When in 1961 Alan McLeod expressed his confidence that the new Commonwealth writing would be ‘the particular interest of English scholars in the next fifty years’, he was expressing a view shared by only a handful of people, among them Norman Jeffares at Leeds University and Bruce Sutherland at Pennsylvania State College (later University) where, with their respective colleagues, they set up the first courses in Commonwealth literature on either side of the Atlantic (Bahri and Raja, *The Cambridge History*). Even though McLeod’s sentiment has been more than confirmed in the decades since his introduction to *The Commonwealth Pen*, there is much that has changed in the field of the then Commonwealth literature, not least of which has been the shift of nomenclature from that to the now more widely used postcolonial literature. Yet to view the undoubted ascendancy of postcolonial literature as merely the evolutionary consolidation of an ecumenical literary sensibility that dates from the era of the attainment of independence of formerly colonized countries is to ignore the fact that many of the tendencies and concerns central to the field today can be traced back to at least the mid nineteenth century, if not much earlier. With the consolidation of the field of postcolonial literary studies in the past forty years and its continuing interdisciplinary intersections with other interests, the need to establish the terms by which we might understand the sources of postcolonial literary history is more urgent now than ever before.

Thus we might note, for example, Hartley Dewart’s introduction to *Selections from Canadian Poets* in 1864 and George Stewart’s brief discussion in 1870 of Canadian literature in his *Literary Quarterly Magazine*. Despite writing in the context of Canada, Dewart’s opening words to *Selections from Canadian Poets* had a peculiar resonance for many parts of the colonial world:
Only the illiterate and unreflecting adopt the sentiment, that, because more books have been already produced than can possibly be read in the compass of the longest life, to increase the number of books or the quantity of literature, is undesirable and unnecessary. The literature of the world is the foot-prints of human progress, and unless all progress should cease, and mental paralysis arrest all human activity, these way-marks shall continue to be erected along the pathway of the vanishing years. Whatever is discovered as new in the records of creation, in the capacities and relations of things, in the history of the mind’s operations, or in the forms of thought and imagery by which in its higher moods soul speaks to soul, will always demand some suitable embodiment in literature.3

Both Stewart and Dewart take account of the emergence on the literary scene for the first time of poems, stories and novels written and often published not in metropolitan England but in the colony itself. As various commentators posed questions about the literary value and national significance of such new forms of writing, the directions of later postcolonial enquiries began to take shape (Siemerling, *The Cambridge History*). And it was not only in Canada that such discussion took place. Srinivasa Iyengar introduced the term ‘Indo-Anglian literature’ to account for the literary texts on the subcontinent that drew upon the dual traditions of Britain and India, whose roots lay in colonial contact and cohabitation from the early eighteenth century, and that were in their turn to feed into postcolonial writing in India (Kabir, *The Cambridge History*).4 By 1955 Aimé Césaire was to outline the earliest form of colonial discourse analysis in his monumental *Discours sur le colonialisme*. He was followed in rapid succession by Albert Memmi and Frantz Fanon in setting out a mode of analysis that was literary and poetic as well as refracting revolutionary, political and cultural ideals.5 From the Caribbean we might also note the works of C. L. R James, George Lamming and V. S. Naipaul, each of whom raised key questions about nation and narration, the struggle between universalism and localism in the literature of the newly independent nations, and the fraught intersections of the aesthetic, the ethical and the political dimensions of these new forms of writing.6 With the exception of Fanon, these thinkers were also well-known writers and in their literary works explored the ideas they gave voice to in their more critical-theoretical offerings (Savory, Murdoch, *The Cambridge History*). Even with Fanon, it may be argued that he wrote in such a highly charged poetized idiom that works such as *Black Skin, White Masks* should be productively read under the rubric of literature (Prabhu, *The Cambridge History*).7 If we add to these early strands of debate the material provided for postcolonial literary studies in slave narratives, travel writing, auto/biographies, missionary journals, photography, in the long tradition of
Asian and Black writing in Europe that dates from as early as the 1700s, and the resource matrices of orality and indigenous languages, we find that the field of Postcolonial Literature is fed by many discursive histories (Carpio, Griffiths, Holden, Mudimbe-Boyi, Esonwanne, Prasad, *The Cambridge History*). Postcolonial literature has also had a growing presence in the popular imagination outside the academy. Theatres on both sides of the Atlantic have seen musical renditions of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (directed by Tim Supple, 2003) and Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (adapted by Biyi Bandele-Thomas, 1997). Rushdie’s novel is being adapted for the big screen and will be directed by the renowned Indian filmmaker Deepa Mehta. There has also been an international audience for the politically oriented plays of Ariel Dorfman and Athol Fugard since the 1970s; Anthony Minghella’s Oscar-winning film of Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* and various postcolonial interpretations of Shakespeare and of Greek tragedies place postcolonial literary ideas on popular screen and classical stage alike. These, along with a string of Nobel, Man Booker, Commonwealth, Neustadt and Pulitzer prizes to writers as varied as Octavio Paz, Pablo Neruda, Gabriel García Márquez, Naguib Mahfouz, J. M. Coetzee, Arundhati Roy, Kamau Brathwaite, Keri Hulme, Peter Carey, Jhumpa Lahiri, Ben Okri, Nadine Gordimer, V. S. Naipaul, Kiran Desai, Wole Soyinka, Doris Lessing, Derek Walcott and others have ensured that what is normally studied under the institutional rubric of postcolonial literature has had a wide and growing readership well beyond the academy. Within the academy itself the study of postcolonial literature is marked by the publication of numerous monographs and books on the area, with publishers as diverse as Routledge, Blackwell, Rodopi and the university presses of SUNY, Minnesota, California, Manchester, Oxford, Duke, Indiana and Columbia producing a steady stream of postcolonial titles. The area is now part of the curriculum of all major universities not just in the UK, the US, Germany and France, but also growing in popularity in Italy, Spain and even in Japan and South Korea. In 2005 literary scholars from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia and Iceland formed a Nordic Network for Postcolonial Studies with generous government funding for conferences, seminars, and other forums of discussion. Apart from this there are now major scholarly journals such as *Wasafiri*, *Kunapipi*, *Interventions*, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *Callaloo*, the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* (formerly *World Literature Written in English*) and *ARIEL (A Review of International English Literature)* that are exclusively devoted to the discussion of postcolonial literature and literary theory (Raja and Bahri, *The Cambridge History*). This is not to speak of the many articles on postcolonial literature and the special issues on postcolonial topics to be found in the most important journals in the
humanities and social sciences. To highlight just one example from a non-literary field, by the end of the twentieth century Environment and Planning D: Society and Space ran regular essays on postcolonial topics. The late 1990s saw articles in the journal by Barnett, Schech and Haggis, and Best that liberally referenced the work of writers such as South African J. M. Coetzee and Australian Christopher Koch, as well as postcolonial critics Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha and Arjun Appadurai, among various others. This trend continues with several journals that do not originally address a literary constituency.

