise the notion of travel: if exile is both the ultimate incarceration and the ultimate freedom from it, what do other forms of travel entail? Susan Bassnett advances the view that '[t]ravellers have pretensions towards faithfulness, insisting that we believe their accounts simply because they have been there and we have not'.⁵⁰ Neither is this the only distinguishing feature of the travel writer; Steve Clark tells us that '[t]ravellers return: their traces are ephemeral. They must remain in order to comprehend, but the simple fact of temporary residence would remove the original frisson of interrogation of and by the other'.⁵¹ There is, it would seem from the composite of these two views, an inherent inauthenticity in the tale of the mere recreational traveller, caused either by deliberate duplicity or by a simple and perhaps inevitable failure to be subsumed into the host culture. Travelling implies returning home, since otherwise one dwells, voiceless and immobile in a place that is not home.

The question of whether this inauthenticity has been perceived by readers since its inception is more difficult to answer. Certainly, there is some support among travel writing critics for the view that writings born out of exile are distinguished by their gravitas in a way that eludes other accounts of travel. Let us return to Caren Kaplan for a view on the historical differentiation between the disparate associations of exile and tourism:

The commonsense definitions of exile and tourism suggest that they occupy opposite poles in the modern experience of displacement: [e]xile implies coercion; tourism celebrates choice. [...] Culturally, exile is implicated in modernist high art formations while tourism signifies the very obverse position as the mark of everything commercial and superficial. [...] Looking at exile and

⁵⁰ Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: an Introduction*, p.103.

⁵¹ Steve Clark, ed., *Travel Writing and Empire*, p.17.

tourism as cultural representations aids an analysis of the social practices of different kinds of displacement and travel, moving beyond mystification to more historically and culturally nuanced interpretations.⁵²

It can be seen, then, that what Steve Clark has called ‘the ready and habitual equation of traveller and liar’ has been reinforced and propagated by learned concepts of intellectual hierarchy.⁵³ Moreover, the differentiated understandings of postcolonial and modernist exiles present in Kaplan’s work contribute, perhaps, to a feeling expressed in Jonathan Raban’s description of public distaste for ‘[the] deep egoism of moving for moving’s sake’ which, in turn, serves to relegate the traveller’s tale to a yet lower rung of the ladder.⁵⁴

A possible reason for the perceived inadequacy (at best) of the traveller’s tale is the complication of its mission – ‘[...] la tradition du *récit* de voyage: il faut instruire le lecteur’⁵⁵ – by its supposed inauthenticity. This is not, however, the only problem. Travel writing has become increasingly ideologically loaded in recent years, many readers realising, as Susan Bassnett did, that there is no way of relating one’s experiences outside one’s community which avoids some kind of political act. Steve Clark agrees:

Travel reference is to do with world-coherence: the book projects a world, and it is the ethics of inhabiting that alternative domain that are primarily at stake.

Thus the genre presents a problem for academic studies. It seems too dependent on an empirical rendition of contingent events, what happened to happen, for entry into the literary canon, yet too overtly rhetorical for disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, geography or history. [...] Over the last two decades, however, post-colonial studies has seized upon this very impurity of the form as an exemplary record of cross-cultural encounters between European and non-European peoples. Its powerful and innovative models of reading have made the question of travel inseparable from that of power and desire: asking not only who shall be master, but also what does the master want?⁵⁶

⁵² Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*, p.27.

⁵³ Steve Clark, ed., *Travel Writing and Empire*, p.1.

⁵⁴ Jonathan Raban, *Old Glory: an American Voyage* (London: Picador, 1986), p.183.

⁵⁵ Sonia Faessel, ‘Entre *Récit* de voyage et littérature: le cas de Tahiti’, in *Miroirs de textes: récits de voyage et intertextualité*, ed. by Sophie Linon-Chipon, Véronique Magri-Mourgues et Sarga Moussa (Nice: Publications de la Faculté des Lettres, Arts et Sciences Humaines de Nice, 1998), pp.305-21 (p.309).

⁵⁶ Steve Clark, ed., *Travel Writing and Empire*, p.2.

This insight into the role of travel writing in imperial power relations, combined with Rodney Needham's disdainful reference to 'fashionable anthropology', brings to mind the relationship between Said's work and that of Claude Lévi-Strauss. Said's engagement with Lévi-Strauss is largely implicit: in all of *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, only one reference to his 1955 text, *Tristes Tropiques* (a text which indicts the anthropologist-cum-travel writer for his or her complicity with empire), can be found, for example. *Tristes Tropiques* would be interesting and valuable to study just from the point of view of its status as 1950s text and commentary not only on Lévi-Strauss's own multi-disciplinary background (crucially not as a professional anthropologist, originally) but also on the emerging structures of French (post)colonial life. Said does refer to Lévi-Strauss, in *The World, the Text and the Critic*, as one of a group of thinkers who challenged traditional humanism and who effectively laid the foundations for Said's own 'secular' criticism:

The traditional university, the hegemony of determinism and positivism, the reification of ideological bourgeois 'humanism,' the rigid barriers between academic specialties: it was powerful responses to all these that linked together such influential progenitors of today's literary theorist as Saussure, Lukacs, Bataille, Lévi-Strauss, Freud, Nietzsche, and Marx. Theory proposed itself as a synthesis overriding the petty fiefdoms within the world of intellectual production, and it was manifestly to be hoped as a result that all the domains of human activity could be seen, and lived, as a unity.⁵⁷

Clearly, Said has derived some support for his disdain for closed schools of thought from Lévi-Strauss, yet he is not convinced by the latter's every assertion: Said notes, in *Orientalism*, that

the point Lévi-Strauss makes [in *La Pensée sauvage*] is that the mind requires order, and order is achieved by discriminating and taking note of everything, placing everything of which the mind is

⁵⁷ Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, p.3.

aware in a secure, refindable place, therefore giving things some role to play in the economy of objects and identities that make up an environment.⁵⁸

Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques* also acknowledges this human tendency, but laments it, as does Said elsewhere.

Lévi-Strauss muses before his reader, 'Sans doute, les relations entre deux sociétés seraient facilitées s'il était possible, au moyen d'une sorte de grille, d'établir un système d'équivalences entre les manières dont chacune utilise des types humains pour remplir des fonctions sociales différentes.'⁵⁹ Later, he makes the following, related observation:

Pas plus que l'individu n'est seul dans le groupe et que chaque société n'est seule parmi les autres, l'homme n'est seul dans l'univers. Lorsque l'arc-en-ciel des cultures humaines aura fini de s'abîmer dans le vide creusé par notre fureur, tant que nous serons là et qu'il existera un monde – cette arche ténue qui nous relie à l'inaccessible demeurera: montrant la voie inverse de celle de notre esclavage et dont, à défaut de la parcourir, la contemplation procure à l'homme l'unique faveur qu'il sache mériter.⁶⁰

Just as Said invokes T.S. Eliot on the subject of organic relations within society and the academy,⁶¹ so too might he have invoked Lévi-Strauss: the proliferation of academic specialisations so unpalatable to Said appears also to be anathema to the anthropologist, though of course Structuralism is the extreme of this position.

It is clear, though, that Lévi-Strauss would not tolerate absolute lack of discernment between sets of cultural specificities. He implies in *Tristes Tropiques* a view which Edward Said would later elaborate, that all voyages are not politically or personally identical, and

⁵⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, p.53.

⁵⁹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (Paris: Plon, 1955), p.113.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.240.

⁶¹ See Chapter 1, Footnote 70.

that any notion of travel must be attenuated; that is to say that travel is not the same as migration, which, in turn, differs from exile. Lévi-Strauss discusses what he terms, somewhat disingenuously, 'un incident futile' during a journey which he shared with a French colonial expedition to Paraguay:

[L]es officiers et leurs épouses confondaient un voyage transatlantique avec une expédition coloniale et le service comme instructeurs auprès d'une armée somme toute assez modeste, avec l'occupation d'un pays conquis à laquelle ils se préparaient, moralement au moins, sur le pont transformé en place d'armes, le rôle d'indigènes étant dévolu aux passagers civils.⁶²

This is a useful starting point for an understanding of the evolution of travel literature, and for a familiarity with Lévi-Strauss's attitude to that evolution, in relation to Said's. *Tristes Tropiques* laments the effects of colonialism:

Les parfums des tropiques et la fraîcheur des êtres sont viciés par une fermentation aux relents suspects, qui mortifie nos désirs et nous voue à cueillir des souvenirs à demi-corrompus [...]. Cette grande civilisation occidentale, créatrice des merveilles dont nous jouissons, elle n'a certes pas réussi à les produire sans contrepartie. Comme son œuvre la plus fameuse, pile où s'élaborent des architectures d'une complexité inconnue, l'ordre et l'harmonie de l'Occident exigent l'élimination d'une masse prodigieuse de sous-produits maléfiques dont la terre est aujourd'hui infectée. Ce que d'abord vous nous montrez, voyage, c'est notre ordure lancée au visage de l'humanité.⁶³

Lévi-Strauss goes on to suggest that Western travel literature has existed not principally to heighten Western awareness of alternative cultures, but to assuage boredom: 'Je comprends alors la passion, la folie, la duperie des récits de voyage. Ils apportent l'illusion de ce qui n'existe plus et qui devrait encore exister, pour que nous échappions à l'accablante évidence que 20 000 ans d'histoire sont joués.'⁶⁴ For Lévi-Strauss, writing in the middle of the twentieth century, travel writing and accompanying photographic material had supplanted the West's previous trawls, such as spices or woods, from colonial expeditions. Crucially, for Lévi-Strauss, introduction of loot from colonised cultures into Western cultures does not constitute a valid exchange: Westernisation is imposed overseas;

⁶² Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, p.26.

⁶³ Ibid., p.27.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.27.

other cultures are tokenised in the West through the subsumption of their foodstuffs and crafts into Western life. This vision is quite different from the picture of cultural exchange painted by Caren Kaplan. As it is put in *Tristes Tropiques*, '[l]'humanité s'installe dans la monoculture'.⁶⁵ This monoculture has caused untold damage: Lévi-Strauss claims,

[j]'ouvre ces *révits* d'explorateurs: telle tribu, qu'on me décrit comme sauvage et conservant jusqu'à l'époque actuelle les mœurs de je ne sais quelle humanité primitive caricaturée en quelques légers chapitres, j'ai passé des semaines de ma vie d'étudiant à annoter les ouvrages que, voici cinquante ans, parfois même tout récemment, des hommes de science ont consacré à leur étude, avant que le contact avec les blancs et les épidémies subséquentes ne l'aient réduite à une poignée de misérables déracinés.⁶⁶

Here, Lévi-Strauss emphasises two principal ideas: the first is of course that writings about distant communities are not always to be taken at face value; the second is that Lévi-Strauss and his views, though unchanged in the interim, had not the credence when he was an unknown student that was subsequently afforded them. Intellectual celebrity has proved its own authority. This is key also in Said's work: the disenfranchised, those whom Gayatri Spivak calls the subalterns who cannot speak, are given voice in his criticism.⁶⁷

At the point at which we begin our close contrapuntal readings of Vailland and Sembène, we are aware of changes in literary preoccupations: the first of these is a renewed interest in travel literature. Steve Clark reminds us that '[b]ecause of post-colonial scholarship, travel writing, particularly in its most racist and imperialist guises, has become interesting for us again; but usually as a kind of love that dare not speak its name'.⁶⁸ The paradigm shifts which have undoubtedly occurred in recent years in postcolonial thought have not only resurrected travel literature as a genre, but have also, in fact, raised questions about the very existence of that genre, making it important for this project to consider the

⁶⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, p.27.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.28.

⁶⁷ See Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, eds, *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

⁶⁸ Steve Clark, ed., *Travel Writing and Empire*, p.3.

problematization of travel narratives and of the attendant issues of exile and migrancy. The second important development is the relative popularisation of what Richard Phillips calls ‘critical and revisionist histories of imperialism’;⁶⁹ Said must be considered a prime mover in this field and his theory of counterpoint – at best dismissed as ill-developed, at worst ignored altogether – ought to be evaluated. This evaluation will be derived from close contrapuntal readings of texts by Vailland and Sembène, with, in this chapter, a particular focus on place. The two authors’ texts, emerging as they do from a context in which Lévi-Strauss’s *Tristes Tropiques* is highlighting the exilic (Lévi-Strauss himself being a Jewish exile from Nazi-occupied Europe) and the growing realisation that Western society is not the uniquely privileged entity it has been perceived to be, may be appropriately considered in relation to geographical concerns.

IV. *Boroboudour: la terre plus grande que le ventre de l’Histoire*⁷⁰

When Steve Clark identifies travel writing as problematic for academic studies, due to the ‘impurity’ of the form, he is not positing a new insight. Romuald Fonkoua advanced the view in 1998 that ‘[l]e discours du “voyageur à l’envers” emprunte rarement – sinon par défaut – les formes canoniques’.⁷¹ This notion is clearly materialised in Sembène, for instance. The difficulty in categorising travel narratives is thus explained by Fonkoua:

Le discours du ‘voyageur à l’envers’ emprunte les genres familiers de la pratique littéraire sans aucune précision supplémentaire qui la distinguerait, sans la préparation nécessaire à une lecture spécifique, sans la création des conditions d’une écriture particulière et sans l’élaboration des

⁶⁹ Richard Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire: a Geography of Adventure*, p.161.

⁷⁰ Claude Roy, ‘Préface’, in Roger Vailland, *Boroboudour; Choses vues en Egypte; La Réunion* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1981), pp.7-9 (p.7).

⁷¹ Romuald Fonkoua, ‘Le “Voyage à l’envers”. Essai sur le discours des voyageurs nègres en France’, in *Les Discours de voyages*, ed. by Romuald Fonkoua (Paris: Karthala, 1998), pp.117-45 (p.118).

discours théoriques et des mécanismes esthétiques propres à l'invention d'un genre particulier. En outre, à la différence de ce qui s'est produit dans les champs littéraires européens, les récits d'aventures dans l'univers de l'Autre, les comptes-rendus ou les relations de voyage ne constituent pas un objet reconnu et institutionnalisé à travers des collections et séries spécifiques d'édition susceptibles de forger, de renforcer ou d'inciter à une pratique du genre du voyage, ou d'établir entre divers écrivains une concurrence dans le champ littéraire et discursif qui conduirait à sa vitalité. Ici, toutes les catégories figurées de l'esprit humain ou tous les genres de la littérature – l'épître, le roman, la poésie ou l'essai – semblent privilégiés par rapport à la 'relation' ou au 'récit' de voyage.⁷²

Vailland's relationship with travel writing will be seen, at first glance, as illustrative of the European travel experience, which Steve Clark describes thus: 'Europeans mapped the world rather than the world mapping them. [...] The strong model of travel writing and empire would insist that their texts promote, confirm and lament the exercise of imperial power; and that this ideology pervades their representational practices at every level.'⁷³ There is, though, a generic issue to be addressed, here: is it permissible – or, indeed, possible – to conflate travel writing (in any of the forms validated by Fonkoua, or others) and fiction in a contrapuntal reading of Vailland and Sembène? Steve Clark's identification of the link between traveller and liar, first addressed by Percy Adams, is perhaps a little too cynical to be helpful in making explicit the rationale for treating travel writing and fiction in the same study.⁷⁴ It may, however, be argued that the notion of what Douglas Pockock terms 'humanistic geography', which has previously been outlined, permits some conflation, since this term, with its *general* emphasis on the interaction of person and place, allows the reader to see travel literature as a very broad church; moreover, the 'figure in the landscape' of which J. Hillis Miller, borrowing from Hardy, writes serves as a useful point of convergence between travel writing and fiction. The problem of what constitutes *littérature de voyage* is a long-standing one, but provisional solutions are offered here. It ought also to be borne in mind that Edward Said himself has implicitly sanctioned the

⁷² Ibid., p.118.

⁷³ Steve Clark, ed., *Travel Writing and Empire*, p.3.

⁷⁴ See Percy G. Adams, *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983).

conflation proposed, having told interviewers in 1993: 'I'm totally against separatism.'⁷⁵ It becomes possible in this project, therefore, to consider Vailland's *récits* and Sembène's novel without undue concerns about genericity, the overlap between fiction and non-fiction in any case being made material in Vailland, novelist and journalist.

Jan Gorak has said that '[a]s Said represents them to his New York audience, the new French critics operate from "nomadic centers [*sic*], provisional structures that are never permanent"⁷⁶. It may be readily conceded that neither Gorak nor Said himself had Roger Vailland in mind. Vailland, however, shares more than simply a space in time with Said, as well as with Sembène, as evidenced by their writings on, for example, the Suez Crisis.⁷⁷ Moreover, Vailland, as a writer, if not as a critic, seems himself to operate from a nomadic centre. As Claude Roy reminisces in his preface to a collection of Roger Vailland's *récits*:

Dans la bibliothèque de la vieille maison campagnarde où Roger Vailland me rejoignait souvent à la fin des années quarante et au début des années cinquante, il y avait un globe terrestre de bureau un peu jauni. Roger aimait le soir le faire rêveusement tourner sous ses doigts et tresser sur ses longitudes le réseau des révolutions en train de germer et les feux de position des points chauds où nous projections d'aller.⁷⁸

Vailland's *récits*, perhaps more than his novels, reveal a deep interest in the influence of place upon person consistent with such ruminations. One of these *récits*, *Boroboudour* (1951), begins much as one would expect of a non-fictional work by Vailland. The 'homme de grands partis pris'⁷⁹ renowned for his unequivocal ventures into atheistic

⁷⁵ Anne Beezer and Peter Osborne, 'Orientalism and After: an Interview with Edward Said', p.28.

⁷⁶ Jan Gorak, *The Making of the Modern Canon: Genesis and Crisis of a Literary Idea*, p.213.

⁷⁷ Said made his first foray into political writing while a Princeton undergraduate, and his subject for a student magazine was the Suez Crisis; Vailland's *Choses vues en Egypte*, of course, makes use of some of the same subject matter.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁷⁹ Claude Roy, 'Préface', in Roger Vailland, *Boroboudour; Choses vues en Egypte; La Réunion*, p.9.

religion, politics and other such contentious arenas displaces himself from his native France to visit Indonesia at the behest of *La Tribune des Nations*, a left-wing newspaper.⁸⁰

Perhaps the most striking feature of Vailland's narrative is its tendency to numismatic assignment of nationalities to that which Vailland, as narrator, observes. He describes 'Uniformes gris-bleu de la R.A.F. Discipline et courtoisie britanniques'⁸¹ as well as likening women he encounters in El Adami to Parisians 'entre la rue de la Paix et le faubourg Saint-Honoré' (B, p.17). Yet this anxiety to construct the familiar from the raw materials of the alien is not uncontested: indeed, there is apparent excitement in the possibility of travelling yet further than Java or Bali to the last in a string of islands approaching Australia, a thrilling search for that which is radically other. Fred, Vailland's acquaintance, urges the latter, 'Pousse un peu plus loin' (B, p.15), and Vailland himself speculates, 'peut-on aller à Karachi?' (B, p.16). There is consistent recognition of the arbitrary manner in which nations are categorised by others – Vailland claims that, once he has arrived in Cairo, '[t]out l'après-midi, on m'a parlé de l'Égypte "qui fermente", de l'Orient "qui bouge"' (B, p.17)⁸² – as well as an awareness of the more sinister desire held in some quarters to be subsumed by another nation, an aspiration of '[l]'ennemi numéro un [...] Bao-Daï [...] [qui] n'a confiance que dans le dollar' (B, p.18).

This observational style, which admits of no alternative interpretation, is apparently entirely at odds with Béatrice Mousli's identification of the writer:

⁸⁰It is clear from Vailland's correspondence that this journey is a serious undertaking. He wrote to Elisabeth Naldi (his future wife), 'Nous ne nous quitterons plus à partir de mon retour' (Roger Vailland, *Écrits intimes*, ed. by Elisabeth Vailland and Jean Recanati (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1968), p.342). Moreover, the dedication of *Boroboudour* is to 'Elisabeth Naldi, pour qui [ce livre] fut écrit, chaque soir d'un voyage trop long' (Roger Vailland, *Boroboudour; Choses vues en Égypte; La Réunion*, p.12).

⁸¹Roger Vailland, *Boroboudour* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1981), p.16. Subsequent references are to this edition (first publ. Paris: Corrêa, 1951).

⁸²Interestingly, Edward Said's memory of this time and place departs from that related by Vailland and describes an Egypt very much in motion. Writing about his own school, Said claims that, '[a]fter the 1952 Free Officers' Revolution the school slowly lost its European cachet and by the 1956 Suez Crisis had become something else altogether' (Edward W. Said, *Out of Place*, p.37).

Vailland voyageur. Vailland qui prend l'avion, et écrit un certain nombre de textes sur l'avion. C'est l'homme pressé, l'homme qui, contrairement au voyageur du début du siècle, traverse des pays sans même s'en rendre compte. [...] Pour lui, le voyage en avion, c'est l'uniformisation.⁸³

A closer look at *Boroboudour*, however, yields something of this sense – but with regard to Vailland's *companions* – as it relates experiences of first-world visitors to a third-world territory and, even more interestingly, relates conversations taking place among such visitors while they are actually *en route* to these countries, emphasising their fundamental detachment from the territories as well as the geographical and metaphorical superiority afforded them by virtue of their flying overhead.

Vailland comments early in the *récit* upon a conversation with a Norwegian consul and his wife on board the 'plane to Calcutta: '[Le consul et sa femme] sont heureux de bavarder avec un écrivain français. Qu'est-ce que l'existentialisme?' (B, p. 24). This exemplifies the manner in which incomers can excise themselves entirely from the context in which they are in the process of placing themselves. Just as Said comments in his memoir on the incongruous Englishness of Victoria College in Cairo, the Britishness of Saint George's in Jerusalem and the self-conscious Americanness of the Cairo School for American Children,⁸⁴ so Vailland hints at a societal super-structure, controlling and yet ignoring the territory over which it rules or attempts to rule. While it is true that one structure is fixed, the other fluid – in the sense of being *no place* – Vailland's travellers barely concede the distinction. The pilot of the 'plane in which Vailland and his Norwegian co-travellers are flying is emblematic of this idea: 'L'aviateur se laisse aisément à oublier que chacun de ces hommes a une vie individuelle, qui a de l'importance' (B, p.25). Moreover, Vailland's revelation that the Norwegians are interested in discussing the question of existentialism -

⁸³ André Dedet, Jean-Jacques Faussot, John Flower, Béatrice Mousli and David Nott, 'Roger Vailland et l'exotisme: La Fête en actes', *Cahiers Roger Vailland*, 4 (1995), 77-100 (p.78).

⁸⁴ Said describes his experiences at his Cairo schools as those of 'just a fees-paying stranger' (*Out of Place*, p.108).

a relatively recent, therefore fashionable, concept, as well as the area of expertise of the stereotypical French intellectual - lends strength to the impression of European resistance to engagement with the culture being visited. Travel is presented as a vector, with all the connotations of single-mindedness that that term conjures.

Béatrice Mousli's idea that Vailland sees air travel as inducing uniformity is a fascinating one, particularly when considered in conjunction with Vailland's depiction of his fellow travellers and, more especially, with the title of this *récit*. Boroboudour (or, more usually, Borobudur) was – and is – a monument in central Java, built by the Sailendras, the Mountain Lords, in the ninth century. According to B.G. Gokhale, it is in this monument that '[t]he syncretism of the new Hindu-Buddhist-Javanese culture is most evident'.⁸⁵ This must be seen as crucial to Vailland's *récit* and to the current study, for several reasons. Firstly, from the point of view of Vailland, the choice of Boroboudour to represent or describe an entire work which traces an extensive journey may be perceived as an ironic historical echo of the supposed syncretism underway at the time of writing, an irony only reinforced by the Christian overtones of the first chapter's title – 'Noël sur trois continents'. By this is meant that the doomed struggle of the Dutch from 1945 to 1949 to regain control of Java after the Japanese occupation during the Second World War and the subsequent declaration of Indonesian independence represent no such happy alignment of cultures – more of which later. The extent to which this irony is intended is a moot point, since, on one hand, the description of travellers' behaviour supports the irony, but, on the other, Vailland's notion – which will be discussed in due course – that the Javanese have been tolerant of, even amused by, their Dutch colonisers would seem to belie the bitter fighting which 'history' tells us took place. The depiction of harmonious near-

⁸⁵ B.G. Gokhale, 'Java (Island)', Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2000 <http://encarta.msn.com> © 1997-2000 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

miscegenation is undeniably problematic. There is, of course, a further implication for the methodology of counterpoint, which, being largely synchronic in approach, would tend to ignore the earlier history of Java, and this will be a problem which will be considered at the end of this chapter.

In the meantime, let us proceed with a contrapuntal reading of Vailland and Sembène by considering the pertinent section of *Boroboudour* in conjunction with the early part of Sembène's novel, *O Pays, mon beau peuple*, which opens with a vision of Oumar Faye communing with his environment:

Les nomades avoisinants se demandaient si le fils du pêcheur n'était pas devenu fou. Ces courses dans la savane étonnaient. On racontait l'avoir surpris plus d'une fois en train de parler seul. Mais lui se saoulait de nature et n'en était jamais repu. Ses yeux avaient vu le jour dans ce pays; il se savait pétri de cette glèbe qui était sienne. Sa peau était imprégnée de sa saveur. Depuis son enfance, il s'était frotté à elle de la tête aux pieds. Ah, qu'il aimait la terre, cette terre, sa terre, comme il la chérissait! Il en était jaloux. Il la comparait à une femme aimante. (OPMBP, p.75)

This interaction of person with place – an interaction which may be purely the preserve of the native – sets the tone for the remainder of Part Two. Where the first part of Sembène's novel appears to define, through Oumar Faye, profound contentment as a place in the sun, the second part appears to develop the notion of happiness, through his wife, Isabelle, as a place in the heart, the sun itself, in Part Two, having proven itself ephemeral.⁸⁶ The role of Isabelle is crucial to an understanding of the importance of location in this part of *O Pays, mon beau peuple*, in that hers is the figure in which the periphery is constituted. Her letters to her parents in France bring together the issues of

⁸⁶Isabelle's concept of deprivation in Part Two is not to be able to 'conquérir un cœur où elle craignait ne pouvoir jamais trouver place' (Ousmane Sembène, *O Pays, mon beau peuple* (Paris: Presses Pocket, 1975), p.112. Subsequent references are to this edition (first publ. Paris: Presses Pocket, 1957). In Part One, though, her husband's fear about his persecution is founded on his being forbidden to 'me tailler une place au soleil' (OPMBP, p.69). The association of sun and happiness does indeed prove spurious, with the former described, finally, as nothing more than a two-dimensional 'disque rouge' (p.82).

literature and geography as she writes across the periphery, translating cultures. As Isabelle speculates on the reasons for her limited acceptance into her husband's community, she resorts to another literary work, from another geographical context, by way of explanation:

Enfin, je pense qu'il y a une troisième raison qui fait que je ne suis pas très bien accueillie: c'est que nos deux pays ne sont pas pleinement souverains. Je vais vous recopier une phrase, que je viens de lire dans le livre d'un Chinois dont j'ai oublié le nom, qui vous fera bien comprendre ce que je veux dire: 'Dans les pays qui sont placés sous une domination étrangère, les individus perdent peu à peu leur puissance créatrice et, de génération en génération, leur énergie diminue.' (OPMBP, p.77)

And yet Isabelle, in a sense, unconsciously supports this foreign domination, when she remarks to her parents that, in Senegal, '[I]a jeunesse a l'air de mieux voir où elle veut aller' (OPMBP, p.78, my italics). There is little doubt that her use of this travel metaphor implies that movement across boundaries constitutes progress.

Sembène's Isabelle is not alone in writing across the periphery in *O Pays, mon beau peuple*. Agnès, a Senegalese friend, has an uncle who writes from his adopted home in Marseille: his correspondence makes the journey reciprocal to that of Isabelle. When Agnès expresses her longing to visit France, a longing fuelled by these letters, Seck, a teacher, recites some lines to counteract this urge:

Pourquoi, heureuse enfant,
 Pourquoi quitter notre doux pays
 Pour ces villes trop peuplées,
 Pour récolter la souffrance,
 Confier ton corps à des nervis,
 Faire de grands adieux à nos chers baobabs?
 Toi, ici à moitié vêtue,
 Là-bas frissonnante sous la neige,
 Comme ils te manqueront nos tam-tams,
 Nos rires francs,
 Et si le corset sans pitié emprisonnait tes flancs
 Il te faudrait mendier ton dîner
 En vendant le parfum de ta chair,
 L'œil rêveur, suivant dans le sale temps
 Les épais fantômes d'arbres absents. (OPMBP, p.80)

The ovation Seck receives is indicative of a certain reactionary tendency on the part of the Casamancian group, and it is telling that these words are spoken by an educator. Images ranging from those of an over-populated metropolis and poor climate to those of the begging and prostitution alleged to be necessary for survival there are presented in unrelenting rhythm to the dreaming girl. Ironically, though, it is afterwards said of Seck: 'Il rêvait d'aller au théâtre, ne serait-ce qu'une fois, pour voir *Roméo et Juliette*. Seck savait que les vers qu'il venait de réciter n'étaient pas de lui' (OPMBP, p.81). The metropolis and the monuments of Western intellectual life are, for Seck, both terrifying and enticing. The counterpoint with Vailland's flight episode is clear: where Seck has a reticent interest in European literature, the Norwegian consul and his wife feel perfectly at ease quizzing Vailland about his responses to it. It is a European domain and they, therefore, have rightful access to it.

Sembène reinforces, in *O Pays, mon beau peuple*, the physicality of nationality and of race. Oumar Faye remarks to a man he encounters, '[t]u es syrien comme je suis nègre, de la tête aux pieds' (OPMBP, p.90). Vailland, too, makes this association, though with a background understanding of how misleading the physical can be: he notes, 'on me prend pour un Américain' (B, p.27), and when he comments that 'la totalité du corps participe aux danses javanaises' (B, p.36), it is clear that the body is acting in a way which is contrary to the mindset. There is a sense in which nationality is portrayed as something physically portable in Vailland's text; it is counterpointed in Sembène's novel by the negative connotations of that fact. For Vailland's 'characters', the unspoken acknowledgment that they cannot be divested of the *advantages* of nationality is the governing principle of their travelling experience. For Sembène's characters, nationality is an incarcerating force: like Vailland's companions, they are always accompanied by their nationality and defined by it, but their overriding awareness is that they cannot *escape* it. Counterpoint, here, shows that the nationality of the incomer actually determines the 'place' of the indigenous person.

We have seen that *Boroboudour*, in its consistent categorisation of people with their nationalities, continually highlights strict delineations between locations, but it also foregrounds an awareness of hybridity, as evidenced, perhaps, by the physical participation in the Javanese dance in spite of mental detachment from it: Vailland intimates to the reader, ‘je préfère Versailles au nid d’aigle de Berchtesgaden, les jardins de Tivoli aux précipices des Alpes, et l’allée d’eau des rizières de Java aux laves stériles de ses volcans’ (*B*, p.43), yet he quotes the more complex discourse of a teacher speaking to a group of students about the cultural interaction which has produced ‘Boroboudour’ the name, as well as Boroboudour the place:

Baroboudour, Borobudur, disait l’homme, est un nom hybride, formé du mot boro, dérivé du sanscrit bihara, qui signifie monastère, et du mot indonésien budur, qui signifie colline. Boroboudour est un monastère sur une colline... En Indonésie, comme dans l’Inde ancienne, vivaient côte à côte deux sortes de bouddhistes, les Hinayānas, bouddhistes qui ne croyaient qu’en un seul Bouddha, et les Mahāyanas, bouddhistes qui révéraient un grand nombre de Bouddhas. (*B*, p.44)

Soon, though, the tendency towards rigid delineation returns; the physical aspect of national identity is emphasised through a horticultural metaphor in *Boroboudour*. Although Vailland idealises Boroboudour to a point - saying, ‘[à] cet âge-là, j’eusse aimé Boroboudour à l’exclusion de tout autre lieu et nul sort m’eût paru plus digne d’envie que celui du dernier roi de Mataram’ (*B*, p.43) - he also proposes the notion that a living thing can only flourish in its native, or near-native environment. Discussing the Boroboudour orchid industry, he claims, ‘[c]e qui fait le prix d’une orchidée n’est pas seulement sa rareté – laquelle provient de la difficulté de reproduire en serre les conditions très spéciales du développement d’une plante qui, le plus souvent, se trouve être tout à la fois parasitaire et parasitée; il faut donc reconstruire autour [de l’orchidée] tout son univers’ (*B*, p.45).

Vailland proceeds to discuss various characteristics of the orchid, and during the discussion mentions that, 'la fleur des orchidées se dérobe encore longtemps sous un double pétale recourbé, que les botanistes appellent *casque*, et sous un triple sépale, également recourbé, et qui forme comme un casque sur le casque' (B, p.46). It cannot be accidental that Vailland dwells on the notion of the 'casque': he claims earlier in the *récit* that 'le casque colonial n'a pas survécu au régime colonial' (B, p.14). The double protection afforded the orchid by its two 'casques' renders the flower impervious to external conditions; the 'casque colonial' which disappeared along with the régime similarly protected the wearer from environmental conditions alien to him or her. It is a physical partition between cultures. The conflation of these two casques may be seen as suggestive of the idea that cultural barriers continue to exist after the moment of Dutch Empire has passed.

This tension between cultural discreteness and cultural hybridity returns to the *récit* almost immediately to produce a sense of orthodox humanism. Glossing Aldous Huxley, Vailland writes:

L'abondance que produiront les techniques nouvelles (la fission de l'atome, l'hérédité des hybrides), au service de la société sans classes, la liberté qu'engendrera enfin la maîtrise totale de la nature et de l'homme dans la nature, permettront au contraire de différencier et d'enrichir à l'infini les structures humaines. (B, p.48)

However, expressing his own thoughts, he writes of hierarchy and separateness:

Quand je rêvais de bergères devenues reines, en train de jouer sur les terrasses de Boroboudour, c'étaient bien des reines que je voyais, chacune aussi singulière que seule la reine pouvait être, autant de variétés, d'espèces, de famille, de genres de reines qu'il y a de créatures humaines, des reines aussi différentes des reines du passé que la licorne de tous les animaux sauvages ou domestiques, connus ou inconnus, créés ou imaginés. (B, p.48)

This dichotomy between the continuity implicit in hybridity and the discontinuity of the ranks in a hierarchical structure is exemplified by Vailland's observation of the Javanese economy:

où la catastrophe fut le plus durement ressentie, ce fut dans l'industrie sucrière, qui constituait la principale richesse de Java (je veux dire des financiers hollandais qui possédaient les plantations de canne à sucre de Java et ses sucreries modèles, sans y être jamais venus). (B, p.59)

For the student of Said, these lines are strongly reminiscent of *Culture and Imperialism's* reading of *Mansfield Park*. When Vailland writes about wealth located in Java but deployed in Europe, the contrapuntal awareness of that experience varies little from that of the Bertrams' sugar plantation in Antigua funding the family pile in England.

Vailland, like Said, does not dissemble from an awareness that no commercial interest can be excised from its political context:

[Les Anglais] sont plus conscients que les Français de l'évolution historique et ont compris qu'en Asie, le système colonial, sous sa forme brutale, a fait son temps. Ils s'appêtent à se retirer politiquement des Indes, non sans garder le contrôle du capital et du commerce indien. (B, p.61)

Like Said, too, Vailland focuses on the question of exile during his discussions of international relations. He emphasises that, in some instances, the influence of nationality means that 'place' can be brought to bear on process, as, for example, in the case of the 'commission d'arbitrage de l'O.N.U. [...] présidée par un Américain' (B, p.65), but he is aware, too, that this effect can be negative, as in the cases of those Dutch living in Indonesia whose identities, they claim, are adversely affected by the place in which they are resident: 'être Hollandais en Indonésie, il n'y a que ceux qui furent Juifs en Allemagne nazie, qui puissent comprendre ce que cela signifie' (B, p.66). This is, of course, problematic, since the Dutch have elected to travel to Indonesia in the first, and are not

subject to the coercion inflicted on the Jews, and a horrifying attempt at expiation for empire, if that is what is at the root of such a claim.

Ironically, the Dutch will not feel at home in the Netherlands either: those of them 'qui n'ont pas encore quitté l'Indonésie pour rentrer en Hollande, ou plus souvent pour émigrer en Australie ou en Afrique du Sud, car en Hollande non plus il n'y a plus de place pour eux' (B, p.66) are abandoned in a kind of exile. What is most interesting, perhaps, about this impression of exile is that the Indonesians themselves do not appear to resent the presence of the Dutch. Vailland notes,

Je n'ai par contre jamais entendu d'Indonésien parler avec haine des grands hommes blonds, qui pendant des siècles astreignirent sa patrie au régime des travaux forcés et édifièrent leur richesse sur le système [...] Le ton des Indonésiens à l'égard de leurs anciens maîtres est plutôt ironique et légèrement protecteur. (B, p.66)

There is none of the coruscating resentment of colonisation perceptible in other spheres, an absence which is striking and rather unconvincing. Yet Vailland reveals a telling personal attitude towards the Dutch language:

K, P et M sont les initiales de trois mots hollandais que je suis incapable de retenir, cette langue est barbare [...]. La KPM donc est une compagnie de navigation hollandaise qui détient le monopole de fait de tout le trafic maritime à l'intérieur de l'Indonésie. (B, p.68)

It is clear that the Dutch control is considerable and yet the language which represents that control is impenetrable to the outsider. The outsider, needless to say, is more usually in reality the insider, the indigenous person excised from his or her context. Moreover, it is not simply one of a number of economic elements over which the Dutch reign: 'Toutes les relations intérieures indonésiennes sont maritimes. La KPM se trouve donc être le système nerveux et le système sanguin de l'Indonésie, matérialisation de l'unité nationale indonésienne' (B, p.69). The physiological allusions which serve as a metaphor for the

Indonesian economic infrastructure appear to be designed to emphasise the holism of place, the interrelation of geography, commerce and humanity.

The question of what is going on historically and spatially in this textual rendering of Vailland's experience must be central to a contrapuntal reading of *Boroboudour* with *O Pays, mon beau peuple*. The sense of holism in the Dutch-Indonesian encounter inferred from *Boroboudour* in the above reading is clearly incongruous with what is known to be occurring at this point in history. Not only does history relate that the struggle for renewed control of Java by the Dutch against the Javanese bid for independence was extremely bitter and hard-fought, but also the *French* have by this time been engaged in nation-building activities elsewhere for a century and a half and, by Vailland's own admission, '[l]a principale qualité de l'écrivain est la vigilance.'⁸⁷ Vailland's 'wordliness', Said might argue, ought to force a yoking of the process to which he is an eyewitness and the process which he knows to be underway elsewhere in the developing world. Senegal, setting for Sembène's novel, *O Pays, mon beau peuple*, is subject to just the kind of nation-building activities on the part of the French that the Dutch have been engaged in in Indonesia. What can be inferred, contrapuntally, from Vailland's evasion – that is to say his failure to make explicit this connection and his suggestion of native tolerance of colonisation – is that Isabelle, in *O Pays, mon beau peuple*, is victimised for representing this same attitude.

Perhaps one answer to this problematic is to be found in Vailland's *récit*, where the author's preoccupation with the activity of writing recedes only sporadically and is always finally foregrounded. Seemingly falling into the trap identified by Steve Clark, and signalled earlier in the chapter, Vailland hints at aesthetic calculation, claiming that '[à] l'origine de

⁸⁷ Roger Vailland, *Chronique d'Hiroshima à Goldfinger*, 1945-1965, ed. by René Ballet (Paris: Messidor, 1984), p.15.

l'art, il y a toujours recherche d'efficacité, c'est-à-dire de produire un effet; le poème ou la danse est un alcool d'un genre particulier' (B, p.73). Another solution is possible, though: André Dedet signals that solution, arguing, 'Vailland dit: "Je suis partisan de la rigueur morale." C'est de l'anti-Vailland qu'on lit dans *Boroboudour*.'⁸⁸ According to Dedet, it is in the pages of *La Réunion* that '[o]n retrouve le Vailland que l'on connaissait après *Boroboudour*.'⁸⁹ It is indubitable that Vailland presents the reader with some challenging contradictions; John Flower has noted, 'Je trouve très intéressant que, dans *Boroboudour*, en 1951, Vailland ait écrit: "Le dépaysement n'est plus possible aujourd'hui."' ⁹⁰ It is, indeed, interesting that Vailland should suggest, on one hand, that one's sense of nationality is inescapable, integral to one's general identity and, on the other, that the Dutch can never again feel that sense, even were they to return home, since they are not mere recreational travellers with every intention of returning, but colonists.

It is arguable, of course, that Vailland simply offers the nearest possible approximation to objective reiteration of his experience, and identifies no need to set up any oppositions in what is theoretically a neutral representation. Yet Rodney Needham has asserted that this is not an unconscionable, but a genuinely impossible choice:

[the concept of opposition] has been held to express a spontaneous and necessary act of the mind, such that it is to be found in every type of culture. These supposed characteristics would seem to claim for opposition a special value in attempts to arrive at a general understanding of social forms and human powers. The only way to attain this understanding is by the widest practice of comparativism, but the greater the differences among the linguistic traditions studied, the less it can be presumed that the words of our common discourse will be adequate to that task.⁹¹

Needham would seem to be suggesting that opposition is an involuntary intellectual

⁸⁸ André Dedet, Jean-Jacques Faussot, John Flower, Béatrice Mousli and David Nott, 'Roger Vailland et l'exotisme: La Fête en actes', p.81.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.84.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.80.

⁹¹ Rodney Needham, *Counterpoints*, p.1.

function. This has implications not only for what Vailland has and has not done, but for the reader of Vailland and of Sembène, since a lexical point of convergence between their works raises another contrapuntal interest. Vailland writes: '[a]rrivèrent enfin les Hollandais qui essayèrent vainement de convertir au Protestantisme les habitants de Java, Célèbes, Sumatra etc., mais qui pour les raisons de commodité amoureuse que nous avons expliquées plus haut, laissèrent en paix les Balinais' (B, p.71). Vailland writes of the Dutch choosing to leave the Balinese 'en paix', and this is a phrase which permeates Sembène's novel. On each occasion that any of Sembène's characters is asked about his or her health or state of mind, the response comes, 'en paix', or, 'paix seulement'. Vailland's notion of being left 'en paix' is juxtaposed with the prospect of religious conversion by colonists which is, by implication, a violent process; Sembène's characters' repetition of variations on the phrase contrasts with an implied and expectantly awaited belligerent entity, which later materialises in the form of Faye's murderers. Vailland depicts the threat to peace as an external, infiltrating body; Sembène, as an internal, ever-present force. The significance of such a comparison for counterpoint is clear: the common lexis between Vailland and Sembène is a point of entry to their political agendas. Counterpoint, while necessarily limited in the scope of its examples illustrating any single point, does indeed attempt the widest practice of comparativism. It can no more effectively avoid a certain degree of presumptuousness with regard to linguistic differentials than any other theory, but can and must exploit those lexical intersections which serve as gateways to greater literary understanding.

Said urges his reader to understand that, '[i]n practical terms, "contrapuntal reading" as I have called it means reading a text with an understanding of what is involved when an author shows, for instance, that a colonial sugar plantation is seen as important to the process of maintaining a particular style of life in England'.⁹² A contrapuntal reading of

⁹² Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.78.

two texts of approximately the same chronological moment, being considered ‘against’ each other, then, requires that each provides some information of that kind which is latent or concealed in the other narrative. This is intricately bound up, too, with the notion of what has become known as the reversal of the gaze. In the context of Roger Vailland’s travel accounts, John Flower has described the initiator of this gaze as follows: ‘celui qui normalement regarde en tant qu’homme dominant et qui, à un certain moment, se rend compte qu’il est regardé lui-même. On a un cercle bouclé d’une certaine façon.’⁹³ This notion of circularity is apt, since it keeps in sharp focus the idea that chronologically equivalent texts are fundamentally linked and cannot be considered mutually exclusive. Not only that, but a broader vision of the contrapuntal experience is made possible when Said is invoked. As Laurie Jo Sears writes in her book, *Shadows of Empire: Colonial Discourse and Javanese Tales*,

Said focuses mainly on British, French and American imperial attitudes, but his arguments can be extended to include Dutch behavior [sic] in the Indies and especially Dutch attitudes towards Islam. This book shows a particular example of orientalist discourse in the tensions of empire that influenced both European and Javanese literary and historical traditions. [...] I do present Dutch discourses about Java and Javanese traditions, but I am equally interested in how the actions of local intelligentsias [...] were impelled by their own logics and needs and how these activities intersected, obstructed, or occasionally meshed with Dutch efforts to represent and control Javanese literary and historical productions.⁹⁴

In our first attempt at contrapuntal reading – of Vailland’s *Boroboudour* and the first part of Sembène’s *O Pays, mon beau peuple* – this inability to look at texts as though their contexts were mutually exclusive has meant that Vailland’s text has furnished the reader with the ‘structures and attitudes of reference’⁹⁵ likely to be governing the mindsets of the European colonising forces in overseas territories, thus contributing to a more complete

⁹³ André Dedet, Jean-Jacques Faussot, John Flower, Béatrice Mousli and David Nott, ‘Roger Vailland et l’exotisme: La Fête en actes’, p.90.

⁹⁴ Laurie Jo Sears, *Shadows of Empire: Colonial Discourse and Javanese Tales* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1996), pp.14-15.

⁹⁵ This is Edward Said’s term. In *Culture and Imperialism*, he writes: ‘the idea of overseas rule – jumping beyond adjacent territories [...] has a lot to do with projections, whether in fiction or geography or art, and it acquires a continuous presence through actual expansion, administration, investment, and commitment [...]. When I use the phrase “a structure of attitude and reference”, this is what I have in mind’ (Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.xxvi).

picture of the colonial experience than that which is offered in Sembène's novel. From *Vailland's* travelling companions' conversations as they journey to Dutch territory – not to say from Vailland's own insistence on indigenous contentment – the reader may infer something about the Senegalese situation and about the colonists' attitudes which have produced such resentment towards the Frenchwoman, Isabelle, in *Sembène's* characters. This is a crucial and positive first function of contrapuntalism, since Sembène, in this text, has elected to suppress explicit comment of his own. In our next contrapuntal reading, the problem of 'actual geographical possession of land [which] is what empire in the final analysis is all about'⁹⁶ will be treated through a contrapuntal reading of Vailland's *Choses vues en Egypte* and the third part of Sembène's *O Pays, mon beau peuple*.

V. *Choses vues en Egypte: partir pour l'exil*

Vailland's 1952 *récit* opens thus: 'J'arrivai au Caire, en avion, le 12 août 1952, seize jours après le coup d'Etat militaire qui obligea le roi Farouk à abdiquer et à partir pour l'exil.'⁹⁷ He recalls ensconcing himself in a group which included the *Daily Mail's* Walter Farr, who had 'déjà bu beaucoup de whisky' (*CVE*, p.155). Farr is reported to have remarked to Vailland: 'Nous voici de nouveau tous réunis. Mauvais signe pour l'Egypte. Quand nous nous abattons sur un pays, c'est que le sang va couler' (*CVE*, p.155). This view is aptly reinforced by David Reynolds in his book *Britannia Overruled*, in which he observes, with recourse to the vocabulary of anatomy, that Egypt was subject to intense British military protection because of the role of the Suez Canal as 'the prime *artery* for oil traffic to Europe' (my italics).⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.93.

⁹⁷ Roger Vailland, *Choses vues en Egypte* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1981), p.155. Subsequent references are to this edition (first publ. Paris: Editions Défense de la paix, 1952).

⁹⁸ David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Longman, 1991), p.177.

