3.8 POSTCOLONIALISM AND MULTICULTURALISM

Activities

(a) Compare the ways in which ethnic differences are complicated and compounded by those of gender, class and age in a couple of the following post/colonial texts: Tan and Kipling (5.2.1); Fugard (5.3.3); Achebe (5.4.5).

(b) Draw on the questions and suggestions in ‘How to practise postcolonial approaches in a multicultural context’ to help frame a response to any text which interests you in these respects. (Kipling’s Muhammed Din (5.2.1) offers a thorough work-out.)

(c) Rewrite the extract from Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe (‘I Call Him Friday’, 5.2.2) so as to explore alternative subject positions and perspectives. Consider changes of genre, medium and period, too, if you wish. Add a commentary on the problems and possibilities encountered. (Later, see Holdsworth and Coetzee – also 5.2.2 – for versions done by someone else. Again, consider what other options are still possible.)

Discussion

(i) English the subject is the place where a fundamental question about intercultural relations is being addressed.

(ii) Post-colonialism [is] an always present tendency in any literature of subjugation marked by a systematic process of cultural domination through the imposition of imperial structures of power.
   Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge, ‘What is Post-colonialism’ in Williams and Chrisman (1993: 284)

(iii) The challenge of postcolonial literature is that by exposing and attacking anglocentric assumptions directly, it can replace ‘English literature’ with ‘world literature in English’.

(iv) All of us, in some sense, belong to the diaspora; every nation is hybrid, becoming more so as migration increases.
   Dennis Walder, Post-Colonial Literatures in English (1998:199)

♦ In Salman Rushdie’s article ‘The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance’, published in The Times (UK) for 3 July 1982 (p.8), he writes of the way in which some recent literature written in postcolonial nations incorporates local languages and dialects, letting the languages interact with each other. Read the examples of
such writing in Part Five (e.g. Achebe, 5.4.5; Tutuola, 5.3.2). Consider the ways in which this is and isn’t a ‘writing back’.

♦ Is postcolonial criticism essentially colonial criticism, inescapably bound up in Western, post-enlightenment ways of thinking and being? Does it / can it escape being so?

♦ Consider English in its current form as a result of various colonisations of the United Kingdom. How have various other countries and languages contributed to current English positively and perhaps negatively?

♦ What do languages reveal about geopolitics?

♦ What are the ethical (and other) ramifications of translating literature into other another language?

♦ In 2011 there are more people learning English in China than there are in England. What impact do you think this might have on English language and literature?

♦ If you were to construct a multicultural anthology of contemporary poetry written in your country of birth, which poets and poems would you include and why?

Here are some relevant web sites:

‘Contemporary Postcolonial and Postimperial Literature in English’, by George P. Landaw et al. (n.d.) http://www.postcolonialweb.org/