This somewhat celebratory list of institutions, writers, publishers, journals and popular productions must not obscure the controversies that have also made themselves evident periodically in postcolonial literary studies. In a 1982 New York Review of Books piece, the astute and otherwise flawless Helen Vendler criticized what she termed the ‘ventriloquism’ of Derek Walcott, future Nobel Prize laureate, whom she found ‘peculiarly at the mercy of influence’. The issue is not so much whether Vendler’s criteria of evaluation were accurate or not, as that Walcott presented a difficult case for anyone intent on unearthing the authenticity of his poetic voice. Is Walcott best understood via a model derived from T. S. Eliot’s ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, in which the contribution of a writer fits into the temple of established literary monuments by means of their subtle reconfiguration of the already established aesthetic standards? Or is he best assessed through the model of the agonistic or even adversarial ‘writing back’ that Bill Ashcroft and his colleagues made famous in The Empire Writes Back in 1989? And if that is the case, what is the usefulness of cognate terms such as adaptation, appropriation and intertextuality? (Mukherjee, Dovey, The Cambridge History). How do we account for the fluid and ongoing relationship between orality, popular culture and the more highbrow postcolonial literature of Africa, India, and Latin America that has been the assumed and thus far unchallenged focus of pedagogical interest in schools and universities everywhere? (Esonwanne, Newell, Gupta, The Cambridge History). Add to all these Amitav Ghosh’s voluble dismissal of the label ‘postcolonial’ writer, and the field shows itself to have as much controversy as it has points for celebration. It is impossible to think coherently and creatively, much less with any sense of authority, about these and other questions without a proper literary historical context in which to read and study postcolonial literature.

What, when and how is the postcolonial?

Though it is now conventional to ascribe the birth of the field of postcolonial studies to the publication of Edward Said’s landmark Orientalism in 1978, with
further insights being extrapolated from Ashcroft et al.’s already mentioned and now classic *The Empire Writes Back*, the prehistory of the term ‘postcolonial’ itself proves slightly more colourful than generally supposed. The earliest instance of the word, used in a largely temporal sense and with a hyphen, appeared in academic writing in a 1910 essay by T. W. Allen in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* with reference to some minor poets of the pre-Homeric era. In various scattered instances up to 1950 it was used in historical journals mainly with reference to early American and Latin American republics. The term’s first unhyphenated application was in language studies and appears to have been in a 1952 issue of the journal *American Speech*. That essay, by A. R. Dunlap and E. J. Moyne, dwelt on traces of the Finnish language along the Delaware River. Its first use in literary studies, again unhyphenated, appeared in 1958 in the journal *Comparative Literature* in an article by Justus M. Van der Kroef on the colonial novel in Indonesia translated from Dutch. By the 1960s and 1970s the term had shifted to the field of African and Pacific area studies where the two variant uses (hyphenated and unhyphenated) were deployed interchangeably. The term entered the comprehensive MLA Bibliography in 1967, with the *PMLA*’s list of Forthcoming Meetings and Conferences in 1981 publicizing the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies held at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand under the topic ‘Nationalism, Regionalism, and Internationalism in Postcolonial Literature’; it appeared in *PMLA* articles only in 1990. Apart from the 1990 *PMLA* pieces – an introduction to the special issue on African and African American Literature by Henry Louis Gates Jr and an essay by Debra A. Castillo on Coetzee’s *Dusklands* respectively – in each of the early published usages of the term it was deployed as a temporal marker to indicate the period after colonialism, whether this was in colonial antiquity with reference to the pre-Homeric era, or with respect to the cultural realities of post-independence America, or in relation to the end of empire in the mid twentieth century. After *The Empire Writes Back*, and vastly expanding the significance of the *PMLA* pieces by Gates and Castillo, the 1990s saw a decisive shift of usage from the merely temporal to the more discursive and theoretical, with Robert Young, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Aijaz Ahmad, Bart Moore-Gilbert, Ania Loomba, Elleke Boehmer, Ato Quayson and Achille Mbembe among others providing key parameters for debating the field. Williams and Chrisman’s *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* was the first to gather diverse essays that collectively provided a genealogy of orientations in the field, with Ashcroft et al.’s *Post-Colonial Studies Reader* following a similar format and rapidly becoming a standard text. Even though none of the early anthologies had a specifically literary historical bent, texts like them now abound in the
field and provide a plethora of viewpoints for students and scholars. Despite the
1990s marking the expansion and consolidation of the field, it is nevertheless
1983 that we must take as the totemic date for the use of the term in an
exclusively non-temporal sense in public academic debate, with the MLA panel
chaired by Gayatri Spivak, then of the University of Texas at Austin, entitled
Colonialist and Postcolonialist Discourse being the landmark event. Her co-
panellists were Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, then at the University of Sussex,
and William Pietz, who has since left academia to work in green politics and
neurocognitive training.20 Spivak, Said and Bhabha have long been hailed as
providing the most significant early theoretical ideas for the field of postcolonial
studies, so that the 1983 panel, coming half-way as it did between the publica-
tions of the late 1970s and what was to later become a veritable flood from the
1990s, acquires special significance in this regard.

When we outline the meanings of the term through current usage rather than
from the etymology of first appearance, the unhyphenated version is taken to
denote the field as an area of recognizable interests, debates and controversies.
Understood not as limited to the implicit temporal marking of the ‘post-’, but as
the sign of a critical orientation towards colonialism and its legacies, postcolo-
nial literature then designates the representation of experiences of various kinds
including those of slavery, migration, oppression and resistance, difference,
race, gender, space and place, and the responses to the discourses of imperial
Europe. It is conventionally assumed that postcolonial literature is as much a
reflection on conditions under imperialism and colonialism proper as about
conditions coming after the historical end of empires.

European expansion and the colonial world

Despite the designation of postcolonialism as a field of discursive practices as
opposed to the temporal supersession of colonialism, the collective attempt to
outline a literary history of postcolonial writing foregrounds certain concep-
tual and methodological difficulties for the elaboration of such a history. The
time and inception of the colonial and how they are understood as processes
as opposed to singular ruptures is decisive for both determining the literary
writing that is taken to fall under the rubric of postcolonialism and the criticism
that sees itself as doing justice to such writing. The process of imperial and
colonial expansion from Europe proceeded in two main phases, both of which
overlapped and were tied to the formation of the global political economy. The
first expansion of modernity (1492–1650) was set in motion primarily by the
Spanish and Portuguese crowns in the long sixteenth century, while the second
modernity (1650–1945) saw a decisive shift away from the multiple repercussions of Iberian ambition towards the interests of England, France, the Netherlands and Germany. Each historical phase of modernity also generated its own internal and external imaginative borders, such that whereas in the first modernity the expansion of Spain into the Americas coincided with the expulsion of Arabs and Jews from Spanish lands in the name of ‘blood purity’, a concomitant assumption of the heathen status of the natives the Spaniards encountered in what later became Latin America was also maintained. The second modernity, on the other hand, saw the progressive construction of the uncivilized Other (Chinese, African, Caribbean, Southeast Asian) that needed to be reformed through the light of reason and colonial governmentality.21 The imaginative connection between the two modernities of expansion is provided in the relentless stream of letters, reports, chronicles and travel narratives by Europeans from the earliest period of contact which typified the non-Europeans they encountered as pagan and strange (Griffiths, The Cambridge History).22 An example of these was to be wryly noted by Gabriel García Márquez in his 1982 Nobel acceptance speech:

