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New Soundings in Postcolonial Writing: Critical and Creative Contours

Essays in Honour of Bruce King

Introduction

Janet Wilson and Chris Ringrose

The title of this volume embraces the idea of ‘new soundings’ in its double meanings: ‘soundings’ in the sense of exploratory fathoming and plumbing of the ocean depths, and ‘soundings’ in the contemporary sense of sonar registrations of the seabed, made in order to hear and notate the invisible, inaudible life and activity below the surface. The metaphoric connotations of depth charges in the former usage point to the various forms of mapping, of the discoveries and expansions associated with the opening up of what were once conceived as distant lands, as well as the hazards and betrayals entailed in such colonizing. ‘Soundings’, when used in the sense of registering sound shapes and effects, implies metaphorically those acts of communication, whereby the newly charted, discovered worlds transmit their cultures, heritage and voices, receiving in return the mixed messages of those who discover and colonise. For such processes of settlement and entrenchment are fraught with contestation, involving new contact zones, encounters with Indigenous peoples, recognition of racial and ethnic differences and ideological reassessment of the nature of civilisation.

The subtitle’s reference to ‘contours’ invokes the new cultural frames that emerge from such forms of contact, and the organising, reshaping and syncretising of what Homi Bhabha has called the ‘spaces between’¹ cultures that contact/collision provokes. Such new cultural landscaping can be found in the critical and creative writing of the last half century that embodies as well as engages with issues of the postcolonial. The subtitle also refers to the critical essays, poems and stories collected in this volume, all of which are associated with the discipline of postcolonial studies, and might be seen as products of this broad field. Just as the critical contours seek to debate and give wider visibility to postcolonialism’s major contestations, so the book’s creative contours showcase some of the movement’s significant themes and imaginative configurations .

¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994): 1-2.

Both tropes -- of sounds/soundings and contours/contouring – are therefore also potent metaphors for the aspirations of the discipline of postcolonial studies and its predisposition to an often utopian newness. This can be seen for example, in the way the very term ‘postcolonial’ constitutes a recasting of earlier disciplinary terminologies for studying the cultures of colonial/decolonised nations: Commonwealth literature, new literatures in English, new national literatures, world literature written in English. Matching this capacity to be represented under different banners has been the discipline’s vigorous foray into this terrain of intellectual, critical and literary investigation by adopting theoretical paradigms and disciplinary perception offered by, for example, feminist studies, deconstruction, and poststructuralism. Postcolonialism’s capacity to plunge into the depths, to evacuate, recuperate, re-canonise, and to present its new hearings/bearings within the academy has always been marked. Furthermore, its reflexive self-critical edge, and capacity to accommodate to new and emerging disciplines like diaspora studies, globalisation, trauma studies and queer theory, and its refusal to ossify into a singular, monolithic discourse, has given it an extended life and energy.² These twists and turns, contradictions and complexities are touched on in many essays in this volume, which testify to the project of re-examining the literature and cultures of decolonised nations under the disciplinary banner of postcolonial studies

Furthermore, the linked metaphors implied in the title to this volume: of depth charges, new and rediscovered voices, and reshaped critical and creative contours, are apt in view of the remarkable contribution to the understanding of postcolonial literatures (and broader contribution to the study of World Literature) of Bruce Alvin King, in whose honour these essays have been brought together. In a career which has spanned many phases, King first engaged with the postcolonial in its earlier incarnation as Commonwealth Literature through studies at the University of Leeds, when he arrived there from the USA as a doctoral student. His time at Leeds lasted from the mid 1950s to 1960, commencing a long-term relationship with the UK and with British intellectual life. There he came into the orbit of the multi-talented, influential academic A.N. Jeffares, who had introduced into the Leeds School of English programmes in American Literature, Anglo-Irish Literature and Commonwealth Literature (King remarks that the latter two “were practically [Jeffares’s] inventions”). Jeffares’s encouragement is described in an article King published in 1989, “How with the Help of Derry

² On various predictions of collapse and exhaustion, see Patricia Yaeger, "Editor's Column: The End of Postcolonial Theory? A Roundtable with Sunil Agnani, Fernando Coronil, Gaurav Desai, Mamadou Diouf, Simon Gikandi, Susie Tharu, and Jennifer Wenzel," *PMLA* 122.3 (2007): 633-51. See also *Rerouting the Postcolonial: New Directions for the New Millennium*, ed. Janet Wilson, Sarah Lawson Welsh & Cristina Sandru (London: Routledge, 2010): 1-13.

Jeffares, I (I am an American) Became a Commonwealth Literature Specialist.”³ It follows that King’s work can be described as a series of sounding in exploring postcolonial writings, through the recuperation of little known authors and under-researched topics, and a testing of the boundaries between these and other forms of writing -- in an extended engagement with the complex contours of this type of literature, its critical and theoretical frameworks, and the shaping of a new canon.