Vailland's *récit* ends on a sentimental, almost campaigning note:

Le principal but de ce petit livre est de renforcer la solidarité de tous les peuples pour le grand, le noble, le pacifique, le tendre et bienveillant, le courageux peuple égyptien dans les très dures épreuves qu'il va encore avoir à subir. (*CVE*, p.244)

The inauguration of a new Egyptian republic heralds considerable demographic change for the country, and this aspect of the *récit* is one which may be counterpointed with the third and final section of Sembène's *O Pays, mon beau peuple*. In both texts, the relationship of people to territory is the principal concern. For Edward Said, '[t]he main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans for its future – these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative.'⁹⁹

The third section of *O Pays, mon beau peuple*, like the preceding two, opens with a litany of geographical, temporal and agricultural observations, as well as, on this occasion, an ironic, proleptic foreshadowing of the novel's *dénouement*, through a reference to the supposedly completed 'saison morte' in Senegal (*OPMBP*, p.145). In the wake of a season of famine, Oumar Faye gathers the community elders to discuss their situation:

Je ne suis pas ici en étranger, vos souffrances sont celles du peuple, nos pleurs sont ceux de tous, et ceux qui vivent sur cette terre et ne sont pas là en ce moment dépendent aussi de vous. Il ne faut pas aimer la terre pour ce qu'elle donne, il faut la chérir parce qu'elle est nôtre. Elle est une mère et une femme. (*OPMBP*, p.149)

Apart from merely railing against the selfish exploitation of land, Faye presages later events concerning his role in the land's evolution, and that of his wife. When, finally, he is murdered, Isabelle remarks to Papa Gomis, '[m]a douleur est à moi, mais la terre où il repose est à vous' (*OPMBP*, p.185). As Faye himself had predicted, the land has indeed

⁹⁹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.xiii.

become a wife to him, and in death it has supplanted his own wife, who has emotional, but not geographical, access to him. She acknowledges that her rights over the land where her husband is buried have been purely provisional, and that she – neither fully immigrant, nor exile, but *tourist* – has, ultimately, no authority over her own recent history.

In this section of the novel, it is geography which constitutes the ultimate authority. With regard to his wife's pregnancy, Faye tells her, '[i]l y a des choses qui concernent les femmes et pas les hommes, *c'est la coutume ici*' (OPMBP, p.159, my italics). Isabelle, for her part, senses that her location is making her ill, since the odour of the dying leaves from the forest are nauseating her, but she asserts, even more tellingly, '[c]e n'est rien, ce malaise ne sera que *passager*' (OPMBP, p.159, my italics). Her own status as traveller is, ironically, the basis from which the couple's difficulties stem and the reason for her final loss. Faye, after all, is at one with this environment: when Rokhaya asks him to visit his father, he says, 'j'irai au coucher du soleil' (OPMBP, p.158); son and sun coincide, but Isabelle cannot hope to enjoy this same synthesis.

It is clear, at this stage, that the location of God is also profoundly important. Faye has little interest in pilgrimage, and states, 'Dieu se trouve partout, en nous, sur la terre qu'il a créée, dans le ciel, dans l'eau qui arrose nos champs, dans le soleil qui fait mûrir nos semences' (OPMBP, p.164). Moussa Faye, his father, evidently considers God a landmark at the end of a very specific road, telling his son, 'tu es un être perdu pour le chemin de Dieu' (OPMBP, p.165). Oumar Faye retorts by advising his father, 'observe bien les gens que Dieu mettra sur ton chemin, n'oublie pas, dans ta hâte, de lever la tête pour contempler les maisons et les mosquées' (OPBMP, p.165). This effects a reversal: Faye observes that, rather than walking on God's path, his father follows his own, and that God intercedes along the way. When he tells his mother, Rokhaya, '[j]e désire mon paradis

ici' (OPMBP, p.165) he is minimising the prospect of an afterlife and attempting intellectually to relocate whatever benefits an afterlife might have.

Evidence of Oumar's dislike of the notion of a single, holy path is compounded by the claim that '[s]a popularité avait franchi les limites du territoire' (OPMBP, p.166, my italics). He is outward-looking and unobsessed with strict delineations of territory. The *territoire* he occupies, though, has clearly been corrupted by a white presence. In the European colony, '[t]out était conçu pour adoucir le séjour des blancs en terre africaine' (OPMBP, p.168). Descriptions of how land has been divided to accommodate different games and activities culminate in an image of radically different communities sharing the same space: '[a]insi se côtoyaient deux mondes qui ne se comprenaient pas, qui vivaient sur la même terre au rythme des mêmes saisons et qui ne pouvaient rien mettre en commun' (OPMBP, p.169).

This would suggest eternal division between the races, yet when Oumar Faye is discussed in an organised meeting of some community members, a combination of Africans and Europeans, he is described as a hybrid and a misfit, 'trop malin pour un noir, mais pas assez pour être un blanc' (OPMBP, p.171). Criticism is made of his possession of Marxist texts and he is referred to as 'un bolchéviste' (OPMBP, p.171).¹⁰⁰ Again, the travel metaphor is crucial: Pierre, supporter of Faye, in trying to persuade his colleagues to alter their perspective, tells them, '[s]i vous ne voulez pas voir ce qui se passe autour de vous, si vous êtes trop fiers pour vous retourner, vous n'en avez plus pour longtemps, les difficultés se dresseront l'une après l'autre sur vos chemins' (OPMBP, p.172, my italics); in response, he is told, 'Pierre, tu prépares tes bagages. Ton séjour ici t'a beaucoup influencé, tu as besoin de repos. Prends un congé' (OPMBP, p.172). Ironically, Pierre invokes the

¹⁰⁰ It is interesting to note the authorial approval implicit in this epithet and to compare it with Vailland's ideal of 'le vrai bolchévik' which, though strictly absent from his reporting, is a recurrent motif in his fiction. In *Choses vues en Egypte*, the model is clearly in Vailland's mind, despite its remaining unarticulated.

travel metaphor to describe those who are, in fact, in intellectual stasis; he, who has already 'moved' in his thinking, must now embark on a literal journey.

Pierre, who has requested repatriation for years, is now granted it, because he is initiating controversy. He is, in a Saidian sense, exiled.¹⁰¹ True, he has desired physical relocation, but he is being marginalised from a debate in which he wishes to play an active part, and given that, as we have seen several times, Said's concept of narrative is as a function of speaking from a place, Pierre has been exiled from the very place which *allows* him to engage in that narrative. Seck, the teacher, asks Papa Gomis if he, too, is about to leave: 'Allez-vous faire comme ces cultivateurs vagabonds qui vont à la recherche d'une nouvelle terre? Ce n'est pas en vous exilant que vous trouverez une solution au problème' (OPMBP, p.176). Even Faye himself is held captive by the land, subject to a meteorological dictatorship; as he says, 'la pluie, elle, n'attend pas' (OPMBP, p.176). The last sentence of the novel, written about the dead Faye, maintains the sense of the importance of the territorial to life: '[Faye] précédait les semences, il était présent durant la saison des pluies et il tenait compagnie aux jeunes gens pendant les récoltes' (OPMBP, p.187). Faye's presence is at once physical and metaphysical, now: he is buried in the land, therefore the land still holds him prisoner, but the influence he always desired over the land is exerted from beyond the grave, allowing him to 'relocate' his nationality to make *it* part of *him*.

The philosophical inalienability of nationality is sharply drawn here. The resolution of Sembène's novel resides in the reassuring conclusion that one's land, one's place is unassailable, even after death. Vailland's *récit*, *Choses vues en Egypte*, also suggests that land rights are the only rights which, ironically, are not utterly disregarded in Egypt by colonising and otherwise influencing forces. Certainly, it is made explicit that the interest

¹⁰¹ Said identifies exile as being '[p]redicated on the existence of, love for, and a real bond with one's native place; the universal truth of exile is not that one has lost that love or home, but that inherent in each is an unexpected, unwelcome loss' (Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.407).

of the government of the United States in Egypt derives from that nation's proximity to Libya, Jordan and Iraq and from its helpful position with regard to the Soviet Union; it is clear, too, that France and Britain have considerable economic interests in the area. However, as Vailland writes in 1952: 'la question agraire va jouer un rôle décisif. Seize millions de paysans sur vingt millions d'habitants, et pour moins d'un million d'ouvriers, représentent la force essentielle avec laquelle tout régime devra compter' (*CVE*, p.239). That agricultural force is the one to which the military forces must pander: 'Pour obtenir l'appui des paysans, le Comité militaire avait dû promettre la réforme agraire, et tolérer la formation des comités de paysans' (*CVE*, p.240).

This demonstration, at the end of the *récit*, of peasant power has, of course, been premonished by Kamal, in his dealings with Vailland, and in retrospect his actions assume a greater significance. In the sixth chapter of the *récit*, Vailland writes that 'Kamal descendit dans un champ me cueillir une fleur de coton, que je serrai dans mon portefeuille. Nous décidâmes d'écrire ensemble un poème, lui en arabe, moi en français, un poème bilingue, à la gloire de son pays: "La vallée du Nil est un jardin"' (*CVE*, p.200). The reader may draw the inferences that, first, the produce of the land may be given by a native, but not taken by a colonist, and, second, that national glory derives from agricultural concerns. These notions are reinforced at the end of this same chapter, when Kamal and his compatriots are demonstrating. Their power resides in their land:

Vive l'union des paysans et des ouvriers!
 Vive l'armée populaire, à bas la police!
 A bas l'impérialisme!
 A bas l'Angleterre, à bas l'Amérique, à bas la France!
 Vive le peuple français!
 Et Kamal me désigna à la foule.
 Vive le partage des terres! (*CVE*, p.203)

Vailland's *récit*, though, implicitly problematises the whole notion of geography; it is notable that the territorial interests of Britain, France and the United States are actually served by the land rights of the Egyptians, since it is only by native control of the land itself that the safety of foreign investment is assured. Hence, it may be argued that land and territory are polar opposites, each dependent on the control of the other – by the Other. Once again, let us insist upon a contrapuntal reading of Vailland and Sembène, here: from the conclusion of his *récit*, as well as from the starkly anti-imperialist ejaculations, cited above, which attract no authorial criticism, it is evident that Vailland, in his *Choses vues en Egypte*, is attempting a proselytising narrative, and one which is, in some ways, clearer than that of Sembène. *Choses vues en Egypte* invites the reader to deconstruct geographical issues, to separate intellectually land from territory; *O Pays, mon beau peuple* offers a more confusing picture of those issues: here, the indigenous people are found to be captives of the land, apparently at the mercy of climate change, but also to be captives of the territory, that is to say under the control of the colonising force. The novel, though, problematises the nature of travel, not strictly of geography: Isabelle is not, as she has initially been treated, a representative of the French colonising mission in Senegal; rather, she is, as we have said, a tourist, a temporary resident. Her investment is not material, but emotional, and that is why, infrastructurally and culturally, her late husband's community is seen to be unchanged by her. The geographical interests Isabelle has had have been those she shared with Oumar, namely *land* interests; Vailland's *récit*, read contrapuntally with Sembène's text, demonstrates that Isabelle's lack of *territorial* interest may explain why her influence upon the Senegalese community into which she married has been purely transitory.

In *The Pen and the Sword*, a transcript of a series of conversations which took place between 1987 and 1994 between David Barsamian and Edward Said, Said is permitted, in an unusually informal environment, to discuss his views on imperialism and his contrapuntal

response to imperial literature.¹⁰² In his conversations with Barsamian, Said makes his 'main point [which is] that the experience of imperialism is really an experience of interdependent histories'¹⁰³ and the supplementary point that '[i]mperialism is never the imposing of one view on another. It's a contested and joint experience'.¹⁰⁴ This is certainly borne out by the foregoing contrapuntal reading, from which the reader may begin to draw the conclusion, contrary (perhaps) to his or her initial perceptions about the texts involved, that Vailland's text is *about* imperialism in a way that Sembène's is not. During the next contrapuntal reading, this tentative conclusion will be borne in mind, as, indeed, will the impression, doubtless growing in strength by now, that the kind of metastatic leap from one text to another that counterpoint facilitates may actually be seen as an ironic reflection of the far-reaching overseas ventures implied in the imperial process.

VI. *La Réunion: Et si, à l'échelle de l'univers, la terre n'était qu'une île?*¹⁰⁵

Between 1638 and 1643, what is now the *département* of La Réunion had been claimed by the French, by whom it was named, in 1649, Bourbon, and colonised two decades later. The island had been uninhabited when the Portuguese discovered it in the previous century, so the French brought to their new colony slaves from Africa who would work

¹⁰² It is worth noting that no reference is made in the book's index to counterpoint, despite Said's own reference to it on page seventy-one. This constitutes evidence for the main premise of this project: that no sustained evaluation of his contrapuntal theory has yet been attempted, and that, however seriously Said is taken as an academic, it is not because of this theory.

¹⁰³ Edward W. Said and David Barsamian, *The Pen and the Sword*, p.72.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.73.

¹⁰⁵ Roger Vailland, *La Réunion* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1981), p.326. Subsequent references are to this edition (first publ. Paris: Editions Rencontre, 1964).

on the coffee plantations, and, from the nineteenth century, on the sugar plantations which remain the area's economic mainstay. This was only the first in a series of large-scale immigrations to the island; after the abolition of slavery in 1848, yet more servants, hitherto indentured in parts of South-East Asia and India, were brought to the island to work the plantations. Vailland's *récit*, *La Réunion*, reminds the reader of Raymond Williams's inspiration for Edward Said's secular criticism: 'Williams teaches us to read in a different way and to remember that for every poem or novel in the canon there is a social fact being requisitioned for the page.'¹⁰⁶ In this contrapuntal reading, we shall, of course, be considering, implicitly, links between Réunion and Senegal, links permitted temporally and spatially by their positions in the continuum of the French imperial quest.

Boroboudour juxtaposed the vibrant exoticism of Indonesia with 'des reliques de la gloire paternelle', adding that '[l]e casque colonial n'a pas survécu au régime colonial' (B, p.14). Such observations highlight the slippage between migrancy and travel which is so important to a discussion of place in literature, in that the superficial charms which a mere traveller enjoys are seen to give way to the image of decay more apparent to a resident. When Vailland observes 'le sol s'effondre soudain comme un ventre vidé' (B, p.19), he offers not simply the image of a sunset, but also visions of anatomical collapse and of physical interdependence with the natural world which emerge from the text. Similarly, in *La Réunion*, the utopian vision of 'un paradis terrestre' (R, p.249) – the vision of a traveller rather than of a migrant – quickly surrenders to a strangely ambivalent catalogue of decadent images. When Vailland quotes naturalist Etienne de Flacourt's 1649 report to the Compagnie de l'Orient, at the outset of *La Réunion*, it is clear that the land described is a haven for the traveller: Flacourt writes of running water, 'cascades qui sont si admirables à voir qu'il semble que la nature les a ainsi faites pour allécher les hommes qui les voient à y demeurer' (R, p.249). However, the historical references to bird-eating spiders (R, p.283)

¹⁰⁶ Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, p.23.

and the hints at cannibalism (R, p.272) herald Vailland's account of post-slavery Réunion, in which contemporary native behaviour is related to historical deprivation. In each of these visions, nature serves humankind. Yet there is a stark contrast between the fortuitous appearance of cool water at the time of the traveller's need and the savage consumption of one of nature's creatures by another. The ambivalence is not lost on Vailland:

je sais depuis longtemps que la Providence n'a pas créé les melons avec des côtes pour que les philosophes les mangent par tranches, ni les îles tropicales pour que les écrivains y trouvent prétexte à mauvaise littérature, et que les bons nègres pour les Blancs sont les pires pour les autres nègres. (R, p.251)

It is significant that Vailland is able to submerge the literary ego to this extent, given that it is precisely because of a piece of writing that he clearly feels it incumbent upon him to investigate

[c]omment en trois siècles le paradis terrestre est-il devenu territoire de monoculture, terre surpeuplée? Voilà les questions que je me suis posées après qu'un hasard m'eut fait lire le rapport d'Etienne de Flacourt et pourquoi, un mois de mars récent, je me suis embarqué sur le *Jean-Laborde* des Messageries maritimes, à destination de la Réunion. (R, p.250)

Like Lévi-Strauss, Vailland deplures monoculture.

It is a textual stimulus which has prompted Vailland to travel to La Réunion and it is a textual product which is the culmination of his voyage, yet he is conscious of the degree to which writing is irrelevant to what he witnesses there. He demonstrates an ironic awareness, too, of his own irrelevance as a Frenchman, Réunion being so far from his homeland:

L'île où furent abandonnés les mutins de Fort-Dauphin n'était pas tout à fait inconnue des navigateurs. Selon les cartes marines, elle était dénommée Mascareigne, Mascarin ou *England Forest*. Deux ans plus tôt, le hasard des vents avait poussé M. de Pronis jusque sur ses rivages; il l'avait rapidement explorée, avait constaté qu'elle était déserte et en avait pris possession au

nom du roi de France; il l'avait nommée Bourbon. Elle est située dans l'océan Indien, à huit cents kilomètres à l'ouest de Java, à *quatre mille* kilomètres au sud des Indes, à *treize mille* kilomètres de la France. Elle s'appelle aujourd'hui la Réunion et c'est un département français. (R, p.248, my italics)

And yet it is Vailland's self-consciousness as a French writer that, more than anything else, characterises this *récit*. He mentions such disparate writers as Baudelaire and Corneille, and says of his own style, 'je suis trop vite, je suis trop avide, je laisse la page qu'il me plairait le plus de bien achever pour n'importe quel plaisir qui passe. J'exécute au lieu d'apprivoiser, brute' (R, p.252). Rather than hurry to record his own impressions, Vailland contents himself with those of other writers: '[e]n mer rouge enfin, j'abordai la littérature consacrée à la Réunion' (R, p.253). These writers are foreign and include Dutchman Pierre-Guillaume Verhuff and English pirate Blackwell. Vailland's *récit* gives the impression that the writer dismisses any notion that nationality can explain behaviour: 'Un noir de petite taille, ivre, titubait au milieu de la piste; le ministre le regardait avec mépris. "C'est un Réunionnais", me dit-il, comme si ceci suffisait à expliquer cela' (R, p.255). Yet at the same time, the *récit* is assiduous in its determination to demonstrate that something older and more authoritative than the current inhabitants exerts an influence upon La Réunion, and here again Vailland resorts to a literary authority: 'Le poète Malcolm de Chazalles, originaire de Maurice, suppose que les découpures de certaines montagnes des deux îles (les *mornes*) ne sont pas dues à l'érosion; il y voit l'œuvre de sculpteurs appartenant à une civilisation disparue et parents de ceux de l'île de Paques' (R, p.254). In fact, each stage of Vailland's experience in La Réunion appears to induce a corresponding reference to non-*Réunionnais* writers: 'Je pensais à Hugo, à Gustave Doré, à Conrad, aux catastrophes cosmiques' (R, p.264). Further references are made to Blake (R, p.282) and to Voltaire (R, p.293). Travel and intertext are closely related, here, as each stage of the journey is linked to a text from the literary archive familiar to Vailland.

Comparing the text of *La Réunion* with the section of Vailland's *Écrits intimes* written as he researched the former work yields even more evidence of Vailland's literary dependence. Between 16 March and 30 August, 1958 are mentioned *Barnabooth*, *Le Cahier rouge*, *La Flore complète de France*, *Drôle de jeu*, *L'Enclos*, *Les Palmiers sauvages*, *Voies nouvelles no.2*, *La Pléiade*, *Le Riz et la mousson*, *L'Invaincu*, *Sartoris*, *Paradis perdu*, *Une très courte histoire*, and Mazzini's *Essais*. Moreover, the invocation of Rimbaud in Chapter Six is reminiscent of that writer's appearance in Vailland's novel, *Un Jeune Homme seul* (1951), which relates the young Eugène-Marie Favart's desire to go 'en Afrique comme Rimbaud', a wish, the reader will discover in the following chapter, that is at once naïve and ideologically unsavoury.

The first part of Ousmane Sembène's 1957 novel, *O Pays, mon beau peuple*, yields many issues which may usefully be counterpointed with Vailland's *Réunion*. This novel is a third-person narrative, in contrast with Vailland's first-person *récit* and details the return to Casamance of native Oumar Faye with his white French wife, Isabelle. The voyage from France to Africa is the voyage home for Oumar, but the virgin trip for his wife, who, like Vailland in *La Réunion*, has learned about her new home from what she has read about it: 'Ce qu'elle avait lu [...] l'aiderait à amortir les chocs que ne manqueraient pas de provoquer les croyances et le fanatisme de cette nouvelle famille.'¹⁰⁷ Interestingly, though, while Isabelle's view of Africa has been partially formed before her arrival, Vailland's perception of La Réunion is derived from what he reads once he – as both author and, to some extent, protagonist – has arrived. Isabelle's reading prepares her for what she is about to witness; Vailland's supplants what he ought to witness, as he resorts to a largely Western corpus of literature written about La Réunion. Indeed, this point is reinforced by Vailland's comment that the 'extrême difficulté à accoster l'île explique sans doute qu'elle

¹⁰⁷Ousmane Sembène, *O Pays, mon beau peuple*, p.15.

est restée déserte jusqu'en 1646.¹⁰⁸ Robinson Crusoé n'aurait pas pu y aborder' (R, p.269). Counterpoint highlights, here, the difference between the temporary and the permanent – or, at least, semi-permanent – resident of the colony: Vailland remains habitually superficial to that which occurs in La Réunion, knowing that he will be going home; Isabelle consciously dispenses with all external sources of information once in Senegal in order that she might adopt some of the habits of the community in which her residence as Oumar's wife is unexpectedly curtailed.

Further, Vailland's and Sembène's approaches to their admittedly different genres are recognisably disparate from the outset. Sembène's *O Pays, mon beau peuple* begins with a lengthy first paragraph on the local environment, its wildlife and natural features. While the notion of travel is immediately introduced via the first line, '[l]e bateau reprit sa lente remontée du fleuve' (OPMBP, p.11) - a motif also present at the opening of *Le Docker noir* – no human being emerges until the second paragraph, at which point an unidentified 'homme sortit une cigarette de sa poche, l'alluma machinalement sans cesser de contempler la beauté massive de cette végétation' (OPMBP, p.11). Contrast this with Vailland's opening lines of *La Réunion*:

Au printemps 1646, M. de Pronis, gouverneur de Fort-Dauphin, au nom de la Compagnie de l'Orient fondée par Richelieu, se trouva en difficulté avec quelques-uns de ses subordonnés. Fort-Dauphin, à l'extrémité sud de Madagascar, à la pointe d'une presqu'île séparée de la grande île par des marécages, n'était encore qu'un groupe de huttes, protégé par des fortifications sommaires, terre battue maintenue par de gros rondins. Une centaine de Français se trouvaient rassemblés là depuis quelques mois, survivants des colons envoyés trois ans plus tôt à Madagascar par la Compagnie, traqués par les Malgaches - qu'ils n'avaient pas réussi à opposer tribu à tribu, comme il leur avait été recommandé au départ de France - auxquels s'étaient ajoutés des naufragés recueillis par les embarcations de l'expédition et quelques pirates repentis. Fièvres, famine, désespoir, chacun achevait son 'voyage au bout de la nuit'. (R, p.247)

This final reference to Louis-Ferdinand Céline's 1932 picaresque novel can be seen as an implication of the importance of the relationship between environment and the human

¹⁰⁸ Most historical accounts actually identify 1643 as the correct date of the French claim to Réunion, with the first inhabitants being the Portuguese in the early sixteenth century and the first (French) colony being established in 1662.

being. There is a dichotomy here: Vailland's privileging of the colonising human in the opening section of the *récit*, as well as his reliance upon Western literary representations of La Réunion would suggest that the importance of the island itself is only secondary; yet the Céline reference implies a significant relationship, symbiotic or otherwise, between person and place. There is a dichotomy, too, in Sembène's novel: what at first appears to be a foregrounding of place, explicit in the first paragraph and implicit in Isabelle's willingness to abandon reading about Africa in favour of experiencing it, at times appears to give way to a privileging of the individual in isolation. The 'homme', who is unidentified until the third page of the first chapter, while apparently absorbed in the scenery around him is nonetheless conscious of his solitude: 'A ses côtés, sa compagne paraissait perdue' (OPMBP, p.11). In this very specific sense, it is possible to form the opinion that Vailland's *récit*, while heavily reliant upon colonial accounts, concedes more to the importance of place than Sembène's novel, an irony underlined by the fact that Isabelle and her author have, arguably, the greater investment in geographical concerns.

In both works, the question of race is, unsurprisingly, paramount. Sembène's novel deliberately clashes the metropolitan with the apparently peripheral in order that his book's murderous climax be simply explained. On Oumar Faye's return journey to his native country after having been pressed into military service in Europe, it is crucial to note that the voice which shouts to the passengers sheltering from the rain on the boat, 'Regagnez vos places, tas d'imbéciles!' is that of 'un homme de peau blanche' who quickly becomes violent (OPMBP, p.12). Those who emerge from the cabins wondering, 'Est-ce les nègres qui se révoltent?' (OPMBP, p.13) may be compared with the *fonctionnaires* of Vailland's *La Réunion* who live together in Saint-Denis, a kind of anti-ghetto for the classic

masters-turned-slaves.¹⁰⁹ Oumar Faye's ability to bring the dispute to an end is testament to his quasi-hybrid status as a black African married to a white Frenchwoman. This ambivalence is further reinforced by an ambiguous attitude on Faye's part to the spoils of war he has collected: 'bien qu'il ne les portât presque jamais, il conservait jalousement ces médailles' (*OPMBP*, p.14). The almost romantic image of racial hybridity encapsulated in the contradictory description of Isabelle as 'cette femme blanche qui le suivait comme son ombre' (*OPMBP*, p.14) gives way to the reality of the experience of inter-racial marriage: when Isabelle asks her husband to explain his participation in the fight on the ship, he retorts, 'Que voulais-tu? Qu'il les frappe et que, moi, je croise les bras? Ou que je l'aide, peut-être?' (*OPMBP*, p.14).

Despite this lingering bitterness against the French, Faye appears to have undergone a change in perspective during his eight years away from home; whether this is a result of genuine openmindedness or simply of brainwashing is not made explicit.

Il avait beaucoup vu, beaucoup appris pendant ses années d'Europe; d'importants bouleversements s'étaient produits en lui, il en était même venu à juger sans indulgence ses frères de race; leur sectarisme, leurs préjugés de castes qui semblaient rendre illusoire toute possibilité de progrès social, leur particularisme et jusqu'à la puerilité de certaines de leurs réactions 'anti-blancs'. (*OPMBP*, p.15)

While there is no explicit indication of any disingenuousness in this portrait of Oumar Faye as a sophisticated thinker in terms of race, a suggestion is made only three paragraphs later that his relationship with his wife, Isabelle, is not wholly one of understanding. Sembène describes the couple thus: 'Ils étaient beaucoup l'un pour l'autre, ils se donnaient la main, marchant sur deux routes parallèles' (*OPMBP*, p.15); the reader must be free to draw the inference that, since two parallel lines never meet, Faye and

¹⁰⁹The Hegelian-Marxist slave dialectic holds that the masters of slaves frequently themselves become enslaved by dint of their paranoia about being stolen from or otherwise exploited by the sheer volume of people under their control. See also p.292 of *La Réunion*.

Isabelle may not be destined for lifelong happiness, a reinforcement, perhaps, of the racial disharmony alluded to in the game scene.

This uneasy feeling is something of a timebomb ticking for the remainder of the novel. The rest of the first part of the novel, meanwhile, is devoted to the account of Isabelle's introduction to her husband's country and family, and to the unpicking of some of the long-established traditions operating in that society. One tradition from which Oumar Faye is seen to dissent is that of multiple marriage. He rejects a prospective bride selected for him by his mother, Rokhaya. His father, Moussa Faye, though, has three wives among whom there is said to be harmony. Sembène's description of the older man is telling: 'Moussa Faye gouvernait sa barque à sa façon' (*OPMBP*, p.16). The use of another travelling metaphor suggests that Oumar Faye's way of life is not necessarily any more progressive than that of his father: stillness is not necessarily stagnation; movement is not necessarily progress. Indeed, at times the notions of place and space are introduced specifically to undermine the suggestion that travel has a positive influence – '[l]e monde va en voyage' (*OPMBP*, p.27) is one such instance – and the metropolis is frequently depicted as a contaminating force. Massiré, an artisan and a member of Faye's community claims that '[à] Dakar, les jeunes filles et les jeunes gens sortent toutes les nuits pour aller au bal. Je me demande jusqu'où ira la perversion' to which a friend, Demba M'boup, adds,

La première fois que j'étais à Saint-Louis, j'ai vu de mes yeux, au quartier de Lodo, un bal où hommes et femmes dansaient si serrés que, lorsqu'on a un esprit étroit, il est permis de penser à tout autre chose... Ah! Que Dieu vous garde de cette vision. (*OPMBP*, p.18)

Such spatial infringements, whether between individuals or, by extension, between metropolis and periphery, are clearly anathema to the older generation of residents. They lament the demise of another era, one which, once again, is presented in geographical terms: 'les jeunes veulent chasser les hommes blancs. Ils s'appellent entre eux les

“Rouges”... Ils disent qu’après, ils se partageront tout, qu’il n’y aura plus de *chemin de Dieu*, rien que manger et faire l’amour’ (OPMBP, p.18, my italics). Moussa Faye is paraphrased: ‘Ce qu’a dit Moussa est vrai, Samba: tu ne quittes jamais ce lieu où tu es, et tu sais tout’ (OPMBP, p.19).

For most characters in this novel, life is said to be ‘un trait d’union entre la naissance et la mort. Un chemin sans bifurcation’ (OPMBP, p.20). In Fayène, the village where Oumar Faye’s family lives, ‘au beau milieu de la pièce centrale, hommes et femmes assis autour du repas plongaient leurs mains dans le plat familial’ (OPMBP, p.21). This is one of many indications that the circle will be closed to Isabelle, whose own path in life clearly is not similarly limited. When she and her husband disembark from their boat, ‘[i]ls gagnèrent la passerelle’ (OPMBP, p.28), the metaphorical bridge between two worlds and two attitudes of mind, but Isabelle’s apprehension is prescient: ‘Elle aurait préféré traverser l’enfer plutôt que soutenir tous ces regards posés sur elle’ (OPMBP, p.28) and Faye’s adoption of Ouolof when speaking to his uncle who has come to meet them distances her yet further from this culture. Isabelle is subject to what David Spurr identifies as

the overpowering and potentially destructive effect of the gaze. But as any visual artist knows, the gaze is also the active instrument of construction, order, and arrangement [...] it offers aesthetic pleasure on one hand, information and authority on the other.¹¹⁰

Isabelle’s own power resides, clearly, in her relationship with Oumar Faye, whose mother, Rokhaya, is jealously suspicious of her daughter-in-law to the point of doubting her humanity: ‘Pour elle, Isabelle n’était pas une femme’ (OPMBP, p.30). Her disappointment at her son’s choice of spouse is such that he is prompted to say, ‘Ne pleure pas, mère...Je ne suis pas mort’ (OPMBP, p.30). Death, of course, is the final frontier which must be

¹¹⁰ David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Colonial Administration* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1993), p.15.

transcended and it is no accident that Rokhaya is seen to perceive her son's betrayal as a journey away from her of this gravity. She responds with a geographical trick of her own, by taking Isabelle into an adjoining room. Meanwhile, Isabelle is engaged in a reversal of the gaze turned on her: discussing the question of multiple marriage with Faye she comments, 'trois femmes pour un homme, c'est trop. Je n'arriverai jamais à le comprendre' (OPMBP, p.32). The chapter ends with Oumar informing his mother that the arranged marriage must be cancelled.

The second chapter of the first part of Sembène's novel returns the reader to a theme which is also important to Vaillant's *La Réunion*: the inseparability of humankind from geographical considerations. Person and place are fundamentally interrelated: 'Des manguiers, des acajous donnaient [à la grande place] leur ombre, ainsi qu'un gros fromager dont les racines ressemblaient à des corps d'enfants couchés' (OPMBP, p.34). It is against this seemingly ineluctable truth that the question of forced conformity to European norms emerges. M'Boup is 'habillé à l'indigène, d'un haftane teint à l'indigo, son casque sous l'aisselle'¹¹¹ (which is an interesting counterpoint in itself to one of Vaillant's assertions in *Borobondour*, about the Insulinde, in which it is claimed: 'Le casque colonial n'a pas survécu au régime colonial'¹¹²) but Seck, a primary school teacher, is obliged to 'se vêtir à l'européenne' (OPMBP, p.35). The implication of European malfeasance is unambiguous: during a discussion about Oumar Faye having been falsely accused of having stolen a book when he was at school, the culprit is said to have received from Faye not simply a slap, but 'une belle correction *de Portugais*' (OPMBP, p.37, my italics).

While in Sembène's novel, the sense of interracial history of the French colonies underpins the narrative, in Vaillant's *récit*, in an important, if frankly contradictory, sense

¹¹¹ The same phrase is employed in Sembène's *Docker noir*, in which Boubacar is described as being 'habillé à l'indigène mais avec goût'. See Ousmane Sembène, *Le Docker noir* (Paris: Editions Debresse, 1956), p.20.

¹¹² Roger Vaillant, *Borobondour*, p.14.

La Réunion can be seen as a place whose actual geographical location is of minimal significance. Vailland combines the research instinct of a political journalist with a descriptive style that tends towards the quixotic. More than once La Réunion is likened to 'un œuf', partly due to its geographical isolation, but crucially due to its facilitation of travellers' emotional isolation. The 'egg' is an enclosed space, protective and fertile. The following excerpt from *La Réunion* is illustrative of this notion:

A la limite de l'insularité, l'univers se confond avec l'île. Il y faut donc une île qui soit parfaitement île. M. (un philosophe italien de mes amis) prétend que le goût croissant de nos contemporains pour les îles (Capri, Porquerolles, Hawaï, Tahiti) est une manière de fuite devant la vie. La peur de l'Occidental devant une société qui se décompose. On se retranche de la communauté. On se mutile de la civilisation. On se coupe de l'univers. Un vrai retour dans le ventre maternel.

Dans l'œuf. A l'abri de la coquille. (R, p.315)

This sense of isolation is carefully presented by Vailland as a double-edged sword. In Chapter Eight of the *récit*, he comments that the youth of La Réunion believes that there is no world outside the island. So insular is the general attitude of schoolchildren that they are convinced that the French colonists are complicit with teachers in fabricating histories of the rest of the world. Vailland relates a conversation with a man who remembers his own childhood naïveté:

L'instituteur vous avait bien parlé des continents, des océans, des nations?

L'instituteur était un ivrogne.

Il vous avait montré des livres, des images, des photographies...

Nous étions persuadés qu'il avait tout inventé, tout ce qui n'était pas l'île.

Les gendarmes, les forestiers? La plupart viennent de France. Ils vous avaient certainement parlé de la France?

Nous pensions qu'ils s'étaient mis d'accord avec les instituteurs. Tous d'accord. Des histoires pour nous faire travailler. (R, p.314)

Moreover, the deployment of the ovular vehicle for such an image of protected isolation reinforces another theme of the text: that of the cyclical nature of life on La Réunion. The bird-eating spiders previously referred to form part of the ecological chain, just as the

'egg', as both container of life and comestible, contributes to the cycle. There is something of the sense of auto-propagation that Barthes identifies in Verne's *L'Île mystérieuse*: 'l'outil produit l'outil, selon un pouvoir qui est celui du nombre; le nombre dont Cyrus démonte soigneusement la vertu génératrice.'¹¹³ Island life appears self-propagating; the implication is that nothing need be imported from outside. Yet it is clear that this is an illusion, since it is written elsewhere:

Les travailleurs des plantations [...] sont obligés de faire venir leurs aliments d'au-delà des mers. Comme la population est très dense, la demande de travail est très supérieure à l'offre et les salaires sont bas. Ils ne peuvent donc faire venir d'outre-mer que les nourritures les moins coûteuses: la morue de Terre-Neuve et le riz de Thaïlande ou de la Birmanie. (R, p.287)

The era of self-sufficiency over, the *Réunionnais* are forcibly surrounded by external forces, out of place at home. This is, of course, simply the renewal of an existing cycle: slaves were brought to the island to populate it in the first place in the seventeenth century; servants were 'imported' from India and South-East Asia in the nineteenth century once slavery had been abolished. Immigration of all kinds thus becomes the governing trope of the *récit*.

The notion of being 'out of place' is central to Vailland's *Réunion*, as well as, of course, to Sembène's *O Pays, mon beau peuple*. In the former can be perceived interplays between Vailland's adoption of the mindset of everyman, writing of the feelings provoked by island features 'chez le voyageur' (R, p.284) and of his ironic description of the French influence in La Réunion, epitomised perhaps by his mention of '[u]ne plaque indicatrice. En grosses lettres: *Propriété des Potasses d'Alsace*. En lettres plus petites: *Don des Potasses d'Alsace*. Ce n'est pas la propriété qui est donnée, c'est la plaque indicatrice' (R, p.290). This hints at a public, yet paradoxically only nominal, metropolitan influence. Where the influence is perceptible,

¹¹³ Roland Barthes, 'Par où commencer?', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Eric Marty, 3 vols (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1993), II, 1384-91 (p.1389) (first publ. in Roland Barthes: *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972)).

it is frequently negative, as in the case of the missionary priest determined to make of the island 'une seconde Bourgogne' (R, p.297) or in that of the immigrant Breton community whose urge to indulge its horticultural nostalgia brought plants to La Réunion which destroyed the indigenous fauna. This is consistent with the portrait painted throughout of an only minimally involved group of French civil servants:

[L'Européen] reste étranger aux hommes qui l'entourent, pas tellement par principe, mais parce que l'éducation première, les coutumes, la langue, la culture, les habitudes ancestrales etc., sont différentes. La vie de société se réduit à la fréquentation des Européens du voisinage. Les termites mangent les livres, l'humidité fait gondoler les disques; le cinéma est rare, les films sont vieux; les communications demeurent difficiles. On finit par jouer au bridge avec des partenaires dont on connaît d'avance le jeu. (R, p.291)

The idea of knowing the outcome of the game in advance is a guiding principle of the *récit*, and this is nowhere more evident than through the theme of slavery. Vailland's citation of a report made to the Compagnie des Indes in 1717 on the state of slavery on Bourbon illustrates the paranoic relationship between master and slave. Moreover, it introduces a stark association between travel and suffering; in relating the deterrent effect of the execution of one slave upon the rest, the report unwittingly demonstrates that the colonised peoples are twice victimised by the wheel: the first time by the arrival of the colonisers and the second when they are broken upon it by means of execution.

Les habitants disent qu'ils n'ont pas le nombre d'esclaves suffisant pour la culture de leurs terres et, en même temps, ajoutent qu'ils craignent qu'un nombre plus grand ne rendît les esclaves maîtres de l'île... La Martinique a cependant quarante mille Noirs et n'a pas trois mille hommes français; néanmoins tout y vit en paix; il est vrai que quand on découvre des conspirateurs on les fait expier sur une roue; les autres Noirs assistent à l'exécution; le spectacle d'un châtement sévère retient dans le sentiment du devoir. (R, p.304)

While in 1717 there remain vestiges of colonial naïveté, as far back as 1671 another representative of the Compagnie des Indes, Dubois, could perceive the presages of revolt:

[Dubois] en quelques lignes a planifié tout le développement de la Réunion de 1671 à nos jours, esquissé avant Hegel la dialectique du maître et de l'esclave et établi avant Marx la lutte des classes comme moteur des rapports sociaux [...]. Au troisième paragraphe, il met en garde contre les

révolutions, précisant bien qu'il arrive toujours un moment où le maître risque de devenir l'esclave de ses esclaves. (R, p.301)

Unsurprising, then, that Vailland should detail the beginnings of revolt: as he puts it, '[l]a terreur et la rébellion s'organisèrent parallèlement' (R, p.305). When Said writes of the emergence of literary opposition to colonialism (and to imperialism), he asserts that those engaged in rebellion make (non-parasitic) use of European structures in order to undermine them.¹¹⁴ The Réunion slaves have exploited, rather, their native knowledge in order to outwit the colonists, and this knowledge has been principally geographical. They have resorted to 'districts des hauts de l'île' where '[l]e terrain leur était favorable': unknown to the colonists, 'toute la partie supérieure de l'œuf [offrait] des refuges d'accès difficile' (R, p.305).

Clearly, the indigenous person – or the closest approximation thereto – is at perpetual advantage, in this scenario. As far as textual considerations are concerned, we have already seen that the writer of travel experiences is often regarded not as a mere objective conduit, but as someone whose tales are suspect. This is what Steve Clark refers to as 'the ready and habitual equation of traveller and liar' (see this chapter, Footnote 53). There is also question at stake of the writer's place in the tension between migrancy and recreational travel; Jean Bessière has written:

L'étranger est disponible; il est ce site à partir duquel on entreprend d'écrire les images et les témoignages donnés et les évocations. L'étranger est, en quelque manière, familier puisqu'il est disponible à l'écriture d'une reconnaissance. Mais, à cause du double foyer du texte et des jeux d'inférence qu'il porte, l'évocation de cet étranger paradoxalement familier ou connu ne cesse de supposer déconstruits le spectacle, la semblance de l'étranger.¹¹⁵

The vocabulary employed by Bessière suggests a smoke-and-mirrors scenario, where the text is, at the least, a two-fold process and the incomer, be that person travel writer,

¹¹⁴ See Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.293.

¹¹⁵ Jean Bessière, 'Voyage, récit de voyage et rhétoricité', in *Ecrire le voyage*, ed. by Görgy Tverdota (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1994), pp.253-62 (p.254).

translator or any other kind of witness, fulfils more than one role and cannot, therefore, be expected to be objective. Once again, we are returned to Said's view of the self as a composite of currents, perceptible in various permutations at various times. This has relevance for a contrapuntal analysis of *La Réunion* and *O Pays, mon beau peuple* undertaken via the role of the agricultural worker.

As already outlined, the ghostly presences of land workers in Vailland's *récit* are the slaves who are, by the time of writing, long dead. Oumar Faye, by contrast, is very much alive for most of Sembène's *O Pays, mon beau peuple*, and his desire to break free from the family tradition which dictates that every man become a fisherman to begin a career as an *agriculteur* is met with incredulity and derision from his family: this initiative is seen as another step on the ill-considered trajectory which saw him marry Isabelle. Indeed, Faye's mother, Rokhaya, considers him racially contaminated, saying, '[t]on père, le père de ton père, tous étaient des pêcheurs, mais toi le toubab, tu veux la terre?' (*OPMBP*, p.87). Faye seeks refuge in the land from the reactionary tendencies of his family; the slaves about whom Vailland writes, however, have paradoxically both escaped from the rigours of the land and sought refuge in its contours, in that they have attempted to resign their positions as agricultural slaves to the colonists and, in so doing, exploited their superior knowledge of the land by hiding in the hills. The territory of the slaves is conceivably rightfully theirs: even when they have been compelled to work the land, as the servants of an immigrant force, the land has always belonged to them, as proven by their unmatched ability to take advantage of its more challenging features. It is possible to postulate, from a contrapuntal reading of *La Réunion* and *O Pays, mon beau peuple*, the idea that Oumar Faye's determination to work the land in his native Senegal is an attempt to reinscribe the power of the colonised who were, as we have seen in *La Réunion*, forced to work the land in various colonies for their masters' benefit. In this view of Oumar Faye, his is arguably a kind of contrapuntal resistance.

Faye is depicted, however, as having no rights over the land of his birth: his wish to work the land is met with contempt, and his attempt to do so is one of a number of cultural departures culminating in his murder by traditionalists. This counterpoint between the two works and between the portrayals of agricultural endeavour therein yields an interesting conclusion, which is that the Faye family's dismissal of the job of an agricultural worker demonstrates why it is that slaves were hired to do this work in the first place; those who consider themselves in charge of the territory do not wish to work the land. This relates to the intellectual gulf between land and territory which was discussed in relation to *Choses vues en Egypte*. Vailland and Sembène, therefore, set native against native by, respectively, allowing some slaves to escape into the land and dictating that a native will be killed by his compatriots for his commitment to it. The success of those slaves who escaped their fate (as well as, it should be added, the mutilation and death of those who did not) is clearly intended to be seen as a direct consequence of colonialism.

By the same token, Faye's murder can be viewed as the result of colonialism, having been provoked by his compatriots' suspicion of his marriage to a representative of the colonising force.¹¹⁶ This notion of the differing literary treatments of native peoples is reinforced, contrapuntally, in *La Réunion*, by the frequent use of the word 'échelle': the implication is of upward movement, of progress, in spite of the ugly fate of many of the natives. *O Pays*, on the other hand, embraces a less optimistic attitude at its *dénouement*, for while Isabelle is ultimately made welcome by her adoptive family, her bi-racial marriage does not survive. The phatic communion hitherto peppering relations among Sembène's characters – as evidenced by multiple references to passing the night 'en paix' – is revealed as profoundly misleading. The ending of Vailland's *La Réunion* is trite:

¹¹⁶ Clearly, this is a controversial reading: a traditional reading of the ending of the novel would conclude that Faye was murdered by the Europeans and that Isabelle is ultimately accepted by her in-laws. I should argue, in response, that Isabelle is not yet at home ('Ma douleur est à moi, mais la terre où il repose est à vous'(p.185)).

Ce qui est pénible, pour les Réunionnais et pour l'homme du siècle, c'est d'être né après que le paradis des âges héroïques eut été perdu et avant que les ingénieurs aient achevé de rassembler les matériaux qui vont nous permettre de le reconstruire, à notre échelle. (R, p.331)

Here, chronology is a vital consideration in questions of politics and geography: the politics of geography rarely recede into the background of Sembène's novel, *O Pays, mon beau peuple*, and this is especially true of the episode in the first part during which Isabelle makes a lone visit to the cinema, where

[i]l y avait deux catégories de places: des bancs pour les indigènes et des chaises pour les blancs. Cette ségrégation était en partie due à la différence de prix. Quelques indigènes auraient pu cependant se payer le luxe d'une chaise, mais ils s'y refusaient par solidarité et se logeaient à la même enseigne que leurs frères. (OPMBP, p.60)

In the cinema, Isabelle is accosted by a white man, Jacques, whom she earlier met on the boat to Senegal. She is sexually harassed by him and when he refuses to leave her, she tells him, 'Vous m'ennuyez. C'est du français, non?', to which Jacques replies, 'Je pensais que vous parliez nègre' (OPMBP, p.61). Isabelle refuses to be allied with the man on his terms, which are, of course, their shared nationality (though he has conflated nationality and race), and in doing so is verbally recategorised and, in his view, relegated to the ranks of the native Senegalese. When the film finally begins, references are made by Sembène to the 'hors-la-loi' and to the '[é]ternelle séduction des westerns' (OPMBP, p.63) and once again, the notion of being stimulated by being 'outside' a given culture is foregrounded.

Now, the ambivalent nature of exile is resurrected. We have seen that Said's response to exile is double-edged, since he views the experience as painful, yet inspiring and liberating. His is not a bizarre or isolated opinion: Steve Clark has written, '[e]ven the variant narratives of exile – those of the hostage, migrant or slave – do not preclude the experiences of curiosity and pleasure in new circumstances.'¹¹⁷ In Sembène's work,

¹¹⁷ Steve Clark, ed., *Travel Writing and Empire*, p.3.

Isabelle is seemingly accorded exilic status by the author and this only begins to erode when it becomes clear, due to her pregnancy, that she will be the mother of a Casamancian child. Sembène's sympathetic portrayal of her as a victim, while appropriate, in a sense, is also confusing. Isabelle, after all, is not an exile; she has chosen a foreign husband and has elected to live with him in Senegal. Oumar's status as exile is, paradoxically, arguably more complex: his exile began, presumably, at the moment when he was drafted into the French military forces. Yet while the reader is privy to much information about his travels, his role as an exile is not foregrounded until, ironically, he returns to his home and family. Only then is he ostracised by most of his own community. Towards the end of the second chapter, conflicting emotions and behaviour can be observed in the character of Rokhaya, Faye's mother: she appears willing to make sacrifices for the sake of geographical proximity to her son: 'Je vous servirai à manger. Je serai votre servante... Mais ne me quitte pas' (*OPMBP*, p.48); however, when she reaches the boundary between her prejudices and acceptance of her daughter-in-law and her influence upon her son, she pulls back from the brink. Her tears signify the spillage of her worthier emotions over the boundary of her reticence, a readiness to cross the line between her culture and that of Isabelle, but she does not surrender to them: 'Venues de la contrainte qu'elle imposait à sa douleur, les larmes se libérèrent, inondant son visage. Elle les renifla vivement' (*OPMBP*, p.47). Isabelle remains outside this culture; Oumar remains exiled from his community – until his untimely death, when he returns to the land.