Antonio Pigafetta, a Florentine navigator who went with Magellan on the first voyage around the world, wrote, upon his passage through our southern lands of America, a strictly accurate account that nonetheless resembles a venture into fantasy. In it he recorded that he had seen hogs with navels on their haunches, clawless birds whose hens laid eggs on the backs of their mates, and others still, resembling tongueless pelicans, with beaks like spoons. He wrote of having seen a misbegotten creature with the head and ears of a mule, a camel’s body, the legs of a deer and the whinny of a horse. He described how the first native encountered in Patagonia was confronted with a mirror, whereupon that impassioned giant lost his senses to the terror of his own image.23

The deadpan inflection of the ‘strictly accurate’ in Márquez’s account coupled with his nonchalant listing of what are evidently fantastical elements from Pigafetta’s journal are stylistic devices that will by now be familiar to vast numbers of readers of his novels all over the world.

As Edward Said and others were to show, what started out as chronicles, histories and travel narratives was by the eighteenth century to be transformed into Orientalism proper, possessing an internal logic and ultimately tied to issues of colonial governmentality. But the two periods are also connected through the complex forms of resistance and complicity that proliferated everywhere Europeans found themselves. Despite the significance of the early fifteenth-century intercultural encounters to the forms of postcolonialism some literary writers were to represent, it is the inception of the second
modernity, with the elaboration of variant mechanisms for the governance of different peoples under the impress of empire, that currently provides the bulk of interest for postcolonial studies. Complicated factors affected the acquisition of territories, dependencies and protectorates throughout the period of formal colonial expansion, consolidation, and demise from the mid-seventeenth century to the 1960s, when the bulk of colonized countries gained their independence. Several interrelated themes animate this period.\\(^2\text{4}\) 

As Patke adroitly shows in his chapter on ‘Postcolonial literature in Southeast Asia’, the pattern of trade-offs among European countries was central to the demographic and political constitution of that region; yet the pattern can be shown to have been endemic to the constitution of empire and colonialism in general. The British, in strong rivalry with the Dutch, established the Straits of Settlement (Penang, Singapore and Malacca) between 1786 and 1824, while also gaining increasing control over the princely states of Malaya between 1874 and 1914. The Opium Wars with China ended with the Treaty of Nanjing that effectively ceded Hong Kong to Britain. On the other hand, whereas 1783 saw Britain formally recognize the impossibility of holding on to the thirteen colonies that came to form the nucleus of the United States of America, the contours of empire were already being redrawn in that part of the world some twenty years earlier at the close of the Seven Years’ War (1756–63) that concluded in the Treaties of Paris and Hubertusburg. With these treaties Britain acquired Quebec, Nova Scotia, Cape Breton and India from France, with Florida also being ceded to them by Spain. In the Caribbean, Britain took control of Dominica, Grenada, St Vincent and the Grenadines, and Tobago. Perhaps more significantly, the loss of the thirteen colonies of the eastern coast of the United States made them unavailable for convict deportation. This recognition ultimately led to the establishment of a penal colony in Australia’s Botany Bay in 1788.

Significantly, the period from the seventeenth century was to be characterized by vast movements of populations from Europe to different parts of the world. The instigations for these movements were many, and included dire demographic transitions in Europe, acute living and social conditions due to the population explosion, and last but not least, the rabid religious persecutions and zeal for renewal that marked the Reformation and Counter-Reformation of the seventeenth century in particular. The plagues that afflicted London at various times during the 1600s (1603, 1625 and finally 1664–6) were estimated to have killed at least 100,000 people, with the Great Fire of 1666 gutting a large section of central London. The plagues and natural disasters exacerbated the religious persecutions that raged in the period, and in combination they led to a stream of migrations to the Americas and other parts of the world. While
merchants and other adventurers had been encouraging people to relocate to
the Americas to settle new lands as early as the 1530s, by the 1650s the trend
had shifted to embrace ordinary people desperate to escape the vagaries of
Europe. As A. N. Porter points out, ‘as many as 400,000 people may have crossed
the Atlantic from the British Isles during the seventeenth century, half of them
between 1630 and 1660. In these decades of religious and political upheaval,
arvests were poor and wages low; there was much unemployment and
underemployment.’

Sometimes such dispersals also became handy instruments of demographic
control, especially with regard to race, poverty, and crime. Thus whereas West
Africa had long been considered unsuitable for a penal colony in favour of
Australia, a settlement was still established in Sierra Leone for London’s ‘black
poor’ from 1786 to 1791; these were subsequently joined by black settlers
from Nova Scotia. The term Nova Scotians at the time did not refer to persons
originally from what is now a Canadian province; rather, a large majority of
those that migrated to what was subsequently to become a West African colony
in 1808 were ex-slaves from Virginia and South Carolina, who had moved
as Black Loyalists to British Nova Scotia in 1783, before leaving again in 1787
and then in 1792 because of broken promises of free land. The resolution of
issues of poverty in Britain through the movement of segments of its own
population was not limited exclusively to the plight of the black poor. As early
as 1618 a hundred ‘vagrant’ children in London were rounded up and trans-
ported to the colony of Virginia. The policy of enforced child migration
continued piecemeal throughout the colonial period, with orphaned children
being sent off to the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa and the Swan River
Colony in Australia in 1832 and New Brunswick and Toronto in Canada in
1833. An estimated 150,000 poor children were transferred in this way until
the outbreak of World War II, with at least 80,000 of these being sent to
Canada alone. Many of the children ended up in dastardly slave-like conditions
of labour servitude. The child exploitation that William Blake was to rail
against in his *Songs of Innocence and Experience* in the 1790s clearly had its
counterparts in the situation of the many children that were scattered across
country. It is a profound irony that despite the moral panic often expressed in
many parts of Europe and North America today at the prospect of immigrants
and asylum seekers on their borders, the period of extensive migrations from
Europe itself in the seventeenth century and after was marked by the same
forces that have underpinned the desperate movement of populations from the
global South to the global North from the latter part of the twentieth: spas-
modic nation states, famine and natural disasters, inter-ethnic conflicts and

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religious persecutions. These later population movements, as we shall come to see presently, have also left their imprint on postcolonial writing.

Another underlying factor to imperial expansion and colonial administration comes from the conditions that were generated for the sometimes voluntary and often forced movement of colonized peoples across states and regions all over the world. This overlapped with the European dispersals we have noted yet bore implications for the postcolonial world that were ultimately quite different from those earlier population movements. Examples can be multiplied several-fold that might serve to illustrate the effects of demographic criss-crossings and the intersections, controversies and hybrid identities that were produced by these colonial population movements. North and West African tirailleur (light infantry) regiments were to fight alongside the French in their various campaigns from as early as the Napoleonic period, with many of them progressively ending up in Paris and its suburbs to impact upon the racial character of France itself well before the wave of migrants from its former colonies were to arrive from World War II onwards. The Tirailleurs Sénégalais conscription supplied an estimated 170,000 troops for France in World War I alone, with many of them fighting and dying in Europe.28 On the other hand, in East Africa the British indentured labour policy that operated from the 1880s until the 1920s was to have a major impact on the demographic constitution of the region. The indentured labour policy was itself designed as a response to the abolition of slavery in 1833 to take account of the needs of plantation owners who now felt their plantations were under threat of collapse due to the loss of slave labour. When the policy was extended to East Africa it was mainly to provide non-African labour for building the East African railway. Of the roughly 32,000 Indian men brought in, roughly 6,700 stayed behind to work in the commercial and business sectors. After the official termination of the indentured labour flows colonial policy encouraged family reunion along with more voluntary migration from South Asia. By the end of World War II the Indians in East Africa were an estimated 360,000, with many of them firmly in control of the commercial trade in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. After the independence of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania in the 1960s the Indians had not only become a central part of the civil service administration but also considered themselves African.29 The ill-advised policy of Africanization in the region and the racially based economic policies aimed at wealth redistribution were later to lead to the migration of this population to other parts of the world, with the ascension to power of Idi Amin, the Ugandan dictator, in 1971 entrenching their violent diasporization. The conditions in East Africa speak to hybridity as much as to nationalist aspirations, which both impact upon the
ways in which we might think of the literary history of the region. Postcolonial writers that have come to write specifically about the long presence of Indians in East Africa include Shiva Naipaul, V. S. Naipaul (his brother and 2006 Nobel Prize laureate), M. G. Vassanji and Yusuf Dawood, among others. In thinking about a postcolonial literary history, it is no longer adequate to stipulate that sub-Saharan Africa is a space in which orality and literacy are the only elements that struggle for literary ascendancy. Rather, as Uzoma Esonwanne (*The Cambridge History*) shows, the very nature of our key terms has to take cognizance of the foundational nature of the mixings that have taken place everywhere on the continent.

The final animating thematic to empire and colonialism follows from the previous themes of dispersal yet takes us in a different direction. The many varied demographic and hybrid criss-crossings that took place in the period of colonial expansion also served to speak back to the colonial metropolitan centres and ultimately to affect social relations there. While several scholars have persuasively shown that ships were the travelling crucibles and micro-cosms of transnational multicultural societies, composed as they were of seamen from across the colonial world, it is the port towns in various parts of imperial metropolitan Europe that were to carry the permanent signs of these decisive mixings. In the seaports of Bristol, Liverpool and Cardiff for example, a real multicultural and transnational identity was shaped by being recursively constituted through the dynamic impact that African, Asian and Arab seamen had on the social relations of the port communities of which they were a permanent feature by the start of World War I.

The Liverpool black community is particularly interesting in this regard. Genealogically varied, this community dates from the middle of the eighteenth century. After the abolition of slavery, and beginning in the 1870s, shipping firms were to hire Africans in large numbers, particularly from the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, the Gambia, Liberia and Nigeria. Shippers in Liverpool also hired Afro-Caribbeans and Lascars (demobilized Indian soldiers), Chinese, Arab and Somali seamen. By the beginning of the twentieth century Liverpool had come to dominate the British trade with West Africa and indeed much of the colonial world. Estimates are that up to a third of the labour force on British ships from 1901 to the 1950s, or roughly 66,000 men, were from West Africa, East Africa, the Caribbean and the Arabian peninsula. Significantly, however, the numbers of coloured seamen hired by British ships changed according to the availability of their white counterparts. The two world wars of the twentieth century saw a shortage of white seamen and a concomitant rise in non-Europeans for the shipping industry. The popularity of the latter also
fell just after the wars. After World War I, the demobilized black soldiers who remained in Liverpool were to face significant racism and violence. Thus in June 1919 Charles Wooton was murdered by a white mob in Liverpool, provoking an uprising of blacks in almost all areas where they had settled. Indeed, it is this first race riot in Liverpool that was to reveal the intricate connections between domestic social relations in Liverpool and Britain and the politics of colonial governance in Britain’s colonies.

Given that the seamen in Liverpool from different parts of the empire were male, by settling down and entering different forms of relations with white women they introduced a sexual dynamic into metropolitan Britain whose results could not have been originally anticipated by colonial policy. After the 1919 riots colonial policy makers struggled unsuccessfully to accommodate the requests made by African seamen to return home with their white wives. These immediately raised unbearable headaches for the Home Office, the Colonial Office and the local colonial governments respectively, with the governments in the colonies being especially nervous about the deleterious effect that the sight of white women living in impoverished conditions with their black husbands might have on white respectability. Every imaginable effort was exerted to prevent such women from travelling back with their husbands, with sometimes damaging implications for the health of both the Africans and their white wives. It was only from the 1950s that a significant number of women began migrating from the Caribbean, Africa and Asia into Britain in general. Liverpool, and other colonial ports like it, then become significant portals through which we might examine various vectors of what constitutes Britishness as it has historically interacted with the colonial Other not just in the colonies, but within Britain itself. The residues of these dynamic processes and relations make themselves visible in the postcolonial writing that has taken shape in Europe, and they serve to show how the metropolitan centre itself becomes postcolonial (McLeod, Lennox, Thomas, *The Cambridge History*).

**Decolonization and postcoloniality**

As a general rule, when talking about decolonization, scholars in postcolonial studies conventionally refer to India, Africa and the various countries in the Caribbean that gained independence from their European overlords in the twentieth century. To view the matter from the perspective of Latin America, however, is to discover a completely different sociopolitical and cultural inflection to the processes of decolonization. A number of ‘independences’ had been unofficially declared from as early as the late sixteenth and early
seventeenth centuries, with attendant social processes that revealed the pro-
gressive weakening of links between Spain and its colonies. Despite Spain’s
best efforts, widespread smuggling and illicit trade persisted between ports;
many banned works of Enlightenment thought reached the Americas and
beyond; Hispanicizing and nativist indigenous, African and mixed-race peo-
ples wrote about and expressed membership in a broader reinvented Catholic
culture and history which not only accounted for them, but also put them in a
new moral centre prefigured by Christ’s message; while criollos who were filling
the convents and monasteries chafed under the lack of high office and con-
sequently composed histories that reimagined global visions, with themselves
as crucial harbingers and reformers of the New World. Formal decolonization
from Europe itself occurred at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when
countries in the region broke decisively away from Spain and Portugal. With
the overall process of decolonization too, the relations among European
nations had a direct impact on what unfolded in their colonies. In the guise
of strengthening the Franco-Spanish pact against Portugal, Napoleon invaded
Spain in 1807 and replaced Charles IV with his younger brother Joseph as
King José I. This marked the conclusion of the long process of Spain’s enfee-
blement at the hands of Britain and France, its main European rivals from the
1650s. The overthrow of the Spanish king led first to popular revolt in Spain
itself, with the emergence of civil and military juntas in various provinces
determinedly opposed to the French occupation. It also had a dramatic effect
on the Spanish colonies in America, who themselves saw no reason to continue
under the impress of Spain following the political disorder that was unfolding
there. Sometimes with the affirmation of loyalty to the king, and at others with
an explicitly stated desire to break away from what had long been perceived
as an inequitable structure of relations with the metropolitan centre, several
countries in the region declared their independence from Spain in rapid succe-
sion, such that between 1810 and 1925 it had lost all of the American mainland.
Cuba was to remain under Spanish rule until 1898, with the Philippines in
Southeast Asia experiencing unbroken colonization under Spain from 1521 to
1898, when it was lost to the Americans following the Spanish–American War
that had begun in Cuba but had spread to the Philippines.35