Oumar Faye's exile is not only experienced on a geographically large scale (that is to say, he is exiled from one continent to another) but also on a smaller scale within his community. It is no accident that he and Isabelle set up home in an area of forest,

uninhabited by other natives; no accident, either, that they must build their own home rather than share that of Faye's family or occupy an existing building. Moussa Faye's synecdochical claim that his son 'avait quitté le toit familial' (*OPMBP*, p.50) only reinforces the geographical and emotional nature of the exile and even the well-disposed Amadou conflates moral rectitude and geographical choice, saying to his nephew, Faye, 'Je vous soutiendrai tant que vous êtes sur le bon chemin' (*OPMBP*, p.53). But Oumar Faye is depicted as an outsider throughout. When he goes fishing, for instance, it appears that he is reverting to the family traditions, yet he struggles with a shark, and the outcome of the encounter is never stated. The reader is left to wonder whether the episode serves as a metaphor for the dangers of adhering to home and all its traditions, or whether, by contrast, it is designed to highlight Oumar Faye's emotional dissociation from his community and to show that his figurative exile from it is the only possible destiny for him.

That notion of being, as J. Hillis Miller put it, reprising Derrida, 'neither inside nor outside, or both inside and outside at once' (see this chapter, Footnote 44) or, as Said will have it, 'out of place' is integral to this bi-racial partnership: each partner serves as the catalyst for the exile of the other. Moreover, when Faye's living exile ends in the ultimate exile of death, Isabelle is more than a non-participatory catalyst, for while Isabelle is never fully integrated (in the early part of the novel she straddles two cultures, wearing 'la chemise coloniale et un casque blanc' (*OPMBP*, p.68)) nonetheless as her husband's exile is complete, so her acceptance into his community begins.

The resignation to their circumstances of Rokhaya and Isabelle in the wake of Faye's murder can be counterpointed with Vailland's *La Réunion*, in which the writer describes aged historical pirates as having decided, in view of their advanced years, to take the Candidian route to 'consacrer le reste de leur vie à cultiver sagement leur jardin' (*R*, p.293).

Rokhaya and Isabelle are, at this point, depicted as compatriots, acknowledging, rather than challenging, their place in colonial history; Vailland's pirates, the opportunist force, do not relinquish their positions for any moral reason, but for a pragmatic one. Though the texts in which they feature are chronologically equivalent, the pirates and Rokhaya and Isabelle are chronologically disparate, a fact which again calls into question the efficacy of a contrapuntal method which eschews the diachronic. However, a contrapuntal approach to these texts permits a composite perspective of colonial life which would otherwise be absent, and permits a negotiation of geographically disparate elements and of localism, while avoiding universalism.

VII. Wading In, Digging Up: Vailland, Sembène and Said¹¹⁸

Reference has been made several times to Said's concept of the self as a composite of currents, and it is undoubtedly true that the different selves of a writer fulfil disparate expectations. The diarist or personal correspondent whose thoughts and observations may be read in Vailland's posthumously published collection of his letters and diaries *Écrits intimes*, for instance, differs from the journalist, travel writer and novelist whose work is public property, and self-consciously so. In the context of place, it may be useful to note a counterpoint in Vailland's travel writing, one which exists between his travel *récits* and his personal correspondence undertaken at the same time. In *Écrits intimes*, there is some evidence to support the impression that Vailland's letters, particularly those he wrote to Elisabeth Naldi during his sojourn in Indonesia, have a quality of prophylaxis for the writer; that is, the moments of discomfort, fear and penury endured by Vailland while

¹¹⁸ In his review of *Culture and Imperialism*, Leo Muray suggests that Said's theory is ill-considered by claiming that Said 'wades into Verdi's opera "Aida"' and that he has 'dug up Thomas Carlyle's mention of "The Nigger Question"' (Leo Muray, 'One More Challenge', *Contemporary Review*, 263 (1993), 330-31 (p.331)).

researching *Boroboudour* are assuaged in the act of correspondence. On 29 April 1958 Vailland records: 'Aujourd'hui, repos, lectures, courrier' (*EI*, p.548).

Here, then, can be perceived the symptoms of migrancy. Vailland struggles to maintain links with homeland, as represented by Naldi. Ironically, she reciprocates, but much of the time from her native Italy. She, too, is anxious to maintain a geographical proximity through a French connection. More than this, however, the diaries reveal the point of convergence of record and fiction. For instance, in 1958, Vailland records having seen a '[p]laque indicatrice: propriété des Phosphates d'Alsace – (en plus petit) don des Phosphates d'Alsace' (*EI*, p.543). It will be recalled that in *La Réunion*, an almost identical observation was made of a plaque reading 'Potasses d'Alsace'. Similarly, a discussion about the master-slave dialectic recorded in the diaries makes an appearance also in the *récit*. As well as serving as an emotional outlet for Vailland, then, his letters and diaries also appear to constitute his literary research.

Upon closer inspection, though, there is a slippage between Vailland's privately avowed ability and desire for compartmentalisation of historical periods, and his public (because published) attempts to convey associations between generations.¹¹⁹ He claims in his diaries that '[m]a vie, comme le développement des plantes, par stades, se découpe en périodes bien tranchées. La période commencée en 1943 avec ma désintoxication et mon entrée dans la Résistance est close' (*EI*, p.551). Vailland does not employ the same principles in his treatment of history, however. His writing, in *La Réunion*, suggests a commitment precisely to the linkage of the contemporary situation in Réunion with the predicament of slaves living there in generations long expired. Moreover, throughout his *récit* he invokes the works of other writers, thereby obliquely situating his own writing in

¹¹⁹ Clearly, the public and the private selves of Vailland are now, to a great extent, melded in the reader's consciousness. Posthumous publication of *Écrits intimes* has rendered the 'composite of currents' less 'real', though, of course, publication is, paradoxically, a necessary intervention if the fact is to be revealed.

what he clearly regards as a distinguished corpus. His view of La Réunion is presented as the latest in a continuum which began with the Pronis report of 1646. A sustained examination of Vailland's personal writings will confirm this as a pattern and it will be seen that his diaries constitute a contrapuntal narrative which illuminates his fiction and his reports.

For Said, this would be a clear example of the utility of the contrapuntal method. The reader may cut across a chronological moment and read in one body of texts that which may not be read in another. Said's theory of counterpoint at this stage, as throughout the project, is under review. Clearly, unfavourable evaluations of the theory continue to cast a shadow, even if, as in the case of Donald Lyons, who writes of counterpoint '*coming down to confronting these European artists*' and '*amounting to correcting old novels [...] with later political propaganda*' they are quantitatively, not qualitatively, obsessed.¹²⁰ Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia consider that 'it is in travel and movement across boundaries that Said feels that the true heterogeneity, the true complexity and the wonder of life can be unravelled', hence the validity of references to Vailland's 'literal' travel writing and to his 'figurative' contrapuntal identity.¹²¹

For the real significance of place, as has been ventured elsewhere, lies in its power to construct identity. The dilemma in invoking Said is that, while he writes of intertwined and interdependent histories, he also dismisses what he considers a 'filiative' approach, in favour of an 'affiliative' one – that is to say, he prefers to examine histories horizontally, on an equivalent spatial and temporal plain, than to examine those histories in the light of a vertical, historically chronological view. Counterpoint, therefore, is a largely synchronic, rather than diachronic analytical method. In this connection, Rodney Needham, in

¹²⁰ Donald Lyons, 'Jane Austen and Other Exploiters', *Commentary*, 96 (1993), 60-62 (pp.60, 62). My italics throughout.

¹²¹ Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, *Edward Said: the Paradox of Identity*, p.26.

Counterpoints, usefully paraphrases Aristotle: 'When acquiring knowledge we have sometimes to commence not from what are logically the first principles of our subject, but from the point whence we can learn most easily.'¹²² This provisional strategy is one of which Said could be said to avail himself. Dana Polan recognises that '[t]he contrapuntal method sets out not to read literature as a seemingly unified object in relation to another social practice that is less ideologically unified (the political or the historical), but to argue that these elements interpenetrate'.¹²³ Said's overriding interest in geographical issues has facilitated a fruitful comparison between metropolitan reportage and non-metropolitan fiction, as exemplified, in this chapter, by Roger Vailland's *récits* and Ousmane Sembène's novel, *O Pays, mon beau peuple*, but the synchronic nature of his contrapuntal method is a potential obstacle to its wholesale acceptance. Let us remember that Vailland's *récit Boroboudour* in its very title recalled an age of syncretism whose echoes resonated, however distorted they had become, in the era during which Vailland was writing. The illumination of a *champ littéraire* becomes much more problematic when the synchronic verges on the diachronic, and this is an issue which will be borne in mind in subsequent chapters.

Questions of travel have been rendered more interesting and more challenging by the application of Saidian counterpoint to Vailland's *récits* and Sembène's novel. The counterpoint which exists between migrancy and recreational travel, for example, has been highlighted by a consideration of the role of Sembène's Isabelle, who, as a migrant, abandons her reading about Senegal once she arrives there, and Vailland himself as the travelling voice of *La Réunion*, who specifically immerses himself in outsiders' writings about the territory when he alights at the edge of the Red Sea, or Vailland as the voice of *Choses vues en Egypte*, whose earliest recorded memory is of his meeting with a journalist from an English newspaper. Vailland indulges, arguably, in what Ashcroft and Ahluwalia

¹²²Rodney Needham, *Counterpoints*, p.8.

¹²³Dana Polan, 'Art, Society and Contrapuntal Criticism', *Clio*, 24 (1994), 69-79 (p.75).

identify as '[t]ravelling at home', clinging to European literature and to home, often in the guise of Elisabeth Naldi, all the time that he is abroad.¹²⁴ The significance of the physicality of land, as against the more spurious notion of nationality, has been thrown into relief by a contrapuntal comparison of Oumar Faye's commitment to agricultural life, once he has returned to Senegal from Europe, and the isolationism of the French civil servants living, in a crucial sense, separately from the land that they ostensibly govern in *La Réunion*.

With the discussion of the links between travel and imperial issues growing in currency, John Phillips has posed the question:

Does theory travel? The critique of western metaphysics that characterises much of what is now recognised as post-structuralist or postmodernist discourse is also inextricably related to work that develops as a self-conscious travelling theory, and is concerned with the phenomena of post-coloniality. This intellectual idiom both theorises the experience and representation of travel from perspectives distinct from that of the imperial and metropolitan centre, and may itself be read as a form of travelogue articulating the historical and geographical displacement undergone by the populations of the colonial periphery.¹²⁵

If we take the basis of post-structuralist thought to be a deep-seated anxiety about the radical uncertainty entailed in losing all linguistic reference points, combined with the belief, retained from structuralist thought, that experience is shaped by linguistic representation, we cannot fail to be challenged by the prospect of a travelling theory; after all, with no points of fixity, from where and to where might theory travel? This problematises, too, of course, Caren Kaplan's view that there are no fixed centres (see this chapter, Footnote 33). The question of postmodernist discourse, however, is different, and should not, perhaps, be yoked with post-structuralism as casually as it is here. Subjective observation seems vital to the theory of travel (as well as, of course, to

¹²⁴Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, *Edward Said: the Paradox of Identity*, p.26.

¹²⁵ John Phillips, 'Lagging Behind: Bhabha, Post-colonial Theory and the Future', in *Travel Writing and Empire*, ed. by Steve Clark (London: Zed Books, 1999), pp.63-80 (p.63).

travelling theory) and absolutely crucial to counterpoint, and to its major preoccupation, geography. Moreover, generic overlap – such as that which has been effected in this chapter, between fiction and *récits de voyage* – is entirely permissible, indeed encouraged. More than theorising travel from outside the metropolitan centre, as John Phillips claims is possible, Saidian counterpoint facilitates, it may be argued, a true reversal of the gaze, allowing geographical and generic overlap to become precisely the tools by which a contrapuntal analysis is effected. Ferial Ghazoul has written that '[Said] wants Arab-Islamic culture re-admitted to the discourse of nations, in the first place by introducing hitherto unnoticed parallelisms and affinities to its Western counterpoint';¹²⁶ this 'discourse of nations' is also at the root of this project.

Jean Sévry writes of cultural identity less in terms of the geographic than of the verbal and the aural. He claims:

On pourrait parler d'un échange d'inconnues, de sorte que la première rencontre est aussi souvent la dernière. Chacun entend se cantonner dans sa grammaire de groupe et conserver sa voix. Pour qu'une telle rencontre puisse fonctionner, il faudrait que nous puissions nous mettre à l'écoute des autres voix que nous portons cachées en nous, afin de pouvoir demeurer disponibles et capables d'adaptation.¹²⁷

The chapter which follows will move on from place to consider voice, its place in the methodology of counterpoint, and in a contrapuntal analysis of Roger Vailland's 1951 novel, *Un Jeune Homme seul*, and Ousmane Sembène's 1956 novel, *Le Docker noir*.

¹²⁶ Ferial Ghazoul, 'The Resonance of the Arab-Islamic Heritage in the Work of Edward Said', in *The Edward Said Reader*, ed. by Michael Sprinker (Cambridge, MA. and Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp.156-72 (p.161).

¹²⁷ Jean Sévry, 'De la Littérature des voyages et de leur nature, et à propos des premiers pas, des premiers regards et d'un rendez-vous manqué, et autres réflexions', in *Les Discours de voyages*, ed. by Romuald Fonkoua (Paris: Karthala, 1998), pp.45-70 (p.69).

Chapter Three

Voice

*Who writes? For whom is the writing being done?*¹

*

*[I]t is sometimes of paramount importance not so much what is said, but who speaks.*²

*

*The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types and by differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions.*³

¹ Edward W. Said, 'Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community', p.248.

² Edward W. Said, 'The Franco-American Dialogue', in *Traveling Theory: France and The United States*, ed. by Ieme van der Poel and Sophie Bertho (Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1999), pp.134-56 (p.153).

³ Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by Mikhail Bakhtin*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp.259-422 (p.300) (first publ. in *Vospriy Literatury* (Tomsk: Tomskogo Universiteta, 1973)).

I. Theories of Voice

During his interview with W.J.T. Mitchell, Edward Said discussed, briefly, his concept of narrative. The conversation went as follows:

E.S.	The narrative [...] is a function of speaking from a place.
W.J.T.M.	I see. So narrative for you is actually a kind of spatial notion.
E.S.	Absolutely. Not a temporal one. ⁴

This idea is reinforced in one of Said's rebukes to Ernest Gellner during their long-running debate in *The Times Literary Supplement* in 1993. In it, Said claims that '[a]ny page of Hodgkin's work on Africa and on imperialism is more valuable than what Gellner has written about Islam: why? Because Hodgkin writes from *within* his subject' (my italics).⁵ However, there is some inconsistency in Said's *œuvre* on this point: he claims, in *Culture and Imperialism*, that there is an ideological problem with the view that one need have direct experience of an environment in order to be a credible commentator on it. He writes:

If you know in advance that the African or Iranian or Chinese or Jewish or German experience is fundamentally integral, coherent, separate, and therefore comprehensible only to Africans, Iranians, Chinese, Jews or Germans, you first of all posit as essential something which, I believe, is both historically created and the result of interpretation – namely the existence of Africanness, Jewishness, or Germanness, or for that matter Orientalism and Occidentalism. And second, you are likely as a consequence to defend the essence or experience itself rather than promote full knowledge of it and its entanglements and dependencies on other knowledges.⁶

When Said urges the reader of *Culture and Imperialism* to accept 'the notion that although there is an irreducible subjective core to human experience, this experience is also historical and secular,' at virtually the same time as condemning Gellner's attempt to write

⁴ W.J.T. Mitchell, 'The Panic of the Visual: a Conversation with Edward W. Said' in *Edward Said and the Work of the Critic: Speaking Truth to Power*, ed. by Paul A. Bové (Durham, NC & London: Duke University Press, 2000), pp.31-50 (p.44).

⁵ Edward W. Said, 'Culture and Imperialism', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 19 March 1993, p.15.

⁶ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, pp.35-36.

about histories which are not his own, he sets up a contradiction in his argument which may be said to characterise his entire project.

It is a contradiction which derives, in part, from the complex interrelation of two components of identity: place and voice. Said has said as much, in conversation with Anne Beezer and Peter Osborne: 'I feel we all have different audiences in different constituencies.'⁷ It is, perhaps, a truism that conversational style, lexis, tone, and so on, alter according to one's listener, but, once again, Said is self-contradictory on this point. In his 1975 text, *Beginnings*, he postulates the view that '[b]eing is ultimately univocal, without levels, hierarchies, or gradations of reality'.⁸ This ambivalence is a very important issue for the reader of Said, in that it does not constitute simply an excusable extension of his polemic, but a genuine and challenging contradiction. His championing of the absence of hierarchies, and, indeed, his assertion that no such hierarchies exist in the realm of 'being' are further complicated in *The Pen and the Sword*, during Said's conversation with David Barsamian, a segment of which follows:

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| Edward W. Said: | There are very few organs today, platforms where one can speak, generally [...] just a tiny handful in a generally homogenizing intellectual landscape. |
| David Barsamian: | This whole issue of authentic voices and who gets to speak, for example, seems to be central to this particular debate. |
| Edward W. Said: | I think it's become almost too central. The idea is that we have to have a representative from X community and Y community. I think at some point it can be useful. It certainly was useful to me. At a certain moment, there was a felt need for an authentic Palestinian or an authentic Arab to say things, and then one could say it. But I think one has to always go beyond that, not simply accept the role but constantly challenge the format, challenge the setting, challenge the context, to expand it, to the larger issues that lurk behind these. It's not just a question of simple representation and an authentic voice. Like having a tenor, a soprano, an alto and a bass in a chorus. But a much larger social issue which has to do with social change. That's what lacking at the present moment. ⁹ |

⁷ Anne Beezer and Peter Osborne, 'Orientalism and After: an Interview with Edward Said', p.29. This concern is also distinctly Sartrean, as evidenced in Chapter I by discussion of his awareness of his reader.

⁸ Edward W. Said, *Beginnings*, p.301.

⁹ Edward W. Said and David Barsamian, *The Pen and the Sword*, pp.169-70.

It seems that, for Said, there is *a moment* at which statements only have authenticity when they are issued from involved parties; this is another reason, perhaps, why travel narratives are sometimes considered suspect, and why, also, it has been suggested by Kadiatu Kanneh that '[o]ral, or 'traditional' cultures offer themselves up for visual de-coding in the drama of landscape and environment'.¹⁰ There can be, in this conception of oral cultures, no artificial replication by an outsider of such a relationship. Said's more pressing agenda, however, is to make all aspects of 'being' discussable by all societies. He is acutely aware of the dangers of clinging to exclusive modes of representation and would surely concur, ultimately, with Jan Gorak's view that, '[t]ragically, none of [the] canons for the representation of a colonized culture brings into the field of shared vision the non-threatening humanity of its members. Their *silence* becomes brooding malice; their *volubility* becomes a simmering prelude to insurrection' (my italics).¹¹ Silencing the Other must be seen as instrumental in preventing contrapuntality of experience.

It is a fairly nuanced notion of the Other – be he or she vocal or silent – which this project attempts to adopt. For instance, there is no intention to repeat, parrot-fashion, the insights of scholars of socialist realist or postcolonial texts; in the introduction, a debt to John Flower for his incomparably wide studies of metropolitan French proletarian literature was acknowledged and a similar debt must also be acknowledged in the field of postcolonial scholarship to Mary Louise Pratt, Bart Moore-Gilbert and many others. Just as the project attempts to illuminate a *champ littéraire* signalled by Said, via his own, new praxis of comparativism, so, too, does it endeavour to highlight a new understanding of voice. Thus, Mikhail Bahktin and Gayatri Spivak, for example, find their views on textual voice yoked herein. The notion of the Other, moreover, *must* be nuanced in the context of a study of voice, since the semantic scope of this last term is vast: do we mean by 'voice'

¹⁰ Kadiatu Kanneh, "'Africa'" and Cultural Translation: Reading Difference', p.276.

¹¹ Jan Gorak, *The Making of the Modern Canon: Genesis and Crisis of a Literary Idea*, p.206.

an opportunity to express an opinion; the opinion that is expressed itself; the means by which that opinion is expressed; support for a petition; narrative viewpoint; the sound of something inanimate; each of the notes or lines able to be played simultaneously by a musical instrument; a sound heard only by a mentally disturbed person; a disembodied spirit? 'Voice' understood to be the voice(s) heard by a mentally disturbed person may be linked to aphasia, a condition in which the capacity to understand or to replicate language is impaired; this will prove interesting as it is applied to Sembène's novel, *Le Docker noir*. 'Voice' understood in the musical context seems to have direct application to Said's contrapuntal project and to heteroglossia – present in, for example, Vailland's *Un Jeune Homme seul* – both of which contribute to a fuller and more complex narrative structure. 'Voice' as a disembodied spirit, or as what the *O.E.D.* terms 'an absent presence' is equally linkable to Said's project and to his foregrounding of what Ashcroft and Ahluwalia have called 'shadowy absences'.¹² It is with a continuing awareness of this semantic complexity that this chapter on voice must proceed.

Silence, of course, is a paradoxical, inevitable focal point of discussions of voice, and is a perennial academic preoccupation, it seems. In her William Matthews Lecture at Birkbeck College, University of London in 1996, *How May I Speak in my Own Voice?*, Maggie Gee addressed the peculiar problems faced by writers and academics in this regard: 'I suppose for all writers, each silence is a challenge. The small internal voice asks, what is the silence saying?'¹³ Gee talked about what she identified as peculiarly English taboos, but also of the 'international' silences affecting the majority of us, silences which replace discussion of 'sex, the emotions, class, race, money, success, failure, excretion, of course, illness, age and death'.¹⁴ At least two of these, class and race, are topics which constitute important

¹² Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, *Edward Said: the Paradox of Identity*, p.96.

¹³ Maggie Gee, *How May I Speak in my Own Voice? Language and the Forbidden* ([London]: [Birkbeck College], 1996), p.1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.1.

silences in Vailland and Sembène. Gee contends, though, that '[a]ny kind of spontaneous writing – diaries, letters, notebooks – can free the silenced voice [because] [o]n the written page we no longer have to please or flatter or defer to the prejudices of particular individuals'.¹⁵ This is not wholly true, especially in the case of Sembène – who is obliged, tellingly, to write in French – and this is an argument to which the project will return.

As far as appreciating Edward Said's contribution to a discussion of voice is concerned, we must return to his own material, material published before any explicit preoccupation with counterpoint has developed. In *The World, the Text and the Critic*, Said is firm in his conviction regarding what constitutes practical, valuable literary criticism and he offers a glimpse of his notion of 'worldliness' which will be developed later in his *œuvre*:

[i]n the main - and here I shall be explicit - criticism must think of itself as life-enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination, and abuse; its social goals are non-coercive knowledge produced in the interests of human freedom.¹⁶

The intellectual struggle towards such liberty runs parallel with the effort to develop a critical consciousness from within an inestimably influential and highly specific cultural and political context, and is aimed at challenging the hitherto prevalent process of representation, which, says Said, 'reinforces the known at the expense of the knowable'.¹⁷ Said's objective is to investigate the knowable, while taking account of the environment specific to each of us which makes it easier and more comfortable to tend towards non-progressive reinforcement of the known.

Neither is Said's view without heritage, and its relationship to counterpoint may be seen, in fact, as particularly indebted to Bakhtin, who has written:

¹⁵ Ibid., p.8.

¹⁶ Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, p.29.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.23.

[e]very type of intentional stylistic hybrid is more or less dialogized. This means that the languages that are crossed in it relate to each other as do rejoinders in a dialogue; there is an argument between languages, an argument between styles of language. But it is not a dialogue in the narrative sense, nor in the abstract sense; rather it is a dialogue between points of view, each with its own concrete languages that cannot be translated into the other.¹⁸

This is very much in line with Said's view that, though texts are intimately related and comprise some sort of dialogue, which may be highlighted by counterpoint, that dialogue cannot always be narrated in a linear fashion. That mirage of linearity is also criticised in contrapuntal works which pre-date Said's *Culture and Imperialism*, such as Bruce Zukerman's 1991 re-reading of the Book of Job, *Job the Silent: a Study in Historical Counterpoint*, in which Zukerman argues that the original tale of Job must be read alongside the King James rendering of it, because '[t]he polyphonic relationship between what is ancient and what is authorized cannot be ignored or broken. Otherwise, it would not be the story of Job at all'.¹⁹

Prior to considering what Said's work adds to the discussion of voice in literature, we ought to situate the present study in the development of Said's critical reception, and this can be done by paying some attention to two critiques of his 1978 work, *Orientalism*: one is made by Aijaz Ahmad's *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*; the other by James Clifford's *The Predicament of Culture*. These show something of the manner in which Said's 'voice' has been heard by critics. The first indulges in the now seemingly obligatory praise for Said's political commitment and literary erudition before taking *Orientalism* to task for its attempt to deploy Foucauldian terms without accepting the consequences of Foucauldian thought for its own narrative. As Ahmad says,

¹⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, 'From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse', in *Modern Criticism and Theory: a Reader*, ed. by David Lodge (London and New York: Longman, 1997), pp.125-56 (p.150) (first publ. in *Vosprosy Literaturny* (Tomskogo Universiteta, 1973)).

¹⁹ Bruce Zukerman, *Job the Silent: a Study in Historical Counterpoint* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.32. Zukerman's contrapuntal readings do differ from Said's in that they are largely diachronic, rather than synchronic, in approach.

the idea that there could be a discourse - that is to say, an epistemic construction - traversing the whole breadth of 'Western' history and textualities, spanning not only the modern capitalist period but all the preceding pre-capitalist periods as well, is not only an un-Marxist but also a radically un-Foucauldian idea.²⁰

Said's meaning is usefully refined, however, in the later *Culture and Imperialism*, in which he acknowledges that [i]t would be insane to argue that individual writers and works do not exist, that French, Japanese, and Arabic are not separate things, or that Milton, Tagore, and Alejo Carpentier are only trivially different variations on the same theme'.²¹ Ahmad also problematises Said's attempt to create a history of literature to rival Auerbach's *Mimesis*. Ahmad appears to suggest that it is Said's resentment of the domination of the field of comparative literature by the 'High Humanism of a very conservative kind'²² proffered by Auerbach, Curtius and Spitzer which prompts him to compile such an alternative as *Orientalism*. Yet Said has admitted some nine years before the publication of Ahmad's *In Theory*:

It may seem odd, but it is true, that in such matters as culture and scholarship I am often in reasonable sympathy with conservative attitudes, and what I might object to in what I have been describing does not have much to do with the activity of conserving the past, or with reading great literature, or with doing serious and perhaps even utterly conservative scholarship as such. I have no great problem with those things.²³

These two refutable criticisms made by Ahmad direct us, though, to what is a genuine problem: that Said *does* subscribe to a conservative humanism, in that he writes in terms of the canon, but that he takes issue with the individual components of the canon; '[i]n other words, he duplicates all those procedures even as he debunks the very tradition from which he has borrowed them.'²⁴ For it is not simply Said's inconsistencies in terms of the traditions to which he nods that pose a problem for his reader - after all, our need, according to Said (and it would be difficult to disagree), is to be taught 'how to be critical,

²⁰ Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (New York: Verso, 1994), p.166.

²¹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, pp.382-83.

²² Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Nations, Classes, Literatures*, p.162.

²³ Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, p.22.

²⁴ Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, p.167.

rather than how to be good members of a school'²⁵ – but the larger philosophical question of how to resolve the problem of hierarchy in a canonical structure; how to recognise that 'some literature is actually good, and that some is bad'²⁶ without establishing hierarchy in the process of selection. This is one question which will pertain to the issue of voice.

Further, Ahmad is justifiably critical of Said's claim that the important aspects of an Orientalist text are 'style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original'.²⁷ Says Ahmad:

It would be unimaginably difficult, if not altogether pointless [...] to refer a representation to its 'setting' and 'the historical circumstances' of its production and dissemination without raising, in some fundamental way, the issues of its 'fidelity' and 'correctness', for it is usually with reference to 'historical and social circumstances' that worthwhile distinctions between a representation and a *misrepresentation* are customarily made.²⁸

One could hardly dissent from that. However, Ahmad fails to address the most problematic aspect of this citation, namely the use of the phrase 'some great original'. If the reader is being invited to indulge his or her suspicions about the political motivation of the Orientalist writer's style, it seems not only disingenuous but fairly illogical to dismiss the 'original' being represented through that style, without making clear that one is stating a truism, namely that *every* representation is, inevitably, a misrepresentation.²⁹ Moreover, Said's anxiety to burst the bubble of the Orientalist's emphasis on exoticism reduces his own work, on occasions such as this, to an inverted, but equally vague glossing of that which is being represented.

²⁵ Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, p.29.

²⁶ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.386.

²⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, p.21.

²⁸ Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, p.185.

²⁹ Said writes in *Orientalism* that the responsible reader should 'view representations (or misrepresentations – the distinction is at best a matter of degree) as inhabiting a common field of play' (p.272).

It is precisely because partial (in the original sense) critiques of Said's work, such as Ahmad's here, proliferate that it is necessary to re-evaluate Said's role in criticism. Indeed, another of Ahmad's observations involuntarily makes this very point: '[t]he transition that Said makes [in *Orientalism*] to Dante is *strategic* on at least two counts.'³⁰ This is mooted as a criticism, but it is precisely this sort of strategem that makes Said's work so important to modern literary criticism, since the whole essence of his counterpoint is a self-consciously ultra-strategic process by which traditional critical methods can be re-examined and new ones developed. A strategist in Said's mould is exactly what is required for the task of highlighting the disquieting fact that, in criticism as much as in *Orientalism*, 'all is Repetition with Difference.'³¹

So much, then, for what Said aims to do; understanding what his brand of criticism *actually does* can be, and frequently is, complicated by the intellectual paraphernalia in which the principles are couched. A characteristic shared by many critics of Said is a tendency to feel (and to admit to feeling) intimidated by his erudition, and Ahmad's work is no exception. The latter remarks, '[a]mong the essays on individual figures, the one on Verdi is my favourite - not because I wholly understand operatic language, or have ever actually seen *Aida*, but because I quite follow Said's highly convincing argument.'³² This self-same essay, in another incarnation, has been commented upon by John MacKenzie, who

first heard this passage as a keynote address to the conference of the British Association of Art Historians in Brighton in 1986. I was not convinced then and I am even less convinced now when I see the arguments in cold print.³³

The diffidence which derives from lack of specialist knowledge constrains Ahmad's critical inclinations. This is the type of reaction which prompts MacKenzie to say of Said: 'It is all

³⁰ Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, p.187.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.195.

³² *Ibid.*, p.199.

³³ John MacKenzie, 'Edward Said and the Historians', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 18 (1994), 9-25, (p.16).

too easy to attack him on the flank while leaving his main fronts unmolested.’³⁴ Here, Ahmad is not alone. It is precisely this trap into which James Clifford falls. In his book, *The Predicament of Culture*, Clifford remarks that Said ‘never defines Orientalism but rather qualifies and designates it from a variety of distinct and not always compatible standpoints.’³⁵ This is irrefutable. When it comes to describing exactly what it is that Said does instead, though, Clifford is on less certain ground:

If Orientalism, as Said describes it, has a structure, this resides in its tendency to *dichotomize* the human continuum into we-they contrasts and to *essentialize* the resultant ‘other’ - to speak of the oriental mind, for example, or even to generalize about ‘Islam’ or ‘the Arabs.’ All of these Orientalist ‘visions’ and ‘textualizations,’ as Said terms them, function to suppress an authentic ‘human’ reality.³⁶

The beginning of this *résumé* is almost solid enough to obscure the import of the two concluding words: “‘human’ reality’. Said’s view that ‘human identity is not only not natural and stable, but constructed, and occasionally invented outright,’³⁷ would seem to divest of sentiment and even of meaning Clifford’s idea of ‘Said’s commitment to the human’.³⁸ Besides, Clifford makes no attempt to nuance his *résumé* by pointing out that Said asserts, in *Orientalism*, that ‘human reality’ is innately multipartite anyway: ‘Can one divide human reality, as indeed human reality seems to be genuinely divided, into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races, and survive the consequences humanely?’³⁹ The same repetitious Western mind which will essentialize the oriental is also capable of regurgitating age-old truisms about the ‘universality’ of the ‘human condition’. Bizarrely, Clifford contradicts his own summing-up of Said’s position on the very next page of his book, saying that, ‘[Said] suggests that “authenticity,” “experience,” “reality,”

³⁴ John MacKenzie, ‘Occidentalism: Counterpoint and Counter-polemic’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 19 (1993) 339-44, (p.339).

³⁵ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, 7th edn, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard 1994), p.259.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.258.

³⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, p.332.

³⁸ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, p.275.

³⁹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, p.45.

“presence” are mere rhetorical conventions.’⁴⁰ Clifford’s subsequent gripe – that ‘Orientalist inauthenticity is not answered by any authenticity’⁴¹ – is, therefore, hardly fair. It may be frustrating for any reader to discover only criticism of a system, and no suggested alternative to it, but it cannot be justifiable to criticize Said for failing to answer a question which he simply wishes to pose. That is the inalienable freedom offered by philosophy.

Clifford does have challenging things to say about the right to speak; he claims that

the privilege of standing above cultural particularism, of aspiring to the universalist power that speaks for humanity, for the universal experiences of love, work, death, and so on, is a privilege invented by a totalizing Western liberalism. This benevolent comprehension of the visions produced by mere ‘local anecdotal circumstances’ is an authority that escapes Said’s criticism.⁴²

This does not in the direction of one of Said’s major discursive flaws, for when he ‘castigates Orientalism for its construction of static images rather than historical or personal “narratives”’⁴³ there is no clear acknowledgement of the probability that giving movement to static images only adds credence to an already flawed, Eurocentric perspective. If every representation is a misrepresentation, or, at best, an incomplete one, the question of representation must boil down to degrees of acceptability. In that view, static snapshots are preferable to motion pictures, because they are less reliant upon the inevitable inventions which punctuate and link them. Static images do not give life to falsehoods in the way that moving ones can.

We arrive, then, at the already problematic question of the right to speak. This question, fundamental to this chapter, is further complicated by Said, who praises the authority of

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.259.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.260.

⁴² Ibid., p.263.

⁴³ Ibid., p.263.

Hodgkin because he 'writes from within his subject',⁴⁴ yet claims, 'I consider false the proposition that only an insider, a Muslim, a woman, a Black can write meaningfully about Islamic, women's or Black experience.'⁴⁵ Said allies himself with Auerbach's approbatory position on Hugo of Saint Victor's view that,

he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign place. The tender soul has fixed his love on one spot in the world; the strong person has extended his love to all places; the perfect man has extinguished his.⁴⁶

This radical shift sees the *outsider* privileged. Even then, of course, it is Said who selects those few commentators – among them Renan, Massignon and Raymond Williams – whom he considers worthy of being charged with the task of commenting on other cultures. This is a fundamental contradiction in Said which, while consistent with the notion that we are too environmentally conditioned to be objective, is inconsistent with the idea that literary and cultural criticism should not be reduced to discrete specialisations.

Finally, Clifford's critique of Said's *Orientalism* looks at the synchronic and diachronic genealogical distribution of Orientalism. He implicitly picks up on Said's notion that '[a]ppeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present'.⁴⁷ He opines:

Genealogy, like all historical description and analysis, is constructive. It makes sense in the present by making sense selectively *out of* the past [...]. Genealogy is perhaps the most political of historical modes; but to be effective, it cannot appear too openly tendentious, and Said's genealogy suffers on this score. To his credit he makes no secret of the restrictive choices involved.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Edward W. Said, 'Culture and Imperialism', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 19 March 1993, p.15.

⁴⁵ Edward W. Said, 'Culture and Imperialism', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 4 June 1993, p.17.

⁴⁶ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.407.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.1.

⁴⁸ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, p.267.

This is an important observation; since it must be argued that counterpoint is *consciously* synchronic in both theory and methodology, it seems odd that Said's eschewing of the diachronic should be criticised. Moreover, the tendentiousness of Said's arguments is inevitable; it is trite to say, as Clifford does, that he 'gives himself too easy a target'⁴⁹ because the target, for Said, is pre-existent, awaiting his response. What is a more credible criticism is that 'Said's work frequently relapses into the essentializing modes it attacks'.⁵⁰ The difficulty Said encounters and never fully resolves is that in making reference to the West and Western tendencies, one cannot help but imply an oppositional East. Since each of these exists only in the discourse of the other, essentialisation is unavoidable. We have seen a similar problem in our contrapuntal reading of *O Pays, mon beau peuple* and *La Réunion*, where pre-existing generations, occluded in a contrapuntal reading, proved still to be present and always implied. Said's view of the Orient as a construct can be seen as standing in diametric opposition to his belief in individual, narratable case histories which belie the spurious notion 'that there are geographical spaces with indigenous, radically "different" inhabitants who can be defined on the basis of some religion, culture or racial essence proper to that space'.⁵¹

When Said despairs that, '[t]o launder the cultural past and repaint it in garish nationalist colors [*sic*] that irradiate the whole society is now so much a fact of cultural life as to be considered natural,'⁵² the modern reader no longer finds radicalism in the thought. After all, Said has for some time been established in the critical canon, his *Orientalism* having been subsumed into the mainstream of humanities research. However, the polity against which he pits his wits in the period leading up to his writing *Orientalism* is not only

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.268.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.271.

⁵¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, p.322.

⁵² Edward W. Said, 'Nationalism, Human Rights and Interpretation', in *Freedom and Interpretation: the Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1992*, ed. by Barbara Johnson (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), pp.177-200 (p.191) (first publ. in *Raritan*, 12 (1993), 26-51).

formidable but often self-contradictory. Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* discusses the concept of Enlightenment and reveals a basic confusion. On the fourth page of the book, it is claimed that '[k]nowledge, which is power, knows no obstacles: neither in the enslavement of men nor in the compliance with the world's rulers'.⁵³ However, two pages later, we read, '[f]or the Enlightenment, whatever does not conform to the rule of computation and utility is suspect.'⁵⁴

It is clear, then, that the transference or sharing of knowledge ought to be free, if not from politics, then at least from the effects of *oppressive* politics. This Enlightenment concept, it may be supposed, would have appealed to Said. However, the danger to which he is always alert is that 'utility' is subject to (mis)appropriation by ill- as well as well-motivated parties. Said's much-cited dialectic in *Culture and Imperialism* on Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, for instance, demonstrates this very notion, that literature, which seeks to dispense knowledge, is capable of supporting a regime which favours colonising societies over those which are colonised.

Said's work inherits from the kind of conscientious thought which produced *Dialectic of Enlightenment* a willingness to challenge what is proffered to any member of any society as *truth*. In their revised preface, Adorno and Horkheimer underline one of the most important ideas encapsulated in the book:

False clarity is only another name for myth; and myth has always been obscure and enlightening at one and the same time; always using the devices of familiarity and straightforward dismissal to avoid the labor [sic] of conceptualization. [...] Just as the Enlightenment expresses the actual movement of civil society as a whole in the aspect of its idea as embodied in individuals and institutions, so truth is not merely the rational consciousness but equally the form that consciousness assumes in actual life.⁵⁵

⁵³ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1979), p.4 (first publ. as *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (New York: Social Studies Association, 1944)).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.6.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.xiv.

All this is simply one way of expressing the notion that there is no one truth, but a multiplicity of truths, which vary according to individual experience. This idea has not proved ephemeral. Norman Geras, in his 1995 critique of the work of Richard Rorty, goes as far as to claim that 'where there is no truth, there is no injustice'.⁵⁶ Somewhere between Adorno and Horkheimer and Geras can be discovered strands of Said's own thesis. It is the injustice of an untruthful, unrepresentative way of looking at literature and culture which he tackles, and which induces him to listen not to the univocal mass, but to individual voices. This is, we realise by now, symptomatic of Said's characteristic ambivalence, problematic not only because of the semantic scope of the term 'voice', but also because it is a challenge to be able to comprehend why the same critic who can tell interviewers, 'I am interested in the tension between the articulate and the silent [...]. I'm not interested in monophony,'⁵⁷ is also able to state, approvingly, that '[b]eing is ultimately univocal' (see this chapter, Footnote 8).

Voice is crucial to the authors this project takes as its focus. The traditionally disenfranchised (and not-so-disenfranchised) groups which are brought into sharp focus by Vailland and Sembène are given voice in those authors' respective fictions. The reader must not simply listen to the voice, though, but listen to it with a critical ear, because, as Roger Vailland will have it, '[t]oute action modifie l'objet.'⁵⁸ The act of observing the world constructs the world: knowledge is shaped by representation. Put differently, by Nietzsche as it happens, 'truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is

⁵⁶ Norman Geras, *Solidarity in the Conversation of Humankind: the Ungroundable Liberalism of Richard Rorty* (London: Verso, 1995), p.107.

⁵⁷ Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin, 'Interview with Edward Said', p.424.

⁵⁸ Roger Vailland, *Ecrits Intimes*, p.10.

what they are'.⁵⁹ At our peril (or, more likely, at someone else's) should we disregard the inherent values and principles operating within a given representation.

In this regard we return to Edward Said, whose 1978 polemical work, *Orientalism*, inchoates a discussion on this very topic. It is not enough, one gathers, to *hear* the 'voice' in fiction or in criticism: one must ask *who* is speaking, *for whom* and *to whom* the voice is speaking, and, even more significantly, who has the right to speak. Said's own views on these questions are incisive, if not always consistent, and I propose to invoke them during the course of my examination of Roger Vailland's *Un Jeune Homme seul* (1951) and Ousmane Sembène's *Le Docker noir* (1956).

The most elementary glance at the two texts named above yields obvious points of comparison: each novel traces the history of a young man engaged in a foray into an alien culture or social milieu. The major difference lies, clearly, in the angle of perception: Eugène-Marie Favart, Vailland's protagonist, is a middle-class French boy eager to tackle the challenges he considers the preserve of the working class; Sembène's (anti-)hero, Diaw Falla, enters metropolitan French working-class life from a background in colonial Senegal. This is an obvious enough connection. This thesis, though, reads these novels not within a structuralist framework, but *against* each other, to determine the extent to which each can be said to inform the other. It has been suggested that,

Saidian counterpoint is a response and a *potential* movement beyond. It is rooted in a varied series of precursors: the Fanonian desire to force Europe to consider its own history together with that of the colonies; Fernando Ortiz's study of transculturation (the neologism he coined) in *Cuban Counterpoint* whose lyrical study of tobacco and sugar is in turn at the heart of Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Segalen's notion of exoticism, the extreme of which is a 'contact zone' experience of autoscopia in which identities of traveller and travellee, of Western self and Tibetan other, seem to merge.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense', in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1954), pp.46-47 (p.46).

⁶⁰ Charles R. Forsdick, 'Edward Said After Theory: the Limits of Counterpoint', p.194.

At root, then, comparing literatures entails comparing cultures, according to Said. A study of the use of voice (and appropriations and reappropriations thereof) will be an indispensable stage of this reading process, and one which follows logically from a study of place. As Said himself puts it, in the concluding sentence of his memoir, '[w]ith so many dissonances in my life I have learned actually to prefer being not quite right and out of place'.⁶¹

In an article on Said, Aamir Mufti inexplicably claims that Said's secular criticism, as described in the opening chapter of *The World, the Text and the Critic*, 'has received nothing like the attention that, for instance, has been lavished upon the concept of Orientalism or the strategy of what he calls contrapuntal reading'.⁶² While it is indisputable that critical attention paid to Orientalism has been considerable, the same can certainly not be said of counterpoint. It should not be forgotten, though, that much of what Said writes in *Orientalism* is directly related to questions of voice, if not explicitly to counterpoint. He asserts that mythic language must be systematically constructed:

Mythic language is discourse, that is, it cannot be anything but systematic; one does not really make discourse at will, or statements in it, without first belonging - in some cases unconsciously, but at any rate involuntarily - to the ideology and the institutions that guarantee its existence. These latter are always the institutions of an advanced society dealing with a less advanced society, a strong culture encountering a weak one. The principal feature of mythic discourse is that it conceals its own origins as well as those of what it describes.⁶³

Yet, it is impossible for such a discourse to hide its origins entirely, since we know from what Said has said to W.J.T. Mitchell that 'narrative [...] is a function of speaking from a place' (see this chapter, Footnote 4). Indeed, he comes close to expressing just that opinion in the much earlier *Orientalism*.

A literary text speaks more or less directly of a living reality. Its force is not that it is Arab, or French, or English; its force is in the power and vitality of words that, to mix in Flaubert's metaphor from *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, tip the idols out of the Orientalists' arms and make

⁶¹ Edward W. Said, *Out of Place*, p.295.

⁶² Aamir R. Mufti, 'Auerbach in Istanbul: Edward Said, Secular Criticism, and the Question of Minority Culture', *Critical Inquiry*, 25 (1998), 95-125 (p.95).

⁶³ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, p.321

them drop those great paralytic children – which are their ideas of the Orient – that attempt to pass for the Orient.⁶⁴

There is, we are given to understand, a truthfulness in literary texts, if only we listen to what they say.

II. *Le Docker noir*: Aphasia

Sembène Ousmane's first novel appeared in 1956 to more subdued critical fanfare than his acclaimed novel, *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu*, would four years later. A classic example of a work which is read in the metropolis as a peripheral text, *Le Docker noir* fits perfectly Edward Said's profile of literature vulnerable to misinterpretation and misrepresentation. It also, when read against Vailland's *Un Jeune Homme seul*, underlines Said's contrapuntal theory:

To rejoin experience and culture is of course to read texts from the metropolitan centre and from the peripheries contrapuntally, according neither the privilege of 'objectivity' to 'our side' nor the encumbrance of 'subjectivity' to 'theirs'. The question is a matter of knowing how to read, as the deconstructors say, and not detaching this from the issue of knowing what to read. Texts are not finished objects. They are, as [Raymond] Williams once said, notations and cultural practices.⁶⁵

Firstly, with this in mind, the narrative voice in *Le Docker noir* will be considered; this will lead to a discussion of the eternal dichotomy between essentialism and solidarity, and from there to an examination of characters' voices in the novel. Throughout, reference will be made to what might be termed 'literary aphasia', as the project seeks to establish whether an impaired mode of self-expression or of comprehension is at work in the novel. Throughout, too, the discussion of Saidian counterpoint will be continued with reference to issues of voice, particularly as certain semantic understandings of the term relate to aphasia.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.291.

⁶⁵ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.312.

John Callahan, in a book centred on the role of voice in fiction, claims that,

[i]n twentieth-century African-American fiction the pursuit of narrative form often becomes the pursuit of voice. And by voice I mean the writer's attempt to conjure the spoken word into symbolic existence on the page. Because they are close to an oral culture [...] black writers bring a dimension of immediacy to the struggle with the written word. They adapt call-and-response to fiction from the participatory forms of oral culture.⁶⁶

Further, Callahan acknowledges that,

[i]n tribal Africa, according to Roger Abrahams's testifying words, 'the vitality of the storytelling lies in two characteristic elements: first, the seizure of the role of narrator and the maintaining of it in the face of ongoing critical commentary; second, the constant audience commentary and periodic introduction of call-and-response songs.'⁶⁷

The notion of 'symbolic existence on the page' is, of course, crucial, since the use of voice in fiction is far from being mere transcription, as we shall see. Seizure of narratorial role; call-and-response; pursuit of narrative form dependent on pursuit of voice: all these, arguably, are not features exclusive to African-American fiction, but can be detected also in French-African writing, for example in Sembène's *Le Docker noir*, as well as in metropolitan French fiction, as evidenced by the perceptible presence of 'call-and-response' in the role of Eugénie in Vailland's *Un Jeune Homme seul*, which we shall consider in due course.

One of the first points to be noted is that the narrative voice performs more than simply an observational role in the novel. It takes the proactive role signalled by Callahan's notion of *seizure* of authority. The narrative voice, we can say with some certainty, is a vehicle for political (in the loosest sense) opinion, and often a tool for authorial intrusion. Moreover, there is a consistency in the tone of that narrative voice which can be lacking, at times, in the frequently aporetic narratives of Vailland, as we shall see later.

⁶⁶ John F. Callahan, *In the African-American Grain: the Pursuit of Voice in Twentieth-Century Black Fiction* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p.14.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.15.

In the first chapter, which sees Yaye Salimata in turmoil at the fate of her son, Diaw Falla, the narrator comments upon the arrival of Boubacar, a tribal chief, on the scene: ‘Après encore un moment d’attente, apparut un homme, habillé à l’indigène mais avec goût.’⁶⁸ The narrative voice provides an ironic take on the tribesman as he may be seen by a naïve, but well-intentioned metropolitan observer. Boubacar been permitted to retain his cultural identity (thanks to the magnanimity of the imperial force which has colonised his nation) but has had his natural habits tempered by the presence of metropolitan colonists (thanks to the benevolence of the *mission civilisatrice*). Further, the narrative voice juxtaposes metropolitan and ‘peripheral’ concerns in its elaboration upon the role of Boubacar: ‘bien que vivant seul avec sa femme, il n’oubliait pas ses droits de chef. Il était maître maçon dans une entreprise privée’ (*DN*, p.22).

Again, the voice adopts an ironic tone – assuming the position, albeit provisional, of the colonised person – to reveal something of what Edward Said has referred to as ‘the business of empire’;⁶⁹ in a sense – highlighted by the manner in which a family member has been incarcerated and damaged by the effects of empire – Boubacar is an extremely small cog in the ‘entreprise privée’ that is imperialism.

The machinery of colonisation is foregrounded in a dispute which occurs on a bus in Yo, Senegal, between a black civil servant and the bus conductor. The argument is interesting for a number of reasons, all of which derive from consideration of voice. ‘Tu sais,’ says the civil servant, ‘nous les fonctionnaires, *nous n’avons pas le droit de discuter politique, mais je me permets de te dire* que selon le ‘Dakarois’ d’hier, il y a plus de cent morts’ (*DN*, p.17, my italics). Another passenger interjects, and ‘[l]es gens le regardaient, il poursuivit *en français*: “Tu ne sais pas distinguer la politique du sadisme”’ (*DN*, p.18, my italics). When the civil

⁶⁸ Ousmane Sembène, *Le Docker noir* (Paris: Editions Debresse, 1956), p.20. Subsequent references will be made to this edition.

⁶⁹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.25.

servant is asked to leave the bus, he appeals to the conductor, using the words, ‘*Ecoute, N’Doye*,’ (DN, p.18, my italics), and one final passenger enters the fray: “Alors...sors, Dieu n’est pas fini, le car de Ouakam va passer bientôt,” dit la femme se tournant vers l’employé de l’Etat *suffoqué*’ (DN, p.18, my italics). Here we see the conflation of several issues of voice: the limits of what may be related from government to colonial subject; the strategic use of the French language rather than Oulof; the belief held by the civil servant that his voice is that which should be heeded by the conductor; the narrator’s observation that *something* is suffocated, therefore, de-voiced – the civil servant, the Senegalese state, or the French state. These balls are in the air throughout the novel, perhaps because, as Roger Abrahams opines, in African oral story-telling, ‘achieving a sense of closure, of strong and definitive conclusion, is a condition regarded as neither possible nor desirable.’⁷⁰

For a time, the narrative voice does appear consistent, and abandons its gentle irony in favour of more direct criticism during Diaw Falla’s trial for the murder of Ginette Tontisane in Paris: ‘Le plus mauvais créancier était la société qui réclamait toujours son dû et, même payée, ne l’effaçait jamais’ (DN, p.44). Where the role of the narrative voice becomes very much more compromised is at the beginning of the second part of the novel. The reader is informed that several ethnic minorities now live together in a *quartier* of Marseilles, but what seems at first a benign description of their situation soon yields what Said would view as a philosophical problem in the realm of cultural theory. The narrative voice says that, ‘Unis par un esprit de communauté, de *solidarité*, ils formèrent ce village’ (DN, p.80, my italics). Sembène’s narrative voice appears, here, to subscribe to the notion that ‘[b]y definition, only coherent societies are observable’,⁷¹ and as a consequence it falls into the trap of essentialising the characters it seeks to describe. If

⁷⁰ John F. Callahan, *In the African-American Grain: the Pursuit of Voice in Twentieth-Century Black Fiction*, p.15.

⁷¹ Cornelius Castoriadis, *History as Creation* (London: Solidarity, 1978), p.23.

solidarity can be said to be a phenomenon which grows up naturally between parties, essentialism can be seen as being imposed on those parties by external observers, and the following, rather lengthy passage from *Le Docker noir* demonstrates the essentialising potential of the narrative voice:

Il y a des Saracoulés, les plus nombreux, pour qui la vie ne serait rien sans la navigation, bavards, criards, nonchalants, les plus conservateurs aussi.

Les Soussous sont de nature fourbes, malins et craintifs. Les Mandingues calmes et lourds. Les Toucouleurs très nobles de gestes, descendants du conquérant El Hadj Oumar... Les Mandingues et les Diablas surnommés 'les bretons africains' pour leur amour de vin. Les Bambaras guerriers, sans qui la vaillance du soldat noir ne serait rien, commerçants aussi, marcheurs infatigables, fétichistes plus que tout... De rares Dahoméens posés et réfléchis, des Martiniquais, des Maures... Puis il y a des Oulofs, très susceptibles, rusés, roublards. Ils sont sans origine bien déterminée, mélange de toutes les lignées africaines. Ils ont pour sobriquet 'les corses noirs'. Dans leur comportement, ils vont d'un pôle à l'autre. Doux comme un chaton, ou violents comme un volcan.

Diaw Falla est de ces derniers. (*DN*, p.80)

Having essentialised each of the racial minorities living in Marseille, the narrative voice goes on to do the same with the novel's protagonist: 'Diaw Falla compatissait, non par politique, ni par patriotisme, mais par solidarité' (*DN*, p.109).

The question of why such essentialisation matters is not addressed as often as it ought to be, because, as Garth Hallett writes, in the introduction to his book, *Essentialism: a Wittgensteinian Critique*, '[t]hose who lack linguistic awareness are not conscious of being duped by language, hence see no need to acquire such awareness.'⁷² It is an important question because, even in texts such as this which are written by non-metropolitans about non-metropolitans, character is suppressed in favour of the narrative ego and this, in turn, is bound up with the difficulty identified by Said in *Orientalism* and in *Culture and Imperialism* that the person living the life is de-voiced in the literary representation of that life. This, to a extent, is what occurs in *Le Docker noir*. Just as the narrative voice blamed 'la société' for

⁷² Garth L. Hallett, *Essentialism: a Wittgensteinian Critique* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), p.131.

the misfortune which has befallen Diaw Falla, so it elaborates, with all the confidence of an omniscient narrator, upon the reasons for his predicament, since he ‘cannot’ do so himself:

Si on lui avait demandé pourquoi il s’était battu, il n’aurait su l’expliquer. C’était le manque de travail; une plaie était née dans son cœur, il en voulait à tous, aux dockers, qu’il avait tant défendus, alors qu’il vivait au jour le jour, et qu’eux pouvaient manger. (*DN*, p.168)

Likewise, the narrative voice furnishes Lazare, Andrée’s father, with excuses for his behaviour – ‘Vivre cinquante années de calme et voir tout d’un coup les angoisses et les catastrophes balayer cette existence heureuse, frappe d’abord l’homme d’une stupeur qui est le début du désespoir’ – but this time adds a barbed comment designed to imply that, whereas Diaw Falla’s fate has been irresistibly foisted upon him, Lazare’s has been self-imposed: ‘Tel était le cas de Lazare, qui avait toute sa vie préparé sa fortune’ (*DN*, p.169).

The narrative voice hereafter indulges in the sort of social diagnostics to which readers of Céline, or of Victorian English industrial novels, have become used – ‘L’acconage méritait bien son surnom de “tueur d’hommes”’ (*DN*, p.176) – and skilful interposition of observation and comment, such as those which follow:

Il [Diaw Falla] fut pris d’un violent accès de fureur (*DN*, p.198);

Son orgueil de noir et sa fierté d’homme *dictaient* ses mouvements (*DN*, p.198, my italics);

Mais ce qui les séparait [Diaw Falla and Catherine] était comme le ciel et la terre, avec une différence semblable à ce que le jour est à la nuit (*DN*, p.202);

[l]e jury a répondu ‘oui’ à la majorité! (*DN*, p.204)

The narrative voice in *Le Docker noir*, then, is both observer and interpreter. The tendency to essentialise, though, is perhaps its major drawback. In order that we may appreciate the significance of character voices, therefore, we shall return to Garth Hallett. He glosses Carnap, firstly: ‘in explication “the only essential requirement is that the explicatum be

more precise than the explicandum.”⁷³ But, warns Hallett, ‘[a] once-and-for-all listing like Carnap’s [...] ignores context and to that extent is imperfectly pragmatic. It betrays a lingering essentialism.’⁷⁴

For the explicatum to be more precise than the explicandum requires, in literature, that the narrative voice be given greater prominence than character voices, since the former has a responsibility, at times, for the presentation and interpretation of the latter. And, with Hallett, we must recognise that ‘speculative discourse requires constant vigilance whereas non-speculative discourse does not’.⁷⁵ In spite of these considerations, however, we must turn our attention to the supposedly rawer voices of character, in whose words it is at least as possible to discover speculation as in the narrator’s.

[W]hile the narrator can only be defined circularly as the narrative ‘voice’ or ‘speaker’ of a text, the implied author is - in opposition and by definition - voiceless and silent. In this sense the implied author must be seen as a construct inferred and assembled by the reader from all the components of the text.⁷⁶

So claims Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, glossing Seymour Chatman. Thus it is, then, that the reader processes voices of characters in order to create an otherwise mute authorial presence. With regard to *Le Docker noir*, this task would be impossible without reference to the voice of the protagonist, Diaw Falla.

Falla’s ‘voice’ is at its most revealing during his trial for the murder of literary agent Ginette Tontisane (the fourth chapter of the first part of the novel). It is at this stage that we begin to appreciate the complexities of authority, as signalled by voice, in the novel. While reflecting upon his novel about the slave ship, *Sirius*, Falla perceives the implications for his writing of his keenly-felt solidarity with the slaves on board: ‘Il se souvint des

⁷³ Ibid., p.13.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.16.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.131.

⁷⁶ Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Routledge 1997), p.87.

esclaves de son livre. 'Pourquoi l'ai-je écrit, ne suis-je pareil à eux?' (DN, p.43). His realisation is that, in spite of having felt able to straddle African and French cultures, he is, in fact, subject to the same oppression by the white culture as those slaves had been. The reader sees, perhaps, even more than this: that in reappropriating the 'voices' of the black slaves in his novel, Falla has actually fallen into the famous trap signalled by Marx. He has, however unconsciously, subscribed to what for a long time was regarded by many as a truism: *they cannot represent themselves, they must be represented.*

Falla's feeling of having been silenced is, of course, entirely justified by other aspects of the text. He is overwhelmed to the point of deafness to what the voices around him are saying ('Sa poitrine battait si fort qu'il la percevait par dessus le bourdonnement des voix,' (DN, p.44)) and those voices are, according to one's interpretation, either discriminatory against the defendant, or unrepresentative of general opinion ('un murmure *inégal* arriva à lui' (DN, p.43, my italics)). Falla's attempts to represent himself through speech are futile: 'Il cherchait la force de se sauver de lui-même; s'il essayait de traduire ses pensées en paroles, sa langue s'y refusait' (DN, p.47); 'Soudain, un liquide brûlant et suffocant le prit au ventre et à la gorge. Il sursauta à l'annonce, "Messieurs, la Cour", dite d'une voix rauque et grave' (DN, p.45). Falla is aphasic, unable to understand the language of the court, not because it is French, but because it represents a polity alien to him. He is, still in this aphasic state, unable to respond.

When Falla's mutism is counterposed with the voices of other characters involved in the trial scenes, it becomes clear that the criteria for vocal effectiveness are various. Henry, Falla's white, educated, middle-class defence counsel, is listened to by members of the court: 'Henry parlait, les quatre personnes sur l'estrade se penchaient vers lui en l'écoutant attentivement. Il [Falla] aurait aimé savoir ce dont il parlait' (DN, p.45). The fact that Falla is bemused and excluded even by the discourse of his own solicitor indicates the resolute

metrocentrism of the legal system at whose mercy Falla has been placed. Moreover, when a witness to the aftermath of the murder is called to give evidence, that evidence is deliberately represented by the implied author as emotive and incomplete: ‘J’ai crié: “Mon Dieu, Marie, Jésus’, j’ai appelé les locataires sont venus... . De là, on a téléphoné à la police”’ (DN, p.47). The implied author presents the trial in such a way that the witness does not tell the court what she saw, resorting instead to references to moral authorities (‘Dieu’, ‘Marie’, ‘Jésus’, ‘la police’) which are intended to imply Falla’s apostasy, or, indeed, lifelong moral bankruptcy. The narrator’s comment that Falla ‘finit par avoir une conversation avec ses deux anges gardiens’ (DN, p.52) yields a number of possible interpretations: that Falla believes that an appeal to a higher authority may be more effective than any attempt to speak on his own behalf during the trial; that his silent prayer is earnest in contrast to the exclamations of the witness; that the fact of there being *two* guardian angels may imply that one is a moral, the other an immoral guide; that the very appeal to guardian angels at all (their having suffered a demise in Christian thinking in recent years, culminating in the Vatican Council’s decree in the following decade that there was no longer any obligation to believe in them) illustrates a moral naïveté (at best) or deficiency (at worst). Here we see what Garth Hallett meant by claiming that speculative discourse requires constant vigilance, since the narrative voice in this novel presents contemporaneously such contrary visions of the same character.

Cross-examination of another witness during the trial highlights perfectly the chasm between black and white in the metropolitan France depicted by the novel. When the prosecutor asks a witness, ‘Pouvez-vous me dire quelles étaient ses relations [les relations de Falla] avec la victime, amicales ou intimes?’, the reply comes, ‘Je ne peux pas croire qu’elles soient intimes [...] Mademoiselle Ginette était l’honnêteté en personne’ (DN, p.48). Only moral corruption, it is suggested, could have led someone believed to be of sound character to have intimate relations with a black man. When a psychologist is asked

of Falla, 'Vous paraît-il un obsédé sexuel?' he responds, 'La science a déterminé que les hommes de couleur ont des psychoses devant une femme blanche' (*DN*, p.55).

Voice, and the authority which comes with its use, is not a static, but a fluid force in *Le Docker noir*. The judge trying Diaw Falla for murder ostensibly gives him an opportunity to seize once again the power of voice which has been taken from him: 'Pouvez-vous me réciter un passage du livre? Vous avez le choix' (*DN*, p.59). Falla reappropriates his voice and recites the first chapter of his novel from memory giving a detailed description, lasting several pages, of the lives of the slaves aboard *Sirius*. At the conclusion of Falla's reading, it is the judge who arrogates the force of voice by asking the accused, 'Combien de jours vous a-t-il fallu pour l'apprendre?' (*DN*, p.64). In this single question is encapsulated the interplay of racial and class voices in this metropolitan, ultra-formal, legal situation in which there seems only one admissible reaction from the black African defendant: submission to the preconceptions presented by the prosecution regarding the crime for which he is being tried.

This impression endures in spite of disingenuousness on the part of the prosecutor, who professes himself, and the judicial system of which is a part, lenient and sympathetic: 'Si je demande les travaux forcés à perpétuité, c'est parce que je ne suis pas cruel, que nos lois ne le sont pas' (*DN*, p.69). Moreover, the prosecution demands not simply that the defendant be punished for the murder of which he has not yet been convicted, but that restitution of status to French literary history be made. The inference is that Falla has, in 'stealing' Ginette Tontisane's manuscript, appropriated the voices of illustrious French writers before him and has desecrated the history they have created. The them/us dichotomy set up by the prosecution could hardly be more explicit: 'Ce monstre prétend être l'auteur du Négrier Sirius ! Cette insulte à nos lettres est aussi un délit... Nous devons

réparation non seulement à la victime, mais à *notre* littérature, mais à *notre* civilisation' (*DN*, p.70, my italics).

This concretisation of the discrepancy between the immigrant and the metropolitan establishment is further highlighted throughout the trial in exchanges between the prosecution and the apparently well-motivated defence. The prosecutor poses the conundrum of why Falla has not entrusted the secret of the theft of his manuscript to the police, taking no cognisance of the possibility that the very solidity of French institutions is what makes them intimidating to the outsider: 'L'accusé cependant est venu tout exprès de Marseille, pourquoi? 'Il a été volé,' dit-il. Mais à quoi sert la police?' (*DN*, p.69).

The defence counsel responds variously to queries such as this in the following ways:

Pourquoi ne s'est-il pas adressé à la justice, lorsqu'il s'est vu grugé? C'est qu'il pensait qu'on ne le croirait pas: double complexe d'infériorité, dû à sa race et à sa position sociale (*DN*, p.72);

Le racisme n'est qu'une forme de la haine; c'est par crainte d'en être victime que Diaw Falla a hésité à confier ses intérêts à la Justice. C'est nous qui avons incrusté en lui ce complexe redoutable (*DN*, p.73);

Essayons de réparer nos fautes. Si vous rendez à Diaw Falla sa liberté, il pourra reconnaître notre équité, il saura que notre Justice est clémente. (*DN*, p.74)

While the defence solicitor speaks ostensibly in opposition to the prosecutor, he resorts, in fact, to the same accepted norms and to the same tokenist attitude. He continues to speak of 'la Justice', with its connotations of feminine sympathy and institutional solidity, and even mentions 'nos fautes', assuming on behalf of the jury a collective responsibility for his client's fear of the metropolitan justice system which is no more appropriate than the prosecutor's championing of 'nos Lettres'. Like the prosecutor who advocates a hard line against Falla, the defence counsel requests a tokenist judgement which will insure against the perception of France as having an inherently racist judicial structure.

After having heard the closing arguments, Falla is asked if he has anything to add: 'Diaw, la gorge serrée, secoua la tête négativement' (*DN*, p.74). In the second part of the novel, where Falla's actions prior to the trial are analeptically revealed, similar physical restrictions of the voice are described when Falla tries to explain his predicament to Catherine: 'Ce qu'il avait envie de lui dire était plus fort que ce qu'il se répétait étant seul. La fièvre l'empêchait de parler. Il se consumait dans son silence' (*DN*, p.201).

In the third and final section of the novel, after the prison chaplain's visit to Falla, the latter reflects upon his situation and his inability to express himself:

Avant le verdict, quand le président m'a demandé si je n'avais rien à dire, je fus à court d'haleine, j'entendais une voix me dire: 'Demande pourquoi tu as tué...' Ils n'auraient pas été en mesure de me donner des explications... J'ai appris une langue qui n'est pas la mienne. (*DN*, p.215)

Falla's only effective communication around this time is in a letter he writes from his cell to Catherine. In it we can detect the voice of the implied author. Falla asks, 'D'où viennent les crimes... Du chômage!' (*DN*, p.218). However, he is not unemployed at the time of Ginette's murder, since he is working as a docker in Marseilles. This outburst, then, can reasonably be imputed to the implied author, whose voice also emerged earlier, saying that 'le plus mauvais créancier était la société' (*DN*, p.44). Likewise, Falla's claim, in his letter, that '[c]'est la Société qui fabrique ses hommes' (*DN*, p.214) is a view held by the implied author of the novel and stands in contradistinction to a further assertion by Falla that, 'Le passé ne dirige rien' (*DN*, p.220). The distinction between Falla's 'voice' in his letter and the voice of the implied author is particularly important in the light of our previous knowledge of Falla's quite Sartrean way of life, strangely divorced from this self-expression. It was Sartre's claim, expressed in *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, that man is only what he makes of himself and indeed Falla is a docker *and* a writer, because he has a higher vision for himself than the circumstances in which he initially finds himself in France. All of this makes it unlikely that the implied author is constructed from Falla's

speech and writings: the notion that 'C'est la Société qui fabrique ses hommes,' is not one which the protagonist would obviously embrace.

Closer to the implied author's voice, perhaps, is that of Paul Sonko, friend of Diaw Falla. Like him, he is an expatriate African, though not from the same country. However, there is an avowed solidarity between them, rather than an imposed essentialism, as demonstrated through an exchange between Sonko and the prosecuting counsel at Falla's trial:

- C'est mon frère.
- Quoi?
- Je veux dire que nous sommes du même pays.
- Vous êtes Guinéen!
- Oui, mais nous sommes des Africains (*DN*, p.66).

This solidarity drives Sonko to the expression of opinions which support Diaw Falla and which absolve him of blame for the trouble he is in:

Vois-tu, maman, commença l'homme, s'asseyant sur la chaise, c'est pas l'enfant qui est coupable, ce sont plutôt ceux qui contribuent à répandre le sadisme pour dégrader la vigueur morale d'une génération qu'ils veulent asservir, ceux qui sèment le racisme en bouillon de misère et ses conséquences les plus extrêmes. Ils restent impunis, ceux-là! (*DN*, p.34)

Here we see a fairly crude, though not inarticulate, introduction to the views of Sonko and, arguably, to the views of the implied author. What is as yet unclear is whether this lack of subtlety is attributable to the fact that this is Sembène's first novel, and to the fact that his style is not as polished as it would later become, or whether, in fact, there is a deliberate intention, on Sembène's part, to undermine the credibility of the implied author and to insist that he, Sembène, is not identifiable with the implied author: is he making the point that race and class relations are not as simply delineated as the implied author would suggest, that blaming 'society' and 'unemployment' and 'racism' is an inadequate method of assessing the complexities of a multiracial, multiclass community? Certainly, Sonko's next words of note are more emotive than measured or logical:

Où a-t-on vu un fou mettre tant d'ingéniosité pour se dérober aux lois?...Les êtres primitifs n'ont jamais commis une telle boucherie...Pour te parler franchement, cette nationalité de Français est un non-sens; même s'ils devaient m'enlever chaque matin un morceau de ma chair, je maintiendrais que je ne suis pas Français [sic]. (*DN*, p.35).

Sonko's intense awareness of class distinctions prompts him to make generalisations about those who would challenge those boundaries:

'Suppose que tu deviennes célèbre... Alors, tu ne mangeras plus avec nous.'
Sonko avait dit cela d'un [sic] façon comique en imitant les diverses tonalités des voix - celles des grandes classes et celles des basses classes (*DN*, p.98);

'...Car tu luttas pour te maintenir où tu es arrivé, avec deux fois plus d'ardeur que tu avais fait pour monter' (*DN*, p.99);

'Dans la crainte de sombrer, tu es prêt à toutes les bassesses. Si c'est nécessaire, tu marcheras sur un corps vivant (*DN*, p.99).

Paul Sonko's acute sensitivity to racial disharmony is doubtless at least partly due to his involvement with the Lazare family in Marseilles. He is the father of Andrée Lazare's unborn twins, which are aborted illegally (resulting also in Andrée's death) at the request of her mother, who is ashamed that her daughter is pregnant out of wedlock with a black man's child. During the ordeal, while waiting outside the Lazares' house, Paul wonders, 'A-t-elle pensé à moi avant de mourir?' (*DN*, p.136). This oddly self-centred thought follows upon the observation of Sonko expressed by the narrative voice: 'Paul Sonko, malgré sa volonté, s'ennuyait de ne pouvoir y pénétrer' (*DN*, p.134). The impossibility of penetrating not only literally the home of the Lazare family, but also metaphorically of penetrating their social circle is clear. Furthermore, the actual penetration which has occurred between Paul and Andrée can be seen not to have come to fruition either, in that their unborn children have been lost. If Paul Sonko's 'voice' is prone to excesses of emotion and deficiencies of logic (like the voice of the implied author), the narrative voice has complete authority at this juncture, summarising as it does the multi-faceted exclusion to which an African is subject on a personal level in a metropolitan environment.

Andrée Lazare's father's peregrinations after the arrest of his wife lead him to Diaw Falla, whom he knows to be a friend of Sonko and, therefore, an acquaintance of his late daughter. Having supported a polity which saw Africans as inferior people, Lazare changes his attitude when Falla speaks: 'A ces paroles, le cœur du visiteur saigna à flot. Il se voyait diminué par cet Africain' (*DN*, p.172). The social reversal described is a product of the function of voice, suggesting that previous prejudices have resulted from the absence of voice. This is substantiated by what we have already seen of Falla's reluctance to speak during his trial. However, while Lazare benefits from hearing the voices of others ('C'était ce qu'il voulait, entendre parler de sa Dédée' (*DN*, p.174)) his own voice collapses: 'D'Andrée la m... .' Il ne termina pas sa phrase, pointant son index. Un silence l'étouffant survint, aucun n'osait le briser' (*DN*, p.172). The silence is finally ruptured by Falla, and it is he who appropriates the authority of voice, Lazare meekly listening to what he has to say about Andrée.

The encounters we have seen so far have taken place largely between African immigrants to France and white native French characters. However, one of the most interesting interplays occurs between Diaw Falla's mother, Salimata, in Senegal, and the metropolitan French press. Salimata speaks no French, only Oulof, therefore the reader must suspend his or her disbelief when reading the text of her conversation in French. There is, arguably, something to be said about the implications of Sembène's appropriation of native Senegalese voices and the translation of them for metropolitan consumption, but that is outwith the scope of this chapter. Worrying about the plight of her son, Salimata reflects:

Qu'avait-il besoin d'aller chez eux, n'avait-il pas tout ici? Pourquoi m'a-t-il abandonnée? Les toubabs n'ont pas de cœur, ne sont-ils pas comme des chiens, ils n'ont aucune honte, ils s'embrassent dans tous les coins? Ah, cette femme, le 'dihanama' (l'enfer) ne sera pas assez chaud pour elle; faire tant de mal à une vieille femme... Si je savais leur maudite langue, je pourrais lire ce qu'ils ont écrit; (*DN*, p.15)

'C'est pas possible, c'est pas possible,' répétait-elle. Durant toute cette histoire, ces trois mots la reconfortaient. (*DN*, p.1)

Salimata's own language is a comfort to her, because the French language has become a menace. She is, it appears, unaware that, 'Dans le village de Yoff, [Falla] passait pour un indolent, et l'on dit qu'il s'embarqua pour Marseille afin de satisfaire son goût de banditisme, et de tirer sa subsistance des filles de joie' (*DN*, p.28). Reports in French of Falla's murder trial are brought to her, but she cannot read them; instead she gazes at his photograph, suffering what we have called 'literary aphasia', unable to understand the vital text of the newspaper and unable to respond in any practical way to what it contains. This scene brings to mind Tournier's *La Goutte d'Or*, in which the fear of being photographed is of a concomitant appropriation of identity and subsequent death of the subject, and Salimata's predicament becomes all the more pitiful. Later newspaper reports reveal that her distrust of the French press is not unfounded. Diaw Falla is referred to thus: 'Qu'attendons-nous de ces êtres incapables de réagir devant le progrès, qui se disent navigateurs et ignorent jusqu'au fonctionnement des machines modernes?' (*DN*, p.28). Salimata is prompted by her confusion and lack of understanding of press reports about Falla to plan a journey away from her home in Yo: 'Demain j'irai à Dakar, peut-être que je saurai quelque chose' (*DN*, p.16). Thus, Salimata, perfectly content with her life in Yo, Senegal is forced into the metropolis, her prospective journey a metaphor for the irresistible metrocentric power wielded by French society, in this instance typified by Falla's trial in France.

This same metropolitan magnetism has pulled Sembène from his native Senegal to France and he has had to discover methods of making his literature marketable in that country; consider Katharina Städtler's view:

Pendant les années 1940-1950, une bonne partie du champ littéraire afro-francophone se trouve hors du continent africain, dominée et monopolisée par le pouvoir colonial. On a affaire à un champ littéraire dont la production du sens et de l'évaluation de la valeur des œuvres prennent place en métropole. Les difficultés que rencontrent les auteurs africains (trouver un éditeur, un

public, un intérêt de la critique) les amènent à développer des stratégies de conquête leur permettant d'accéder au champ littéraire dominant.⁷⁷

In appropriating the French tongue and using it to convey his literature to a metropolitan readership, Sembène engaged in just such a strategic manoeuvre. His is a struggle to overcome barriers of race, not in a strictly philosophical way, perhaps, but in artistic and commercial ways. Clearly, the racial issues which oblige him (and his character, Diaw Falla) to struggle to achieve and maintain a place in French cultural life also force him to confront questions of class. Roger Vailland's preoccupation, in *Un Jeune Homme seul*, is precisely with highlighting class divisions in the same period. Hence, a contrapuntal reading of this text with Sembène's will, it is hoped, offer a more complete picture of the intersecting issues of class and race dominating life in France.

Städtler's identification of the *champ littéraire* of which she writes must stimulate other questions about where Sembène's and Vailland's relative positions might be within such a field. Needless to say, the evaluation of *Le Docker noir* – written and published in France – was indeed effected in the metropolis, a metropolis in which Vailland was both commercially popular, relatively speaking, and thought of as 'belonging'. Said tells us in *Orientalism* that '[i]deas are propagated and disseminated anonymously, they are repeated without attribution; they have literally become *idées reçues*: what matters is that they are there, to be repeated, echoed, and re-echoed uncritically;⁷⁸ he also tells us – and in the same book – that

narrative is the specific form taken by written history to counter the permanence of vision [...]. Narrative asserts the power of men to be born, develop, and die, the tendency of institutions and actualities to change, the likelihood that modernity and contemporaneity will finally overtake 'classical' civilizations; above all, it asserts that the domination of reality by vision is no more than a will to power, a will to truth and interpretation, and not an objective condition of history.

⁷⁷ Katharina Städtler, 'Genèse de la littérature afro-francophone en France entre les années 1940 et 1950', *Mots Pluriels*, 8 (1998), 1-12 (p.2).

⁷⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, p.116.

Narrative, in short, introduces an opposing point of view, perspective, consciousness to the unitary web of vision.⁷⁹

These two ideas must surely be mutually exclusive. It is Said's contention in *Culture and Imperialism*, after all, that the European novel did not merely reflect empire, but helped to construct it and that it continually reinscribes processes such as imperialism.⁸⁰ This discrepancy may be explained partly by considering voice once more and its incarnation as the expression of opinion of a given group. For Vailland, the 'echoes' inevitably heard in narrative are '*idées reçues*', for Vailland has been brought up and educated in the culture of the European novel. For him, narrative *can* mean all the things that Said signals about 'institutions and actualities'. In the case of Sembène, on the other hand, narrative means little in terms of those institutions and actualities, because they are not *his* institutions or actualities in any permanent sense. For him, the '*idées reçues*' deriving from continual repetition of a specific point of view exist, just as surely as they do for Vailland, but as tools for his exclusion and exploitation, not as instruments of inclusion. They are not echoes of his community's voice.

Said has written, in *The Politics of Dispossession* (1994), that '[f]acts do not at all speak for themselves, but require a socially acceptable narrative to absorb, sustain, and circulate them'.⁸¹ The question of social acceptability of narrative is such a complex and subjective one that, here, counterpoint is the nearest approximation the reader may find to a reading practice which discovers the 'truth', problematic as that term itself can be. Through counterpoint, we may venture that Sembène's depiction of the fate which befalls an African immigrant in metropolitan France renders audible that which we do not hear

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.240.

⁸⁰ Said writes in *Culture and Imperialism*, 'we must continue to remember that novels participate in, are part of, contribute to an extremely slow, infinitesimal politics that clarifies, reinforces, perhaps even occasionally advances perceptions and attitudes about England and the world' (p.89). He also reminds us that 'issues [of land battles] were [...] even for a time decided in narrative' (p.xiii).

⁸¹ Edward W. Said, *The Politics of Dispossession* (London: Vintage, 1995), p.254.

from the Polish immigrant whom we see at the opening of Vailland's *Un Jeune Homme seul*. Through a contrapuntal reading, Vailland's novel tells us about metropolitan attitudes to the 'periphery' in the early- to mid-fifties; Sembène's novel tells how those attitudes are experienced.

III. *Un Jeune Homme seul*: Heteroglossia

If aphasia characterised *Le Docker noir*, then heteroglossia may be argued to characterise *Un Jeune Homme seul*. The continual interplay is not strictly between this 'voice' and that, but is more frequently discernible between a given deployment of voice, and silence – the literal absence of voice which articulates repressed issues of cultural difference. In *Le Docker noir*, Catherine tells Diaw in the second part of the novel: 'Depuis le jour que tu m'avais giflée [*sic*], je n'osai plus venir te déranger' (DN, p.124). Violence has a silencing effect and this clearly has implications for the current study of voice. In Roger Vailland's 1951 novel *Un Jeune Homme seul* the 'gifle' is a recurrent and important motif which manifests itself on occasions on which class boundaries, racial barriers or disputes of family rank are encountered.

Obviously, race is the determining cultural factor in Sembène's *Le Docker noir*, but let us consider, for a moment, the complicating factor of class. Yves Courrière's 1991 biography of Roger Vailland makes mention of George Bernard Shaw's play *Saint Joan* and its run in Paris in 1925 as being a cultural experience which 'fait monter les larmes aux yeux des "vrais" amateurs de théâtre'.⁸² Courrière notes that, '[p]our l'heure, tant par manque de moyens que par timidité provinciale, Roger Vailland s'en tenait écarté',⁸³ but the kind of cultural diagnostics favoured by Shaw were finding favour in Europe, especially given that

⁸² Yves Courrière, *Roger Vailland ou un libertin au regard froid* (Paris: Plon, 1991), p.85.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.86.

he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1925. He presented his views on culture in the 1920s:

Cultures exist in strata [...]. If you take a man from a low culture and bring him up to the top culture, he bursts, more or less, figuratively; mentally and intellectually he does burst, or bodily occasionally.

You will see that I am now getting to the question of internationalism, because these strata are international. Let us borrow from the military gentlemen their classification - C-1, C-2, C-3. You have heard a lot of these, and it is a very good way. You can take C as meaning culture; C-1 is the top stratum; C-2 is the one underneath it, C-3 is the one underneath that. These are all international in the sense that, no matter where you go in the world, you will find C-1 people, C-2 people, and C-3 people. That is the way you must think of the matter. You must not think that there is an English culture, and a French culture, and a Chinese culture, and begin to consider how you can bring them all together. As a matter of fact, you will find in China the C-1 man and you will find in France the C-1 man; and you will find that these cultures really correspond to grades of human ability.⁸⁴

European intellectuals were beginning to conceive of the possibility that social disparities founded on race were incidental to the *real* hierarchy of class, and this is Vailland's implied thesis some twenty-five years later. Shaw tries to efface the primacy of racial identity, all the time preserving geographical barriers ('no matter where you go in the world'; 'you will find *in China*'). When Shaw later remarks that, in encounters with problems of race, religion and economy that '[i]t is only the C-1 man who gets out of them'⁸⁵ he is referring to a person of moral and intellectual superiority. This is a contentious leap, of course, since political power and material wealth are not universally accessible and are not, therefore, guaranteed to be secured by the person of greatest moral strength. Vailland's C-1 man (or woman) is an underground figure – such as Domenica, perhaps – who asserts political power in a non-negotiated manner. Since, as we have seen, racial issues are secondary to those of class in Vailland, he can envisage the acquisition of power taking place in a clandestine way. If we counterpoint this belief with that of Sembène – that racial boundaries are all but impossible to transcend – we may see that the latter's hero, in *Le Docker noir*, was doomed to failure in his bid to penetrate the society of the French *littérati*

⁸⁴George Bernard Shaw, 'Cultural Internationalism', in *Practical Politics*, ed. by Lloyd J. Hubenka (London: University of Nebraska Press 1976), pp.187-99 (p.191) (first publ. *New York Times*, 12 December 1926). This is an abridged version of a lecture given to the Fabian Society on 24 November 1926.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

and in his efforts to survive the ravages of the criminal justice system after the original bid had failed. The conspicuousness of a black African dictates the impossibility of his secretive ascent to power, in Sembène's novel, a fact we can read contrapuntally through Vailland's work.

It bears repeating that Said claims, in *Culture and Imperialism*, that

'contrapuntal reading' as I have called it means reading a text with an understanding of what is involved when an author shows, for instance, that a colonial sugar plantation is seen as important to the process of maintaining a particular style of life in England,⁸⁶

and that

[t]he point is that contrapuntal reading must take account of both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it, which can be done by extending our reading of the texts to include what was once forcibly excluded.⁸⁷

While, in Roger Vailland's *Un Jeune Homme seul*, the notion of imperialism as 'the practice, the theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory'⁸⁸ is not as clear-cut as in *Le Docker noir*, it can be appreciated that, as Said opines, 'colonialism has largely ended; imperialism, as we shall see, lingers on.'⁸⁹ It is certainly true that the 1950s were a time of political awakening in France, if not necessarily a time of corresponding concessions. Alfred Cobban tells us, for example, that Guy Mollet's conciliatory trip to Algiers ended with a demonstration to the French government of the rage felt by *colons* there, and succeeded only in converting a governmental policy 'of concessions to one of resistance'.⁹⁰ French relations with Poland – one of the dialogues treated in *Un Jeune Homme seul* – were, of course, entirely different in heritage; yet the absence of literal imperialism does not preclude the presence of traces of imperialist attitudes in Franco-Polish encounters. France was obliged to come to Poland's aid in

⁸⁶ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.78.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.79.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.8.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.8.

⁹⁰ Alfred Cobban, *A History of Modern France: Volume Three, 1871-1962* (London: Penguin, 1990), p.234.

times of conflict, yet, as we know, France (and Britain) prevaricated greatly in this regard in 1939. France's desire for an ally in Eastern Europe to supplant the Tsarist connection she had previously enjoyed, set against Poland's need for help when under imminent threat rendered unbalanced the relationship. It is a complex attitude of moral and economic superiority over another culture which endures, and which we see in microcosm at the outset of Vailland's novel.

Eugène-Marie Favart's bicycle collision with a Polish immigrant and the subsequent exchange, spoken and unspoken, between them serve to illustrate the divisions between classes and races in the mid-century French society depicted by Vailland. Vailland offers no historical padding in this novel: presences and absences of voice are crucial, then, to an understanding of interrelations between metropolis and periphery in *Un Jeune Homme seul*. The following encounter presents a nuanced heteroglossia, with silences 'speaking' as loudly as voices:

Eugène-Marie *pense*. 'Il tenait sa droite. Je suis dans mon tort' (my italics).⁹¹

'Je tenais ma droite,' *dit-il*. Il parle avec un accent étranger. Le ton n'est pas agressif. (JHS, p.42, my italics)

'C'est un ouvrier polonais,' *pense* Eugène-Marie. (JHS, p.42, my italics)

'Où habites-tu?' *demande* l'homme. Favart *désigne* la maison *du doigt*. (JHS, p.42, my italics)

'Quand il a vu que j'habitais une *maison particulière*, il a été certain qu'on l'accuserait d'avoir provoqué l'accident. Il n'a peut-être pas la conscience tranquille.' (JHS, p.43)

These excerpts are drawn from a chapter in which a constant tension is preserved between the use of voice and the strategic deployment of silence. Eugène-Marie's thoughts survey the implications of the damage he has done to this man and to his bicycle, even to the practical limit of considering the cost of repairs and of compensation

⁹¹Roger Vailland, *Un Jeune Homme seul*, ed. by John E. Flower and C.H.E. Niven (London: Methuen, 1985), p.42. Subsequent references will be made to this edition (first publ. Paris: Corrêa, 1951).

for loss of earnings should the man be badly injured. However, ultimately his thoughts ‘voice’ the racist and classist accent of the boy’s social environment and he knows that it is practically unnecessary for him to explain or apologise. Moreover, Eugène-Marie’s ‘*idée reçue*’ about the Pole suggests, contrapuntally, Ginette Tontisane’s behaviour towards Diaw Falla in *Le Docker noir*, behaviour which is not deconstructed in Sembène’s text. The conclusion reached by Eugène-Marie is a composite of heteroglossian exchanges between voice and silence. The fictional world is lent authenticity by these exchanges, thus underlining the ‘worldliness’ (Said’s term) of the text itself.

The second chapter also foregrounds the role of voice with the arrival of a letter from Eugénie Favart to her daughter-in-law Victoria about the imminent marriage of Eugénie’s son, Lucien, to Lucie, a *repasseuse*. The menial nature of Lucie’s profession, coupled with her undistinguished parentage (her deceased father had been an *ouvrier*, her mother is a *concierge*), prompts Victoria to consider that Lucie is an inappropriate sister-in-law and she voices her objections to the match. It is these objections that Eugénie addresses in her letter. I do not propose to dwell on the vocabulary of ownership – ‘ton mari,’ ‘mon fils,’ ‘ton fils,’ ‘mon petit fils’ – which peppers this letter, and indeed the bulk of the novel: John Flower and Peter Tame after him have dealt thoroughly with this issue.⁹² I shall focus, rather, upon the effect of the transcribed voice on Victoria: “‘Chaque mot de ta mère est une gifle pour nous,’” criait Victoria Favart’ (*JHS*, p.49). This claim once again highlights the profound connection between voice and physical control which the novel identifies as integral to class relations throughout the novel – the slap across the face is a metaphor for moral dictatorship. It is Godichaux, Victoria Favart’s father, who describes to Eugène-Marie the complex operations of Eugénie Favart’s voice, and its effects:

⁹² John E. Flower, *Roger Vailland: the Man and his Masks* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1975), p.75; Peter Tame, *The Ideological Hero in the Novels of Robert Brasillach, Roger Vailland and André Malraux* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), p.272.

Quand tu dis: *je veux*, ta mère te reprend en te faisant remarquer: *le roi dit nous voulons*. Ta mère croit que c'est par politesse que les rois disaient: *nous voulons*. Ta mère n'y comprend rien. Les rois disaient: *nous voulons*, pour bien nous faire comprendre qu'ils voulaient à notre place; le peuple n'avait pas le droit de vouloir; le peuple n'avait qu'à se taire; la volonté du peuple, c'était ce que voulait la volonté du roi. Voilà pourquoi le roi disait: *nous voulons*. Eh bien! Eugénie Favart disait toujours: *nous voulons*. Avant la mort de ton grand-père, c'était parce qu'elle parlait en son nom. Il ne comptait pas, le pauvre vieux. Mais, après sa mort, elle a continué plus que jamais. C'était tout le temps: *nous voulons, nous refusons, nous exigeons, nous n'admettons pas, nous avons décidé que ...*. Après le krach des Raffineries Say, elle a commencé à dire *je*, comme tout le monde, *Je veux, je veux*, plus de *nous voulons*, et les autres ne font pas toujours ce qu'elle veut. (JHS, p.52)

The salient point made by this exposition of Eugénie's behaviour is that she herself recognises, as does everyone around her, that, with the demise of her commercial interests, she has lost the economic power which gave her moral influence. Her daughter-in-law's class consciousness is such, though, that this truth escapes her notice. The monarchical analogy drawn by Godichaux is apt: his daughter believes that Eugénie's superiority is as inalienable – however unpalatable – as a king's rule is constitutional, and thinks that social rank is not negotiated but innate; for this reason, she behaves in a manner which suggests that her mother-in-law cannot be unseated, just as she herself cannot be unseated from her own social position, regardless of financial fortunes. The window-dressing observed by Eugène-Marie (and reported by the narrative voice) in his mother's bedroom is testament to this belief: the boy notices 'deux vases de Sèvres (ou imitation Sèvres, Eugène-Marie ne le sut jamais)' (JHS, p.57).

The deep impact of voice upon Victoria is again evidenced by her reaction to the news that Lucien and Lucie are to marry:

'Remarque,' dit-elle, 'que je n'ai rien à dire contre ce mariage. Qu'un *socialo* épouse une repasseuse, c'est naturel. Qu'un raté fasse sa vie avec la fille d'une concierge, nous aurions dû nous y attendre. Et ils feront de leurs enfants des *ouvrerriers*, c'est le contraire qui serait surprenant...'

(Victoria disait toujours *socialo* pour socialiste et *ouvrerriers* pour ouvrier, avec un bref silence avant le mot, qui équivalait à une mise entre guillemets. Elle croyait ainsi parodier l'accent faubourien, inséparable à son idée de la condition ouvrière et des convictions socialistes). (JHS, p.60)

Interestingly, Eugène-Marie rejoins with his mother as he used to before his 'âge de raison':

- Eh bien...*Je m'en moque comme de l'an quarante.*
- Je m'en moque comme de ma première chemise,* récita Eugène-Marie.
- Je m'en moque comme du singe à papa,* dit-elle, en précipitant le débit.
- Je m'en moque comme du bouc à mémé,* répliqua-t-il.
- Je m'en moque comme du quignon de pain de la reine Elisabeth,* dit-elle sur un ton haletant.
- Je m'en moque comme du chapeau de paille de l'empereur Ferdinand,* répliqua-t-il sur le même ton.

Il redressa le buste, saisit les poignets de sa mère et ils psalmodièrent ensemble:

- Dadi dada dadeu, nous deux, rabi raba rabeu, rien que nous deux, babi baba babou, on se fiche de tout.*

(Les dernières répliques et le chœur final reprenaient une autre ritournelle de leurs traditions intimes d'avant 'l'âge de raison' d'Eugène-Marie). (*JHS*, p.61)

This final sentence is a turning point in the narrative: Eugène-Marie is physically close to his mother and sings with her, joining his voice to hers; yet it subsequently becomes clear that since his 'âge de raison' he has departed from Victoria's totalising view of class divisions and sees the working class not as inferior (nor yet as equal) but as exotic and worthy of pursuit. His dissenting voice is not yet as explicit as this, but Eugène-Marie does begin to question his mother and her response is to dismiss his voice as being that of someone else:

- T'ai-je demandé de faire tes Pâques cette année...Réponds-moi!
- Tu ne m'as rien demandé... en paroles.
- En paroles? Qu'est-ce que tu veux dire par là?
- Ce que je dis.
- Je ne t'ai rien demandé, ni en paroles, ni autrement. Je me contente de prier pour toi. Voilà ce que je fais.
- Merci, maman, dit-il froidement.
- Entêté, dit-elle...Oh! ce n'est pas de ta faute. C'est le sang des Favart qui parle en toi. On dit bien: Savoyard cabochard, Savoyard Favart, double cabochard. (*JHS*, p.63)

Victoria's denial of her son's responsibility for what he says is enduring. When he swears, she says variously: 'Je suis sûre que tu ne sais pas ce que tu viens de dire;' 'Tu l'as répété parce que tu l'as entendu, mais je jurerais que tu ne comprends pas le gros mot que tu viens de prononcer;' 'On m'a sali mon enfant!' (*JHS*, p.64). The ironic deployment of voice is clear: it is silence that is the signifier of attitude; 'voice' is depicted as being attributable to a latent genetic function, and an unwelcome one. The next time song is mentioned in connection with Eugène-Marie, it is very far from being a symbol of union with his mother. At the *dénouement*, 'Le bonheur de vivre chantait pour la première fois dans son cœur' (*JHS*, p.214), because he has become embroiled in the chaotic, yet exotic,

experience of resistance. Voice is internalised, made physical, in quite a different manner from that which his mother has envisaged.

Eugène-Marie's aggression towards his father for his failure to prevent Victoria's discomfiture is manifested not in spoken words, but, like Eugénie's message, is transcribed on to paper: 'Il écrivit en travers de son papier brouillon: *Une gifle exige du sang*' (JHS, p.71). Eugène-Marie's anger at his father can later be seen to have a basis in the latter's tendency to take refuge in established norms:

-Je suis content de te voir mordre à la poésie, dit Michel Favart.
 -Je ne mords à rien, murmure Eugène-Marie.
 -C'était façon de parler...
 -On prend de curieuses façons de parler, continua-t-il. Mordre à la poésie... . Les années passent et on s'aperçoit tout d'un coup qu'on ne dit plus que des platitudes. (JHS, p.79)

Eugène-Marie's desire to effect a life change which will dispense with such platitudes is illustrated by his exoticisation of the working class and his urge to consort with some of its number. When the siren sounds the end of the day at the factory opposite his house, Eugène-Marie stands at the open window watching the workers emerge:

Eugène-Marie entrouvrit la fenêtre, pour entendre leurs voix grasses. Sa mère affirmait que si elles étaient toujours enrouées, c'était à cause des alcools qu'elles buvaient dans les bistrotts du voisinage. Mais comme, même au cœur de l'hiver, qui est rude en Champagne, elles ne portaient en guise de manteaux que ces mêmes châles, dont leurs mains relevaient alors un pan à hauteur du menton, et cela formait un second drapé, superposé drapé des épaules, il est plus vraisemblable qu'elles souffraient d'une laryngite chronique, dont les effets se prolongeaient jusqu'au cœur de l'été. Pour tout le reste de la vie d'Eugène-Marie, l'idée de sensualité restera liée aux voix basses. (JHS, p.85)

The voice of the proletariat, which here he associates with illness, effects a life change in Eugène-Marie. Far from diluting his moral values, Eugène-Marie's intense sensual and sexual interest in the women belonging to what his mother sees as the inferior class appears to reinforce his distaste for the cheapening of the sexual experience:

il attache tellement d'importance au rapprochement des corps [...] que toute plaisanterie sur ce sujet lui répugne. Les obscénités, les mots à double sens, les grivoiseries (il hait ce mot), les gauloiseries (autre mot abhorré), de la plupart de ses camarades, le dégoutent autant que le mot *cochonnerie*, prononcé quelquefois par sa mère. (JHS, p.85)

Victoria's voice, then, can be distasteful to her son, but it is, in fact, the *imagined* discourse Eugène-Marie imputes to her which proves the defining factor in his behaviour, imagined discourse which, it must be surmised, has basis in the patterns of previous experience. As we have seen, Said writes of mythic language being a systematic discourse, the understanding of which dictates, as a prerequisite, membership, conscious or not, of 'the ideology and the institutions that guarantee its existence', the main characteristic of the resulting discourse being 'that it conceals its own origins as well as those of what it describes' (see this chapter, Footnote 63). This is precisely the basis from which Eugène-Marie constructs an artificial discourse, a basis which, in some sense, actually coincides with his mother's view that it is his heritage, 'le sang des Favart', which governs his behaviour and his speech. Similarly, the boy invents a situation in which he makes an amorous advance to a factory girl and imagines her response, a response rooted, needless to say, in the boy's middle-class experiences:

La fille dira: 'Regardez donc ce môme. On lui presserait le nez, il en sortirait encore du lait. Et ça ose aborder une femme dans la ruel Rentre vite chez ta maman. Elle te grondera si tu arrives en retard.' Et ma mère me grondera en effet si j'arrive en retard. Elle auront toutes les deux raison, la fille et ma mère. On reste un enfant tant qu'on ne gagne pas sa vie. (JHS, p.88)

It is sufficient for Eugène-Marie to *imagine* what may be said to him to feel the weight of the implications of his own impecuniousness. He has no ambition beyond earning money for survival, because that is what makes the difference between interaction with the factory women and distance from them. His repeated capitulation to the women in his life is indicative of his knowledge that giving precedes receiving: he prepares to quit the sphere of education, ostensibly because his hands become too cold on the handlebars of his bicycle in the mornings, but, more importantly, because he knows that remaining in education will harm his chances of forming a liaison with any working-class girl; but he

gives in to Victoria's supplications for him to return to school, because if he does not, he will not be given a suit with long trousers, the other symbol of his rite of passage into adulthood. Here, Eugène-Marie listens to two voices: the voice of his social ambition and the voice of his human ambition; his desire to be working-class and his desire to be adult. Victoria has some influence in this latter ambition; by contrast, her husband, Michel Favart, has no influence whatsoever upon his son's decisions.