Even though the specific typology of decolonization in Latin America differed
from place to place, certain cultural factors were shared across the region that
are pertinent to reflecting upon a postcolonial literary history. The most impor-
tant was the fact that the decolonization movement was spearheaded mainly
by the criollos (American-born Europeans). Demography was firmly on the their
side. By 1800, out of an estimated total population of 16.9 million in the region,
3.2 million were whites, with only 150,000 of these being *peninsulares*, or people born in Europe.\(^{36}\) However, the demographic dominance of the *criollos* was not reflected in the distribution of administrative and religious offices. As the eighteenth century progressed Bourbon reformers from Spain adopted the policy of assigning the most important political and religious positions in their colonies to Spanish-born whites as opposed to their *criollo* counterparts. What appeared as the domino effect of the declaration of independence by several states was actually born out of the pan-American orientation of many of its *criollo* intellectuals, with inspiration being drawn from the successful American breakaway from Britain in 1775–83 and, to a lesser degree, the Haitian Revolution of 1791–1804. The emergence of political leaders such as Venezuelan Simón Bolívar and Argentinian José de San Martín, who inspired a pan-regional following in efforts to separate from Spain, was also telling. Much later, in 1959, Che Guevara and Fidel Castro were to attain iconic status within the region and well beyond as leaders of the Cuban Revolution.

Despite the fact that it was *criollos* that spearheaded formal decolonization from Spain, they were by no means alone in feeling restive under imperial arrangements. The *criollos* in their turn had been responsible for establishing and enforcing a racial hierarchy that worked to their advantage in relation to the non-white population. The racial mix in the region included the descendants of black slaves brought from Africa and the native Indians who frequently had their rightful claims to territory and farmland brutally repressed, along with the growing body of *mestizos* (mixed-race children) who complicated the racial classifications that were used to assign social and economic privilege. Many resistance movements arose that sought to challenge these hierarchies, the most famous and bloodiest of these being that of Tupac Amaru II from 1780 to 1782 in the Peruvian Andes. Tupac Amaru was a Christian who asserted his Inca lineage, spoke both Quechua and Spanish fluently, and drew on significant *criollo* as well as Indian and *mestizo* support until he was abandoned by the *criollos*. On his final defeat the bulk of his family was captured and killed, with he himself being decapitated and dismembered in the public square at Cuzco. He was subsequently to attain mythical status and was used as an inspirational figurehead for several subsequent rebellions across the region.\(^{37}\)

The fertile cultural and historical mix just described accounts for some of the most important literary tendencies to have emerged from Latin America. Whereas, as Ángel Rama instructs us, the bureaucratic processes of establishing a coherent administration in Latin America produced what he describes as the ‘*Lettered City*’ in the form of an army of scribes whose responsibility to render administrative and religious edicts from Spain engendered a vast array
of writings, the cultural and religious admixture accounts for what has come to be known as the genre of magical realism (Ortega, Natali, Siskind, *The Cambridge History*). As Siskind points out, the impact that the work of Jorge Luis Borges, Miguel Ángel Asturias, Gabriel García Márquez, Isabel Allende, Laura Esquivel and other Latin American writers have had on postcolonial and world literature is difficult to overestimate, even if the precise definition of what constitutes magical realism remains a subject of intense debate. Indeed, the question is worth posing as to why it is that despite certain telling demographic similarities between the United States and Canada, on the one hand, and Latin America, on the other, it is the latter that manages to produce the magical realism that is now taken to be one of the signature literary forms of the postcolonial world. The answer must lie in various sources, not the least of which is that unlike their northern neighbours, Latin America had sophisticated civilizations among the Mayans, the Incas and the Aztecs, to name the most well known that had to be accounted for at the Conquest and after. Criollo culture had to deal directly with these systems, both in terms of their imaginative semiotic orders and the bureaucratic apparatuses that had marked them as kingdoms and indeed empires well before the Conquest. Quite apart from providing templates for environmental consciousness and revolutionary action among the Indians, the Mayan *Popol Vuh* for example became a direct inspiration for Miguel Ángel Asturias’s *Men of Maize*, originally published in 1949. A reason for the emergence of magical realism must also be sought in the effects of the Catholic disposition towards infusing mundane objects with a sense of the sacred (bread, water, wine, fish, boat, staff, sheep), thus intensifying the practice of seeing uncanny correspondences along the reality/fantastical spectrum that was already common in Indian and African mythologies. Kenneth Mills gives credence to this proposition when he writes with respect to Andean Christianity:

The attraction of indigenous peoples in much of Andean Peru to the Christian cult of the saints was partly one of familiarity. Native Andeans had grown accustomed to the consultation of ancestral originators who asserted themselves across overlapping sacred landscapes . . . Andeans were familiar, too, with visible representations of the holy, and with ways of knowing, recalling and stirring their divinities through the performance of sacred narratives, offerings and visits to special places.

Also pertinent in this regard was the widespread use of Catholic iconography. As various scholars have shown, innumerable images of the Virgin of Guadalupe circulated as a medium for the dissemination of a cult that was to become central to Spanish American identity. Thus the representational effervescence that marked both formal and informal aspects of Catholicism was culturally
reconfigured when its symbols came to be co-mingled with African religious practices brought over by the slaves, with the syncretic admixtures thus generated coming to define the popular cultures of Latin America in santería, candomblé, Eshu and Sango cults, and local carnivals, among others. The literatures of Latin America were to be infused by this hybrid sensibility and magical realism became its mature literary expression.