The implied author intervenes in this scheme, though, to show that women are not, despite appearances to the contrary, omnipotent in this novel. This can be gleaned, to draw upon one example, from the strategic location of Adèle Fleuri in the rue Pétrarque. Adèle is the mother of Lucie, the pregnant *repasseuse* to whom the by now indifferent Lucien is married in the course of the novel. The deployment of the name of Petrarch, a champion of unrequited love, is designed to illustrate, perhaps, the romantic misfortunes of Lucie and her mother. This notion is further reinforced by the direction taken by another doomed couple, Eugène-Marie and Marcelle, after one of their last kisses: 'Ils retournèrent rue Pétrarque par le même chemin' (*JHS*, p.121).

Discrepancies, such as this one between differing portrayals of feminine potency, in the novel's use of voice hint at the possibility that no single voice can have decisive authority. Indeed, there is, in this novel, an implicit suggestion that any deployment of voice is something of a risky pursuit. After the marriage of Lucien and Lucie, then narrative voice describes the guests engaged in their sundry activities: Eugénie absents herself to visit her shop; Michel discusses war damages with his brother, Lucien. In the midst of it all, the narrative voice gives a general overview of the scene: 'On parle, on rit, on joue aux cartes' (*JHS*, p.95). This comment can be understood as implying that even apparently benign social exchanges involve a gamble. Such a view, read contrapuntally with *Le Docker noir*, reveals some naïveté on the part of Diaw Falla; once again, we return to Said's notion that

'[i]deas are propagated and disseminated anonymously, they are repeated without attribution; they have literally become *idées reçues*: what matters is that they are there, to be repeated, echoed, and re-echoed uncritically' (see this chapter, Footnote 78). Diaw is not privy to this nuance of middle-class metropolitan life which Vailland depicts; he is, therefore, vulnerable to Ginette because of what he might reveal to her in the kind of conversation replicated in *Un Jeune Homme seul*.

The narrative voice itself does not escape association with this vocal risk and is at its most interesting when it appears inconsistent with its previous utterances; this can be seen to great effect during and between assertions about religion. In its description of Lucien's and Lucie's wedding, the narrative voice emphasises the source of the pressure for a religious marriage:

La cérémonie religieuse, en effet, une simple bénédiction, à laquelle il avait été finalement consenti pour apaiser les scrupules de Favart ingénieur et de sa femme Victoria, s'était trouvée bâclée par un prêtre bougon beaucoup plus rapidement qu'on ne l'avait prévu. (*JHS*, p.94)

The impression is thus created of a dogmatic, rather than devout, couple. An earlier description of Eugène-Marie's reflection upon religion yields a picture of Michel's shallow and non-*engagé* faith: 'L'anticléricalisme militant lui parassait appartenir au même ordre d'activité que les réunions électorales, la lecture des journaux politiques et les discours de distribution de prix; *son père n'avait jamais voté*, et Eugène-Marie trouvait cela tout naturel' (*JHS*, p.84, my italics). Moreover, the notion that Lucien and Lucie could have held a religious ceremony at the behest of Michel Favart grows ever more doubtful when one considers the narrative's presentation of a socially inept Michel as seen through his son's eyes:

Il est plutôt porté à envisager qu'il existe, entre les convictions nouvelles de son père, appuyées sur la lecture des pères de l'Eglise, et la dévotion de sa mère, une différence du même ordre que celle

qui place, dans son esprit, les professions libérales au-dessus des professions industrielles ou mercantiles. Evidemment, il a vu son père s'agenouiller sur une dalle de pierre, devant une statue de la Vierge, il s'en est senti humilié; mais il pense aussi que c'est peut-être la seule manière que cet homme, qui ne quitte jamais ses lunettes, n'est jamais monté sur un vélo, qui ne va pas au café, qui ne regarde pas la poitrine des femmes et qui ne sait parler aux hommes, la seule manière qu'il ait trouvée de faire un geste simple. (*JHS*, p.83)

This is especially incredible in view of the newlyweds' forenames: these imply that Lucie and Lucien are the enlightened ones; unlikely, then, that the views of Michel and Victoria would impact on their decision to any perceptible degree. A hierarchy of voices emerges, then, with the implied author being, perhaps, the least trusted of all. At the beginning of this section, we posited the view that *Un Jeune Homme seul* subjugates racial issues to class issues, treating the former as a subsection of the latter. The novel presents Eugène-Marie's cultural orientation as strictly metropolitan. The existing vision of the protagonist as being fascinated by the exotic otherness of the working class holds for his view of Africans, but a less benign light is shed upon his disposition, and something of the arrogant superiority displayed by the boy in his encounter with the Pole at the outset returns to haunt later depictions of him:

'Les Prussiens sont battus,' se disait-il. 'Nous leur avons pris l'Alsace et la Lorraine. Mais il reste les nègres, les vrais nègres, même ceux qui ont gardé quelque chose de la verdure primitive. J'irai en Afrique comme Rimbaud, je fonderai un royaume comme lui, et je reviendrai à la tête de mes nègres mettre le feu à Paris et étouffer les *cocus* de ces bâtards dans le sang de leur gorge ouverte'. (*JHS*, pp.111-12, my italics)

One of Eugène-Marie's diary entries – as vivid a deployment of voice as Eugénie's letter – reinforces his political and ethnological orientation and projections: 'Je hais les gauloises et 90% des Français. Préparer l'école coloniale. Aller en Afrique' (*JHS*, p.124). Certainly, Eugène-Marie allies himself more convincingly with foreigners than with the bourgeoisie of his own country; but in his imagination he appropriates the voice – and, moreover, physical power – of Africans in an ill-considered and dubious bid to combat what he sees as class conflicts and inequalities in metropolitan France.

Any notion that Eugène-Marie is *truly* immersed in working-class culture is undermined by his exclamations when Domenica enters his room between the wedding ceremony and the reception which follows: ‘Il répète à voix haute: “Je suis l’homme le plus seul au monde”’ (JHS, p.99). This histrionic claim is indicative of a social immaturity incommensurate with an appreciation of the financial and other difficulties faced by the workers at whom he gazes every afternoon.⁹³ Moreover, the solidarity which he perceives in the working classes (in reality a function of his own essentialisation of them) is absent from his own life. It is an interesting irony that, while Eugène-Marie feels able to adopt the paraphernalia of the working classes and to become like them, he does *not* think it possible to enter into the same process with regard to an ethnic group. When Victorien Fleuri’s derisory attempt to dress and to dance like *un nègre* is in full flood, Eugène-Marie says disparagingly, ‘Il ne sera jamais un vrai nègre’ (JHS, p.113). The notion expressed by Marcelle that one can ‘faire le nègre’ (JHS, p.113) is dismissed by Eugène-Marie, who nonetheless believes it possible (and desirable) to *faire l’ouvrier*. The girl’s derisory response is intriguing in itself: ‘Un grand rire secoua Marcelle’ (JHS, p.113). Clearly this deployment of Marcelle’s voice has significance; what is unclear is whether she finds Eugène-Marie’s naïveté amusing, her opinion being that one can perfectly master the art of imitating a black person, or whether she is in fact laughing at Victorien’s impersonation. We cannot know whether it is the vehicle or the tenor of this image which is the object of derision here: the novel adopts a fairly ambiguous attitude. There is a strong sense, though, of the essentialisation of the black man – just as the figure of the ‘vrai bolchévik’ is essentialised throughout Vailland’s fiction – and the notion of purity of race or class is an enduring one in this novel. It is from this idea, perhaps, that the concept of being ‘de bon sang’ emerges. We find ourselves returned to the question of essentialism, knowing, from a

⁹³ The exclamation is also, it should be said, reminiscent of the opening of Molière’s *La Jalousie du Barbouillé*, where Barbouillé exclaims: ‘Il faut avouer que je suis le plus malheureux de tous les hommes’ (Molière, *La Jalousie du Barbouillé*, in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1962, pp.33-39 (p.33)) and the reader may wonder if this textual ‘game’ is linked to Vailland’s statement that the ideal reader of *Un Jeune Homme seul* should be familiar with Corneille’s *Cinna* (Roger Vailland, *Écrits intimes*, p.443).

contrapuntal reading, that Sembène's Diaw Falla, as an African immigrant, would be subject to just the pressures described here.

Another ambivalence is expressed in a discussion of Eugène-Marie's sexuality. What is meant by, 'A cet âge-là, pourvu qu'on ait une femme dans les bras, on ne regarde pas la couleur de sa peau' (*JHS*, p.116) is unclear. Perhaps the implication is that racial prejudice has not yet taken a hold on the young mind; however, one must remember the attention paid to *l'âge de raison* earlier in the text, and one may surmise, perhaps, that it is simply naïveté which is being proposed as the reason for Eugène-Marie's foray into miscegenation. The exoticisation and commodification of the black body going on in other literatures is perhaps disingenuously glossed, here. After all, as we have seen, the French psychologist invited to assess Diaw Falla during his trial in *Le Docker noir* clearly believes in the exoticisation of the black body, regardless of gender, suggesting that black men are sexual obsessives.

Cultural position is sometimes depicted in this novel as fixed. The theme of the immutability of social status is perfectly exemplified in Eugénie Favart, a key figure in Vailland's near-satirisation of the middle classes. During the investigation following Pierre Madru's death, the *inspecteur principal* probes the background of the Favarts and asks Mme. Lièvre about Victoria's musical interests:

-Mme. Favart mère est musicienne? demanda le principal.
-Sans doute, puisqu'elle tient tellement à son piano. Mais je ne l'ai jamais entendue taper dessus. (*JHS*, p.157)

Eugénie is in a class limbo. She comes from working-class stock and from these roots has founded a successful business. However, the aspirations which she feels are appropriate to her more recent status as a member of the middle class, such as playing the piano, remain unfulfilled. The perpetually silent piano is emblematic of Victoria's inability to find her

own voice. Interestingly, though, neither narrative voice nor any character's voice appears to have authority with regard to this issue. Prostitute La Blanchette, for instance, tells the middle-class Eugène-Marie, 'Avec tes diplômes, tu ne peux pas faire autrement que de te faire une situation' (*JHS*, p.180). Later, however, she claims that '[u]n ouvrier qui sait se défendre ne reste pas ouvrier, il devient patron' (*JHS*, p.181). Here we see conflicting notions of class boundaries: a middle-class boy such as Eugène-Marie has a social position which is unassailable and from which he himself cannot escape; the working class, according to La Blanchette, must remain downtrodden if it is not to be perceived as having betrayed itself; and yet Eugénie Favart, a working-class woman who is more than able to defend herself and her position in life has not truly penetrated the oligarchy of the middle classes. So much is said in this novel about the possibilities and the impossibilities of social transcendence, yet no authoritative position is reached. This is interesting, from a contrapuntal point of view, since it allows the reader to develop a more nuanced view of *Le Docker noir*. Sembène's *title* does not privilege questions of race over those of class, but the novel is read as, precisely, a study of an African immigrant in France. What Vailland's foregrounding of La Blanchette does is highlight the problems of class division at work in metropolitan France which would exist anyway, for an immigrant and for a French citizen alike.

The *inspecteur principal's* interview with Eugène-Marie in the wake of Pierre Madru's death is one of the most revealing exchanges in the novel. The inspector begins by appropriating the voice of his interlocutor, which he does by borrowing Eugène-Marie's own analogy between the situations of pianist and mathematician and using it to align his social circumstances and moral orientation with those of Eugène-Marie. When the latter objects, saying, 'On ne se rencontre pas sur un point' (*JHS*, p.161), the inspector introduces the notion of counterpoint to emphasise that the information he requires will inevitably be presented to him, regardless of Eugène-Marie's attempts to obstruct his enquiries:

Je pars du principe que les dissonances apparentes sont les fragments discontinus d'un contrepoint qui m'échappe, ou qu'on me cache. Alors, je me joue l'air de mon client, j'essaie des contrepoints, je tâtonne; c'est là que l'artiste intervient. Quand j'ai trouvé le contrepoint qui rend leur sens à toutes les dissonances, je sais tout ce que je veux savoir du passé et du présent de mon *client*. Je peux même prédire son avenir: je n'ai qu'à continuer à jouer dans le ton. (JHS, p.162)

Interestingly, the statement of the inspector seems to echo Edward Said's sense of identity as being a composite of currents or a discontinuous state of being. Here, counterpoint appears to be an *intra-* rather than an *inter-*textual phenomenon. When Eugène-Marie asks if he is being interrogated, the inspector tells him that he is content, for the moment, to listen to him: 'L'interrogatoire, c'est l'expérimentation succédant à l'observation' (JHS, p.162). He has his own brand of contrapuntal analysis, and it differs from that described and promoted by Edward Said in the criticism of literature. The analogy between the two contrapuntal systems is valid, since the critic probes the 'story' of the author in the same way as the investigator probes the evidence of the interviewee. Vailland's police inspector does not consider his own position and goals against those of his interviewee, but rather seeks artificially to adopt Eugène-Marie's values in order to undermine them. The ambiguity of 'jouer' only reinforces the double-edged nature of this counterpoint. In addition, the inspector's contrapuntal methodology encompasses no objective of moral purity: he will discover 'tout ce que *je veux savoir* du passé et du présent de mon client,' (my italics) and not *tout ce qu'il y a à en savoir*. The inspector's admission that he 'tâtonne' and his description of interrogation as 'l'expérimentation' reinforce and challenge in equal measure Said's idea of counterpoint, in the first case because they admit an element of amateurism which derives from the novelty of the contrapuntal process, and in the second because they involve a method of comparativism which is far from being divested of hierarchy and which, instead, depicts the critic (or investigator) variously as artist and soothsayer. In the aftermath of Pierre Madru's death the authority of the narrative voice, when listened to closely, seems spurious and yet somehow assured and convincing. A tribute to Madru divulges that 'sa main [était] habile à toute chose, sensible et juste comme une bonne balance' (JHS, p.202), and dismisses at a stroke the possibility of accidental death.

Moreover, the narrative voice describes the railway worker as 'mort dans le combat' (*JHS*, p.202), suggesting sanction of Madru's moral imperative and prompting further suspicion of narrative motives.

Just as the *principal* seeks to disorientate Eugène-Marie by appropriating his 'voice' and contorting his words for use against him, so Favart adopts the policeman's own analogy and dismisses its validity. The *principal* asserts: 'Tous les hommes sont égaux devant le policier, comme devant devant le médecin et le confesseur' (*JHS*, p.210). Eugène-Marie's spirited retort against the relentless questioning of the *principal* denigrates the justice system and compares it with what he sees as the corrupt machinery of the church, whose official the policeman has just invoked in the support of his own position: 'Prêtre et flics, vous êtes des sadiques sans grandeur, qui opérez lâchement à l'abri de l'appareil de l'Eglise ou de l'Etat' (*JHS*, p.211).

In examining Eugène-Marie's identification of the policeman with the priest, we may once again counterpoint *Un Jeune Homme seul* with *Le Docker noir*. Eugène-Marie's relations with the justice system naturally differ materially in several ways from those which exist between Diaw Falla and the police. Diaw is in stasis, acted upon by the voices of others in the courtroom where he is being tried; Eugène-Marie, on the other hand, has the luxury of being, at root, on an equal social footing with the *principal*, and of being permitted and equipped to enter into dialogue with him. The latter encounter has disquisitive, rather more than inquisitive, features. Arguably, both Diaw and Favart are in self-imposed exile: Diaw from his homeland; Favart from the class into which he was born. The difference between the two lies in appreciation of the consequences of exile: Diaw has left Senegal in order that his voice may be heard more globally through his novel, yet in fact he is silenced by the very environment he had hoped would effect this; Favart, on the other hand, is at liberty to use his voice paradoxically to say as little as possible about the events

which have led to his colleague's death. By counterposing these two histories, we can perceive the immutability of certain social situations, a theme which emerges at several points in the literary spectrum of this era: when the principal speaks of being able to discover 'tout ce que je veux savoir du passé et du présent de mon *client*', one is reminded of Sartre's *La Nausée* in which the idea is often repeated that the past is a commodity, something possessable only by members of a certain economic stratum; equally, more than a decade after the publication of *Un Jeune Homme seul*, seven years after that of *Le Docker noir*, Alain Robbe-Grillet is still to be found ruminating on those luxuries indulged in only by the middle classes, and his words illuminate the motivation of Eugène-Marie's involvement in a struggle he could well have ignored: 'L'angoisse est un vice bourgeois.'⁹⁴ If one wishes to discover which luxury is reserved for those without money or status, one need look no further than *Un Jeune Homme seul*'s Eugène-Marie Favart himself: 'l'amour de la patrie est devenu un luxe de pauvre' (*JHS*, p.170). The protagonist likes neither the French, nor the Americans, nor the Russians but in childhood, we must remember, he expressed a desire to go to Africa and to return to his detested France with 'mes nègres'. Small wonder, then, that patriotism is for the poor, for it is only the affluent who can venture further afield to purchase the loyalties of other races, and only their status which allows them to voice such a desire. Falla's fate in *Le Docker noir* demonstrates this all too keenly.

Lest *Un Jeune Homme seul* be considered, at this point, a direct reflection of 'reality', we ought to consider, once again, Said's view that, '[narrative] asserts that the domination of reality by vision is no more than a will to power, a will to truth and interpretation, and not an objective condition of history. Narrative, in short, introduces an opposing point of view, perspective, consciousness to the unitary web of vision' (see this chapter, Footnote

⁹⁴ Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Pour un Nouveau Roman*, p.44. The author is here paraphrasing Ilya Ehrenbourg.

79). Certainly, the implied author seems sceptical as to the ability of fictional discourse to represent reality. When Mme. Lièvre is quizzed about relations between the adult Domenica and her husband, Eugène-Marie, she says of one of her accounts of their exchanges: 'Ça n'a pas l'air méchant... mais c'est le ton qu'il faudrait imiter, un ton excédé' (*JHS*, p.157). Text, we must infer, cannot hope to imitate voice. Moreover, aspersions are cast upon the motivations of the author of the text; immediately prior to the inspector's conversation with Eugène-Marie about the 'accident' which killed Madru the narrative voice explains: 'Un des auteurs du sabotage avait été arrêté' (*JHS*, p.162). Alternative terms to indicate the terrorists at fault are eschewed: the implied author selects 'auteur' in order, perhaps, to prompt his reader to consider the distortive effect of textual representation and to recognise the presence of saboteur in author. Like André Gide and some of the *Nouveaux Romanciers*, Vailland is questioning in the course of his writing its very validity, which, in turn, obliges the reader to question the various deployments of voice therein. Yet, the fact that Vailland does not shy away from highlighting this very problem allows the reader to make use of reading practices, such as counterpoint, in order to be able better to establish a representative view of the text.

The concluding pages of *Un Jeune Homme seul* mark a return to a previous preoccupation with the role of violence in domestic and public power relations as embodied in vocal exchange. Jacques Madru, son of Pierre, is in police custody being interviewed by his uncle, Etienne Fleuri, when he exclaims, 't'es un sale flic de Vichy' (*JHS*, p.213). This elicits a violent response from the officer and an interesting comment from the narrative voice: 'Fleuri gifla le garçon à toute volée. Une gifle fait voir rouge' (*JHS*, p.213). This latter remark, obviously enough, prepares the way for further violence between citizen and state, here exemplified between nephew and uncle; however, it does something more than this: it introduces the notion that political ideology can be shaped by one's experience of establishment conduct. The fact of 'seeing red' is not solely related to anger, but can be

inferred as having a relationship to Communist affiliation, in that suppression, by physical or other means, is seen as breeding political rebellion. This notion gives a new slant to the mantra-like words of Victoria Favart which permeate the novel: ““Moi,” dit-elle, “j’appelle cette lettre une gifle”” (*JHS*, p.47); ‘Chaque mot de ta mère est une gifle pour nous’ (*JHS*, p.49). Victoria herself is not moved from political inertia by these ‘assaults’, but her son does appear to be. Let us consider, for example, one of his thoughts to which we have already devoted some attention: after the episode in Victoria’s bedroom when she is comforted by Eugène-Marie, the latter sums up his pent-up emotion by writing, ‘Une gifle exige du sang’ (*JHS*, p.71). It is not until the variation on this phrase – ‘*Une gifle fait voir rouge*’ (*JHS*, p.213) – some one hundred and forty-two pages later, that the reader begins to understand what is meant by it. It is not simply the eye-for-an-eye philosophy it appears to be; rather the possibility emerges that the physical attack on Michel by his mother, Eugénie, which initiates this cycle demands not the spilling of another’s blood but the *rising* of the Favart blood against the powers which would seek to oppress it. In other words, when Pierre Madru tells Marcelle, after she has slapped Eugène-Marie for his impudence to her, that ‘[i]l est de bon sang’ (*JHS*, p.136), the reader can impute to this statement the belief that the Favart blood will assure the boy’s ultimate honour in political engagement. Eugénie’s original violence, then, is not, as it surely seems at first glance, an act of suppression of her family, but a call-to-arms which Eugène-Marie finally answers after the disappointment of the previous generation.

Lastly, *Un Jeune Homme seul* is full of italicised interjections, the source(s) of which merit investigation. It appears that the italicised phrases oscillate between the representation of received wisdom and the hackneyed views of certain of the novel’s characters. This cannot be but a deliberate strategy on the part of the author and/or his implied counterpart to disorientate the reader who must struggle with identifying objective ‘truths’ sanctioned by the implied author and ironic repetitions of empty truisms touted by the intellectually and

morally slight among his characters. We are reminded, at this juncture, of Edward Said's previously-quoted principal concern that much literary criticism 'reinforces the known at the expense of the knowable' (see this chapter, Footnote 17). This notion of a comfortable and comforting reinforcement of existing prejudices and preconceptions has implications for the art of fiction as well as for its criticism. Vailland plays his own game with the reader by introducing 'voices' which, while presented in typographically identical ways, are mutually contradictory in sentiment. Hence, if we equate '*Une gifle exige du sang*' with an earlier italicised credo, '*On n'est jamais reçu la première fois à Polytechnique*' (JHS, p.49), we make the mistake of confusing the expression of Victoria Favart's wounded bourgeois pride (expressed in the second quotation) with the presentation of a guiding principle of the novel (offered in the first quotation), which is that community solidarity can be achieved through the acting out of power relations among that community.

Here we can perceive an interesting counterpoint with Sembène's *Le Docker noir*, which is also subject to authorial interjections, albeit that they are less frequent. It has been said that 'authorial presence makes itself felt by stylistic means':⁹⁵ Vailland's implied reader is tested throughout *Un Jeune Homme seul* as to his or her ability to distinguish between the author's interjections and, therefore, between the intellectual and moral bases thereof. Readerly success or failure dictates the level of understanding of the novel and thus differentiates between readers. *Un Jeune Homme seul* has influence beyond its covers. Sembène's implied reader, however, is already clearly defined from the outset. Let us consider, by way of example, the opening pages of *Le Docker noir*, during the course of which the reader is introduced to the thoughts of Yaye Salimata regarding the French and especially Ginette Tontisane, the initiator of Diaw Falla's troubles:

⁹⁵ Sheila Bell, 'Orchestrated Voices: Selves and Others in Nathalie Sarraute's *Tu ne t'aimes pas*', in *Narrative Voices in Modern French Fiction*, ed. by Michael Candy, George Evans and Gabriel Jacobs (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), pp.13-35 (p.15).

Qu'avait-il besoin d'aller chez eux, n'avait-il pas tout ici? Pourquoi m'a-t-il abandonnée? Les toubabs n'ont pas de cœur, ne sont-ils pas comme des chiens, ils n'ont aucune honte, ils s'embrassent dans tous les coins? Ah, cette femme, *le 'dihanama' (l'enfer)* ne sera pas assez chaud pour elle. (DN, p.15, my italics)

The placing of the Oulof word for 'hell' in inverted commas is significant because it indicates the author's assumption that his readership will not be familiar with his native tongue. It also has the effect of distancing the reading culture from the writing culture, in that the reader's impression, gleaned from the inverted commas and from the ensuing translation of the word, is that it is acceptable not to know what 'le "dihanama" is; the punctuation implies that linguistic and cultural ignorance will not be inferred in the reader. More than this, however, it is clear that the author's stylistic awareness does not simply operate for the *inclusion* of non-Oulof speakers, but also for the *exclusion* of non-francophones. Of course, we know already that the novel was published by a Parisian house, but the use of inverted commas on occasions such as this clearly demonstrates that when the author 'speaks', it is to a francophone 'audience' desirous of the flattering reassurance that French is the superior norm, and Oulof the tongue which is safely alienised by inverted commas. This counterpoint between Vailland's novel and Sembène's is a substantive indication of a more significant distinction. Vailland's contradictory interjections, coupled with the ambivalent voices encapsulated in relation to race and class, illustrate his creative confidence: the indication is that his readership is assured. Sembène, on the other hand, does not have the same creative freedom: he must defer to the vagaries of his French readership, through his syntax and through starker, less ambiguous uses of voice in matters of politics. This discrepancy is what we may glean from a contrapuntal reading.

IV. Recalling Said

In invoking, once again, Edward Said's theory of counterpoint, we must return – at some length – to *Culture and Imperialism*.

[i]t would be insane to argue that individual writers and works do not exist, that French, Japanese, and Arabic are not separate things, or that Milton, Tagore, and Alejo Carpentier are only trivially different variations on the same theme. Neither am I saying that an essay about *Great Expectations* and Dickens's actual novel *Great Expectations* are the same thing. But I am saying that 'identity' does not necessarily imply ontologically given and eternally determined stability, or uniqueness, or irreducible character, or privileged status as something total and complete in and of itself. I would prefer to interpret a novel as the choice of one mode of writing from among many others, and the activity of writing as one social mode among several, and the category of literature as something created to serve various worldly aims, including and perhaps even mainly aesthetic ones. Thus the focus in the destabilizing and investigative attitudes of those whose work actively opposes states and borders is on how a work of art, for instance, begins *as* a work, begins *from* a political, social, cultural situation, begins *to do* certain things and not others.

The modern history of literary study has been bound up with the development of cultural nationalism, whose aim was first to distinguish the national canon, then to maintain its eminence, authority, and aesthetic autonomy [...]. The surviving doctrine of aesthetic autonomy has dwindled into a formalism associated with one or another professional method – structuralism, deconstruction, and so on.⁹⁶

The more one reads of Said's thoughts on the misdirection of literary criticism, the more one is struck by a fundamental irony, which is that, in spite of his protestations against the 'fetishistic'⁹⁷ divisions of specialties within literary studies, Said's own work is treated in precisely this way. He does not wish postcolonialism, for instance, to be considered a subset of postmodernism,⁹⁸ since such taxonomic patterns of organisation are anathema to his own inclusive intellectual orientation. However, in Rice and Waugh's *Modern Literary Theory: a Reader*, Said's 'Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community' is to be found in a section sandwiched between Structuralists, such as Derrida and Barthes, and New Historicists, such as Robert Weimann and Jerome McGann (see this chapter, Footnote 1).

⁹⁶ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, pp.382-83.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.382.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.382.

Where, then, does Said stand, if total discreteness of works and writers is 'insane' and subdivision of criticism has led to proliferation of what are pejoratively identified as 'professional methods'? He comes to something of a resolution in the end:

[O]ne cannot postpone discussions of slavery, colonialism, racism in any serious investigations of modern Indian, African, Latin and North American, Arabic, Caribbean and Commonwealth literature. Nor is it intellectually responsible to discuss them without referring to their embattled circumstances either in post-colonial societies or as marginalized and/or subjugated subjects confined to secondary spots in the curricula in metropolitan centres. Nor can one hide in positivism or empiricism and offhandedly 'require' the weapons of theory. On the other hand, it is a mistake to argue that the 'other' non-European literatures, those with more obviously worldly affiliations to power and politics, can be studied 'respectably', as if they were in actuality as high, autonomous, aesthetically independent, and satisfying as Western literatures have been made to be;⁹⁹

Exile, far from being the fate of nearly forgotten unfortunates who are dispossessed and expatriated, becomes something closer to a norm, an experience of crossing boundaries and charting new territories in defiance of the classic canonical enclosures, however much its loss and sadness should be acknowledged and registered;¹⁰⁰

And just as it is true that we cannot read literature by men without also reading literature by women - so transfigured has been the shape of literature - it is also true that we cannot deal with the literature of the peripheries without also attending to the literature of the metropolitan centres.

Instead of the partial analysis offered by the various national or systematically theoretical schools, I have been proposing the contrapuntal lines of a global analysis, in which texts and worldly institutions are seen working together, in which Dickens and Thackeray as London authors are read also as writers whose historical influence is informed by the colonial enterprises in India and Australia of which they were so aware, and in which the literature of one commonwealth is involved in the literatures of others. Separatist or nativist enterprises strike me as exhausted.¹⁰¹

Said satisfies himself that his theory of counterpoint is a methodology which eschews the problems created by such separatism, and yet still we find an obstacle to wholesale acceptance of the system. We remember James Clifford's confusion when encountering some of Said's inconsistencies regarding Marx – 'It is unclear why Said does not [...] convict Marx of subsuming individuals under the "artificial entities" "class" and "history"¹⁰² – and if we read what Simon During has to say about modern universalism, we hear Said's echoes ringing in our ears: 'even the humanist marxian critique of formalist universalisms is itself a universalism, for it anticipates a time when the substance of the

⁹⁹ Ibid., p.383.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.384.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp.385-86.

¹⁰² James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, p.270.

individual, the productive being, will be drawn into a non-coercive legal and economic apparatus available to all.’¹⁰³

Let us now consider, once again, one of Said’s thoughts on criticism:

[i]n the main - and here I shall be explicit - criticism must think of itself as life enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination, and abuse; its social goals are non-coercive knowledge produced in the interests of human freedom. (see this chapter, Footnote 16)

In pleading for a non-universalist theory of criticism Said has, in fact, ushered in another universalism. The particularism dictated by a ‘life-enhancing’ agenda makes the outlawing of specialisation virtually impossible, and makes Said’s patent disdain for the multiplicity of specialisations within the discipline of literary criticism seem the manifestation of a rather aimless frustration.

What to make, then, of these difficulties, and what to make of them, particularly, in relation to voice? Edward Said’s multiple elaborations of counterpoint are designed to yield a common impression: that counterpoint can be seen as a theory of comparativism divested of hierarchy. It is this distaste for hierarchy which makes sense of Said’s extension of the musical metaphor which he insists has its foundation in an ‘atonal ensemble’¹⁰⁴ rather than in a synthesising orchestration dependent upon strict, even if oscillating, hierarchies. It also makes sense of a contrapuntal approach to Vailland and Sembène which admits the full semantic scope of voice – that scope including, ironically, yet most notably, the deployment of silence. Issues of race and class may then be perceived in a more problematised, yet a clearer way.

¹⁰³ Simon During, ‘Waiting for the Post: Some Relations Between Modernity, Colonization, and Writing’, in *Past the Last Post*, ed. by Helen Tiffin and Ian Adam (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp.23-45 (p.26).

¹⁰⁴ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.386.

Much more challenging than those attacks which, as John MacKenzie has it, 'leave [Said's] main fronts unmolested' (see this chapter, Footnote 34) are problems which were signalled at the end of the previous chapter: these are largely concerned with counterpoint's synchronic agenda in the face of diachronic readings. For instance, we must ask ourselves if a synchronic reading, as implied in counterpoint, erodes the quality of what we glean from *Un Jeune Homme seul*, when only a diachronic reading would permit us to take into account the history of Franco-Polish relations. Certainly, focusing on the notion of place, as Said would have us do, has allowed a valuable contrapuntal reading of Vailland's *révits* and Sembène's fiction, with the subsequent investigation of voice within a given geography enhancing further a more schematic understanding of French-language literature of the mid-twentieth century than has previously been possible. The next chapter, *Memory*, will be the ultimate test, however, of contrapuntal reading, where the diachronic encroaches to such a degree upon the synchronic that this potential obstacle to counterpoint can no longer be sidelined in favour of the more efficient aspects of the theory.

Chapter Four

Memory

The theory of organic memory placed the past in the individual, in the body, in the nervous system; it pulled memory from the domain of the metaphysical into the domain of the physical with the intention of making it knowable. Through analogy, it equated memory with heredity, arguing that just as people remembered some of their own experiences consciously, they remembered their racial and ancestral experiences unconsciously, through their instincts.¹

¹ Laura Otis, *Organic Memory: History and Body in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), p.3.

In the introduction to her book, *Questions of Travel*, Caren Kaplan writes of the family in which she grew up, '[w]e had family in Argentina whom we no longer knew how to contact and we had relatives in touch by letter from South Africa and Israel. Always implicit in family narratives but rarely mentioned were the ones who stayed behind in Eastern Europe, now scattered beyond the reach of memory or communications.'² Kaplan brings together the notions of place and voice with a reference to 'family narratives', receptacles of recorded family histories and geographies, at the same time making the point that processes of memory increasingly cease to take the histories of some relatives into account. All kinds of questions about memory occur, here: if the Eastern European relatives are barely mentioned, but are 'implicit' in family discussion, must we conclude that memory is composed of revisions of 'history' and that, unable to make those revisions because distanced by geography, time or death, Kaplan's family allowed the early history to dissipate?; is the 'reach of memory' limited, because for each day by which a life is extended, a day is effaced from the memory? Kaplan appears to be making the general assertion that geographical rupture causes historical rupture, and narratives which are based on only old memories may not legitimately be voiced.

We know already that for Edward Said, history and geography are fundamentally overlapping entities, and it will become clear in this chapter that he believes not only that histories can be out of the reach of memory, as Kaplan claims, but are often either deliberately forgotten or reconstituted. Said discusses, in *Culture and Imperialism*, the problem of encouraging students to understand this:

Merely to urge students to insist on one's own identity, history, tradition, uniqueness may initially get them to name their basic requirements for democracy and for the right to an assured, decently humane existence. But we need to go on and to situate these in a geography of other identities, peoples, cultures and then to study how, despite their differences, they have always overlapped one another, through unhierarchical influence, crossing, incorporation, recollection, deliberate

² Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*, p.ix.

forgetfulness, and, of course, conflict. We are nowhere near 'the end of history', but we are still far from free from monopolizing attitudes towards it.³

There is a very great problem with Said's assertion,⁴ here. His contrapuntal theory – deriving from his championing of affiliation over filiation – is a synchronic theory. Not for nothing does he note that 'few things are as problematic and as universally fraught as what we might have *supposed to be* the natural continuity between one generation and the next' (my italics).⁴ His interest, when it comes to reading practice, resides in cutting across a chronological moment, not slicing lengthways down the whole of recorded history. Here, he appears, from references to 'history', 'recollection' and 'forgetfulness', to be assuming the presence of an informative, even if concealed, past, similar to that to which Caren Kaplan referred. We raised the question in the last chapter of whether or not counterpoint, being largely synchronic, might, by eschewing the diachronic, interfere with reading practice as much as it enhances it in other ways. Memory is the ultimate focal point for discussing the conflict between synchronism and diachronism. In this chapter, we shall explore what is meant by 'memory', and what Said's concept of memory might add to our understanding and use of contrapuntal readings.

Firstly, let us be clear about the relationship that exists between memory and writing. Nicola King, in her book, *Memory, Narrative, Identity: Remembering the Self*, proposes 'a threefold model of narrative as 1) the event; 2) the memory of the event; and 3) the writing of (the memory of) the event. It is the third stage of this process that constructs the only version of the first to which we have access, and memory is the means by which the relationship between the event and its reconstruction is negotiated'.⁵ The principle is sound enough: if the reader wishes textually to gain access to a past event, he or she should be aware that the event has undergone at least two stages of revision or filtration

³ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.401.

⁴ Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, p.16.

⁵ Nicola King, *Memory, Narrative, Identity: Remembering the Self* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p.7.

before arriving on the page. Lest it be thought that Said's contrapuntal theory is by now a latter-day Procrustean victim, tied to and made to fit an unyielding and predetermined bed of Place, Voice and Memory, we should also be clear that memory is a major tenet of his own work and as such must be addressed with regard to his theory of counterpoint. In an article entitled, 'Invention, Memory, and Place', he argues that we are now preoccupied with 'the question not only of what is remembered but how and in what form',⁶ that 'memories of the past are shaped in accordance with a certain notion of what "we" or, for that matter, "they" really are',⁷ and that 'ours has become an era of a search for roots, of people trying to discover in the collective memory of their race, religion, community, and family a past that is entirely their own, secure from the ravages of history and a turbulent time'.⁸ Said is describing a sociological phenomenon, not a literary one, and yet we know from his concept of 'worldliness' that the two are not so easily divorced. He redefines the interaction of memory and geography as 'more specifically, the study of human space',⁹ and we saw in the previous chapter that narrative, for Said, is also a spatial notion. Thus memory, voice and place are, for him, intimately related, in literature as in life. This chapter will seek to consider how his attitudes to memory impact on his theory of counterpoint, and, again, how that theory impacts on readings of Vailland and Sembène.

It need hardly be said that this most problematic topic for the student of Saidian counterpoint is the last to be addressed in this project; Said's implicit attitude to the importance of memory is chronically at odds with his explicit one, a fact which causes much difficulty when it comes to a discussion of identity composed of one's place, voice and memory. This is partly a function of Said's fondness for the image of excavation and, more frequently, in fact, *re*-excavation, a fondness he shares with many other critics and

⁶ Edward W. Said, 'Invention, Memory, and Place', *Critical Inquiry*, 26 (2000), 175-92 (p.176).

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.177.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.177.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.175.

theorists. Foucault, whose work Said admires (for the most part), explicitly uses the image in his *Archéologie du savoir*; Nicola King reminds us that Freud's *Studies on Hysteria* likens the reawakening of a patient's memories to 'the technique of excavating a buried city'.¹⁰ The problem inherent in this image is that it implies depth, which in turn suggests a vertical history; Said, however, promotes the horizontal in his theory of counterpoint, insisting that cutting *across* a chronological moment is the key element of contrapuntal theory and practice. This corresponds to his preference for affiliation over filiation, and to his vision of 'a compensatory order that, whether it is a party, an institution, a culture, a set of beliefs, or even a world-vision, provides men and women with a new form of relationship, which I have been calling affiliation but which is also a new system'.¹¹

Perhaps especially in discussions of memory, Said's favouring of the horizontal plane – were it consistently expressed – is reasonable. He writes of geographical locations being 'overdetermined' to take on a disproportionate mythic significance. (Nicola King also identifies 'over-determination' as the end-point 'which highly reconstructed narratives can produce by deliberately leaving their texts fragmentary and provisional'.¹²) Said writes, in particular, about Jerusalem,

a city, an idea, an entire history, and of course a specifiable geographical locale often typified by a photograph of the Dome of the Rock, the city walls, and the surrounding houses seen from the Mount of Olives; it too is overdetermined when it comes to memory, as well as all sorts of invented histories and traditions, all of them emanating from it, but most of them in conflict with each other.¹³

The notion that *too many* memories feed into the consensus view of a place to construct an artificial whole is reason enough to adopt a 'horizontal', an affiliative, a contrapuntal approach which dispenses with backward glances at history. Yet Said is equivocal on this point, too. He has said approvingly, in interview with David Barsamian, that

¹⁰ Nicola King, *Memory, Narrative, Identity*, p.12.

¹¹ Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, p.19.

¹² Nicola King, *Memory, Narrative, Identity*, p.23.

¹³ Edward W. Said, 'Invention, Memory, and Place', p.180.

because of its fantastic referential power, Jerusalem [is] the center [sic] of the world. Jerusalem, the city from which I come, has a unique status in the world. It's not an ordinary city, at least in its existential and imaginative status [...]. It has this extraordinary exfoliating power.¹⁴

Here, we face an image of the peeling back of layers, similar to the image of excavation seen elsewhere, which emphasises once again the importance of history and confuses once more the concept of counterpoint. Moreover, Said's vision of conflicting histories in Jerusalem, while negatively expressed on this occasion, does not sit easily with his ambivalent attitude to his own 'unsettled sense of many identities – mostly in conflict with each other' (see Chapter 2, Footnote 1).

One senses at times that such discrepancies are of no consequence to Said. Discussing Antonio Gramsci, ignoring the problem of overdetermination and again invoking the sanction of tradition, he has said,

I think there's been a mistake of putting in opposition the humanistic and the political, or radical, or whatever. There's a much longer tradition of the two feeding off each other. [...] I don't think there's this necessary opposition, which goes back, in my opinion, to some phony or factitious Althusserian opposition. It's possible to imagine a literary humanism that is not mandarin, disembodied, or scornful of politics. One can see it is actually very much involved in politics. There's a whole tradition of Caribbean writing which, as C.L.R. James says, never had any other background. We're not talking about Africa, we're talking about the Caribbean – it's a transported population. This is its background: precisely these Western humanistic – and political – ideas. So it doesn't trouble me, what you call this tension.¹⁵

The idea that there should be competing narratives is not accepted by Said, and this partly explains, perhaps, why he is content to promote an affiliative approach, all the while defining that term by resorting to notions of history and tradition. The other part of the explanation resides, possibly, in Said's interest in what he calls 'travelling theory'. In a discussion of Frantz Fanon, he has said,

human beings are not closed receptacles, but instruments through which other things flow. The idea is of the human being as a traveler [sic], who can have imprinted upon him or her the sights and sounds and bodies and ideas of others so that he or she could become an other and can take in

¹⁴ Edward W. Said and David Barsamian, *The Pen and the Sword*, pp.61-62.

¹⁵ Anne Beezer and Peter Osborne, 'Orientalism and After: an Interview with Edward Said', p.25.

as much as the sea and therefore release the shrouds and the barriers and the doors and the walls that are so much a part of human existence. That's what it's all about.¹⁶

This idea both echoes Said's ideas about the intellectual release of exile and foreshadows our discussion of some of the ancient ideas about the function of memory. Travelling, for Said, always offers intellectual liberty, even if it is purchased at the cost of literal freedom; the notion that each individual makes an imprint on everyone else which whom he or she comes into contact is a Platonian idea, one which admits of heredity as well as contemporaneous exchange. It is with an awareness of these apparent obstacles to contrapuntal reading that this chapter will consider issues of memory.

I. The Beginnings of Memory

Where are the roots of memory? This is the principal question to which Frances Yates's 1966 work *The Art of Memory* addresses itself. Her most extreme invocation is of Plato, whose belief that memories are formed in advance of the soul's arrival on Earth is fundamental to the theory of the talisman, which will be discussed later in the chapter. Edward Said's 1975 text, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, is principally concerned with critical treatment, even manufacture, of origins. Said claims, in the preface to the Morningside edition of his book (1985), that '[he] was trying to describe the immense effort that goes into historical retrospection as it sets out to describe things from the beginning, *in history*'.¹⁷ The implication of this assertion would seem to be that beginnings, or memories of them, are not quite to be trusted when ordered and given the official rubber stamp of academic or historical sanction. This is a theme which has close links to that present in the work of Adam Piette, whose notion of novelistic fabrication will be explored in due course. Said's claim, though, also raises the question, not for the first time, of the extent to which memory as a key to understanding what we blithely call 'history' may be trusted.

¹⁶ Edward W. Said and David Barsamian, *The Pen and the Sword*, p.61.

¹⁷ Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, Morningside edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p.xii.

Said has not been altogether satisfied with developments in literary study since the publication of *Beginnings* and has fiercely criticised the extent to which literary theory has achieved independence as a subject in its own right:

what's happened, in the years since I wrote *Beginnings* in the early '70s, is that theory has become a subject in and of itself. It has become an academic pursuit of its own. And I am totally impatient with it. Why? Because what has been neglected in the process is the historical study of texts, which to me is much more interesting. Firstly, because there are many more opportunities for genuine discovery; and secondly, because political and cultural issues can be made much clearer in terms of comparable issues in our own time. The question of oppression, of racial oppression, the question of war, the question of human rights - all these issues ought to belong together with the study of literary and other forms of texts; as opposed to the massive, intervening, institutionalised presence of theoretical discussion.¹⁸

One imagines, then, that he would have little patience with G.R. Carlsen, who posits the belief that '[l]iterature, as with all art, considers and clothes concepts in symbolic patterns to produce aesthetic satisfaction. It cannot be tested against an external reality'.¹⁹ Yet, once again, Said is self-contradictory, advocating the historical study of texts when his contrapuntal reading methodology approaches a single chronological moment. This may be excused, perhaps, since *Beginnings* may be said to be 'pre-counterpoint' but, on the other hand, counterpoint has never been presented explicitly as a revision of earlier ideas, as we might have expected. Much later, Said discusses his own attitude to power, saying that he has never been interested in having it because 'it always needs the corrective of intellectual honesty and conscience and memory'.²⁰ The question, it seems, is how to steer a middle course between apolitical and ahistorical belletrism, and aliterary political and historical criticism.²¹ A degree of enlightenment comes fourteen years after the Morningside *Beginnings*, in the form of Said's memoir *Out of Place*.

The preface to this partial autobiography begins, '*Out of Place* is a record of an essentially lost or forgotten world [...]. Many of the places and people I recall here no longer exist,

¹⁸Anne Beezer, Peter Osborne and Edward Said, 'Orientalism And After: an Interview with Edward Said', *Radical Philosophy*, p.26.

¹⁹G. R. Carlsen, 'Literature isn't Supposed to be Realistic', *English Journal*, 70 (1981), 8-10 (p.8) quoted in Colleen Zeitz, 'Expert-Novice Differences in Memory, Abstraction, and Reasoning in the Domain of Literature', *Cognition and Instruction*, 12 (1994), 277-312 (p.279).

²⁰Edward W. Said, *The Pen and the Sword*, p.141.

²¹For commentary on this problem, see Peter N. Stearns, *Meaning Over Memory: Recasting the Teaching of Culture and History* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), a book which attempts to identify consensus between canonicity and anti-canoncity in education.

though I found myself frequently amazed at how much I carried of them inside me in often minute, even startlingly concrete, detail'.²² Said in 1999, then, recapitulates that which has been written by Laura Otis in her book *Organic Memory* (1994), as quoted in the epigraph to this chapter. Memories are made 'knowable' (see this chapter, Footnote 1) when they are brought into the realm of the physical. Otis herself is clearly not the first to identify the concept of organic memory: Ralph Waldo Emerson, for instance, alluded to it in 1841 when he wrote, 'If the whole of history is *in* one man, it is all to be explained from individual experience [...]. [Man] should see that he can live all history *in his own person*' (my italics).²³ Organic memory is not a concept which enjoyed universal intellectual assent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; Marcel Proust, according to an article by Maya Slater, denied its validity. Slater writes:

[Proust] suggests that at any given moment, some of our memories may be completely out of reach, 'indisponibles', hidden in a secret place where they can be of no use to us. He goes even further and rejects the idea that we have within us the complete sum of all our past experiences. He thinks this may be a false assumption based on the idea that we have bodies that carry us through life and which are present while we have our experiences. Our bodies should not be thought of as vases containing all our experiences, he claims.²⁴

Just as Kaplan described her lost family as being 'beyond the reach of memory', so Said claims that '[his] own past is irrecoverable'.²⁵ Yet, as we have seen, he considers that people from his past are 'carried inside [him]'. The role of the organic in memory is a problem too complex to be treated fully and the principal concern of this chapter is to examine the relation of memory (often collective) to literary - rather than neuroscientific - contexts. The complementary notions of psychology and pathology of memory nonetheless appear to hold the key to understanding its origins in Sembène and Vailland, not least because they contribute to heredity, a concept inextricably linked to the processes of memory. Not for nothing did Virginia Woolf describe the importance to

²²Edward W. Said, *Out of Place*, p.xi.

²³Ralph W. Emerson, 'History', in *Self-Reliance and Other Essays* (New York: Dover, 1993), pp. 1-17 (pp.1-3) (first publ. in *Essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Boston, MA: Nelson, 1844)).

²⁴Maya Slater, 'Proust, Psychoanalysis and Involuntary Memory', *Literature and Psychology*, 37 (1991), 1-10 (pp.9-10).

²⁵Anne Beezer and Peter Osborne, 'Orientalism and After: an Interview with Edward Said', p.30.

women's fiction writing of 'thinking back through one's mothers'.²⁶ Patrick Brady follows a similar line, arguing that 'memory, history, and archetypes [...] represent ways in which society and our very genetic make-up pass on (or screen out) old and new information from generation to generation'.²⁷ Heredity and the question of re-writing history are interdependent. This fact is not lost on Michael Gilson, who, in his review of Said's *Out of Place*, writes that '[the book] does not seek to describe the Cairo of the late British and early independence period in any detail. It remains deliberately within the oddly truncated world of the family itself'.²⁸

Memories, it seems, are propagated by idiosyncratic means – collective memories perhaps most of all. For Said, '[c]ollective memory is not an inert and passive thing, but a field of activity in which past events are selected, reconstructed, maintained, modified, and endowed with political meaning'.²⁹ This is clearly linked to his idea of the text, of which he writes: 'Each cultural work is a vision of a moment, and we must juxtapose that vision with the various revisions it later provoked'.³⁰ It will be seen, from the close textual readings in this chapter of, in particular, Sembène's *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* and Vailland's *Bon Pied, bon œil*, that these notions of memory and text, while mutually tenable, render more complicated the new praxis of comparativism offered by counterpoint.

II. The Propagation of Memory

i. Repetition

Edward Said's 1983 book *The World, the Text and the Critic* suggests a triangular relation of repetition, heredity and memory. Said discusses Vico's attitude to this relationship (that repetition 'is the consequence of, and indeed can be identified with, physiological

²⁶ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Grafton, 1990), p.2 (first publ. London: Hogarth Press, 1929).

²⁷ Patrick Brady, *Memory and History as Fiction: an Archetypal Approach to the Historical Novel* (Knoxville, Tennessee: New Paradigm Press, 1993), p.7.

²⁸ Michael Gilson, 'The Education of Edward Said', *New Left Review*, 4 (2000), 152-58 (p.152).

²⁹ Edward W. Said, 'Invention, Memory, and Place', p.185.

³⁰ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.79.

reproduction') and Buffon's view (that 'heredity, the pressure of the offspring, was guided by memory').³¹ Said's own interpretation of the memory problem hinges on his fascination with affiliation (though, as we have seen, this is not without its own complications). The importance of repetition to his view of memory is paramount: 'Making is repeating; repeating is knowing because making. This is a genealogy of knowledge and of human presence.'³² At first glance, this seems alarmingly self-fulfilling. Said once asserted: 'I've never felt the canon to be imposing a set of restrictions on me. It never occurred to me that in either reading or teaching the canon I was like a servant at work in the orchard of some great ruling-class figure who employed me to do that.'³³ If this position seems astonishingly naïve, perhaps Said's comments on the genealogy of knowledge go some way to explaining it; the canon must, we surmise, be integral to that repetitive genealogy.

Repetition is not viewed universally as benign and can be seen instead as actually detrimental to the authenticity of memories. As Andrew Lass puts it in a lucid and personal article in Rubie Watson's *Memory, History and Opposition Under State Socialism*, 'Won't having to articulate [my memories] be tantamount to not having them at all?'³⁴ Further, Lass expresses another concern: that 'oral history implies a type of narrative, a pattern of remembering, that is not characteristic of all individuals but rather of the elites familiar with this narrative form and aware of themselves as historical actors'.³⁵ This problem appears to be exacerbated with each degree by which a narrative becomes public and by the time that a memory is deployed in the pursuit of an audience or of a readership, it is distorted beyond recognition. Adam Piette writes of James Joyce, for example,

two preoccupations lie within Joyce's interest in memory. First, as a form of Freudian observation of slips of the tongue that betray what people are most careful to conceal - this necessitated not only a myth about his own extraordinary powers of recall, but also a related myth about his miraculously detailed knowledge of Dublin in order to give authority to the secrets betrayed.

³¹ Edward Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, p.115.

³² *Ibid.*, p.117.

³³ Anne Beezer and Peter Osborne, 'Orientalism and After: an Interview with Edward Said', p.29.

³⁴ Andrew Lass, 'From Memory to History: the Events of November 17 Dis/membered', in *Memory, History and Opposition Under State Socialism*, ed. by Rubie S. Watson (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1994), pp.87-101 (p.92).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.97.

Secondly, a Jungian concept of memory that understood the faculty in terms of racial recall, history, and world-spirit dream retention. The first covers the ground of personal memory; the second of broad cultural memory.³⁶

The conflation of these two types of memory is seen as characteristic of Joyce: as Herbert Schneidau points out,

[n]o one has ever mined his memories so closely and profitably, wresting from the daily bread of Irish experience and the sluggish matter of its earth the raw material of an art that set many readers and writers in quest of their own personal pasts. So well did Joyce fulfill [sic] his goals that he made recovery of the past seem the gateway to a lost country, a realm of infinite meaning where those questions and longings of childhood, that stay with us forever, are satisfied.³⁷

The Freudian aspect of Joyce's interest is revealing, not so much because Freud's *dream work* is crucial to memory (though it is), but because the notion of *condensation* inherent in dream work is pertinent to this project's consideration of memory. It is precisely the instinct to condense, in the Freudian sense, multiple people and events into a single image which can be interpreted as the theory of the talisman, but – and this is a more sinister association – condensation also often leads to essentialisation, a problem demonised by Said and discussed at length in Chapter Two of this project. If History, as it is widely accepted, is predicated on a consensus of memory, and if this memory has been constructed with the aid of condensation, it is not difficult to see why Said has felt compelled to highlight the fundamental flaws of Orientalism and of imperialism. Condensation in memory further problematises authenticity. Questions must be asked, though, about Lass's view that oral history necessitates the presence of an elite; the same, of course, is true of written history, as it would be viewed by primarily oral cultures. This is an important question to be addressed in relation to Sembène's *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu*.

It is interesting to consider how Said treats his own processes of memory in his writing. He makes his most obvious use of memory in his memoir, but this use is far from uncontentiously authentic. Andrew Lass quotes Stephen Owen:

³⁶Adam Piette, *Remembering and the Sound of Words: Mallarmé, Proust, Joyce and Beckett* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p.147.

³⁷Herbert N. Schneidau, *Waking Giants: the Presence of the Past in Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.11.

'History' is something we do to the collective memories of the civilization, just as memoirs and autobiography are something we do to our own memories. The historian processes the past and attempts to definitively master its dangerous forces [...]. The past shows its true dominion when it breaks into the present, at precisely those moments before we can control it with the fixed ceremonies that constitute a 'history'.³⁸

The essence of the past as dominating force, engaged in a race with the present to record or misrecord its events problematises any deployment of memory in writing. Lass's article is predicated on the assumption of two types of historicity: these are recollection and remembrance, the latter being a public and often political activity, such as the publication of a memoir, and in identifying them he confesses to owing not a little to Hegel's *Erinnerung* and *Gedächtnis*.³⁹ Lass describes the crucial distinction thus:

recollection is a personalized act that involves the presence of the past. Yet the recollected may be 'placed in memory' only as a meaningless string of names, faceless and available to all to call upon and repeat as fact, like a poem that we 'know by heart' but which need not mean anything at all in order that it may be remembered. In the act of committing violence upon recollection, memory rescues thought from the self.⁴⁰

In this view, personal memories are hijacked at the moment at which they enter the public domain, whether that domain be vast, as in a television audience, or limited, as in a conversation with another individual. Lass writes that 'some of us experience violence as our recollections are *erased* by remembrance. One part of our life wishes to join the new history - the revelations that place our memories on the heroic side of suffering - while the other part wishes to remain private' (my italics).⁴¹ This latter sentence provides one possible reason for Said's termination of his memoir at 1962. His more recent life is perhaps too precious to be distorted by public record.

Lass's interest in the movement from memory to history has much to do with the printed form and its dissemination. For Said, these days, nothing is said or written that is not made public; for Vailland, too, publicity was forthcoming in his lifetime; for Ousmane

³⁸Andrew Lass, 'From Memory to History: the Events of November 17 Dis/membered', p.87 quoting Stephen Owen, *Remembrances: the Experience of the Past in Classical Chinese Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

³⁹Ibid., p.92.

⁴⁰Ibid., p.92.

⁴¹Ibid., p.101.

Sembène, things were different: the problem expressed by Lass is central to Sembène's 'decision' to write in French and publish in France and to join that 'new history':

History and culture, both stories and commodities are, through the institutionalized means of dissemination, re/presented as components of everyday life with the added distinction of the past tense [...]. The historical monuments, like personal names, tie the past to a place and therefore to the person who moves through it as he moves through his life. From the very beginning, the historical individual's biography has historical significance.

It was not at all surprising, therefore, to find that so many of the historical acts that maintained oppositional histories took place in public spaces - as if these locations could have a memory of their own. Thus Wenceslas Square in Prague became the staging ground for all official parades of the last forty years [...].

To oppose the status quo in a public place, then, is to invoke history and therefore to engage, from the very beginning, in rewriting it.⁴²

Clearly, Edward Said's own preoccupation with oppositional histories does, in this sense, involve him in rewriting 'history'. When Lass writes about 'individuals who may perceive themselves as agents of history', his reader may fairly categorise Said in this bracket.⁴³ Further, the description is redolent of Noam Chomsky's review comment on the cover of *Culture and Imperialism*, in which he states that Said 'helps us to understand who we are and what we must do if we aspire to be moral agents, not servants of power'.⁴⁴ This is no glib compliment: Chomsky has elsewhere claimed that 'if you are not subordinate to power, you rarely make it through the system.'⁴⁵ Making an attempt to understand the foundations of power necessitates the involvement of memory, as well as an examination of its influences and is clearly vital to Said's project. His contrapuntal reading of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* is one such example, but one which is complicated by the eternal struggle between considerations of the synchronic and the diachronic.

⁴²Ibid., pp.88, 89.

⁴³Ibid., p.89.

⁴⁴Noam Chomsky, quotation from review, in Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, back cover.

⁴⁵Noam Chomsky and Harriet Swain, 'A Lifetime Kicking Against the Pricks', *The Times Higher Educational Supplement*, April 9 1999, p.20.

II.ii. Effaced Memories: Austen and Camus

As was alluded to earlier in this chapter, Frances Yates attempts to sketch a genealogy of understanding of memory in her 1966 work, *The Art of Memory*. She juxtaposes the beliefs of Aristotle with those of Plato and in so doing sets the notion of memory as a learned artform against the conception of it as an innate resource with essentially unspecifiable origins. Both ideas are helpful in considering a tripartite relationship which we may perceive textually to have developed among Edward Said, Jane Austen and critic Jocelyn Harris.

Said's interest in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, and in its status as a text ripe for contrapuntal analysis which leads to revelation of imperial processes, is, as has previously been established, apparently the most memorable feature to emerge from critics' readings of *Culture and Imperialism*, it is certainly the most hackneyed, and has led less vigilant readers of Said to believe that only the English (not even English-language) novel is a suitable subject for contrapuntal reading.⁴⁶ *Culture and Imperialism*, and, therefore, Said's reading of *Mansfield Park*, had not yet been published when Jocelyn Harris concluded *Jane Austen's Art of Memory* as follows: 'We are to be sure a miracle in every way, says Fanny Price, but if any one faculty of our nature may be called *more* wonderful than the rest, it is memory [...]. Jane Austen's true muse was Memory, mother to all the rest. In memory she found origins for art.'⁴⁷ It is a pity not to have Harris's thoughts on *Culture and Imperialism*, since *Jane Austen's Art of Memory* clearly engages with earlier aspects of Said's output:

We accept that poetry is made out of poetry, but the novel, too, in spite of the insistent realism by which we identify the genre, may have complex origins in other people's books that make it allusive, even symbolic. Edward Said seems to believe so, when he writes in his *Beginnings*, 'Each new novel recapitulates not life, but other novels.'⁴⁸

⁴⁶ See, for example, Valerie Kennedy, *Edward Said: a Critical Introduction*, p.108: 'English novels should be read in terms of their (usually suppressed) engagement with imperial possessions.'

⁴⁷Jocelyn Harris, *Jane Austen's Art of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.221.

⁴⁸Ibid., p.219 and Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (*Beginnings: Intention and Method* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p.1.

The reader is hereby given the impression that Harris and Said concur on this point. Yet Harris claims at an earlier stage that ‘you need not know Richardson to appreciate Jane Austen, but there are bonuses if you do’, an opinion which is not sanctioned by Said’s contextual preoccupations, even if it appears to be so by his somewhat contradictory privileging of affiliation over filiation.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, it seems that Austen’s *Mansfield Park* serves as an inadvertent link between Said and Harris, who appear philosophically associated in any case; Harris’s conclusion is entitled, ‘Nothing Can Come of Nothing’ and Said, in the preface to *Beginnings*, is keen to point out that ‘[e]ach of [his] chapters builds on [the] interplay between the new and the customary without which (*ex nihilo nihil*) a beginning cannot take place’.⁵⁰ Elsewhere, Said underlines his linkage of memory and repetition: ‘right up to the last sentence [of *Mansfield Park*], Austen affirms and *repeats* the geographical process of expansion involving trade, production, and consumption that predates, underlies, and guarantees the morality.’⁵¹ It is not altogether surprising, perhaps, that the more conservative Harold Bloom should write about the novel, ‘Austen’s art as a novelist is not to worry much about the socioeconomic genesis of that inner freedom [of her heroines].’⁵² It is precisely that genesis of freedom (or the lack of it) that Said’s contrapuntal reading practice is designed to probe.

One important question, here, is why Said’s study of *Mansfield Park* is relevant to a chapter purporting to be a study of memory in the French novel. A great deal of Said’s critical work is predicated upon his real-life experience as, variously, immigrant, colonial subject, perpetual foreigner, or at least upon his memory of that experience. Indeed, Said’s opening comments in a sustained examination of the novel in *Culture and Imperialism* are deliberately analeptic: ‘Perhaps [...] Austen, and indeed, pre-imperialist novels generally, will appear to be more implicated in the rationale for imperialist expansion than at first sight they have been.’⁵³ *Mansfield Park* is Said’s example, selected, one suspects, simply

⁴⁹ Jocelyn Harris, *Jane Austen’s Art of Memory*, p.214. For Said’s explanation of the distinction between filiative and affiliative approaches to literature, see his book *The World, the Text and the Critic* (London: Vintage, 1991).

⁵⁰ Edward W. Said, *Beginnings*, p.xvii.

⁵¹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.111 (my italics).

⁵² Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon*, p.258.

⁵³ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.100.

because he actually likes the novel, and enjoys writing about it; his argument, though, holds for other texts, and for other empires. Indeed, much has been written about Said's criticism of *Mansfield Park*, but very little about his apparent assimilation of European colonising powers: his frequent references to 'mainstream European culture' act as a backdrop to his criticism of the novel and imply a monolithic European approach to imperialism.⁵⁴ This can be misleading, though Said surely would not approve what Paul Johnson has written on the subject:

It is impossible to make any truthful generalization about colonialism. The same is true of the decolonizing process. The most that can accurately be said is: it occurred. All the rest is propaganda; *ex post facto* rationalization. Colonialism has been presented as a conspiracy of capitalist states; decolonization as a further conspiracy when it became economically more prudent to switch to 'neo-colonialism'. But if there was a conspiracy, why did the conspirators never meet or exchange plans and ideas? The truth is colonialism was born in intense rivalry and died in it. The colonial powers did not conspire against the natives. They conspired against each other.⁵⁵

If it should be felt that Johnson's version of events ignores the constants of colonialism, like the characteristics of power relations, Said does not help. True, he does not ignore constants; rather, he may be seen to create them, venturing so far as a (perhaps unwitting) essentialism.⁵⁶ Naturally, one is inclined to respect Said's view of identity, at least in a provisional way, in spite of his having rubbished the bald concept.⁵⁷ When he discusses identity politics, his reasoning seems perfectly acceptable:

There is no effective secular organisation, anywhere, in the fields in which we work. That's part of the failure which I lament so much. So there is this tremendous thing about authenticity and ethnic particularity. The politics of identity is the problem: the failure to take account of, and accept, the migratory quality of experience; that everybody is a migrant or an exile. In England, for example, the people who have been most vociferous against the *Satanic Verses* are migrants who want to assert their authenticity in an environment which has been basically hostile to them. Rather than saying, 'our experience is very much like that of the Palestinians, very much like that of the Bangladeshis'; instead of seeing it as something beyond the binary oppositional thing, 'us versus them', and therefore being able to see it in different terms, there's this obsession about returning

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.98.

⁵⁵ Paul Johnson, *A History of the Modern World from 1917 to the 1980s* (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd., 1983), p.506.

⁵⁶ Said occasionally proffers sweeping generalisations which would seem to damage his own thesis, such as that 'despite its extraordinary cultural diversity, the United States is, and will surely remain, a coherent nation. The same is true of other English-speaking countries (Britain, New Zealand, Australia, Canada) and even of France, which now contains large groups of immigrants' (Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.xxix). In this example, Said appears to be contradicting the implications of his later arguments, that coherence is a mirage born out of the marginalisation of ethnic groups.

⁵⁷ It will be remembered that Said dismissed '[i]dentity as such [as being] about as boring a subject as one can imagine' (see Introduction, Footnote 104).

to yourself: only in the community, and the purer form of the community, is my salvation – which is, I think, a form of perdition.⁵⁸

Here, Said draws attention to what he seems to be suggesting is an almost innate migrancy in every person, paradoxically essentialising the English landscape of society as he goes. Here, again, there is a fundamental problem. Emphasis is placed on the notion that ‘everybody is a migrant or an exile’, and yet there seems also to be a background assumption that such a thing as ‘Englishness’ exists. This seems to be supported by what he quotes from and writes about Auerbach:

‘I may also mention that the book was written during the war and at Istanbul, where the libraries are not equipped for European studies [...]. On the other hand, it is quite possible that the book owes its existence to just this lack of a rich and specialized library. If it had been possible for me to acquaint myself with all the work that has been done on so many subjects, I might never have reached the point of writing.’

The drama of this little bit of modesty is considerable, in part because Auerbach’s quiet tone conceals much of the pain of his exile. He was a Jewish refugee from Nazi Europe, and he was also a European scholar in the old tradition of German Romance scholarship. Yet now in Istanbul he was hopelessly out of touch with the literary, cultural, and political bases of that formidable tradition. In writing *Mimesis*, he implies to us in a later work, he was not merely practicing [*sic*] his profession despite adversity: he was performing an act of cultural, even civilizational, survival of the highest importance [...]. And in so losing the authentic presence of the culture, as symbolized materially by libraries, research institutes, other books and scholars, the exiled European would become an exorbitantly disOriented [*sic*] outcast from sense, nation, and milieu.⁵⁹

What is fascinating about this passage of Said’s is the assumption of an ‘authentic presence of the culture’ which is ‘symbolized materially’: this implies an independent, pre-existing, contingent entity which is not created, but merely reflected by human literary endeavour. This notion counters much of what Said asserts elsewhere in his textual output – let us not forget that Said believes that

[i]f you know in advance that the African or Iranian or Chinese or Jewish or German experience is fundamentally integral, coherent, separate, and therefore comprehensible only to Africans, Iranians, Chinese, Jews or Germans, you first of all posit as essential something which, I believe, is both historically created and the result of interpretation – namely the existence of Africanness, Jewishness, or Germanness, or for that matter Orientalism and Occidentalism. And second, you are likely as a consequence to defend the essence or experience itself rather than promote full knowledge of it and its entanglements and dependencies on other knowledges. (See Chapter 3, Footnote 6)

This clearly creates a problematic dichotomy.

⁵⁸ Anne Beezer and Peter Osborne, ‘Orientalism and After: an Interview with Edward Said’, p.28.

⁵⁹Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, p.5.

Certainly, in *Orientalism* Said considered competing national traditions in Orientalist ventures, as exemplified in the radically different approaches of Hamilton Gibb and Louis Massignon, but by *Culture and Imperialism*, this sensitivity seems compromised at times.⁶⁰ It is, we might concede, already compromised in *Orientalism*, where he argues that 'towering Orientalist scholars like Massignon and Gibb' were proponents of '[t]he idea of using specific texts, for instance, to work from the particular to the general (to understand the whole life of a period and consequently of a culture)'.⁶¹ That is some justification, at least, for considering *Mansfield Park* in a study of French and French-language texts.

Jocelyn Harris's book on Austen's use of memory is invoked at this stage to illuminate discussion of what might be called 'intertextual memory', whereby certain features of a text may be seen to have been drawn from an earlier text, often by the same author. These are not always borrowings, so much as recollections, or repetitions, as we discussed earlier. An element of this 'intertextual memory' will later be considered with reference to Roger Vailland's 1950 novel, *Bon Pied, bon œil*. Harris painstakingly draws parallels between Austen's work and that of Richardson, while frequently making reference to Joshua Reynolds on the subject of degrees of plagiarism. Harris rightly states that 'Jane Austen's relationship to her predecessors is always changing' and, since the same must be true of Austen's successors' relationships to her, it is evident that memory itself must be a fluid, not a fixed, entity.⁶² The unpalatability of Harris's work lies in its debt to Reynolds, who is often (albeit accurately) paraphrased: Harris seems oblivious to the contradictions inherent in his work, as illustrated here:

As Sir Joshua Reynolds explains it, the artist must first collect a stock of ideas to be combined and varied as occasion requires. Once he has learnt all that has been known and done before, he may dispense with instructions from a particular master and consider the art itself as his master. The third and last period, says Reynolds, emancipates the student from subjection to any authority, Now he may confide in his own judgment;⁶³

Reynolds, writing that a great part of every artist's life must be employed in 'collecting materials for the exercise of genius', argued that invention 'is little more than a new combination of those images which have been previously gathered and deposited in the memory'.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, p.264.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.258.

⁶² Jocelyn Harris, *Jane Austen's Art of Memory*, p.213.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp.213-14.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.217-18.

If it can be said to be true at all that the artist is emancipated from the authority of artists from whom he or she borrows, simply because the art is itself organically attached to the new artist, it must also be acknowledged that there is a moral problem, tantamount to plagiarism, waiting in the wings. When Harris claims, then, that '[Austen's] allusions [...] resonate so widely that fully annotated editions of the novels seem almost unthinkable', Reynolds can be seen to have been right, but not in the way he presumably intended. The student is set free from artistic authority, but only by practical considerations. He or she may steal, but is certain not to be caught.⁶⁵ Frances Yates's notion of new experiences being placed on the topoi of the familiar can now be viewed not only as pointing out the restrictive qualities of this use of memory, but also its moral problematic.

Jocelyn Harris's own view that 'Jane Austen was not [...] a sociologist, but a maker. She was a true poet, not tied like historians to things as they are' is one of the most interesting in her book, as far as an exploration of memory is concerned.⁶⁶ Let us recall Edward Said's observation of the role of the maker: '[m]aking is repeating; repeating is knowing because making. This is a genealogy of knowledge and of human presence' (see this chapter, Footnote 32). Jane Austen was not 'tied to things as they are', though frankly it is difficult to imagine that anyone, even a historian, could be; she is a branch of the genealogical tree of literature, and, much as she was aware of her borrowings from Richardson, she could not know all that he borrowed from others, or they from still others. To this extent, memory, while irrefutably intertwined with repetition, can be unconscious.

Said's position on memory would seem, at first glance, to be clear and strong. He believes, as we have seen, that '[c]ollective memory is not an inert and passive thing, but a field of activity in which past events are selected, reconstructed, maintained, modified, and endowed with political meaning',⁶⁷ yet his grammar undermines his argument. His use of a passive construction suggests that memory is not a dynamic force, but, rather, a field in which other dynamic forces are at work. Similarly, he refers in 'Invention, Memory, and

⁶⁵Ibid., p.220.

⁶⁶Ibid., p.216.

⁶⁷ Edward W. Said, 'Invention, Memory, and Place', p.185.

Place' to Pierre Vidal-Naquet's *Assassins de la mémoire*,⁶⁸ making no comment on the conceit of Vidal-Naquet's title, which implies that memory is a sentient, dynamic, yet vulnerable entity. Yet Said knows that memory is as vulnerable and intangible an entity as could be imagined.

This knowledge is implicit in his readings of Camus, in *Culture and Imperialism*, to which we alluded in Chapter One. Said makes much of the French imperial mission's preoccupation with prestige,⁶⁹ and of Algeria's unique position within that mission. Albert Camus is acknowledged as a writer whose 'narratives of resistance and existential confrontation, which had once seemed to be about withstanding or opposing both mortality and Nazism, can now be read as part of the debate about culture and imperialism',⁷⁰ but the point is forcefully and repeatedly made, too, that what has largely survived of Camus is the ethos of 'universality and humanism'.⁷¹ Said's self-contradiction yet again comes to the fore in his reading of *L'Étranger*: he claims, on one hand, that 'Camus's general concern is the actual state of Franco-Algerian affairs, not their history or dramatic changes in their long-term destiny. Except occasionally, he usually ignores or overlooks the history, which an Algerian for whom the French presence was a *daily* enactment of power would not do';⁷² Said's solution is presented thus: '[t]o situate Camus contrapuntally in most (as opposed to a small part of) his actual history, one must be alert to his true French antecedents, as well as the work of post-independence Algerian novelists, historians, sociologists, political scientists.'⁷³

It is clear that a historically informed reading of *L'Étranger* is a valuable one, but is it contrapuntal? We must argue that it is not, unless we adopt some alternative notion of the diachronic which allows for Said's affiliation, a synchronic idea, as we know. We might, perhaps, concede that '[t]o resituate *L'Étranger* in the geographical nexus from which its

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.176.

⁶⁹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.204.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.208.

⁷¹ Ibid., 208.

⁷² Ibid., pp.211-12.

⁷³ Ibid., p.216.

narrative trajectory emerges is to interpret it as a heightened form of historical experience',⁷⁴ but this is consistent with Said's general thesis that narrative is a spatial notion, and not a temporal one (see Chapter 3, Footnote 4). It is decidedly *inconsistent* with other views we have considered, such as his support for affiliation, his view that memory is often the product of invention (especially when transformed into recorded 'history'), his metaphor of the 'atonal ensemble'. The temporal is so problematic for Said – hence, perhaps, his rationale for identifying narrative as spatial – and the problem has inspired his theory of counterpoint, yet periodically, and in significant readings, he invokes it in spite of himself.

The close readings which follow of Ousmane Sembène's *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* and Roger Vailland's *Bon Pied, bon œil* will be undertaken with a sense of the complexity of the concept of memory, as temporality complicates spatiality, in an ongoing attempt to evaluate contrapuntal reading practice.

III. Ousmane Sembène's *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu*

i. Orality and Memory

Said has written that the question of memory is not only a question 'of what is remembered but how and in what form' (see this chapter, Footnote 6). We rely for the propagation of our memories on two principal modes of narrative, the oral and the written, and for Said these modes are politically loaded:

[f]ar from being a neutral exercise in facts and basic truths, the study of history, which of course is the underpinning of memory, both in school and in university, is to some considerable extent a nationalist effort premised on the need to construct a desirable loyalty to and insider's understanding of one's country, tradition, and faith.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.224.

⁷⁵ Edward W. Said, 'Invention, Memory, and Place', p.176.

Tellingly, Said identifies the underpinning of memory as being history; he does not address the opposite scenario.

In recent years, the African-American literary scene has been preoccupied by the role of orality in narrative. I say, 'in recent years', because the Western notion of culture has historically been intricately bound up with the written, rather than the spoken word. As Jean Sévry has noted,

L'Afrique s'est toujours heurtée à un conflit culturel qui n'a pas facilité la rencontre. Pour tout Occidental qui se respecte, le mot même de 'culture' évoque dans nos esprits des monuments superbes ou de grands textes. Nous sommes une culture du Livre, qu'il s'agisse du monde hébraïque, de l'Islam ou de la Chrétienté.⁷⁶

Sévry readily concedes that the great monuments of ancient Egypt, for instance, provoked a revision in European thought, but insists that the same respect was not afforded to other parts of Africa:

Dès les premiers instants de la rencontre, l'Européen entend bien faire sentir à l'Africain qu'il dispose d'un mode de communication qui va le réduire à l'impuissance et que le Noir de ce fait, aura tendance à la considérer comme une autre forme de magie. Aux yeux mêmes du voyageur, le seul fait de posséder une écriture alors que d'autres n'en ont pas, ou n'ont pas la même, est la marque tangible de son indéniable supériorité.⁷⁷

In the space between oral narrative and text, there is silence. Said, as we know, is as much interested in the silences of a text as in its utterances; it is not a quantum leap to the realisation that silence can be symptomatic of repression, and that what is very often repressed is memory.

Helen Lock, in an article on African narratives, considers precisely the question of the memory process in life and in text:

[a]lthough the precise way in which memory functions is still open to question, especially in these days of contentious debate over repressed/coerced memory, a useful distinction can be made between the differing perceptions of the memory process generated by oral and by literate

⁷⁶ Jean Sévry, 'De la Littérature des voyages et de leur nature', p.62.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.63.

cultures. This distinction, and, more importantly, the possibility of mediating between these differing perceptions, has been extensively invoked by many writers of the African diaspora for whom the process of memory is a controlling narrative principle. Through memory, perceived in both oral and literate terms, they aim to reconstruct the absences and silences of oral history that are contained within the official written record.⁷⁸

For writers of the African diaspora, then, history is not, it seems, the underpinning of memory; rather, the opposite is true. History, to be rendered authentic, must be augmented by observations recalled from memory. Lock's premise is that

[l]iterate cultures characteristically consider memory to be a rational, intellectual process [...]. Because literates think in terms of a fixed original whose total recapitulation is not only possible but desirable, 'objective, deliberate, and exact recall' thus becomes the privileged definition of memory,

and that 'since oral cultures characteristically conceive of time more in cyclical than linear terms, the past is not experienced as a single fixed entity, repository of unchangeable facts or "truth"'.⁷⁹ The oral culture's perception of memory is a challenge to the monolithic view suggested by the literate culture. Yet in some ways, this is not a world away from Said's concept of memory as being strategic, politically motivated and subject to multiple revisions over time. It seems that the oral culture is naturally inclined to leave open the door to history; the literate culture is strategically so. This is ideologically linked to Caren Kaplan's notion of the fallacious fixed centre (see Chapter 2, Footnote 33), designated as and by the metropolis. It is further reinforced by the Western, literate culture's exclusive concept of memory as 'like an inner *writing*' (my italics).⁸⁰

David Rubin, in his book *Memory in Oral Traditions*, also attempts to elucidate the differences between oral and literate cultures in their uses of memory:

The distinction between explicit and implicit memory can also be used to clarify one use of oral traditions. Implicit memory is knowing how. It shows the effects of past experience, but not in an intentional, declarative way. It is demonstrated by recitation, explanation, or communication. It can

⁷⁸ Helen Lock, "Building Up from Fragments": the Oral Memory Process in Some Recent African-American Written Narratives', *College Literature*, 22 (1995), 109-20 (p.109).

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.110.

⁸⁰ Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Pimlico, 1999), p.22 (first publ. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966).

occur in a situation where the behavior [*sic*] can be talked about but not executed [...]. Implicit memory is involved in the act of singing a piece in an oral tradition, but the information transmitted by an oral tradition to a listener is the conscious, explicit, declarative knowledge that the events described in the song occurred. Thus oral traditions can transfer the implicit information necessary to sing a song into a song containing explicit information.⁸¹

Rubin's text provides more enlightening sound bites than may reasonably be quoted, but some of the more indispensable follow: 'routines of daily life can remain available to implicit memory'; '[e]xplicit memory is also useful to educate people about events before they can be observed'; '[c]ultural knowledge that can be codified in terms of language can be transformed from knowledge that exists only as implicit memory to knowledge that exists as explicit memory. Storage and transmission of such knowledge in a literate culture is often the task of oral traditions'.⁸² All of these observations add up to one which was made by Nicola King and invoked earlier in the chapter, namely that once a text is written (be it novel, poem or song) the original memory referred to within has been revised by mere dint of being articulated, being put into language. Rubin calls this codification, which is a useful term, since it makes explicit the certainty that the reader or listener will need to break the code in order to access the memory; this is distinctly reminiscent of Said's view that '[f]acts do not at all speak for themselves, but require a socially acceptable narrative to absorb, sustain, and circulate them'.⁸³ Whereas in Chapter Three, *Voice*, we saw that, through a contrapuntal reading with Sembène's *Le Docker noir*, we could render audible that which we could not hear from the Polish immigrant whom we see at the opening of Vailland's *Un Jeune Homme seul*, we are now faced with the further complication that counterpoint will not only have to render silences audible, but will also have to master the codification of memory which further suppresses articulation.

In Sembène's *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu*, cultural knowledge (accessed via what Rubin terms 'implicit memory') is indeed transformed, or codified, as per Rubin's model, to become explicit memory. Typically, the transmission of information takes place from older, experienced characters to younger, less experienced ones. A useful illustration of this

⁸¹ David C. Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions: the Cognitive Psychology of Epic, Ballads, and Counting-Out Rhymes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.191.

⁸² Ibid., p.191.

⁸³ Edward W. Said, *The Politics of Dispossession* (London: Vintage, 1995), p.254.

transmission can be found in Maïmouna's song about the legend of Goumba N'Diaye. Maïmouna is not, of course, the oldest of the women of Thiès, nor even the oldest of the group which marches to Dakar in support of the striking men. She is, however, a special case, given her blindness and her resultant tendency to have spent a great deal of her life confined to her home community and to have absorbed its histories and myths. Though not perhaps exemplary of the Platonic theory of pre-natal memory, Maïmouna's memory is implicit, in the Rubinian sense. In singing her song, Maïmouna proves that she 'knows how'.

The singing of Maïmouna's song is of undoubted significance; indeed any song sung by women in this text is interpreted as 'un chant que les femmes dédiaient aux hommes'.⁸⁴ After the strike action has ended, and after the killing of Béatrice, wife of one of the 'toubabs', Maïmouna's voice is the last heard in the novel as she sings the *Légende de Goumba*.

Pendant des soleils et des soleils,
Le combat dura.
Goumba, sans haine, transperçait ses ennemis.
Il était tout de sang couvert.
Mais heureux est celui qui combat sans haine. (BBD, p.379)

The implicit memory which Maïmouna carries within her in the form of local legend is made explicit, albeit late, to those who have been engaged in the bitter struggle of the rail strike. In this, then, it may be observed that Andrew Lass's view of orality as the property of self-aware elites is somewhat extreme: his claim that 'oral history implies a type of narrative, a pattern of remembering, that is not characteristic of all individuals but rather of the elites familiar with this narrative form and aware of themselves as historical actors' (see this chapter, Footnote 35) belies the observable fact that Maïmouna *et al* do not believe themselves instrumental in the writing of history; rather, they see their function as limited to the support of the striking men of their communities. Thus, their oral history is

⁸⁴ Ousmane Sembène, *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* (Paris: Presses Pocket, 1988), p.218. Subsequent references are to this edition (first publ. Paris: Le Livre contemporain, 1960).

fundamentally contained within the community, in spite of their travels beyond its limits. True, the women seem to exemplify a new sense of community and a new sense of gender, not a footnote to existing histories, but the notion that they constitute a self-conscious elite is nonetheless open to debate. Indeed, it may be argued that Maimouna's song at the *dénouement* reinforces the circularity of the oral culture's notion of memory described by Helen Lock, and not the sense of linearity that might have been expected had a new community truly been born.

Maimouna, however, is not the only receptacle of implicit memory, and hers is not the only song. It is claimed of the women participating in the march:

Depuis qu'elles étaient sorties de Thiès, les femmes n'avaient cessé de chanter. Aussitôt qu'un groupe laissait mourir le refrain, un autre le reprenait, puis, de nouveaux couplets étaient nés, comme ça, au hasard de l'inspiration, une parole en amenant une autre qui trouvait à son tour son rythme et sa place. (BBD, p.296)

Implicit memory in one sector becomes explicit memory for the less experienced groups, which, in turn, begin to sense the pattern, the 'rythme' of cultural knowledge. This is the process by which cultural memory is propagated and personal memory created in predominantly oral cultures. It conforms to Helen Lock's view of the relationship of oral cultures to memory, in that the singing, as soon as it ends, recommences in precisely the type of cyclical pattern that she suggests, in keeping with what she argues is the oral culture's perception of time. This is a pattern which is reinforced in Bamako, where Niakoro recalls events of years gone by. Her thoughts reflect the self-contained nature of the community and the formulaic features of relationships within it:

Aux temps anciens, avant même que l'étoile du matin eût disparu dans les premières lueurs de l'aube, commençait le chant des pilons. De cour en cour, les pileuses se renvoyaient le bruit léger du martèlement incessant de leurs pilons et ces bruits semblaient cascader dans l'air bleuté comme le fait le chant des ruisseaux qui folâtraient entre les grosses racines, le long des murs des maisons ou au bord des chemins. Au coup sec d'un pilon heurtant le rebord du mortier répondait un autre coup. Ainsi se saluaient les travailleuses du matin en un dialogue qu'elles seules comprenaient. Ces échos répétés qui annonçaient la naissance du jour présageaient une heureuse journée. Ils avaient à la fois un sens et une fonction. (BBD, p.158)

Eventually, however, Lock's disavowal of the notion of a 'fixed original' memory must be refined, in a reading of Sembène's *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu*, and the reason is that the

privileging of organic memory in the text *necessitates* the recognition of a degree of fixity of memory. Just as an organ of the body may become diseased, or may be cured of disease, while still remaining that organ, so must an organic memory remain recognisably itself, no matter the changes it undergoes. In Chapter Three of Sembène's novel, after the first clash between trade unionists and employers, 'les ouvriers se dispersaient, chacun emportant en lui un petit echo de l'immense clameur qui s'était levée de la poussière noire de Thiès' (BBD, p.54). The cyclical concept of time and of life is unchanged.

Orality, then, is one receptacle of collective memory and a conduit for its articulation, but there are others. Next, we shall turn our attention to the concept of the talisman for the propagation of memory.

III.ii. Talismanic Images: Metaphor and Memory

At its most basic, the talisman is an *aide-mémoire*, a reminder of home when the bearer is abroad, of good in the face of evil, of the familiar, in short, when the environment is alien. It is at once a substitute for memory, in that it concretises past experiences without constantly accessing them, and a defender of memory's supremacy, in that it concentrates an abundance of experiences into a single powerful weapon with which to face new experiences. According to Frances Yates, Plato imagines an internal talisman when in the *Theaetetus* he writes of Socrates's impression of memories being imprinted like seals upon a block of wax present in a person's soul, and of his own belief that those memories pre-date birth – which, incidentally, is a justification for placing some value on the concept of organic memory.⁸⁵ In Sembène's *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* the talisman assumes a number of forms, not the least important of which is the rosary. Ramatoulaye and her friends trundle through the mysteries on a daily basis, each decade a signpost in their conversation with God. The act of counting extends beyond the merely dogmatic: the reader discovers later Awa's terror of being subject to enumeration, since it reminds her of the legend that being

⁸⁵ Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, p.50.

counted prefigures bad luck. Mame Sofi creates a talisman for the future, by naming her baby 'Grève', in the anticipation that the implicit memory of the 1947-48 strike will be made explicit through the child.

Closely allied to the function of the talisman, the relationship between metaphor and memory is one of this novel's prominent themes. At times the two are symbiotically related, but they are always at least mutually dependent. The function of metaphor often extends to the extreme of myth, hence the fear of the marchers when they come upon a group of vultures: '[c]es arbres et ces oiseaux qui, dans les vieilles légendes incarnaient l'esprit du mal, n'allaient-ils pas leur porter malheur?' (*BBD*, p.299). Even the more mundane uses of metaphor are closely linked to what has been observed in nature: the belligerent Awa, wife of Séné Maséne, 'semblait la reine des abeilles entourée de ses ouvrières' (*BBD*, p.300). The ability to manipulate metaphor can be seen to be a powerful weapon in the struggle to control the behaviour of the masses. Penda, engaged in battle with Awa, begins to count the women, an apparently innocuous gesture. Séné objects: 'Ne nous dénombre pas s'il te plaît [...]. Nous sommes des Bouts-de-bois-de-Dieu, tu nous ferais mourir' (*BBD*, p.300). Awa's reaction is equally violent, and she brings her own metaphorical grist to the mill: 'Arrête, tu nous dévores toutes crues! [...] Mon rêve était donc vrai! J'ai rêvé que des spectres armés de couteaux pointus venaient me couper en morceaux pour me manger!' (*BBD*, p.300)

Metaphor does not invariably invoke those memories which terrorise, however. Equally, it translates and uses positive memories to project a secure future. The concluding words of the 'Marche des Femmes' chapter reject the tragic drama of the deaths of Penda and Samba N'Doulougou at the hands of soldiers: 'Mais que pouvaient quelques chéchias devant ce grand fleuve qui roulait vers la mer?' (*BBD*, p.313). The synecdochical dismissal of the men's power inverts the traditional respect engendered by uniform and the image of the unstoppable force of a body of water flowing to join a yet larger one. The collective memory sacrifices individual memories of Penda and Samba, but also of those who caused

their deaths, and retains, instead, the picture of the unassailable power of nature which they themselves have harnessed.

It has already been asserted that for some writers, including Edward Said, memories are physically located. In a sense, then, the body itself may be seen as a talisman. It has also been argued earlier in the chapter that '[t]he past shows its true dominion when it breaks into the present' (see this chapter, Footnote 38). These related observations are nowhere truer than in the case of Maïmouna, the blind mother of twins, when she is accosted during the women's march: 'Maïmouna qui marchait un peu en retrait de Penda, sentit soudain une main se poser sur son bras' (*BBD*, p.313). This single gesture forces Maïmouna to confront her past and her memories of it, because the hand belongs to Samba N'Doulougou, the father of her twins, one of whom is by this time dead, crushed in a strike demonstration. The past also manifests itself in the physical present in the form of wrinkles and scars: Niakoro's tattooed lips are described as a 'souvenir d'une jeunesse coquette' (*BBD*, p.14); it is said of Bakary that '[d]e ses années de chaufferie la peau de son visage avait viré au gris et était recouverte d'une sorte de cal' (*BBD*, p.42). The memory of youth is retained in the body, even if paradoxically in the form of wrinkled skin. The process by which implicit memory is made explicit is uncompromised, when it is undertaken by the body; the codification involved in linguistic transfer is not a consideration.

In this novel, it is not just the body which is possessed of talismanic qualities, but often the whole person. The function of the baby 'Grève' has already been mentioned, but it is arguable that in *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* the most identifiable talisman is, in fact, Ibrahim Bakayoko. Bakayoko is absent for most of the novel, having left his wife, Assitan, niece (and adopted daughter), Ad'jibid'ji, and mother, Niakoro, in Bamako, in order to address groups of workers in other parts of the country. He is, nonetheless, something of a ghostly presence. An intellectual mentor to Ad'jibid'ji and others at home, he is yet more so when abroad: he still teaches, since friends continue to borrow from his personal library in his absence; he still inspires loyalty and awe, as demonstrated by Ad'jibid'ji's

keenness to write him letters and her anxiety to impress. Bakayoko is brought to mind with such sentimentality that at times the reader could believe him dead, an impression reinforced by Beaugosse's response to him. The younger man is so jealous of Bakayoko's captivating effect on N'Deye Touti that the absent Bakayoko has the air of the ghost of a loved one, with whose memory no living rival can compete. As Nathaniel Hawthorne put it in the nineteenth century, 'everywhere and in all matters, Dead Men tyrannize inexorably over us.'⁸⁶ Ibrahim Bakayoko, then, is a talisman for those who believe that his intervention in the unrest the community is experiencing is the only hope of peace. His absent presence allows his family and friends to remember times of greater harmony and to imagine those times revived. For Beaugosse, it is N'Deye Touti's view of Bakayoko as a talisman that distorts both his memory and his imagination. For both N'Deye and Beaugosse, reality is compromised, and this mediation is possibly the most important function of memory in the novel.

III.iii. Memory Manipulation: Recasting 'Reality' in the Women's March

Frances Yates, in her book, *The Art of Memory*, proposes the theory that the function of memory is to place perceptions of new events upon the topoi of the already familiar. This inevitably means that consciousness is moulded to resemble previous consciousnesses. Yates states that 'imagination is the intermediary between perception and thought';⁸⁷ her view coincides in this way with that of Herbert Schneidau, who claims that 'for language-using beings, all experience is mediated'.⁸⁸ We have read variations on these themes before: Nicola King, has drawn our attention to the gap between observation and narration; David Rubin insisted that implicit memory, in order to become explicit, is codified in language. As Said says, 'memory is not necessarily authentic, but rather useful.'⁸⁹

⁸⁶Malcolm Cowley, ed., *The Portable Hawthorne* (London: Viking, 1948), p.568.

⁸⁷ Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, p.46.

⁸⁸ Herbert Schneidau, *Waking Giants*, p.14.

⁸⁹ Edward W. Said, 'Invention, Memory, and Place', p.179.

Just as it has been asserted that Said's deployment of memory in his autobiography is not uncontentious, so too can it be suggested that the novelist, in making use of memory, has a more than purely reflective agenda. Indeed, Adam Piette goes as far as to claim that '[o]ne of the novelist's most essential tasks, traditionally speaking, is the fabrication of memory'.⁹⁰ Piette is hardly original in this: Frances Yates reminds us that Aristotle made much the same observation in the *De memoria et reminiscentia* (an appendix to the *De anima*). Yates describes Aristotle's belief that '[m]emory [...] belongs to the same part of the soul as the imagination. [...] [T]he intellectual faculty comes into play in memory for in it thought works on the stored images from sense perception'.⁹¹ Said, too, believes that invention is a fundamental element of memory, as he writes that 'invented memory of the past [is] a way of creating a new sense of identity for ruler and ruled'.⁹² Memory goes beyond being mediated and compromised, in this view, to being artificially constructed.

Artificial construction of memory is, it may be argued, a governing principle of *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu*. Ousmane Sembène's *œuvre* is the product of a then French-based writer who has emerged from a primarily oral culture, specifically from a Wolof-speaking community in Senegal. His novel, *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* was published in the same year that Senegal achieved independence. Arguably the focal event of the text, the women's march from Thiès to Dakar in *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* is not simply an event whose narration compromises memory, but an event which never, in fact, took place. This particular episode has no foundation in history, though it is woven into a plot which is based upon the very real Dakar-Niger railway strike of 1947-48. The mere fact of this embellishment (to put it mildly) admits the notion of imaginary memory, a deliberate fabrication of past events, not to be confused with (but erring towards) what is now fashionably termed 'false memory syndrome'.⁹³ The logic of this is outlined in *Memory* by Brian Smith: 'There is no reason why our imaginings, since they may be repeatedly entertained by us, should not

⁹⁰ Adam Piette, *Remembering and the Sound of Words: Mallarmé, Proust, Joyce and Beckett*, p.205.

⁹¹ Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, p.47.

⁹² Edward W. Said, 'Invention, Memory, and Place', p.178.