Colonial space-making

Even as the inaugural time of the postcolonial is directly related to that of the colonial, it is not to be mistaken for or indeed limited to the epochal rupture signified by the dates that have conventionally framed some of the most intense debates in postcolonial studies: 1492 (Columbus’s arrival in America and the expulsion of Jews from Spain); 1603 (Lord Mountjoy’s colonization of the northern counties of Ireland); 1798–1801 (Napoleon’s Egyptian Campaign); 1791–1804 (the Haitian Revolution); 1810–25 (the independence of Spanish America and of Brazil); 1833 (the abolition of slavery); 1857 (the bloody Sepoy uprising in Cawnpore); 1884 (the Berlin Conference and the scramble for Africa); 1947 (the independence of India and its partition); 1954–62 (Algeria’s War of Independence); 1955 (the Bandung Conference); 1994 (the end of apartheid). If postcolonialism (without the hyphen) is necessarily tied to the colonial due to the simultaneous temporal and discursive framing of the field, it is the entire domain of what we might describe as colonial space-making and its after-effects in the contemporary world that gives the term its significance today. Colonial space-making does not merely designate the formation, constitution and governance of a geographically demarcated area, though that is definitely also important. Rather, colonial space-making is first and foremost the projection of sociopolitical relations upon a geographical space. Colonial space-making is ultimately about the distribution of social and political goods along axes of power and hierarchical relations and is the result of a series of interconnected and highly complex procedures and instruments. It is undergirded by assumptions, metaphors and bureaucratic practices all of which interact with a given social environment to produce hegemonic relations of power. While the hegemonic relations of power and the ideas and assumptions undergirding them may be challenged, the platforms upon which the relations take shape are as much cultural and symbolic as they are political and spatial. Colonial space-making is thus defined by sets of relations that were structurally produced and contested across a series of interrelated vectors throughout the colonial encounter. Politically, colonial space-making sought to alter already existing relations
among well-constituted local groups (such as in the case of India between the Mughals and the Hindus or in Nigeria between the northern Muslims and the coastal Yoruba and Igbo), or to reconfigure the hierarchies between indigenous and diasporic populations (such as was exemplified in Southeast Asia or Latin America). And from its inception colonial space-making involved the conscription of material human bodies into the schemas of colonial relations of production and the differential constitution of citizens and subjects.43

Everywhere colonial space-making put into play the intellectual appropriation and symbolic reconfiguration of the relationship between colonizer and colonized, and between the colonized and their natural environment. As Al-Musawi shows in relation to Egypt, for example, when Napoleon landed there in the expedition of 1798–1803 he immediately declared himself a Muslim. With the help of French scholars he took with him he helped put into circulation a highly charged and mutually reinforcing contradiction about Egypt and its relationship to France. On the one hand, the Egyptians’ religion was thought to require reform so as to incorporate them into a greater modernity. This reform implicitly demanded a respect for certain secular ideals. On the other hand, Egyptian writers were also to see the Europeans as languid and effeminate, something that was transferred to European culture itself to make it extremely seductive. The heady mix of secular idealism with erotic conceptualism was later to be taken up by Arab writers themselves, from as early as Hasan al-’Attar’s 1801 disquisition on the French, about which Muhammad Siddiq notes, ‘the young effeminate French scholars who possess and flaunt their superior knowledge, as they do their physical charms and bewitching glances, are depicted as invitingly effeminate’.44 The theme of French effeminateness coupled with the fraught modernity of Arab culture is taken up in different directions by Arab writers such as Yahya Haqqi (Haggi) in his The Saint’s Lamp, Naguib Mahfouz in Midaq Alley and Tayeb Salih in Season of Migration to the North (al-Musawi, The Cambridge History).45

As will readily be evident from several of the chapters in The Cambridge History, each stage of the production and maintenance of colonial space was met with contestation and complicated forms of subversive complicity by the colonized, with varying degrees of efficacy and success. The postcolonial nation state, the ex-colonial metropolitan centres and predatory multinational corporations are all taken to be inheritors and beneficiaries of colonial space-making in the modern world.

Bearing in mind the caveat that there were many configurations of colonial space, and that in various instances these were not mutually exclusive but were rather mixed and overlapped in specific local contexts, we can now set out a structural typology of the colonial from which to situate different kinds of postcolonial literary representations, critiques and inflections:
1. The context of formal colonialism. This involved the establishment of a bureaucratic colonial apparatus comprising legislative and administrative units, the police, censuses, and with attendant cultural instruments and institutions such as the colonial church, school, theatre, arts councils and radio stations among others. Most sub-Saharan African countries, India and Southeast Asia would fall under this rubric. Postcolonial literature was directly impacted upon by the colonial apparatus in theme, content and agonistic reference points. As Simon Gikandi notes with specific reference to Africa: ‘From the eighteenth century onwards, the colonial situation shaped what it meant to be an African writer, shaped the language of African writing, and overdetermined the culture of letters in Africa.’

2. The context of plantation economies. The transformation of plantation slavery into colonialism proper differed from place to place. However, as a general rule plantation economies were marked not by the paucity or indeed small number of subsistence or small farms, but by the fact that plantations tended to occupy the most arable and productive areas and were geared predominantly towards export. The colonial machinery that evolved in locations as different as Sri Lanka (coffee), Brazil, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic and much of the Caribbean (sugar), and Malaysia (rubber) was designed to ensure that products from such places were exported specifically to the ‘mother’ European country, and that their European rivals had limited access to them. Furthermore, all such contexts also involved the mixing of variant populations transferred from different parts of the world. The indentured labour policy we have already noted that was in place in East Africa was also turned towards transferring South Asian and Chinese labour into plantation economies elsewhere. Colonial space-making ensured various degrees of racialized social segregation such that the race relations that remained after the formal end of colonialism were often marked by animosity and ill-will. This has been evident most poignantly in places as distinct as Malaysia, Guyana, and the Dominican Republic, where the fraught nature of race relations to this day may be traced to the plantation economies and their transformations under colonialism. The literature of former plantation economies refracts these interracial and political tensions, and we read about these variously in Naipaul, Walcott, Brathwaite, Lamming, Rhys, Kincaid and others (Savory, *The Cambridge History*).

3. The context of settler colonialism. As has already been noted, from the fifteenth century Europeans had set out to different parts of the world to create settler colonies. This process especially impacted upon southern Africa, Ireland,
Canada, Australia and Latin America. Three attitudes generally marked these settler colonies. At the extreme end was an enclave and segregationist mentality, with strenuous efforts at reproducing the class privileges of the metropolitan centres while keeping the indigenous populations in various forms of servitude. The second attitude of settler colonists veered between policies of compromise or assimilation and the utter destruction of indigenous populations. Canada, Australia, South Africa and to some degree Ireland fall under this rubric. In this instance the indigenous populations (designated as Aborigines, Natives and sometimes Indians) find that the settler communities represent a continuing and unbroken paracolonial order against which they have to struggle (Heath Justice, Brewster, *The Cambridge History*). Whereas in Australia, the penal settlers from 1788 constituted the early vanguard of what was to become a largely British-dominated colony, the settler colonialism of South Africa was constituted by different waves of Europeans attempting to establish bureaucratic and administrative structures in different parts of the country, starting with the Dutch in the 1650s and ending in the Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902, the fully fledged inter-European war of control (Waines, *The Cambridge History*). Concomitantly, these different European settlers also engendered a new set of relations among the local indigenous populations, and subsequently between these populations and the large number of mixed-race children that were produced from the cohabitation of European men with local women. In all such settler colonies the descendants of European settlers developed an ambiguous love/hate relationship to the mother country. Australia, South Africa and Brazil more than Canada would come to show such strong ambivalence (especially in the field of sports), while the situation in Ireland is more complex given the waves of Anglo-Irish layerings over the Celtic indigenous populations from the seventeenth century onwards. The Anglo-Irish were in turn made the object of contradictory and often denigrating cultural and political policies by the British. Some of the most vociferous Irish nationalists came from this Anglo-Irish stock (Cleary, *The Cambridge History*).48 As noted earlier, Britain acquired territories from the French in 1763, with settler colonialism in Canada being complicated by the fact that the French Quebecois came to consider themselves as a minority historically ‘oppressed’ by Anglo-Canada and sometimes insisted on claiming a colonized status (Siemerling, *The Cambridge History*).49