⁹³ This is a Freudian term which is designed to indicate the retrieval in psychoanalysis of supposedly suppressed memories from early life which turn out instead to be products of the imagination.

become more familiar than actual experiences we have had only once.’⁹⁴ Clearly, Sembène could not pass off the march as a historical event, in the conventional understanding of the term. However, the increasing independentist movement in Senegal, we may conjecture, could have prompted him to create a vision of a Senegal whose every indigenous inhabitant was rising against the control of the former colonists, in order to demonstrate a revised sense of community and a new sense of gender, a community which has emerged from the chauvinistic and paternalistic shadows of colonialism.

The women’s march takes place, as the chapter title has it, ‘De Thiès à Dakar’, and it traces that route not only physically but also metaphorically, the women growing in confidence and power as they edge nearer the metropolis from Thiès, ‘un immense terrain vague où s’amoncellent tous les résidus de la ville’ (*BBD*, p.35). Even before the march is sanctioned by the community, Sembène suggests, via his lexis, that the conventional understanding of memory is no more than incidental to the plot of the novel: ‘*De mémoire d’homme*, c’était la première fois qu’une femme avait pris la parole en public à Thiès’ (*BBD*, p.289, my italics). The mere allusion to *living* memory implies the possibility of a function of memory outwith recognised boundaries. This implication is reinforced when, immediately prior to the women’s departure, the marchers meet at ‘[l]a concession de Dieynaba [...] [où] des ombres allaient et venaient, s’interpellaient’ (*BBD*, p.291). The suggestion is of an alternative community, one which is not accurately perceived by the naked eye, but which is stored and remembered within a broader understanding – as Laura Otis might have it, ‘through their instincts’ (see this chapter, Footnote 1).

When the marchers finally embark upon their journey, they are accompanied by ‘le bruit du tam-tam qui n’avait pas cessé’ (*BBD*, p.291). The drum beat punctuates the march to the extent that the cortege is described as ‘précédé, suivi, accompagné par le battement des tam-tams’ (*BBD*, p.292): at times a presage of doom, the beat is also a memory, reminding the marchers of the purpose of their protest and of the justness of their cause.

⁹⁴ Brian Smith, *Memory* (London: Allen & Unwin; New York: Humanities Press, 1966), p.42.

At the same time, Bakary is decorating his body with jewellery, each piece of which is to serve as a talisman: 'Il ne les quitta pas tant que dura le voyage des femmes' (*BBD*, p.292). Why such reminders should be foregrounded in this novel is clear: the memory of 1938 and of a previous strike looms large. Dieynaba, having lost her husband Gorgui to what may be assumed to be gangrene, asks of Lahbib, 'Est-ce qu'on ne pourrait pas tuer tous les Blancs?' (*BBD*, p.295). His response invokes the haunting memory of the 1938 strike: 'Femme [...] il ne faut pas laisser la haine entrer dans ton cœur. Nous ne voulons plus de sang, nous ne voulons plus que des enfants soient tués, mais ce n'est pas la haine qui doit nous guider' (*BBD*, p.295). The *Légende de Goumba* which Maïmouna sings at the end of the novel, though, demonstrates that this advice is not new; it may well be sung that 'heureux est celui qui combat sans haine' (*BBD*, p.379), but history seems inclined to repeat itself.

This memory of a previous strike, then, is propelling the women marchers towards Dakar and other memories are, as we know, revived through song to sustain them on the first day of their journey: 'Personne ne savait plus très bien où commençait le chant ni s'il finirait jamais. Il s'enroulait sur lui-même comme un serpent. Il était long comme une vie' (*BBD*, 296). The importance of song to memory in oral traditions has already been discussed, but this episode has another significance. The metaphor of the snake is taken up again on the third day when Maïmouna remarks to Penda, the march leader, 'Je n'entends plus chanter'. When Penda wonders out loud how long it has been since singing was last heard, Mariame Sonko replies, 'Depuis que nous avons vu le serpent écrasé par une auto' (*BBD*, p.298). Two details are imparted here: the first, central to the whole text, is that time is not measured in hours, but by events and, as a result, memory can be seen to have spatial as well as temporal functions; this is fundamental to Said's concept of narrative, as we saw in the last chapter. The second is that Sembène implies the devastation of the marchers' survival strategy (their song, as represented by the snake) by the forces of metropolitan modernity (as represented by the car). The song is the embodiment of memories of home and past experiences, allied to present events and future aspirations, and when it stops, lethargy sets in and the women collapse on an

embankment. If, as Said has it, narrative is a function of speaking from a place (see Chapter 3, Footnote 4), the loss of narrative may be seen as a kind of disorientation; the women have lost their collective voice, which had been articulating their collective memory, and now their physical existence is threatened. Letting go of memory in this way may be seen to effect a silence and an absence which are particular to the oral culture, since memories are located in the body, rather than in a library. This may be read contrapuntally with Roger Vailland's metropolitan text, *Bon Pied, bon œil*, a text which emerges from a literate culture – with all the connotations of fixity that implies – whose relationship to issues of memory is radically different from a text at least partly emerging from an oral culture, and whose contrapuntal connection with Sembène's text is almost entirely predicated on those issues.

IV. Roger Vailland's *Bon Pied, bon œil*: Fictional Recapitulations

When Edward Said claimed that 'each new novel recapitulates not life but other novels' (see this chapter, Footnote 48) he could hardly have imagined a more succinct illustration than that provided by Roger Vailland's 1950 novel, *Bon Pied, bon œil*. This is a novel whose prologue is spent precisely drawing attention to the fact that many of the novel's characters are borrowed from the earlier *Drôle de jeu* (1945). Not only does the prologue of *Bon Pied, bon œil* make explicit the self-referentiality of Vailland's work, it also indulges in allusory games, such as the adoption of the phrase '*affinités électives*', surely conscious of its literary heritage.⁹⁵ Lass's notion that 'the past shows its true dominion when breaking into the present' (see this chapter, Footnote 38) repeatedly comes to mind in the examination of this novel as the reader encounters the by now familiar issues of memory's relation to repetition and rhythm, to physicality and organicism, to genealogy, both human and literary, to metaphor, to oral traditions, to reminiscence, history and antiquity. Memory is

⁹⁵ Roger Vailland, *Bon Pied, Bon œil* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1972), p.13. Subsequent references are to this edition (first publ. Paris: Corrêa, 1950). Goethe's work, *Elective Affinities*, was published in 1809. In addition, it is notable that Said's own *Culture and Imperialism* follows a model offered by titles from Raymond Williams (*Culture and Society*) and Matthew Arnold (*Culture and Anarchy*) from both of which he quotes in his own texts.

fundamentally the intrusion of the past (however attenuated) into the present and, as such, introduces all such attendant questions.

Vailland's prologue, in explaining the absences in *Bon Pied, bon œil* of certain characters from *Drôle de jeu*, states that '[l]a plupart des personnages de *Drôle de jeu* sont morts en déportation – après avoir subi la torture' (BPBO, p.14). John Flower has noted, with regard to this novel, that

[f]ollowing an orthodox Marxist line on the purpose of literature, he maintains that his task from now on will be to devote himself to a literature which, by dealing with the concerns and problems of the people, would awaken his reader's awareness to them and hence contribute to the Revolutionary cause. *Bon Pied, bon œil* was his preliminary attempt, and, to use his own expression, his 'adieux à la culture bourgeoise'.⁹⁶

He also observes, however, '[i]t is arguable [...] that the debate which underpins this novel remains inconclusive, with Vailland nostalgically clinging to certain values almost in spite of himself.'⁹⁷ Vailland's own memories govern, then, to a degree, his subsequent work. The reader may also infer that fictional characters, like human beings, are subject to the reality of the survival of the fittest. Part of what it means to be 'fit' in such a context appears to be the ability to absorb experiences and allow the memories of them to become organically attached to the self, hence the reason that 'Rodrigue n'avait pas perdu le pas long et régulier du temps de la Résistance' (BPBO, p.20). Experience in *Bon Pied, bon œil*, as in *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu*, is etched upon characters' faces. Rodrigue says to his friend, Lamballe, '[t]u as pourtant vieilli [...] tes rides sont bien plus marquées qu'en 43. Mais tu ne mûris pas. Tu es un vieux jeune homme!' (BPBO, p.27) Yet there is an added complication: the subversive nature of the activities of Albéran and of Rodrigue dictates that certain memories must not be facially detectable; when Rodrigue is spoken to by a police inspector about Albéran's leaking of national defence secrets 'Rodrigue se retient de sourire. Son visage doit rester indéchiffrable, comme au poker' (BPBO, p.102). While Sembène's characters may wear their memories of, for instance, the 1938 strike as badges of honour, Vailland's must conceal theirs in the interests of pragmatism, and this in spite

⁹⁶ John E. Flower, *Roger Vailland: the Man and his Masks*, p.55.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.62.

of the fact that memories are *in* the system: as Antoinette concedes in a letter to Lamballe, 'Je suis encore bien près de mes années de lycée' (BPBO, p.195). This organic relation of memory to physicality is nowhere better illustrated than in Antoinette's farewell letter to Rodrigue, in which she claims to have 'le visage mutilé, comme un vétéran' (BPBO, p.238); her disfigurement and her artificial eye, by now something of a talisman, will ensure that her experience at the hands of the police investigating her husband's activities will be remembered in perpetuity.

It will be remembered that one of the most striking features of Sembène's *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* is rhythm, particularly as expressed by the strategic beating of the tam-tams. Rhythm and repetition play no less significant roles in Vailland's *Bon Pied, bon aïk*. Rodrigue's interrogation by the police is punctuated by the sound of his heart 'qui battait follement dans l'escalier' (BPBO, p.101); in prison, every day is 'réglée par le lever et le coucher du soleil' (BPBO, p.160); keeping his sanity means that '[Rodrique] marcha de nouveau: dix pas, dix pas, il le fallait, il ne devait pas s'affaiblir, il s'appliqua à respirer profondément. Une sorte de rythme s'établit' (BPBO, p.147). Rhythm is not confined to literal marking of time, though, and the function of ritualistic repetition is equally important. While incarcerated, Rodrigue 'passa les deux premières heures de sa détention à se remémorer les récits entendus' (BPBO, p.138), gaining strength and comfort from the familiarity of his words; similarly, he builds upon his self-confidence by repeating, 'Je suis un *politique*, je suis un *politique*' (BPBO, p.148). The degree to which memory assists in the construction of mantras is striking: Rodrigue's mantra to help him deal with the conflict which has arisen between his duty to Antoinette and his desire for Jeanne is, 'J'ai une femme et un fils, comme un arbre a des feuilles. L'arbre ne se pose pas de questions au sujet de ses feuilles;' Rodrigue is said to be 'content de la formule' (BPBO, p.171). Antoinette's own mantra appears during her time of police torture: she states, as she is assaulted by an officer, 'Je le tuerai' (BPBO, p.123) and repeats the assertion a further twenty-one times. The purpose of Antoinette's mantra, like that of Rodrigue, is to distract her attention from the reality of the moment being lived, which she does by focusing on the future while paradoxically relying on memory to supply her diverting words.

Marital relations are soured by the ironic use of repetition in an exchange between Antoinette and Rodrigue after the latter's release. Antoinette tells her husband, when he expresses his annoyance at her having secured his liberty, that she prefers freedom to incarceration no matter the circumstances; Rodrigue's reply is, 'Sois libre [...] sois libre' (BPBO, p.218). After telling him that he owes her no debt of gratitude, since what she did was done out of self-respect, Antoinette says 'du même ton qu'il venait d'employer: "Sois libre, Rodrigue, sois libre"' (BPBO, p.218). Rodrigue's encounter in the cinema soon afterwards with Jeanne Gris also features mirroring, but divested of the biting irony present in the marital exchange: '*Pépé-le-Moko* les déçut et les enchantait; ils réagirent exactement de la même façon' (BPBO, p.222). Rodrigue and Jeanne are delighted by an encounter between two of the actors which once again reflects their attitudes to their own relationship: '*Je suis né dans le treizième, tu es née dans le treizième, nous sommes nés dans le treizième*' (BPBO, p.222). For similar reasons, the repeated claim that '[i]ls rirent l'un et l'autre' (BPBO, p.208) assumes significance. Rodrigue's new mantra concerning his feelings for Jeanne is 'Je l'aime [...] je suis heureux, je l'aime' (BPBO, p.226) and in the course of his repetition of it he resorts once again to the notion of rhythm, saying of Jeanne, 'Je suis sûr qu'elle danse en rythme' (BPBO, p.227). Repetition of a mantra is clearly thought to give life to sentiment.

The authority which the past enjoys over the present is supported by a complex genealogy of characters and of texts which frequently sees the fictional and the real being conflated. This is made clear in the first chapter of the second part of the novel, when the narrative voice describes a mundane domestic scene: '*Antoinette s'éveille. Rodrigue dort à ses côtés, et dans un berceau, près du lit conjugal, leur fils Roger*' (BPBO, p.93). The implication of the author's use of his own name for the baby son is that the characters have, in some way, given birth to the author. The traditional genealogy of the textual family is thus inverted, giving the reader an indication of genealogical distortions to come.

In the third chapter of the novel, Rodrigue reflects upon his recent reading of Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme* and uses his recollection of it to fathom Antoinette's role in his life:

Antoinette au surplus n'est pas Marietta, qui respectait et honorait Fabrice, *comme un homme dans le rang* le général d'armée, Antoinette est comme moi fille de bourgeois, mon égale. Antoinette n'est pas non plus Clélia, fille du général-geôlier Fabio Conti [...]. Qu'est-ce qu'Antoinette? Antoinette n'est pas non plus une fille du peuple. (BPBO, pp.53-54)

Vailland makes explicit here Rodrigue's reverence for historical literary figures and his reliance upon them for making sense of contemporary life, memory being an indispensable feature of reasoning. Fictive authorities invoked include Flaubert (BPBO, p.49), Genet (BPBO, p.166), Shakespeare (BPBO, p.199) and Peter Cheney (BPBO, p.176), whose work is more modern, but of course pertinent, given its tenor; Antoinette also sees reality in fictional terms, herself invoking Courteline and Kafka, but she does not view these writers as moral authorities, rather as somewhat distasteful exponents of the worst of life's extremities. When Rodrigue attempts to push Kafka out of his own mind ('Pas de Kafka, pas de Kafka' (BPBO, p.148)) it is, one supposes, partly because of Antoinette's preoccupation with the writer, partly because of the fragmented absurdism present in his work which challenges the realist depiction of capitalism. Edward Said writes in *Culture and Imperialism* that '[t]he appropriation of history, the historicization of the past, the narrativization of society, all of which give the novel its force, include the accumulation and differentiation of social space, space to be used for social purposes' and this view casts some light on not only how Vailland's uses his novel as a forum for precisely this sort of social action, but also on Rodrigue's attraction to literature as a social forum.⁹⁸ There can be no doubting the power of the text according to Vailland: he is careful to ensure that when Antoinette receives the unwelcome advice contained in her eighth letter from Lamballe, she does not simply put it away; instead she seeks to reduce its potency: 'Antoinette déchira la lettre, et n'y répondit jamais' (BPBO, p.201, my italics). Repetition of the reading is therefore made impossible, thus the 'knowing' and the 'making' referred to by Said are fatally compromised (see this chapter, Footnote 32). Invocation of the past, even of antiquity, does not end with Racine or with Shakespeare, however. Lamballe asks

⁹⁸Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.93.

Rodrigue, 'Seul Alexandre osa trancher le nœud gordien, sans craindre que le ciel ne lui tombât sur la tête. Es-tu Alexandre?' (BPBO, p.63). He approaches Antoinette with much the same tactic: 'Elvire qui a cédé à la passion mérite l'indulgence, mais don Juan est impardonnable, parce qu'il a choisi de sang-froid le libertinage' (BPBO, p.72). Memory, however indirect, is not only guide but inalienable authority.

The dictatorship of the past in the present is represented, too, by lesser figures than these. Jeanne talks to Rodrigue, for instance, of 'un ami, qu'elle avait connu un 14 juillet, au bal public du Pecq, un instituteur, qui avait rejoint un poste en Afrique du Nord' (BPBO, p.224) for whom she readily admits she is not waiting, but who nonetheless casts a shadow over the new relationship. Similarly, though in a lighter spirit, Rodrigue teases Lamballe: 'Monsieur Marat continue à jouer les cyniques. C'est démodé. Tu es resté l'homme d'entre les deux guerres' (BPBO, p.37). Both Jeanne's friend and Marat (Lamballe's Resistance *alter ego*) are 'dead' in the same way that Bakayoko could be argued to be dead in Sembène's *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu*, and the power of the dead, as has previously been discussed, ought not to be underestimated. Rodrigue understands this potency, the tyranny of the dead man:⁹⁹ 'Moi, je ferais le mort, je me rallierais aux copains dans l'action, je serais finalement réintégré' (BPBO, p.59). Rodrigue is himself, of course, subject to just such tyranny: as John Flower has observed, Albéran, Rodrigue's Resistance hero, has no more than a symbolic role in the novel, being physically absent from it.¹⁰⁰

Frances Yates's claim that 'imagination is the intermediary between perception and thought' (see footnote 87) is at once entirely applicable to an examination of memory in *Bon Pied, bon œil* and wholly impertinent to it. Such is the paradox of memory itself. Acts apparently deriving from the imagination – such as Rodrigue's giving the prison guards their various sobriquets – are, of course, rooted in experience, as any metaphorical expression must be. The appeal of anteriority, the placing of new events on the topoi of the familiar, as Yates again has it, dictates reliance upon the past as one remembers it. In

⁹⁹This is a paraphrase of Nathaniel Hawthorne. See this chapter, Footnote 86.

¹⁰⁰John E. Flower, *Literature and the Left in France*, p.163.

this sense, Yates is effectively denying the very existence of imagination. Paradoxically, though, the imagination comes into play: contorting new experiences in order to make them conform to existing knowledge *is* a supreme act of imagination. It is by dint of this process that history is re-written. Crude examples of this re-ordering of historical events are Rodrigue's categorisation of his notes on Robespierre and *La Terreur* in Part Two, Chapter Four and Antoinette's sudden and unannounced reversion to her maiden name in a letter to Lamballe in Chapter Five of Part Two. Vailland engages his own imagination, certainly, in relating discussions taking place among prostitutes about former clients, yet he censors his prose short of the detail: 'Suivait un récit détaillé des exigences de Gant de Cuir' (BPBO, p.69). The effect of this censorship is precisely that the reader relies upon his or her imagination to complete the picture; yet the imagined picture, paradoxically again, can really only be derivative of previous experience or knowledge. Likewise, when the author glosses memory by not disclosing the department of the minister whom Lamballe visits to secure his friend's release from prison, the reader can do no other than make an educated guess based upon past reading. This must be partly what Said had in mind when he wrote that 'memory is not necessarily authentic, but rather useful' (see this chapter, Footnote 89).

Vailland's willingness to exploit this necessity is clear: each section of this novel calls to the reader's mind earlier episodes which inevitably inform his or reading of subsequent ones. François Lamballe's eighth letter to Antoinette is much concerned with the mundanities of his livestock concerns and his apparently insignificant comment is, 'Mon vétérinaire [...] soigna judicieusement le taureau qui, je crois, guérira' (BPBO, p.198). This, however, is no throwaway observation; the reader immediately recalls Lamballe's earlier metaphorical advice to Antoinette: 'Je suis sûr de votre courage, mais j'ai peur de votre intégrité, de votre honneur: c'est la fierté des bêtes sauvages qui les livre sans défense aux hommes' (BPBO, p.179). Lamballe's implicit message is that, in spite of what ills Antoinette's campaigning may bring, he will heal them as his own bull has been healed. The reader repeats, even reenacts events where a gap exists, not only drawing upon an earlier moment in the text, but also from other texts; here, for instance, a certain strength may be imputed

to Lamballe on the basis of his previous incarnation, in *Drôle de jeu*, as a Resistance cell leader. This is what Said means when he claims that novels recapitulate other novels (see this chapter, Footnote 48).

Repetition, then, has been a guiding principle of *Bon Pied, bon œil*, just as it was in *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu*. The former novel resorts largely to textual memory to construct subsequent narrative: Vailland deploys characters from a previous novel; Lamballe's letters to Antoinette form a sequence to be considered retrospectively; Antoinette herself draws attention to the memory of the past by re-adopting her maiden name in a letter, and so on. The latter novel resorts not to textual, but to implicit memory, memory which has usually not been articulated in text or in speech. What, then, does a contrapuntal reading tell us about such a pairing?

Let us consider, once again, the issue of Antoinette's artificial eye. This, we have said, is a kind of talisman, a reminder of old struggles and a source of strength for new ones. Contrast this, though, with Niakoro's tattoos or with Bakary's scarred face in Sembène's novel: these two characters are also marked, but these are not the dynamic activists who are changing the face of their community; rather, they are the representatives of the traditional way of life in Senegal. N'Deye Touti is the representative of the new generation, for whom everything learned at school is inalienable truth and all remnants of traditional community life are retrograde. Hers is the generation for whom the literate French culture is something to be aspired to and emulated. As Maurice Agulhon puts it, 'les populations souhaitaient souvent connaître le français, conscientes qu'elles étaient de l'avantage qu'il constituait comme moyen de communication, d'accès à une vie économique plus active et plus étendue, d'ascension sociale éventuelle.'¹⁰¹ Memory, particularly cultural memory as manifested in language, is a disadvantage in this quest; Agulhon tells us of one of the methods of effacing that linguistic memory, 'du sabot que l'enfant, "coupable" d'avoir lâché dans l'intérieur de l'école un mot de dialecte, reçoit, et

¹⁰¹ Maurice Agulhon, 'Le Centre et la périphérie', in *Les Lieux de mémoire: les France*, ed. by Pierre Nora, 3 vols (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1992), III, 825-49 (p.831).

qu'il garde jusqu'à ce qu'il ait pu le passer à un autre "coupable" par lui repéré, le dernier porteur en fin de journée étant puni'.¹⁰² The metropolitan insurrectionist may be indulged in his or her memories; the need to efface them is much less. This is why Vailland's Antoinette can bear her battle scars and use them to lend her strength, and why Niakoro and Bakary bear theirs only to remind themselves of what struggles they have endured. The generations which follow them have language and culture eroded by stealth. If this should be in doubt, we need only consult Lilian Kesteloot's 1965 text, *Les Ecrivains noirs de langue française*, for confirmation of what seems even to have been Sembène's own agenda:

jouer l'écrivain noir est d'aider à libérer son peuple. [...] Cette 'libération du peuple' par le truchement de la littérature reste en certains points proche de l'éducation. Il ne s'agit pas seulement de revendiquer la liberté politique et de faire connaître à l'Occident les aspirations des populations noires – ce à quoi s'attachent surtout, parmi, les romanciers, M. Beti, O. Sembène, L. Sainville et Ed. Glissant, ou, parmi les poètes, A. Césaire, P. Nègre, J. Rabemananjara, D. Diop et E. Epanya. Il s'agit aussi de libérer mentalement le peuple, de lui faire comprendre ce qu'est, ce que sera la liberté. Une décolonisation que le peuple reçoit sans avoir compris ce qu'elle signifie, est une mauvaise décolonisation. C'est cette signification que les écrivains noirs veulent éclairer pour leurs peuples. Bien sûr, ils écrivent en français et s'adressent donc surtout au public européen, mais ils savent que l'élite noire lit leurs œuvres et en transmet le contenu et les idées.¹⁰³

So proceeds erasure of memory in the non-metropolitan base of the colonial dialectic.

At roughly the same time, an erasure of memory is occurring within *Bon Pied, bon œil*. In 1948, when both novels are set, metropolitan France is recovering from the Second World War and turning its attention to the Cold War; Senegal is a decade away from independence from this preoccupied country. While in *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu*, memory is invoked to battle against the colonising presence, in *Bon Pied, bon œil* it is invoked by some characters to chide others for their new-found capitalist streaks. In each novel, there can be read, contrapuntally, a stark illustration of (perhaps deliberate) amnesia: in Vailland's novel, the freedom from the threat of Nazism which these Resistance fighters have helped to secure does not awaken their collective memory to the reality that the Senegalese described by Sembène are subjugated by the French; in Sembène's novel, the barely-gone

¹⁰² Ibid., p.831.

¹⁰³ Lilian Kesteloot, *Les Ecrivains noirs de langue française: naissance d'une littérature* (Bruxelles: Editions de l'Institut de Sociologie de L'Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1965), p.296.

threat of Hitler in metropolitan France makes, apparently, no impact on the *colons*, who are preoccupied with local issues and who seem to have forgotten the land of their birth, not to say the land to which they might be forced to return. For Vailland's characters, the ideological horror of colonialism is forgotten; for Sembène's *colonisés*, it is the only one which exists. This is what Said has called 'a quite serious split in our critical consciousness' (see Chapter 1, Footnote 73). Interestingly, this split is not one which is lost on Aimé Césaire, himself famously outspoken on colonial issues: he writes, in his *Discours sur le colonialisme*, about his idea

que nul ne colonise innocemment, que nul non plus ne colonise impunément; qu'une nation qui colonise, qu'une civilisation qui justifie la colonisation – donc la force – est déjà une civilisation malade, une civilisation moralement atteinte, qui, irrésistiblement, de conséquence en conséquence, de reniement en reniement, appelle son Hitler, je veux dire son châtiment.¹⁰⁴

This is an interesting counter to what Paul Johnson has to say on the subject. It follows from Césaire's earlier identification of the twentieth-century bourgeois, and ironically, in turn, highlights the paradoxical flaws in memory of some of Vailland's less than bourgeois characters:

Oui, il vaudrait la peine d'étudier, cliniquement, dans le détail, les démarches d'Hitler et de l'hitlérisme et de révéler au très distingué, très humaniste, très chrétien bourgeois du XX siècle qu'il porte en lui un Hitler qui s'ignore, qu'Hitler l'habite, qu'Hitler est son démon, que s'il le vitupère, c'est par manque de logique, et qu'au fond, ce qu'il ne pardonne pas à Hitler, ce n'est pas le crime en soi, le crime contre l'homme, ce n'est pas l'humiliation de l'homme en soi, c'est le crime contre l'homme blanc, c'est l'humiliation de l'homme blanc, et d'avoir appliqué à l'Europe des procédés colonialistes dont ne relevaient jusqu'ici que les Arabes d'Algérie, les coolies de l'Inde et les nègres d'Afrique.¹⁰⁵

Before leaving our contrapuntal reading of *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* and *Bon Pied, bon œil*, we might consider what a straightforward comparative reading of the texts could have offered. Let us take as our example the characters of Maïmouna, Sembène's blind mother

¹⁰⁴ Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme*, pp.15-16.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.12.

of twins, and Antoinette, Vailland's *résistante* whose sight in one eye has been lost during a police interrogation. A comparative study would have shown, perhaps, that each of these women is literally blinded, but figuratively more visionary than her seeing counterparts. Each is able to 'free' her partner, given this superior vision: Maïmouna tells Samba N'Doulougou that he need not be involved with her or the surviving child whom he has fathered, saying that she will tell no one that he is the father, and that, figuratively as well as literally, 'je ne t'ai jamais vu' (*BBD*, p.313); Antoinette, as John Flower points out, pre-empted Rodrigue's abandonment of her by herself going to live with Marat.¹⁰⁶ This comparative glance at the texts yields a sense of universality, a sense which Edward Said would be keen to dispense with and to expose as artificial:

I think talk of 'universal values' tends to produce a sentimentalism that exactly takes us back to the early days of comparative literature. Woodbury, for instance, the first professor of comparative literature in [the U.S.A.] at Columbia in 1892, goes on about congresses of gentlemen scholars, jurists who survey (I think I'm quoting more or less exactly) the scene with a kind of superior detachment, with a general all-encompassing love for all of humanity. Utter nonsense.¹⁰⁷

What a contrapuntal reading, though it is not a perfect reading, offers is a vision of, to stay with our example, Maïmouna and Antoinette not as sight-impaired, strong women, though they are these things, but as characters acting out a specific moment in history, each ignorant of other, contrapuntal aspects of that history. Their histories and geographies are certainly intertwined in a much more tangible way than any comparative reading could show, and this is demonstrated not by any spurious reference to universality, but by a contrapuntal consideration of memory and of what is remembered and forgotten in these texts at the same chronological moment.

¹⁰⁶ John E. Flower, *Roger Vailland: the Man and his Masks*, p.61.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Sprinker and Jennifer Wicke, 'Interview with Edward Said', in *Edward Said: a Critical Reader*, ed. by Michael Sprinker (Cambridge, MA. & Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp.221-64 (p.235).

V. Mise en Abyme in *Le Docker noir* and *La Loi*

In order that it be *deconstructed*, memory must first, of course, be constructed. This is particularly true of literary memory, and will bring us to the Barthesian idea that narrative need not represent events in chronological sequence, but should offer idiosyncratic sequences of observations. This is consistent with Said's notion of telling one's story 'in pieces, as it is' (see Chapter 1, Footnote 25). One point of entry to an analysis of constructed memory is the use of *mise en abyme* in fictional works. This reflective and reflexive technique is at once concerned with reproduction of memory and its fabrication and we shall consider briefly its use in Sembène's *Le Docker noir*.

Lucien Dallenbach's summing-up of André Gide's optimistic conception of *mise en abyme* was that 'nothing sheds more light on the work or displays the proportions of the whole work more accurately'.¹⁰⁸ In *Le Docker noir*, the feature is striking. The novel within the novel is *Sinius*, the writer within the writer, Diaw Falla. The protagonist is arrested, tried and imprisoned for the murder of Ginette Tontisane, a writer and sometime literary agent who steals the manuscript for Diaw's novel by promising him that she will exploit her contacts to try to secure a publisher for it on his behalf. In fact, perhaps predictably, she publishes it under her own name.

The effects of *mise en abyme* may be extended beyond the limits of the actual novel-within-the-novel for a clearer illustration of the functions of memory in *Le Docker noir*. Somewhat paradoxically, it is, in fact, the absences of memory which are most revealing and these will be collectively identified as 'oubli'. This phenomenon is not simply related to the amnesia, conscious or otherwise, which accompanies deracination, but a vital and bi-polar principle of the colonial relationship which Sembène describes.

¹⁰⁸ Lucien Dallenbach, *The Mirror in the Text*, trans. by Jeremy Whitely with Emma Hughes (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p.3.

The most obvious of three complex processes of memory and its erosion is deracination, the notion of ‘forgetting’ one’s cultural roots. The immediately recognisable symptom of this is Diaw Falla’s relinquishment of the Wolof language in favour of French, a language described by Yaye Salimata, Diaw’s mother, as ‘maudite’.¹⁰⁹ Notwithstanding Sembène’s rendering of mother-son conversations in French, Salimata speaks no French: this is not, as one might imagine, an inevitable conceit permitted by the author-reader pact; Sembène glosses the Wolof here, whereas he leaves traces of it elsewhere, complete with translation. Through Salimata the reader sees that communicative processes remain in use which would be viewed by the self-regarding ‘civilised’ world as belonging to a pre-literate culture. The double-bind of Diaw’s ‘forgetting’ of his own language has already been discussed in Chapter Three.

Diaw’s deracination itself has complex roots, and it soon becomes apparent that notions of economic necessity or natural dissemination are inadequate explanations for the displacement of colonial subjects to metropolitan centres. These displacements, and the ensuing effacement of cultural identity, can be seen, by the *dénouement*, as the culmination of an attritive process of ‘oubli’, the fulcrum upon which, as Sembène describes it, the colonial relationship balances. This is the attrition to which Maurice Agulhon alluded in his description of the ‘sabot’ as an instrument of linguistic ‘oubli’ (see this chapter, Footnote 101). The closest approximation to a utopian scene – an ideal which can only be conceived in tandem with a habitual ‘forgetting’ of that which is negative – is described by Diaw in the second part of the novel, when all races and classes in a certain district of Marseilles converge:

[L]a Canebière, le cœur même de la ville, plus peuplée que Babel. On y croisait toutes les origines, du nègre à peau d’ébène au groenlandais en passant par le moujik de la Sibérie. Du chinois aux yeux de chat, à l’incas, du blanc albinos au métis. Les couches sociales les plus opposées semblaient se donner rendez-vous ici. Du bourgeois à l’ouvrier en pantalon bleu de Chine. (DN, p.127)

One of an assortment of Diaw’s views of metropolitan life, this is not, it should be said, the dominant one. Indigenous peoples and colonists do, however, reach an

¹⁰⁹Ousmane Sembène, *Le Docker noir*, p.15.

accommodation, however uneasy, and it abides even on the mainland. This simulacrum of community life which emerges through Diaw's eyes as he strolls through his adopted Marseilles introduces the second process of memory integral to *Le Docker noir*: selective memory.

The colonial relationship relies upon the implementation of a process of forgetting on both sides. Firstly, in order that Diaw Falla may be hastily tried and convicted and harshly punished in Marseilles, years of offences, comparable or greater in gravity, committed in the colonies by the *colons*, whom the indigenous people call the 'Toubabs', must be deliberately 'forgotten' by the offenders. As a bus driver in Dakar tells a civil servant of Diaw, 'Lui, il n'a qu'un meurtre sur la conscience, les blancs viennent de massacrer des dizaines d'hommes, ils ne seront même pas jugés... Personne ne leur demandera de comptes' (*DN*, p.17). During Diaw's trial, the prosecutor sets up, by way of projecting an egalitarian stance which is clearly fabricated, an opposition between the defendant and what he regards as the benign colonial: 'Il n'a rien du grand "Mamadou" inoffensif et candide, fort et souriant, cher à nos cœurs de bons Français' (*DN*, p.27). Diaw confronts a polity which has 'forgotten' its travesties of humanity and which pays grudging lip-service to a judicial process which permits the press to fly in its face by flaunting such premature headlines as 'Le Nègre, Diaw Falla, assassin de la célèbre romancière sera jugé dans trois jours' (*DN*, p.14). In addition to being convicted long before reaching a court, Diaw is deprived of the consolation of correcting a fundamental misapprehension about his crime. The prosecutor informs the court, 'on ne connaît pas le montant du vol' (*DN*, p.30), yet Diaw has killed from a sense of moral injustice, not material temptation, and that injustice is compounded at his conviction.

The correlate of the Toubabs' 'forgetfulness' is the indigenous characters' occasional forgetfulness of the treatment they have received at the hands of their colonist cohabitants. The promise of assimilation is frequently enough to make them forget past injustices and conform to the prosecutor's image of the 'grand Mamadou'. The Dakar civil servant shrugs his shoulders and declares that, 'les blancs sont nos maîtres... je ne vois pas

que des raisons pour les éliminer' (*DN*, p.17). The implication is that captious subjects are airing nugatory grievances against what is seen by the civil servant as a generally benign regime. This lack of solidarity is reinforced by Sembène's re-evaluation of the supposedly symbiotic relationship between fellow *indigènes*, stemming from the view expounded by the novel that, far from rewarding compatriots for their loyalty and support during campaigns for power, certain of the indigenous characters simply 'forget' the assistance they have received from allies who have the same cultural background and the same political aims, once power is attained. This is attested to by Paul Sonko, a close friend of Diaw who, before the literary episode comes to its gruesome end, speculates upon the effect that fame would have on Diaw:

on lutte pour grimper. Mais une fois arrivé, l'aisance, le nom qu'on porte, ce qui te semblait tabou...et tout ce que je ne peux pas énumérer ici, te happens de telle façon que tu en oublies les camarades de souffrance...Car tu luttas pour te maintenir où tu es arrivé avec deux fois plus d'ardeur que tu avais fait pour monter. Tu sais alors ce que tu quittes et ce qui t'attend. Dans la crainte de sombrer, tu es prêt à toutes les bassesses [...] tu abandonnes tes frères et c'est en leur nom que tu te serais élevé. (*DN*, p.99)

Naturally, Diaw denies any such possibility, but two areas of the text belie this denial. Firstly, it becomes apparent mid-novel that Diaw lives in 'son monde à lui' (*BBD*, p.125) seeing life not with objectivity (a notion Fanon considers oppressively European)¹¹⁰ but through a decidedly idiosyncratic lens. It is said, as Diaw sits on a bench with his lover, Catherine,

Un panorama unique s'offrait à lui. Au loin, la rumeur bourdonnante venait lui chatouiller les oreilles. Les toits semblaient une forêt lilluptitienne à côté des collines environnantes. De nouvelles constructions effaçaient de sa vue les rues sordides. A l'anse du petit port, il ne voyait que des formes et des couleurs qui se déplaçaient. (*BBD*, p.127)

Here the real world of the 'rues sordides' is obscured and supplanted by Diaw's more idealistic and literary vision. He later tells Catherine: 'La vie, c'est un aliment, l'univers sa marmite [...]. Nous préparons, nous assaisonnons ces mets selon nos épices. Pour qu'il soit mangeable, il faut que chacun mette du sien' (*BBD*, p.127). Moreover, Diaw's cerebral

¹¹⁰ Fanon suggests that objectivity is an artificial tool of the colonist which is used further to oppress already subjugated indigenous peoples. He claims that '[l]e colon fait l'histoire et sait qu'il la fait. Et parce qu'il se réfère constamment à l'histoire de sa métropole, il indique en clair qu'il est ici le prolongement de cette métropole. [...] L'immobilité à laquelle est condamné le colonisé ne peut être remise en question que si le colonisé décide de mettre un terme à l'histoire de la colonisation, à l'histoire du pillage, pour faire exister l'histoire de la nation, l'histoire de la décolonisation' (Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Editions Gallimard, 1991), p.82 (first publ. Paris: Maspéro, 1961).

processes also weaken the effect of his rebuttal of Paul's suggestion that fame might alter him:

Il avait le choix entre deux personnes: le docker, qui n'était qu'un être animal mais qui vivait et payer [sic] son loyer; l'intellectuel qui ne pouvait résister que dans un climat de repos et de liberté de pensée. (BBD, p.134)

Diaw is emphatically not attempting emotional or even social integration, but pragmatic assimilation. Paying no heed to the cultural context from which he has emerged or to what he represents as an individual, he simply chooses between two guises, either of which, apparently, he can adopt at will. It is partly by dint of behaviour such as this that the colonial relationship is upheld. It is the routine forgetfulness of colonists' offences and of compatriots' support which heralds the ultimate erosion of cultural identity that Sembène is keen to emphasise.

Mark Currie claims, in his introduction to *Metafiction* (1995), that 'the Nouveau Roman [...] had developed the self-reflexivity that fictional realism lacked'.¹¹¹ Arguably, however, the socio-cultural commentary contained in *Le Docker noir* is enacted precisely through metafictional aspects of the text. Not only can the novel be seen as highly self-reflexive, but that very reflexivity serves to underline the already established importance of colonists' forgetfulness of their crimes against their subjects. The novel treats the problem of the need to write and the difficulties inherent in doing so: Sembène's novel about a novel is interspersed with newspaper reports about Sirius, and Sembène hands Diaw the pen at the *dénouement*, in order that he might have the final word through a plaintive letter to his uncle. The crux of the relationship between *Le Docker noir's* self-reflexivity and the potency of its content is made explicit by Fírinne ní Chréacháin: '[t]he conflict between the African docker and the Frenchwoman who has stolen the novel he has written and published it in her own name, is no more nor less than the symbolic representation of the imperialist relationship.'¹¹² This comment sits in diametric opposition to the earlier

¹¹¹ Mark Currie, ed., *Metafiction* (London: Longman, 1995), p.7.

¹¹² Quoted in Andy Stafford, 'Work, Racism and Writing in 1950s France: a Comparison of Driss Chraïbi's *Les Boucs* and Sembène Ousmane's *Le Docker noir*', *Association for the Study of Caribbean and African Literature in French Bulletin*, 12 (1996), 3-13 (p.10).

remarks of Paul Johnson, who would claim that such a conflict could not exist, the imperial forces being in dispute not with the indigenous people whose land they colonise, but with each other, in a race to augment their empire. Here, *mise en abyme* helps to refute such a claim by highlighting the constants of the colonial experience which Johnson and others ignore, thereby reinstating colonial memory.

The reader is sharply reminded of the utility of the *mise en abyme* at work in *Le Docker noir* by the character of Pipo, an unofficial shop steward during the dockers' industrial dispute, when he asks Diaw: 'Tu aspiras à devenir écrivain? Tu ne seras jamais un bon, tant que tu ne défendras pas une cause' (BBD, p.152). Pipo's words find critical echoes in the socialist realist assertions that art must be useful above all else, and Sembène earnestly adheres to this dictum. *Le Docker noir* suggests that there is no such thing as 'forgetting', an accidental phenomenon with significance only for the individual: it is dynamic and it is engaged in by all involved in the colonial relationship. When Sembène's African character turns French colonial subject, and later a resident of metropolitan France, the gradual erosion of his cultural identity is not an inevitability which accompanies the passage of time, but the culmination of a process of memory suppression. Colonists 'forget' their misdemeanours against colonial subjects; subjects 'forget' the offences committed against them; indigenous communities assert individual ambitions and 'forget' the mutual loyalties of old: it is a far from accidental amnesia which dilutes colonial indignation and permits the colonist to steal the subject's very history.

The notion of *mise en abyme* is pertinent, too, to Vailland's 1957 text, *La Loi*, and this novel will be given brief consideration here. Here, the question is not one of colonial memory, but of gender and power relations. Sembène employed the conventional structure of the novel within a novel, but Vailland resorts, in *La Loi*, to a game within a game. The wider game is, conventionally enough, the game of life; the game contained within it is what John Flower has identified as 'La Legge'. Flower summarises the tenets of the game thus:

[the game] depends for its effectiveness on the creation of an artificial social situation in which real life roles often become reversed and in which accusations, goadings and tauntings must, by the

rules of the game, go unheeded by the person at whom they are directed. One of the group is elected as the *padrone*.¹¹³

Arguably, two rounds of 'la Legge' are simultaneously in progress outside the actual limits of the game itself. In the first, Don Cesare is *padrone*, in the second, Matteo Brigante. Cesare's feudal rights secure for him sexual access to any woman of his household: he may reject and adopt partners at will. Continually described as 'désintéressé', however, Don Cesare exercises no power outwith his own household, which effectively allows Matteo Brigante, the weaker character, to become *padrone* of the village of Manacore. Every married person in this novel finds a new lover, and often more than one: in all these configurations, though, there is reciprocity, and when Matteo Brigante chases and attempts to rape the youngest of Don Cesare's household, Mariette, it is Mariette who becomes *padrone*, by slashing Brigante's cheek with a razor.

Vailland's depiction of the elasticity of power relations within the literal game of 'la Legge' and in the broader context of life has processes of memory built in. The breeching of a given boundary is usually quickly followed by the character's return to his or her original position until he or she finds a new margin to challenge. The ability to contort the rules of the game to his own advantage is integral to Matteo Brigante's leadership strategy: '[il] donne des indications aux voleurs et des indications à la police, ce qui lui permet de contrôler les voleurs et la police.'¹¹⁴ Echoed here are the principles of G.K. Chesterton's *The Man who was Thursday* and of Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. Legality and criminal behaviour are two sides of the same coin and Brigante avails himself of both: this is in keeping with Vailland's suggestion at the beginning of *Ecrits intimes* that perception of the world is creation of it.¹¹⁵

Vailland's game within the game and Sembène's novel within the novel constitute *mises en abyme* which allow the reader to watch the acting-out of power relations at closer quarters than he or she is able to simply by watching events unfurl. At the same time, the reader is

¹¹³ John Flower, *Roger Vailland: the Man and his Masks*, p.120.

¹¹⁴ Roger Vailland, *La Loi* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1957), p.43.

¹¹⁵ See Chapter 3, Footnote 58.

conscious of the artificiality of the *mise en abyme* within the framework of a novel whose points of reference are traditionally less open to suspicion, and aware that the representation of memory operating within the *mise en abyme* is constructed, not organic. This performs the task signalled as necessary by Nicola King when she warned that the reader must be aware of the distance between observation and narration of the observation (see this chapter, Footnote 5). Obviously, a contrapuntal reading of *La Loi* and *Le Docker noir* will not yield such an obvious vision of the dialectic between centre and periphery as a pairing with one of Vailland's metropolitan France-based texts would have done, yet read contrapuntally, the *mises en abyme* at work in the texts add something to our understanding of these two novels. The colonial relationship under the spotlight in Sembène's *mise en abyme* is a paternalistic one, but it is more than that; Susan Bassnett reminds us, in her *Comparative Literature*, that '[i]t is incontestable that the discourse of the great age of colonialism made extensive use of gender metaphors. "Oh, my America", says John Donne of his mistress's naked body'.¹¹⁶ Vailland's *mise en abyme* – which becomes a conceit – in *La Loi* shows the reader precisely this relationship at work, with Don Cesare and Matteo Brigante figuratively adopting the roles of benign and aggressive colonist respectively. With the oscillating hierarchies involved in both *mises en abyme*, we can see what Said meant when he wrote:

[a]s we look back at the cultural archive, we begin to reread it not univocally but contrapuntally, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts. In the counterpoint of Western classical music, various themes play off one another, with only a provisional privilege being given to any particular one.¹¹⁷

This notion of provisionality, of the temporariness of any state of affairs and of the practical redundancy of any one memory in the face of the next, effacing one is highlighted through *mise en abyme* more than through any other feature.

¹¹⁶ Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: an Introduction*, p.101.

¹¹⁷ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.59.

VI. The Art of Remembering and the Science of Forgetting

The precarious and ever-changing relationship between memory and history has been negotiated throughout this chapter, and in the epigraph to her article, 'The State, the Writer, and the Politics of Memory', Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi pursues a similar discussion. She quotes Albert Hosteen, Navajo chief, as saying:

[m]y people have come to trust memory over history. Memory, like fire, is radiant and immutable, while history serves only those who would douse the flame of memory in order to put out the dangerous fire of truth. Beware these men, for they are dangerous themselves, and unwise. Their false history is written in the blood of those who might remember, and of those who seek the truth.¹¹⁸

The implied opposition between memory and history is an issue with which readers of fiction must concern themselves and a fundamental part of that investigation lies in seeking an answer to the question of whether memory, simply because constructed, is necessarily false. Said, again recapitulating Vico, asks, 'what is mind but historical memory, capable of infinite articulation, modulation, change [?] Fundamentally, however, memory restrains mind; memory is all about an actuality that whether for primitive men or for the most refined modern philosopher remains essentially a human actuality.'¹¹⁹

While it is indubitable that memory, however one conceives it, is essential to ordered existence, it remains valid to question its utility in other ways. Adam Piette quotes Samuel Beckett: 'The man with the good memory remembers nothing because he remembers everything.'¹²⁰ Here, total recall and total *oubli* are conflated and effectively equated. The absence of selectiveness renders the activity inauthentic, unproductive and, in the end, morally dubious. This is especially problematic for Said, whose view of memory as facility represents a cynical effacement of the more traditional concept of memory as natural and ordered:

¹¹⁸ Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi, 'The State, the Writer, and the Politics of Memory', *Studies in Twentieth-Century Literature*, 23.1 (1999), pp.143-61 (p.143).

¹¹⁹ Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, p.116.

¹²⁰ Adam Piette, *Remembering and the Sound of Words: Mallarmé, Proust, Joyce and Beckett*, p.174.

the art of memory for the modern world is both for historians as well as ordinary citizens and institutions very much something to be used, misused, and exploited, rather than something that sits inertly there for each person to possess and contain [...]. People now look to this refashioned memory, especially in its collective forms, to give themselves a coherent identity, a national narrative, a place in the world.¹²¹

In this view, that which is remembered and that which is forgotten are almost incidental to identity, since all memories are under continual threat of reformation and re-presentation.

Both Sembène's *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* and Vailland's *Bon Pied, bon œil* have presented questions associated with memory: memory's relationships with orality, with organicism, with geography, with repetition have permeated both texts. The ultimate question must be, of course, what Saidian counterpoint does to illuminate functions of memory in the novels. As was the case in considerations of previous combinations of Sembène and Vailland texts, this pairing is not an immediately obvious one. Said, though, makes the link: when he claims in *Culture and Imperialism* that 'culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought, as Matthew Arnold put it in the 1860s', and when he further asserts that 'You read Dante or Shakespeare in order to keep up with the best that was thought and known, and also to see yourself, your people, society, and tradition in their best lights', he does not imagine that only Western canonical texts are involved in this discussion.¹²² While it is true, for instance, that memory in Vailland's *Bon Pied, bon œil* is substantially supported and propagated by reference to the canon (Racine, Shakespeare, Kafka *et al.*), it is equally valid to infer the same process in Sembène's *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* when Maimouna and the rest of the women chant *La Légende de Goumba N'Diaye*: this song represents to the women of Thiès the best that is known and thought in the context of the class struggle. The women devise new verses for this and other songs in the same way that Rodrigue tries to mould Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme* to fit his own experiences and in the same way that Jane Austen alters Richardson's *Clarissa* to fit hers.

¹²¹ Edward W. Said, 'Invention, Memory, and Place', p.179.

¹²² Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.xiii.

It is clear from the most perfunctory glance at Edward Said's output that he believes the written text not simply to reflect history, be it literary or social, but to shape it. Said describes the 'constitution of a narrative subject [as] a social act par excellence'¹²³ and writes of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, for instance, that

To say of this extraordinarily rich mix that it 'reflects' Africa, is somewhat pusillanimous and surely misleading. What we have in *Heart of Darkness* – a work of immense influence, having provoked many readings and images – is a politicized, ideologically saturated Africa which to some extents and purposes was the imperialized place, with those many interests and ideas furiously at work in it, not just a photographic literary 'reflection' of it.¹²⁴

It would be churlish to doubt Said's radicalism in this observation, yet long before his work there were detectable stirrings in this direction, and from sources which at first glance appear entirely at odds with Said. Franklin D. Roosevelt addressed America's booksellers in 1942 on the subject of memory:

Books cannot be killed by fire. People die, but books never die. No man and no force can abolish memory. No man and no force can put thought in a concentration camp forever. No man and no force can take from the world the books that embody man's eternal fight against tyranny of every kind. In this war, we know, books are weapons. And it is a part of your dedication always to make them weapons for man's freedom.¹²⁵

Roosevelt initially implies precisely that which this chapter began by disavowing: that the academic sanction of memory creates not just *a* history, but History. The printed word is seen as encapsulating memory, and, by extension, it seems, truth. The final sentence, however, points towards a notion that will later be taken by Said and others: the appeal to booksellers always to allow books their moral function takes cognizance of the fact that they can do the reverse.

Harnessing the power of memory is part of what lends Sembène's *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* and Vailland's *Bon Pied, bon œil* their own power. This idea is proposed by Said in relation to Jonathan Swift, whom Said credits with thinking that '[a] modern author writes during the loss of a tradition. He is present because of the absence of the ancient authors who

¹²³ Ibid., p.92.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p.80.

¹²⁵ Franklin D. Roosevelt, 'Message to the Booksellers of America, 6 May 1942', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Quotations*, ed. by Elizabeth Knowles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp.267-68.

were being crowded out by a fading memory of the classics'.¹²⁶ Quoting from Racine or Dante can be either an act of deference on the part of the newcomer, or a symptom of insecurity. In either case, the use of memory is a conscious action. Frances Yates writes, at the conclusion of *The Art of Memory*,

The history of the organization of memory touches at vital points on the history of religion and ethics, of philosophy and psychology, of art and literature, of scientific method. The artificial memory as part of rhetoric belongs into [*sic*] the rhetoric tradition; memory as a power of the soul belongs with theology.¹²⁷

The power of memory resides in its defining relationship with authority, of which both rhetoric and theology are arguably symptomatic: a consensus of memory produces History, and History's authority bears heavily upon the present, until and unless another history displaces it. This is why Edward Said's interest in the fundamental role of literature in the imperialist process is consuming. His expression, in *Culture and Imperialism*, of his vision of counterpoint bears repeating:

In practical terms, 'contrapuntal reading' as I have called it means reading a text with an understanding of what is involved when an author shows, for instance, that a colonial sugar plantation is seen as important to the process of maintaining a particular style of life in England. Moreover, like all literary texts, these are not bounded by their formal historic beginnings and endings.¹²⁸

In considering the function and treatment of memory in Sembène and in Vailland, this chapter has highlighted the uncritical reliance of Vailland's characters upon memories of literary authorities for contemporary life, and of Sembène's upon memories of community authorities, as represented by historical songs. In both *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* and *Bon Pied, bon œil*, memory has been demonstrated to be internalised to the point of organic attachment, as exemplified by Niakoro's tattooed lips and Antoinette's artificial eye. Externally, the novels conform to Said's assertion that, 'Each new novel recapitulates not life, but other novels' (see this chapter, Footnote 48): *Bon Pied, bon œil* does so explicitly, by borrowing characters from the earlier *Drôle de jeu*, *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* implicitly, by

¹²⁶ Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, p.65.

¹²⁷ Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, p.374.

¹²⁸ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.78.

Sembène's adoption of the European novel form in the first place to relate activities taking place in a predominantly oral culture.¹²⁹ The relationship between metaphor and memory, sometimes extending as far as the recognition of a talisman, further reinforces the powerful symbiosis which exists between memory and authority, in all of their forms. Memory is also a useful, if complex, point of entry to the *champ littéraire* that has been illuminated, via *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* and *Bon Pied, bon aïk*, only a contrapuntal reading of these texts would highlight, arguably, the erasures of memory which each text comprises, since one must be used to draw inferences from the other. In this way, counterpoint as a theory is sound and as a methodology practicable.

Saidian counterpoint is problematic, on the other hand, because, though rightly emphasising the potential for danger in critical slavery to historical memory, it provides an inadequate solution in affiliation, which invites the reader to run the risk of obfuscating historical memory altogether. This problem, in the background from an early stage in the project, now brings counterpoint to crisis point in the examination of its relation to memory. Moreover, it is apparent from his readings that such obfuscation is not at all what Said has in mind, despite the terms of his contrapuntal methodology. Said's major contention has been that nothing defines us more than where we stand; geography is the defining aspect of identity. When we speak (or write) it is in a voice which is largely dictated by that place. If voice articulates a present self, memory stores and re-articulates all of our past selves: Vailland is re-articulated as an author in the re-use of certain characters from *Drôle de jeu* in *Bon Pied, bon aïk*, past generations of the women marching in *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* are re-articulated in the songs sung by the living generations. The 'genealogy of knowledge and of human presence' (see this chapter, Footnote 32) of which Said writes is propagated by these means, as, of course, is any artificial memory, as Said has warned. The relationship of memory to identity – and we must assume that any

¹²⁹ See Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.195 for discussion of the 'Adopt, Adapt, Adept' process which Barry claims describes the adoption by African writers of the European form, the adaptation of it to African subject matter and the mastery of it as a new novel form. This is closely allied to Sir Joshua Reynolds's notion that once all previous masterpieces have been read and absorbed, the writer's true master is not the classic novelist, but the work of art itself (see this chapter, Footnote 63).

identity is constructed, wittingly or not – is therefore a crucial one. The implications for a contrapuntal reading are serious. One contention might be that the synchronic nature of the theory of counterpoint refutes the importance of long-term memory, an idea which Said's *œuvre* as a whole would seem to dismiss. A response might be that the mere process of selecting chronologically equivalent works is flawed from the outset, if processes of memory within those works are to be taken into account, and yet the reading must be less effective if the reader is consciously excluding those elements from it. The 'overdetermination' of which Said and Nicola King write is avoided if such exclusion takes place, but at what cost to a more informed reading?

Said writes in *Orientalism* that 'representations have purposes, they are effective much of the time, they accomplish one or many tasks. Representations are formations, or as Roland Barthes has said of all the operations of language, they are deformations'.¹³⁰ Barthes does indeed tell us that the sequence in which observations are related in narrative is of no consequence:

La fonction du récit n'est pas de 'représenter', elle est de constituer un spectacle qui nous reste encore très énigmatique, mais qui ne saurait être d'ordre mimétique; la 'réalité' d'une séquence n'est pas dans la suite 'naturelle' des actions qui la composent, mais dans la logique qui s'y expose, s'y risque et s'y satisfait; on pourrait dire d'une autre manière que l'origine d'une séquence n'est pas l'observation de la réalité, mais la nécessité de varier et de dépasser la première *forme* qui se soit offerte à l'homme, à savoir la répétition.¹³¹

Naturally, Said would agree that the observation of 'reality' is impossible, human identity being constructed and 'not natural' (see Chapter 3, Footnote 37), as he has put it. At root, though, this means, for memory and counterpoint, that radically different memories of the same event are equally admissible, unable to be tested, as G.R. Carlsen says, 'against an external reality' (see this chapter, Footnote 19). The dilemma is clear: one cannot dismiss the idea of the representative narrative which relates observations in sequence while also

¹³⁰ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, p.273.

¹³¹ Roland Barthes, 'Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Eric Marty, 2 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1994), II, 74-103 (p.103) (first publ. in *Recherches de sciences religieuses*, 58 (1970); repr. in *Exégèse et herméneutique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1971)).

championing a reading practice which relies on visions of the same chronological moment. For Claude Lévi-Strauss, the answer seems to lie in a master narrative, outwith the influence of the self being narrated:

Tel détail, infime et ancien, jaillit comme un pic; tandis que des couches entières de mon passé s'affaissent sans laisser de trace. Des événements sans rapport apparent, provenant de périodes et de régions hétéroclites, glissent les uns sur les autres et soudain s'immobilisent en un semblant de castel dont un architecte plus sage que mon histoire eût médité les plans.¹³²

For Said, though, memory is more strategic than that; not only does he believe that memories are manipulated and invented outright as a means of subjugation, but he also sees that such manipulation can be used for more laudable purposes. He opens the conclusion to his article, 'Invention, Memory, and Place' as follows:

Let me note in a very brief conclusion what the interplay among memory, place, and invention can do if it is not to be used for the purposes of exclusion, that is, if it is to be used for liberation and coexistence between societies whose adjacency requires a tolerable form of sustained reconciliation. Again, I want to use the Palestinian issue as my concrete example. Israelis and Palestinians are now so intertwined through history, geography, and political actuality that it seems to me absolute folly to try and plan the *future* of one without that of the other.¹³³

The first point to be noted is that memory is described here as being just as strategic an entity as reality, being malleable to a particular agenda. Secondly, though, in spite of the fact that France and Senegal, the two countries with which this chapter has been principally concerned, are not adjacent, they are 'intertwined through history, geography, and political actuality'. The texts should, had Said's project been a consistent one, have been liable to more complete contrapuntal analysis. Counterpoint's efficacy resides in its focus on contemporaneity; the knowledge gleaned from a contrapuntal reading that factor X in one text has a direct impact on factor Y in another is innovative and powerful. A

¹³² Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, pp. 33-34.

¹³³ Edward W. Said, 'Invention, Memory, and Place', p.191.

reliance on historical memory is useful, especially as it informs Said's readings of Camus, but it does not contribute to a strictly contrapuntal reading.

Said has written of his own past being 'irrecoverable' (see this chapter, Footnote 25) and it is perhaps due to this sense of a self lost forever that the invention of memory has become such a preoccupation. We remember that Said has counted as a friend and mentor Raymond Williams, and we know that, in particular, Williams' 'structures of feeling' are important to Said and to his 'structures of attitude and reference'. When Williams writes, in his *Marxism and Literature*, that 'the making of art is never itself in the past tense. It is always a formative process, within a specific present',¹³⁴ he foreshadows Said's own assertions about the multiple revisions undergone by a text after the time of writing. In the context of memory, we have had cause to wonder whether Said's contrapuntal considerations of the texts he chooses are rooted, as he would wish them to be, in a specific chronological moment, or if, in fact, he gives in to the obvious temptation of resorting to historical memory.

It will be remembered that Said has described the process of memory as a necessary antidote to the dominant quest for power; he wrote, '[power] always needs the corrective of intellectual honesty and conscience and memory' (see this chapter, Footnote 20). We have since learned, however, from Saidian contrapuntal readings of Vailland and Sembène, that memory itself, being constantly subject to mediation through the present, is itself liable to continual correction. Like all experience, we gather, memory is mediated – indeed, this would seem to be the only logic by which a contrapuntal reading, with its focus on the synchronic, could be possible. The corollary to a diminished diachronic obstacle to counterpoint is, precisely, that memory cannot be truly the corrective that Said

¹³⁴ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.129.

would wish. In the conclusion, we shall consider whether the 'text of self that [Said] is continually writing, because it involves a continual dialogue between the different and sometimes apparently contradictory dimensions of his own worldliness'¹³⁵ is itself compromising the efficacy of counterpoint.

¹³⁵ Bill Ashcroft and Pat Ahluwalia, *Edward Said*, p.92.

Summary and Conclusions

What you can control is your own ideas. If you keep repeating them, simplifying them, and making them more accessible, through disciples, through rewritings and lectures on the same subject, then you can induce the kind of Borgesian trap that you referred to. I've been very conscious about not doing that. I've always tried to develop my ideas further, in ways that paradoxically make them in a certain sense ungraspable and unparaphrasable. I've found myself, for example, being more interested in some of the inconsistencies and irreconcilabilities of historical experience, including that of Orientalism. There are certain contradictions, what I call antinomies, that cannot be resolved, and it's important to explore and to deepen investigation of them. I want to say, well, they're there, we can't wish them away, we can't reconcile them under duress, as Theodor Adorno says. As intellectuals, we have to be able to make them more apparent, to make their influence more profound and more felt, which requires more work and more of an understanding of different kinds of political organizations and intellectual efforts.¹

¹ Moustafa Bayoumi, Andrew Rubin and Edward W. Said, 'An Interview with Edward W. Said', in *The Edward Said Reader*, ed. by Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin (New York: Vintage, 2000), pp.421-43 (pp.423-24).

I. Summary

This project began by asserting the need for – or at least the desirability of – considering the contrapuntal theory of Edward Said, Palestinian-born, American-based academic, within the framework of French and francophone Studies. Several thoughts prompted this assertion: first, Said's abiding interest in empires and their effects, an interest which has been and continues to be much reported and examined in the English-language press, is incongruous with his relative absence from similar public fora in the francophone press;² second, Said's avowed debt to Michel Foucault, not to say his rigorous engagement with those elements of Foucault's writing with which he disagrees, renders yet stranger that absence;³ third, the English Literature department has long been considered Said's natural home (a misapprehension deriving in part from his British- and American-influenced upbringing and from his current status as University Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia) when in fact he is trilingual in English, French and Arabic and his writing reflects that cultural triangle; and fourth, Saidian counterpoint's main interest being the examination, via literature, of encounters between the metropolitan centre and the 'periphery', as they are customarily defined, there seemed to exist a possible new approach in the consideration, also, of questions of class, hence the involvement of 1950s French socialist realism, the notion of showing things as they ought to be and not as they are, and the marginalisation of what is now often conceived of as the only important field of literary activity at this time, the *Nouveau Roman*.

None of this was intended to suggest, however, that the contrapuntal approach proposed

² The only notable deployment of Said's ideas in the mainstream French press has been occasional engagement with his views in *Le Monde diplomatique*, and even in these cases Said has been identified first and foremost as a Palestinian intellectual.

³ See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, p.23: 'unlike Michel Foucault, to whose work I am greatly indebted, I do believe in the determining imprint of individual writers upon the otherwise anonymous collective body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism.'

in Said's 1993 text, *Culture and Imperialism*, was already assessed and accepted; rather, this project was designed to execute that very evaluation, with writings of Roger Vailland and Ousmane Sembène as exemplars in a literary experiment. It was not only this particular authorial pairing that was original; the evaluation of counterpoint itself had not been properly carried out until this point. References by commentators on Said to the practice of contrapuntal reading have, broadly, fallen into three categories: the first kind of comment has tended towards the fawning, deriving from a feeling of intimidation by Said's immense erudition and resorting not infrequently to his previous bestseller, *Orientalism*, for its evidence, in spite of the absence of any reference to counterpoint in this work; the second type eschews this laudation, but nonetheless fails to venture beyond the merely descriptive to the analytical; the third type of commentary on counterpoint is the most acceptable, claiming, as George Wilson does, that Said does not furnish the reader with sufficient examples of what he intends by 'contrapuntal reading' to allow the reader to assess its utility.⁴ None of these commentaries, even if perceiving a gap, however, has attempted to compensate for it by offering the kind of test of counterpoint that Said himself fails to provide, and so this project has done so.

It has been necessary to situate Said's contrapuntal theory within the main body of his *œuvre*, partly because the genealogy of the approach is not absolutely apparent in *Culture and Imperialism*, and partly because the man himself makes little distinction between his personal politics and his literary study. His view of his own identity as 'a composite of currents' (see Chapter 2, Footnote 1) arguably demands that this notion also be applied to work carried out 'on him'. It is also by adopting a more general overview of Said's work that some of his most startling contradictions, which we shall discuss in our conclusions, have come to light.

⁴ George M. Wilson, 'Edward Said on Contrapuntal Reading', *Philosophy and Literature*, 18 (1994), 265-73 (p.273).

Works by Roger Vailland and Ousmane Sembène were chosen to evaluate Saidian counterpoint for several reasons: first, they accommodated, respectively, existing interests in French socialist realism and in the West African novel in French; second, the approximate chronological equivalence of the writers' output facilitated a contrapuntal examination of the same historical moment as viewed from what most saw as the metropolitan centre, France, and the periphery, the French colony of Senegal; third, the two authors were publishing the works considered herein at a time of spectacular change in France and in French-controlled territories, with the Second World War fresh in the memory, the Cold War and decolonisation underway and relations between France and her colonies (and ex-colonies) at a sensitive stage of development; and fourth, when French-language literature of the 1950s is written about today, it is largely with reference to the *Nouveau Roman*, a tendency which is unhelpfully exclusive and which acts to marginalise alternative discourses. For all these reasons, Saidian counterpoint has been assessed with reference to these two writers.

The selection of Place, Voice and Memory as the orbits for this evaluation have, in part, been signalled by Edward Said himself. We have seen several times that his insistence upon geography as central to any consideration of self-expression or discourse brings into the fray all attendant questions of history and identity, and that having a voice, for Said, depends upon also having a place from which to articulate opinions or experiences. Memory is the third aspect of this triangular relation and its inclusion has been stimulated less by Said's own insistence upon it than by a more general assumption that the identity contributed to by Place and Voice cannot be sustained without reference to that which is contained in the memory, since what Said calls 'human presence' is not generally thought of as constructing itself afresh with each articulation. This aspect of the evaluation has proved the most challenging, as we shall see in our conclusions. In any case, the structure of the project has been dictated in part by Said's interests as expressed in *Culture and*

Imperialism and in interviews about *Culture and Imperialism* and, as importantly, about culture and imperialism. Adopting a structure based on elements of Said's major interests was the only reasonable premise from which to proceed, since it is only by seeing literature and culture as he does, insofar as that is possible, that the reader may begin to engage with his arguments. However, since, as we have argued, the genealogy of counterpoint has had to be traced throughout Said's *œuvre*, it has been vital, too, to draft into our structure issues of obvious importance to Said – such as memory – even when they are not explicitly insisted upon in *Culture and Imperialism* or in his discussions on counterpoint itself. Even here, though, it is not necessary to stray from Said's methodology: it is precisely this strategy that he advocates in the reading of works of literature, reading one text against another with the intention of discovering how one might enhance the other. Such has been the general aim of this project, pursued with reference to Roger Vailland and Ousmane Sembène.

II. Some Conclusions

Upon reading Said's words in the epigraph above it should be clear, perhaps, that the antinomies and contradictions in experience of all kinds to which he refers are no less integral to his own theoretical and writing styles. Having hinted, via the epigraph to this concluding part of our project, at an element of irreconcilability in Said's theory, I should like to invoke more of Said's own words on the subject of his attachment to Antonio Gramsci. In an interview with the journal *Radical Philosophy* in 1993, Said observed:

Gramsci was an inveterate note-writer. He never wrote a consistent piece, except the *Southern Question*, which I make great use of in [*Culture and Imperialism*]. It's very hard to derive from Gramsci's work a consistent political and philosophical position. There's a bit of this, a bit of that – mostly, I think, in the tradition of Vico and Leopardi, a kind of Italian cosmopolitan pessimism;

along with his tremendous involvement in the Italian working-class movement. But beyond that, methodologically it's very hard to 'use' him.⁵

Said, too, can be infuriatingly self-contradictory and his polemic needs frequent refinement in order for it to be applied as a theory. When Laura Chrisman opens an article on 'Gendering Imperial Culture' with the statement that '[t]he publication of Said's *Culture and Imperialism* is arguably both symptom and cause of a new direction in "colonial discourse analysis" – namely, the synthesis of colonial with imperial cultural studies', she approaches a conception of Said as being by turns facilitator and hindrance and of his work as both gateway and obstacle.⁶

That said, we could not claim for a moment that Said himself is 'hard to use' in the same way that Gramsci, for Said, appears to be. Rather, the opposite is true: Said is almost too *easy* to 'use', in the sense that his continual tendency to nuance, often extending as far as self-contradiction, seems to have made him all things to all men. If a particular selection from his argument thrills or enrages a given commentator, he or she feels free to ignore the rest, since clearly no synthesis is possible in any case. This is the great danger for the student of Said and, more particularly, perhaps, for the individual who chooses, rather than to *study* Said, to *read* him.

It is, additionally, problematic that Said permits himself the occasional indiscipline of polemic in the first place, and not a little confusing that he does; confusing, because he admires consistency in others. In his article, 'Foucault and the Imagination of Power', for example, he refers to 'Foucault's admirably un-nostalgic view of history', but also states that 'what is [...] deeply compelling about the continuity of Foucault's early with his

⁵ Anne Beezer and Peter Osborne, 'Orientalism and After: an Interview with Edward Said', (p.25).

⁶ Laura Chrisman, 'Gendering Imperial Culture: *King Solomon's Mines* and Feminist Criticisms', in *Cultural Readings of Imperialism: Edward Said and the Gravity of History*, ed. by Keith Ansell Pearson, Benita Parry and Judith Squires (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1997), pp.290-304 (p.290).

middle works is his highly wrought presentation of the order, stability, authority, and regulatory power of knowledge'.⁷ Said's preference, of course, is not to see power in this way; when he claims that '[Foucault's] interest in domination was critical but not finally as contestatory, or as oppositional as on the surface it seems to be', he is signalling for himself the need to dismantle the tidy and apparently fixed structures of power and authority perceived by Foucault in order that he may engage with its fragments.⁸

It is precisely this interest in the contributory strands of power, empire, the canon, and so on, that irritates some commentators on Said. He refuses to address a monolithic structure which, for him, is a chimera. Timothy Reiss voices occasional objections, in his review of Said's *Culture and Imperialism*, to Said's individual interpretations of certain texts, such as Kipling's *Kim*. He overcomes these reservations promptly, though, to say, 'my objection over certain readings has nothing to do with Said's overall project', and this, perhaps, is the most realistic and helpful, but also dangerous view of Saidian counterpoint.⁹ It would certainly seem odd to take issue with the strands of Said's project, while simultaneously endorsing the sum of the parts. Yet Said's now inalienable position as one of the foremost radical postcolonial theorists has been carved out for him as much as a consequence of his polemicism as in spite of it. Naturally, this helps dissemination; were it not for Said's occasional excesses, he would not have become the media darling that he now is. In any case, the concept of text as immovable monument is not one which Said would favour, in spite of the irony that he himself, radical as he might be, has found himself – particularly with the success of *Orientalism* – squarely in the ranks of mainstream, establishment humanities researchers. He prefers to view the text as something more dynamic: 'although the text resembles a never-to-be-fulfilled ideal, a finality never attained

⁷ Edward W. Said, 'Foucault and the Power of the Imagination', in *Foucault: a Critical Reader*, ed. by David Couzens Hoy (New York and Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp.149-55 (p.149).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.149.

⁹ Timothy J. Reiss, 'Cultural Hegemony or Cultural Exchanges? From Monody to Counterpoint', p.400.

even if desired from the very beginning, the author's asymptotic movement towards his goal gives him an increasingly acute sense of what he is doing all the time.'¹⁰

As has been amply demonstrated by contradictory selections from Said's own texts, this is often symptomatic of the triumph of hope over experience. His discussion, in an article entitled 'The Franco-American Dialogue', of James Miller's *The Passion of Michel Foucault* notes Miller's view that 'works like [Foucault's] *Surveiller et punir* expressed the man's innermost private neuroses: their formidable scholarship was marshaled [*sic*] and deployed in a sense to objectify personal obsessions'.¹¹ This acute observation of Miller's position is strangely at odds with Said's self-analysis: this overriding of critical distance by personal concerns is precisely the feature of Said's own work which attracts most criticism. Paradoxically, though, it is also one of its virtues.

Perhaps the greatest strength of Said's work is its insistence upon an alternative to '[t]he tendency for fields and specializations to subdivide and proliferate, [which] I have for a long while argued, is contrary to an understanding of the whole, when the character, interpretation and direction or tendency of cultural experience are at issue'.¹² (There is a subtle distinction to be made, here, between Said's denunciation of the monolithic structure and his distaste for *artificial* division.) His is an ideal which has been adopted very recently by a number of other formidable intellectuals in diverse fields: Slavoj Žižek has asserted that 'the breakthrough [he] would most like to see happen in the twenty-first century is the unification of the natural sciences with the notion of human freedom';¹³

¹⁰ Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, p.196.

¹¹ Edward W. Said, 'The Franco-American Dialogue', in *Traveling Theory: France and the United States*, ed. by Ieme Van der Poel and Sophie Bertho (Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1999), pp.134-56 (p.143).

¹² Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.13.

¹³ Slavoj Žižek, 'Closing the Gap', in *Predictions: Thirty Great Minds on the Future*, ed. by Sian Griffiths (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.311-20 (pp.319-20).

Steven Weinberg envisages a similarly inclusive scenario in his short essay, 'A Theory of Everything'.¹⁴ Part of Said's utility lies in his cosmopolitanism, of course: his experience and work belie, to a degree, Eric Hobsbawm's claim, in *The New Century* (2000), that

[t]raditional culture spreads through a European model that has been adopted globally and therefore globalized: a concert program in Osaka, Chicago, or Johannesburg will present the same kind of repertoire: European classical music. This is not true of literature because of a very powerful limitation on globalization; namely, language difference.¹⁵

Said contends that the only way that the academy sees of dealing with that which is new and anti-traditional is by subsuming it. He says, '[t]he irony is that it has been the university's practice to admit the subversions of cultural theory in order to some degree to neutralize them by fixing them in the status of academic subspecialties. So now we have the curious spectacle of teachers teaching theories that have been completely displaced – wrenched is the better word – from their contexts; I have elsewhere called this phenomenon "travelling theory".'¹⁶ Actually, the greater irony is arguably that Said himself has been translated from subversive to academic pillar.

It should not be thought, though, that Said savagely bites the hand that feeds him. The university is, to him, an absolutely necessary place and one whose traditional values should not be utterly revolutionised:

Now, in my view, the university is one of the last quasi-utopian spaces in modern society. And if it becomes a place for displacing one set of categories in order to put in their place another set of categories, if we're going to read aggressively one set of texts that were forbidden in the past and that are now possible, and we're going to forbid the texts that we read in the past in order to read these texts, I'm against the practice. That's not the answer.¹⁷

He is clear, however, on the point that the individual researcher should be responsible for

¹⁴ Steven Weinberg, 'A Theory of Everything', in *Predictions: Thirty Great Minds on the Future*, ed. by Sian Griffiths (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.301-10 (p.307).

¹⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *The New Century* (London: Little, Brown, 2000), p.122.

¹⁶ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.389.

¹⁷ Anne Beezer and Peter Osborne, 'Orientalism and After: an Interview with Edward Said', p.29.

the authenticity of his or her own project: '[i]nteresting work is most likely to be produced by scholars whose allegiance is to a discipline defined intellectually and not to a "field" like Orientalism defined either canonically, imperially or geographically.'¹⁸ That is why his contrapuntal theory and methodology may be seen to elaborate a new praxis of comparativism, highlighting a *champ littéraire*, as we have been able to see in the examples of Vailland and Sembène, to which insufficient attention has previously been paid. As Said has said in interview,

I have very little interest, except residually, in the notion of the national literature, English literature, French literature, and so on. All of these specialties in which professionally we're engaged, whether we like it or not, don't interest me very much any longer, any more than the interest that I have today in things like history and anthropology etc. is an interest in those fields as fields, but is rather an interest in the connections between them.¹⁹

It is conceivable, indeed all too conventional, that the social realist initiative illustrated in the work of Roger Vailland is considered in an entirely different category from the fiction of Ousmane Sembène, the metropolitan being hermetically sealed off from the non-metropolitan. One of the great virtues of a contrapuntal reading is that the works of these two authors may be examined together without resort to the predictabilities and artificialities of a traditional comparative study. It has been shown that the pairing is not as arbitrary as it appears at first glance; both writers were publishing during the 1950s, a period, as we have said, of considerable change in France's relations with her colonies. The collocation of Vailland and Sembène constitutes not a clear reversal of the gaze, but a complication of colonial issues of the time, offering a view of the constants of colonialism which does not eschew its complexities, as well as a nuanced vision of class issues.

¹⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, p.326.

¹⁹ Michael Sprinker and Jennifer Wicke, 'An Interview with Edward Said', in *Edward Said: a Critical Reader*, ed. by Michael Sprinker (Cambridge, MA. and Oxford: Blackwell, 1992, pp.221-64 (p.242).

Moreover, Said's notion of the intellectually defined project is made possible, since connections are made which are not derived from canonical precedents.

We have established that the works of Vailland and Sembène are not polar opposites, and that the reversal of the colonial gaze is not illustrated in any straightforward way by them. Indeed, it may even be extrapolated from this observation that no such reversal is uncomplicated. We have demonstrated that the reversal in Vailland and Sembène is complicated by the latter's adoption of French as his professional language and his residence in Marseilles and also by Vailland's self-identification with the French Left.²⁰ It is not complicated as much as one might think, however: Sembène and Vailland, though each at times is away from 'home', do much of their travelling 'at home', in the sense that, in the best tradition of organic memory, they bring tokens of home along with them; moreover, with regard to Vailland and his travel narratives, as John Flower has rightly pointed out, 'it is to [Vailland's] credit that only rarely is his account [*Boroboudour*] to any noticeable extent distorted by his own revolutionary enthusiasm.'²¹ It is also worth noting, it may be argued, that the idiosyncrasies of the individual writer are difficult to second-guess: as we know, Vailland once asked Pierre Dumayet, 'Pourquoi voulez-vous que l'écrivain soit toujours engagé? L'écrivain bataille comme l'escrimeur; il engage, il dégage, il engage' (see Introduction, Footnote 18).

A contrapuntal approach to Vailland and Sembène certainly 'works' on the geographical plane. Vailland's *Boroboudour*, for instance, permitted close inspection of Indonesian opposition and resistance to empire as those instincts have been deployed to end three

²⁰ Sembène's use of French is clearly ideologically problematic, but it is frequently abandoned by critics as an irresolvable conundrum: see, for instance, Roger Little, 'Sembène and the Language Dilemma', *French Studies Bulletin*, 25 (1987), 16-17.

²¹ John E. Flower, *Roger Vailland: the Man and his Masks*, p.72.

hundred years of imperialist rule, as well as offering the reader a vision of the imperial traveller, as he might be seen by indigenous peoples. It mattered but little, to begin with, that Vailland was not Dutch, nor temperamentally nor ideologically inclined to imperial politics, since he was principally a white European. Should this be in doubt, one need only consider his own perception of the behaviour expected of the white traveller to Indonesia: 's'il est Français [*sic*], [il doit] se désolidariser de la politique de nos gouvernants au Vietnam' (B, p.93). The manner in which Vailland represented his fellow European travellers, not as nomads, but as implicitly reluctant voyagers (the Norwegian couple, for example) demonstrated exactly the attitudes of elite historiography that the Indonesians (along, it should be said, with Vailland) were attempting to forestall.

Sembène's *O Pays, mon beau peuple* offered a different perspective on colonialism and on the nature of travel, though it reflected much of the attitude of Vailland's newly-liberated Indonesians. As it was being published in 1957, Kwame Nkrumah was leading Ghana to independence, the first Sub-Saharan country to achieve self-determination. In Sembène's novel, Isabelle was the traveller and Oumar Faye the exile, albeit that that status was only conferred on him, paradoxically, when he returned to Senegal, his homeland. The significance of the physicality of land, as against the more spurious notion of nationality, was privileged in the novel in the moral sense, since Oumar was seen to die because of misconceptions about the importance of nationality, only to return in death to the land and to his rights to occupy it.

A contrapuntal reading of Vailland and Sembène demonstrated that the 1950s decolonisation initiatives were bloody and complex. Vailland's travel *révits* were informative, of course, and often political, but were also entertaining, attractive and, as

John Flower sums up, ‘balanced [...] in the best travelogue fashion’.²² Sembène’s novel showed another side to travel, using Isabelle and Oumar Faye as targets for all the implicit ardour growing in the breast of the Senegalese against the French, whose defeats at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 and in Egypt in 1956 – in a sense foreshadowed in Vailland’s narratives – are implicit and brooding in Sembène’s.

We know that, for Said, a sense of geography is the prerequisite for articulation, and here again counterpoint was a broadly useful approach to Vailland and Sembène. The pragmatic silences of the Pole encountering the strategic silences of Eugène-Marie Favart in *Un Jeune Homme seul* were rendered more meaningful by a contrapuntal look at the aphasic episodes in *Le Docker noir* and by the manner in which Diaw Falla’s and Yaye Salimata’s sporadic aphasia was exploited by the metropolitan authority figures. Yet, though this reading was enriching of the texts involved, it also raised other questions, largely pertaining to history. We could not justifiably conflate Polish and Senegalese experience without reference to recorded history, and Saidian counterpoint, with its adherence to affiliation, does not favour such an approach.

This problem, arising during the evaluation of counterpoint in the orbit of ‘Voice’, naturally grew more pressing when ‘Memory’ was considered, and not least because of Said’s own problematisation of memory itself. He suggested that memory was often a convenience and, at times, an artificially created one. This meant that a contrapuntal approach to *Bon Pied, bon œil* and *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* was limited to the intertextual (as in the re-use of characters in *Bon Pied, bon œil* from *Drôle de jeu*), the symbolic (as in the blindness of Maïmouna and the partial loss of sight of Antoinette) and the ancestral (as in

²² John E. Flower, *Roger Vailland: the Man and his Masks*, p.73.

the songs of the marching women). Recent memory could be only unsatisfactorily addressed in the terms of counterpoint, even though Said himself ignored those terms for the purposes of his 'contrapuntal' reading of Camus, a reading to which, it must be admitted, a sense of historical memory was crucial.

We signalled, in the last chapter, the tremendous difficulty with which the contrapuntal reader confronts issues of memory in reading practice. Said's academic dismissal of memory as a customised convenience appeared disingenuous in the face of his personal rage at having his own memories of exile called into question. Further, an affiliative approach to literary study – reinforced by Said's view of narrative as a spatial, not a temporal notion – seemed impossible to reconcile with anything other than an Existentialist position. Said himself does not try to resolve this problem, preferring instead to adopt his usual provisional positions. However, it is undeniable that memory, however ancient, is necessarily mediated through the present, and through the terms of reference of that present, and, to that extent, Said's affiliative approach may still be of use.

Our readings of Vailland and Sembène assume, it will be observed, a profound connection between text and context, between the writer and the world he inhabits. This Said has termed the 'wordliness' of the text, as we have seen. Connections between the public and the private self are just as important, for Said. He claims that '[a]ll that entire ideology of separation and exclusion and difference etc. – the task is to fight it. But you can't fight it on one level and be shy or tactful on the others. It's got to be fought on all the fronts.'²³

Claude Lévi-Strauss writes of himself, in *Tristes Tropiques*,

Entre le marxisme et la psychanalyse qui sont des sciences humaines à perspective sociale pour l'une, individuelle pour l'autre, et la géologie, science physique – mais aussi mère et nourrice de

²³ Ibid., p.242.

l'histoire, à la fois par sa méthode et par son objet – l'ethnographie s'établit spontanément dans son royaume: car cette humanité, que nous envisageons sans autres limitations que celles de l'espace, affecte d'un nouveau sens les transformations du globe terrestre que l'histoire géologique a léguées: indissoluble travail qui se poursuit au cours des millénaires, dans l'œuvre de sociétés anonymes comme les forces telluriques et la pensée d'individus qui offrent à l'attention du psychologue autant de cas particuliers. L'ethnographie m'apporte une satisfaction intellectuelle: comme histoire qui rejoint par ses deux extrémités celle du monde et la mienne, elle dévoile du même coup leur commune raison. Me proposant d'étudier l'homme, elle m'affranchit du doute car elle considère en lui ces différences et ces changements qui ont un sens pour tous les hommes à l'exclusion de ceux, propres à une seule civilisation, qui se dissoudraient si l'on choisissait de rester en dehors. Enfin, elle tranquillise cet appétit inquiet et destructeur dont j'ai parlé, en garantissant à ma réflexion une matière pratiquement inépuisable, fournie par la diversité des mœurs, des coutumes et des institutions. Elle réconcilie mon caractère et ma vie.²⁴

Said has likewise found a way of reconciling his life with his 'true' self. To return to one of his recent commentators, Valerie Kennedy, herself criticised elsewhere in this project,

Said speaks from near the centre, but with a constant awareness of his responsibilities to those on the periphery. It is a strategic choice of position, allowing him the possibilities of both intervention and distance. It sometimes leads to theoretical inconsistencies of an ironic or frustrating kind, but it also enables him to speak out and defend the rights and values in which he believes.²⁵

The student of Said must ask him- or herself with mind-boggling frequency, 'Is it legitimate to consider Said the man alongside Said the theorist, or theory divested of creator?'. The answer is, it has to be. Said obliges us to think about Carlyle and Ruskin in that way, for instance, when he writes that we feel free to examine their aesthetic theories 'without giving attention to the authority that their ideas simultaneously bestowed on the subjugation of inferior peoples and colonial territories'.²⁶ The question then becomes not so much one of the permissibility of such an approach, but of its utility. How can we get grip on Said's ideas if they are forever oscillating? He has himself claimed, of course, that some of his ideas are ungraspable (see this chapter, Footnote 1). Let us pose a simple question: is he at home in America and in Palestine? 'I'm totally at home in both places';²⁷ 'Whether I'm with Americans or Arabs, I always feel incomplete. Part of myself

²⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, pp.50-51.

²⁵ Valerie Kennedy, *Edward Said: a Critical Introduction*, p.149.

²⁶ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.12.

²⁷ Anne Beezer and Peter Osborne, 'Orientalism and After: an Interview with Edward Said', p.31.

can't be expressed.'²⁸ There is no definitive response. Similarly, we might ask: does a contrapuntal reading preclude other readings? 'I have found it a challenge *not* to see culture in this way – that is, antiseptically quarantined from its worldly affiliations – but as an extraordinarily varied field of endeavour;²⁹ 'I do believe that some literature is actually good, and that some is bad, and I remain as conservative as anyone when it comes to, if not the redemptive value of reading a classic rather than staring at a television screen, then the potential enhancement of one's sensibility and consciousness by doing so, by the exercise of one's mind.'³⁰ Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia tell us that, according to Said's writings, '[t]he consequence of a contrapuntal reading is that the novel cannot simply be restored to the canon of "great literary masterpieces". Such a reading, although it is one among many, changes for ever the way in which the novel can be read.'³¹ This is not quite what Said claims: he does contend that *Mansfield Park* cannot simply be restored to the canon 'to which it most certainly belongs',³² but he does not suggest that the way in which the novel can be read is changed forever. Indeed, this seems a bizarre claim; the possibilities for reading practice were always there. What Said urges is openness to those possibilities:

But why is this a matter of what to read and about where? Very simply, because critical discourse has taken no cognizance of the enormously exciting, varied post-colonial literature produced in resistance to the imperialist expansion of Europe and the United States in the past two centuries. To read Austen without also reading Fanon and Cabral – and so on and on – is to disaffiliate modern culture from its engagements and attachments. That is a process that should be reversed,³³

²⁸ Ferial J. Ghazoul, 'The Resonance of the Arab-Islamic Heritage in the Work of Edward Said', p.157.

²⁹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.xv.

³⁰ Ibid., p.386.

³¹ Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, *Edward Said*, p.97.

³² Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.114.

³³ Ibid., p.71.

Mansfield Park encodes experiences and does not simply repeat them. From our later perspective we can interpret Sir Thomas's power to come and go in Antigua as stemming from the muted national experience of individual identity, behaviour, and 'ordination', enacted with such irony and taste at Mansfield Park. The task is to lose neither a true historical sense of the first, nor a full enjoyment or appreciation of the second, all the while seeing both together.³⁴

These ideas are among the clearest in *Culture and Imperialism*, but Said himself considers that not all of his observations are so easily comprehended. When he claims, as he does in the epigraph to our *Summary and Conclusions*, that '[he has] always tried to develop [his] ideas further, in ways that paradoxically make them in a certain sense ungraspable and unparaphrasable' (see this chapter, Footnote 1), he is surely self-consciously disingenuous. More realistically, perhaps, *some* of his ideas are ungrasped and unparaphrased. After all, if they indeed could not be grasped or paraphrased for evermore, there would seem little point in publishing them, especially when Said also expresses a hope that 'a history of the imperial adventure rendered in cultural terms might [...] serve some illustrative and even deterrent purpose'.³⁵ His contrapuntal theory, from the evidence of the inadequate commentaries on it which have been considered, remains ungrasped by many readers, yet it is in the act of *using* it, *insofar as* one understands it, that it becomes fully formed. Said himself argued in *Culture and Imperialism*, 'I have deliberately abstained from advancing a completely worked-out theory of the connection between literature and culture on the one hand, and imperialism on the other. Instead, I hope the connections will emerge from their explicit place in the various texts, with the enveloping setting – empire – there to make connections with, to develop, elaborate, expand or criticize.'³⁶ This disclaimer, incidentally, highlights as pedantic, even as churlish, the remark of Valerie Kennedy that

³⁴ Ibid., p.116.

³⁵ Ibid., p.xxvi.

³⁶ Ibid., pp.14-15.

'his concept of contrapuntal reading is more successfully embodied in his textual analyses than in theoretical exposition'.³⁷

In its application to works by Roger Vailland and Ousmane Sembène, counterpoint has proved both its values and its demerits. Comments such as Kennedy's, above, do no more than state the obvious, but they do so at the expense of more legitimate criticism of Said, criticism which moves beyond the merely descriptive to a practical evaluation of his work.

III. Final Thoughts

An intelligent commentator on Edward Said has noted the extent to which the latter's work has entered common parlance as a byword for committed criticism and has observed the effects that this has had on the public's critical faculty:

'What do you think of Edward Said?' Like anyone writing on the Middle East – or other subjects – I have learnt that this is never an innocent question, but is always taken as a litmus test for a whole range of political and intellectual issues. The tone of voice often indicates the answer required. You are expected to have a strong position on Edward Said. [...] Students [...] now sometimes have to be bullied to study *Orientalism* critically, rather than glibly using the term as a shorthand for 'all the things we know we're supposed to be against'.³⁸

Clearly, unshakeable admiration for Said predicated on other people's unshakeable admiration for Said is not useful; yet neither should one yield to the sneering criticism exemplified by Neil McInnes, who, in his article 'Enough Said', refers with mock deference to 'Professor Said' while in the same stroke of the pen writing that Said has '[by the last chapter of *Culture and Imperialism*] quite lost the thread'³⁹ and that 'he *tries his hand*

³⁷ Valerie Kennedy, *Edward Said: a Critical Introduction*, p.107.

³⁸ Michael Gilson, 'The Education of Edward Said', *New Left Review*, 4 (2000), 152-58 (p.152).

³⁹ Neil McInnes, 'Enough Said', *The National Interest*, 33 (1993), 104-08 (p.104).

at opera' (my italics).⁴⁰ There is quite enough of substance in Said's arguments with which to engage without resorting to this kind of unscholarly barb.

The mere fact that Said has become so prolific in the last quarter of a century is reason enough for studying him, and tantamount to an obligation to put into practice his theory of counterpoint, which has, since the publication of *Culture and Imperialism*, failed to be submitted to such an evaluation. Some of what has emerged from contrapuntal readings of Roger Vailland and Ousmane Sembène could not, it may be argued, have been observed from any other reading; this was particularly true of the reading of *Un Jeune Homme seul* and *Le Docker noir*, in which the strategic silences and utterances of Eugène-Marie Favart in the former novel illuminated the behaviour of Ginette Tontisane in the latter. Equally, however, Saidian counterpoint has been shown at times to detract from texts to which it is applied in a way that makes it impossible, in some circumstances, to adopt it in lieu of a traditional comparative approach. This was especially the case in Chapter Four, *Memory*, in which the synchronic focus of counterpoint was shown consistently to impede readings of texts in which a sense of historical memory is indispensable. Even allowing for contradictions in Said's writings generally, it would be difficult wholeheartedly to adopt the contrapuntal approach when such an obstacle clearly exists. However, as we have seen, Said's approaches are often provisional (though this is not something he himself has admitted) and as evaluators of his theory of contrapuntal reading, we may allow ourselves the same luxury. The question of memory is the most challenging obstacle to counterpoint, but a view of memory as mediated through, interpreted by and presented in the contemporary moment goes some way to alleviating excessive concern about the encroachment of the diachronic upon the synchronic, and therefore about the fundamental validity of contrapuntal reading.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.105.

This project has proposed that Saidian counterpoint casts light on a more inclusive *champ littéraire* of 1950s literature than is conventionally observed. It has also advanced the view that traditional comparativism is now an approach of last resort. It has been asked, 'What is the object of study in comparative literature?'⁴¹ Saidian counterpoint yields an object of study, as by cutting across a chronological moment it makes silences audible, makes absences present and illuminates a previously concealed *champ littéraire* of the kind signalled by Bourdieu.⁴² For these reasons, it is undoubtedly worth pursuing as an alternative to comparative approaches. It is irrefutable, of course, that no chronological moment is hermetically sealed off from the rest of history, and equally undeniable that the justification for colonialism inevitably depends on memory, its salvage, and its invention. If counterpoint is to be adopted as a default literary approach, it therefore must be with a nuanced sense of the diachronic.

This new sense would be partly predicated on the issue of heteroglossia and the inability of (post)colonial texts to exclude other voices from other times or from other places. Said's concept of the 'atonal ensemble' is a useful one, reminding the reader that synthesis is frequently artificial.⁴³ Moreover, as has been shown, the question of memory as the most problematic complication of counterpoint, while not altogether answered, is partially resolved by the realisation that memories are always mediated through the present. When Said claims, 'we must take into account all sorts of spatial or geographical and rhetorical practices – inflections, limits, constraints, intrusions, inclusions, prohibitions – all of them tending to elucidate a complex and uneven topography,' again he insists upon the centrality of geography to questions of identity.⁴⁴ Said is convincing on all of these points. He has elaborated a new praxis of comparativism, and one which is less hierarchical than

⁴¹ Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: an Introduction*, p.58.

⁴² See Pierre Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l'art: genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1992).

⁴³ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.386.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.386.

traditional comparative approaches; he has provided a praxis which permits the reader to perceive and work with a hitherto insufficiently developed understanding of this specific *champ littéraire*. One certainty, however, remains: as long as an answer to temporal considerations is contrived only from a sense that historical experience is mediated through the contemporary moment, the spatial, the geographical and the rhetorical concerns so important to Saidian counterpoint can be only provisionally taken on board. By this is meant that, in terms of the structure of this project, the temporal difficulties encountered in a consideration of memory and its mediation through the present moment inevitably cast doubt on earlier studies of place and voice. This is because all three elements – place, voice and memory – are linked, and if it must be accepted that the only way to adopt contrapuntal reading as a legitimate practice, while still respecting Said's affiliative approach, is by nuancing received notions of the temporal, then the geographical and the rhetorical must in retrospect be similarly subject to redefinition, in spite of earlier impressions that contrapuntal reading 'worked' in those realms.

While the practice of contrapuntal reading is clearly useful as a theoretical tool, this evaluative project has demonstrated that its wholesale adoption will be impossible. Said has stated his aversion to 'totalistic theories of human history' (see Chapter 1, Footnote 72) but has also been vitriolic in his condemnation of '[t]he tendency for fields and specializations to subdivide and proliferate [which] is contrary to an understanding of the whole, when the character, interpretation and direction or tendency of cultural experience are at issue' (Chapter 1, Footnote 77). It is difficult to know how to proceed when astounding scholarship is so contaminated by contradiction. Said's view that 'the author's asymptotic movement towards his goal gives him an increasingly acute sense of what he is doing all the time'⁴⁵ is doubtless genuinely held, but even it reinforces the provisionality of

⁴⁵ Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, p.196.

contrapuntal reading at the expense of the concrete, albeit that the convenience of that very provisionality is a large part of its appeal.

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