4. The contexts of migration and diaspora. Apart from the European population dispersions that took place in the seventeenth century, in the period of formal colonialism diasporization and population movement were, if not deliberately intended policies of colonial governance (such as with the settling
of convicts in Australia, or the dispersal of indentured South Asian and Chinese labour, for example), then definitely an unforeseen consequence of colonial policy (such as with the 1947 Partition of India). With the rise of diaspora studies from the mid 1980s the concept of diaspora has undergone a number of conceptual changes, several of which may be related to postcolonial studies. Whereas the Jewish, Armenian, Greek and African American diasporas were taken to be the classic diasporas until the first half of the twentieth century, the term has come to be applied to various other constituencies in scholarly discourse and popular parlance. Key among changes in the concept of diaspora is the idea that it has to be understood as much in terms of the causative factors that trigger mass population movement as in the different relations that are established over time between host land, homeland and diasporic communities. Depending on the causes of diasporization myths of homeland and return may either be radically reconfigured or become progressively attenuated within the diasporic imaginary. Furthermore, the idea of difference from the host land undergoes variations and changes, with certain diasporic groups better able to become integrated into the host hegemonic culture than others. Race and ethnic difference are critical in the constitution of diasporas as are the inter- and intra-ethnic modes of spatial identification and differentiation that have informed diasporas. Thus the postcolonial literatures of Britain, Germany and France may productively be understood as literatures of their postcolonial diasporas. With the infusion of new labour populations into the historically white settler colonies of Canada, South Africa and Australia starting in the mid 1960s and intensifying from the 1980s, there has also been the production of vibrant diasporic literary cultures in such historically white settler communities, with an attendant effort at providing space for the articulation of multiple cultural identities (Murphet, *The Cambridge History*).

Because colonial/postcolonial space did not emerge all at once but developed over a long period of time each chapter in *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature* will carefully historicize what it considers to be the colonial/postcolonial for a proper account of the relevant literary history to be provided.

**Past, present and active histories**

We have so far been deploying a singular description of postcolonial literary history – a postcolonial literary history – when all that has been described thus far suggests that it would be more accurate to speak of multiple postcolonial
literary histories. And yet the singular usage is not entirely without use. For it places firmly in the foreground the need to differentiate such a literary history from that organized under the rubric of another conventionally used singularity: the nation. As Linda Hutcheon and Mario J. Valdés remind us, literary history has traditionally been used as an instrument to demarcate and contest national cultural identity and heritage. Literary history then becomes the means by which to organize perceptions of the past and, more importantly, the way that past validates or interrogates present arrangements. The claims made about the past and the designs on the present implied by any literary historicizing, however, have to be completely rethought in the context of the large-scale enterprise embarked upon in *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*. For it is clear that the mapping of literary history for individual nations (Australia, South Africa, India) is significantly different from that of a continental or pan-regional, or hemispheric entity (Africa, the Arab world, Latin America, Southeast Asia) such as exemplified in the chapters by Esonwanne, al-Musawi, Ortega, Natali and Patke respectively. The scope, scale and salience of non-literary events that impact upon the literary field are quite different as are the internal relations of elements within the literary field itself. Even within specific nations the literary history that is produced may differ according to the predominant lens that is deployed. This is aptly shown in the case of India, where Prasad, Kabir, Ganguly and Gupta all provide different standpoints from which to rethink the literary history of that country. The understanding of what constitutes the precise definition of the postcolonial and how it is dated and related to the literary historical field also raises some implications. Thus in Murphet’s account of the postcolonial literary history of Australia, he takes the innovative and counterintuitive view that even though the colonial actions of settlement took place in the eighteenth century, the full collective consciousness of postcolonialism has to be traced to the Vietnam War and how it brought hitherto disparate interests together in redefining a then fraught Australian identity. This perspective is a sharp contrast to that provided in the chapter by Brewster, where Australia’s literary history from an Aboriginal perspective places quite a different inflection on what constitutes the postcolonial writing of the country. The adoption of a thematically oriented as opposed to a nationalist or hemispheric perspective also allows for different kinds of comparative relationships to emerge. Even in such chapters, the focus on islands as a thematic lens taken by DeLoughrey for example contrasts with the more conceptual and structural perspectives of Johannessen and Li. In each instance, then, the use to which literary history is put implies what Valdés, following Paul Ricoeur, describes as ‘effective history’: 21
Effective literary history begins with the recognition that history, and literary history in particular, is effective insofar as it is used and is of use to would-be readers; it is a concept deeply aligned with the idea that we are affected in the present by our sense of the past. Thus, whenever the conceptualization of the cultural past is rigidly exclusive of multiple sectors that for one reason or another have been found wanting, our participation and contribution to the cultural present will be uninformed... Our starting point is the recognition that effective literary history like all historical writing is a construct and it is not the past relived, but effective literary history is a construct based on the problematics of the writer. There is implicit in these considerations a decisive shift from the truth-claim of knowledge to that of an invitation to continued inquiry.53

Postcolonial literary history must then be taken as an invitation to continued inquiry, partly because of the often variegated and sometimes unsettled nature of the national local contexts in which the literature is produced and consumed, and also because, in setting these against the literary history of canonical Western literature, it encourages us to rethink the key paradigms that have governed such literature. This does not mean a sceptical overthrow of concepts such as humanism, irony, or indeed genre, all of which have been central, along with others, to the constitution of the Western canon. Rather it is the rigorous interrogation of the sources and historical dispositions of the main assumptions of the writing of literary history that are raised both individually and collectively by these two volumes.

Given the range of perspectival modulations required for the detailing of a postcolonial literary history, the term 'literature' is used here in an expansive sense not limited exclusively to belles-lettres. While the traditional genres of poetry and prose have specific chapters dedicated to them (Prasad, Ramazani), with extensive discussions of drama in several individual chapters (e.g. Mukherjee, Murdoch, Esonwanne), all contributors pay attention to the full range of literary expression. However, given that other genres such as missionary writing, slave narratives, travel narratives, autobiography, film and popular literature have all had an impact on the constitution of postcolonial literary studies, chapters on these areas have been included as a reflection of the new tendencies in the field (Mudimbe-Boyi, Carpio, Griffiths, Holden, Dovey, Newell and Gupta). Several chapters explicitly address generic ambiguity as well as questions pertaining to the interface between local, indigenous writing traditions and the self-evidently European literary tradition, and one chapter deals exclusively with the character of postcolonial responses to the Western canon (Johannessen, Esonwanne, Mukherjee). With the existence of various non-europhone languages and literary traditions that inarguably provide a...
viable creative resource matrix for postcolonial writing, other chapters acknowledge and contextualize the effect of local languages on such writing along with the effects of English as a global language (Ganguly and Peterson, Mazzon). Chapters such as those on ‘Primitivism and postcolonial literature’ (Li) and ‘The narrative forms of postcolonial literature’ (Fludernik) break new ground by exploring fresh themes that are not only historical but also make a direct appeal to the cognate narrative disciplines of history and anthropology. The chapters on literary prizes and on journals and institutions by Ponzanesi and Raja and Bahri provide direct links between literary history and literary sociology for understanding the institutional foundations of the field within academia.

Volume I is largely composed of national, hemispheric or geographically oriented chapters. The obvious exceptions to this general rule are the chapters on slave narratives, travel writing, missionary writing and auto/biography which between them cover genre-specific topics of overall significance to the field. The chapters at the end of Volume I on postcolonial writing in Britain, France and Germany serve to problematize any conception of postcolonial literary history that marries it exclusively to the context of ex-colonies. As has already been noted, it is evident that the literary production of metropolitan Europe has been thoroughly postcolonialized precisely because of the dialogical processes of colonial space-making and the direct impact these have had on the colonial metropolitan centres through the processes of diaspora and migration.

Volume II, on the other hand, comprises mainly thematically oriented as opposed to hemispheric or geographically inflected chapters, with the chapter on ‘Religion and postcolonial writing’ by Jamie Scott for example performing a wide-ranging and exemplary overview of how to generate a postcolonial literary history by focusing on a particular theme. However, the rationale of The Cambridge History is not to provide an encyclopedia of themes or geographical subjects, but rather to highlight the most productive ways in which literature in the field has been produced and may be discussed.

Postcolonial literary history: geographic coevalness or implicit hierarchy?

Even though it is ultimately literary history that unifies all the chapters, given the mixture between chapters with a decidedly more geographical focus (nation, continent, or hemisphere) and those with a thematic emphasis questions may arise about the implicit prioritization of certain geographical areas as opposed to others and how this is to be distinguished from previous anthologies in the field. Why Africa ahead of the Caribbean and Latin America?
Secondly, the thematic as opposed to exclusively chronological focus may be thought to generate a number of gaps if not outright confusion. Why a chapter on orality in African literature and not anglophone African literature in general? Why the transregional ‘Postcolonialism and Arab literature’, in contrast to the nationally oriented chapters on postcolonial literature in South Africa and India? A collection as wide-ranging as *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, which is both global and multifaceted in scope, raises a particular set of issues that are quite different from those raised by collections that might be focused exclusively on the literature of a particular country, continent, or region. To this specific set of questions we turn in conclusion.

There are two contradictory principles that have underpinned anthologies or collections in the field of postcolonial literature and of the Commonwealth literature that came before it. The first is the principle of coevalness, and the other is that of an implicit hierarchy among the regions that provide the literature. The principle of coevalness could very easily be defended under the rubric of Commonwealth literature, since the term Commonwealth itself was inherently a convenient political as opposed to literary label. It was rare that any justification was sought in the early anthologies for bringing together literature from Africa, South Asia, the Caribbean, Australia and Canada between the covers of a single volume. And yet at the same time there was an unacknowledged genuflection towards the idea of a hierarchy among the regions. In this implicit hierarchy, Africa, South Asia and the Caribbean took priority over Canada and Australia. In such schemas Latin American literature did not appear at all, partly because it was not part of the Commonwealth and partly because it entered into the frame of postcolonial literary study in translation. The combination of coevalness and implicit hierarchy is to be seen in every literary anthology in the field we can identify. Take for example the 1996 *Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literatures in English* edited by John Thieme.54 The volume opens with literatures from the various regions of Africa, before turning to Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, New Zealand and the South Pacific, and South Asia in that order and ending finally on the subject of transcultural writing. Anthologies of a critical-theoretical orientation have a different and more comparative approach to the task of discussing postcolonial literature, but even these betray the two principles outlined. Thus in Dennis Walder’s more literary historical offering *Post-Colonial Literatures in English: History, Language, Theory* (1998) there is no attempt to even devote any special sections to Canada and Australia, instead opening on West African texts and then going through texts from India, the Caribbean and South Africa in that order.55 Are these earlier anthologies less useful because of the unresolved nature of the two principles of
organization? That does not appear to be so, the reason being that the contradiction between the two principles of coevalness and geographical hierarchy is inherently irresolvable once we move outside a specific country or geographical region to embrace a more global and comparative approach to the field.

In fact, behind the principle of implicit hierarchy in Commonwealth and postcolonial literary studies is the unexamined idea that, to put it formulaically, Kenyan literature is more postcolonial than say Irish or Canadian literature. This is centrally because of race and how this category is thought to cross-articulate with questions of historical oppression. Thus, sticking with our earlier examples, Kenyan literature is considered intrinsically more postcolonial than say Canadian literature, given that the first was produced as a response to a rabid and oppressive settler-cum-administrative colonialism and is from the Third World, while the second draws from the dynamics of settler colonialism and is obviously centred in a developed economy. Despite recognizing the value behind such thinking, it is important to point out that given what we noted earlier about the variegated forms of colonial space-making and the cross-illumination that a comparative approach provides, it would be a mistake to retain the implicit form of hierarchy in anthologizing the field without some further and robust justification. In fact, it might even be ventured from a historical and comparative perspective that Irish and Indian literature, on the one hand, are more postcolonial than Nigerian and Canadian literature, on the other, due to the much more complicated character of colonial space-making that affected the first two. This is by no means an uncontroversial proposition, and yet the opportunity to read about the literature from these places from a comparative and literary historical perspective is one that will help answer many questions that have remained silent or poorly articulated in postcolonial literary studies.

As each chapter has a clear chronological framing relevant to the specific topic (geographical or thematic) at hand, it is hoped that readers will finally be able to check facts on specific authors and literary tendencies, or to trace relevant details of stylistic and thematic developments and influences over a period of time, or to explore the often neglected relationships between specific authors and texts and other neglected features of their contexts while also getting a deeper grasp of what constitutes postcolonial literature and literary history. Our collective hope is that working out a system of concepts and ideas that are both historiographic and rhetorical in classrooms that have long been challenged to take true account of the fertile offerings that have come from the postcolonial world, The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature will inspire a more informed and sophisticated engagement not just with its literature, but
with the very imaginative universe that informs our yearnings today. To misquote Shakespeare, to understand is prologue.

Notes

Introduction: postcolonial literature in a changing historical frame

20. I would like to say a special thanks to David Chioni Moore and Elizabeth DeLoughrey, with both of whom I served on the MLA Postcolonial Committee in 2007, for sharing so generously of the research they and earlier members of the committee had done on the etymology of the term. Moore suggested 1983 as a totemic date in his introductory remarks at the 2007 MLA panel on ‘Postcolonial Studies Since 1983: Reflective Assessments’.
25. Porter, Atlas, p. 34.
49. See also Pius Adesanmi, ‘Nous les colonisés: reflections on the territorial integrity of oppression’, *Social Text*, 22 (2004), 35–58.