In his long career, King has covered all the major literary genres as a critic, including biography and, most recently, autobiography. Early on, he specialised in drama and theatrical traditions -- his first monograph was on the plays of Dryden -- and with his talented wife and collaborator, Adele King, published ground-breaking editions of literary-critical work in this field, notably the *English Dramatists* and the *Modern Dramatist* series. The publication in 1977 of a second monograph on the poetry of Andrew Marvell intersected with King’s emerging interest in the geographical diversity of World Literatures in English as it was then called (in 1974 he edited and introduced *Literatures of the World in English*). From the outset, then, his research into English literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries allowed him to bring to bear a breadth of understanding in his investigations of the new literatures in English. With a continuing focus on poetry, he then moved to topics such as modern Indian poetry and the work of Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott, who was to be the subject of his exhaustive 2000 biography *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life*. In turning to postcolonial literature, King used his wealth of expertise in criticism derived from his background in seventeenth-century writing, as well as a first-hand understanding of diverse ex-Commonwealth cultures (New Zealand, Caribbean, African and Indian). His knowledge of Indian poetry in English, West Indian literature and white settler fiction, for example, reflects in part his peripatetic travels as a scholar, as well as the flexibility of his cultural antennae. His fundamental contribution to this developing field of study, born out of this geographical and critical range, is one that, as he says in the opening pages of *New National and Postcolonial Literatures: An Introduction* “was brought about by the new political and economic importance of former colonies after the Second World War and the rapid spread of communications and international business during the last third of the twentieth century.”⁴ *New National and Postcolonial Literatures* is one the two “landmark books” (as Marta Dvorak calls them in her contribution to this volume) by Bruce King. (Dvorak also instances *The Internationalization of English*

³ This essay along with others by Bruce King will be published by Ibidem Verlag (in conjunction with Columbia University Press) in 2016 in a collection titled *From New National to World Literature: Essays and Reviews*.

⁴ Bruce King, ed., *New National and Postcolonial Literatures: An Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996): 3.

Literature 1948-2000 [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004], a text that is also highly thought of by Dr James Acheson, a modernist scholar who researches the contemporary novel).⁵

Bruce King, like other academics of his generation, straddles the boundaries of period and discipline. Born in Philadelphia in 1933, he received his BA from Columbia University in 1954, his MA from the University of Minnesota in 1956 and his PhD from the University of Leeds in 1960. As his scholarly career developed, King engaged with the challenges of the political, ideological and aesthetic qualities of the postcolonial writing that had begun to penetrate the literary market place in the 1970s and which, since Salman Rushdie's landmark winning of the Booker Prize for fiction in 1981 with *Midnight's Children*, has become increasingly valued and accepted into the western canon. His change of direction was partly instigated by his varied academic appointments, with spells of residence in countries including (among others) the USA, Great Britain, Nigeria, Italy, New Zealand, France, Israel, India, Germany and Canada, that allowed him to make life-long friends and colleagues throughout the world, and to experience first-hand the living environments of those cultures about which he writes. Although such mobility has taken him out of the academy for periods, and, as he suggests in his unpublished autobiography, shows him not always fitting into university life, it has given him an invaluable vantage point from which to launch independent critique. Indeed, his willingness to show impatience with posturing and inadequate scholarship, his candour and intellectual directness, have made him an invaluable book reviewer and cultural commentator.

When applied to biography, these qualities have made him an irreverent and provocative researcher, as is evident in his interpretations of the lives of key twentieth-century literary figures such as V.S. Naipaul and Robert Graves, as well as Derek Walcott. The biographies are remarkable for their frank appraisals of their subjects, incisive literary analysis, and understanding of what it takes to live a successful literary life in the twentieth century. They are also rooted in Bruce King's personal friendships with the three subjects under scrutiny and with those who knew them. When writing on issues of current concern in postcolonial studies, including the complexities of black British fiction and Pakistani writers' views of the United States, he has been equally incisive. These engagements in political and ideological issues, combined with sharp critical comment, make his frequent reviews and review articles a source of informed and often controversial opinion: on occasion reviews published in the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* (formerly *World Literature Written in English*) to which he has been a regular contributor since its first publication in 2005, have triggered wider debate and comment. Further, the eclecticism of King's writing and reviewing shows him as equally drawn to the demotic,

⁵ Email communication with co-editor, Janet Wilson.

marginal and off beat as to the mainstream and canonical, making the one resonate with the other as he identified the overlapping cultural modes, discourses, ideologies and political issues (such as freedom of speech, diaspora, translation, literary heritage, aesthetic orientation) by which they speak.

The exceptional range of King's scholarly interests, and his mastery of different forms of academic and life writing, are reflected in the essays and creative writings in this book. The offerings of former colleagues and associates from a number of universities, as well as of poets and writers whose work he has written on, they collectively testify to the admiration and respect in which he is held in the world of postcolonial writing. The essays range across Bruce King's writings and domains of interest, either engaging with his work directly or building upon it as a starting point, while the poetry frequently shows a more personal, direct engagement with King the man, critic and writer.

The first five essays in this collection are on topics relating to the Caribbean, with a strong focus on the oeuvre of Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott, and testify to King's extensive contribution to Walcott's critical reception, through essays on his drama and poetry as well as his commanding 2001 biography. Michael Dash, in "A Perpetual Surprise: East Indians in the West Indies" references the connotations of surprise and renewal implied in this collection's title, and its subject recalls Dipesh Chakrabarty's comment that "newness enters the world through acts of displacement."⁶ Dash explores Derek Walcott's representation of personal and geographical dislocation caused by transnationality and diasporic identity and finds that his treatment of the 'East Indian' has affinities with the insights of Mayse Condé, Earl Lovelace and V.S Naipaul. In a reading of the poem "The Saddhu of Couva" from *The Star-Apple Kingdom*, (1979) Dash shows how the portrait of the Saddhu within the cane fields of rural Trinidad culminates in a "moment of fiery renewal" that transcends the elements of anguish and bewilderment in the 'East Indian' experience: "ultimately Walcott is attempting to create a fragile sense or order, an imagined Creole community, from a history of privation and displacement." Dash is able to show how this poetic meditation upon creolisation is linked to Walcott's Nobel acceptance speech, and his arrival at a sense of "elation [...] not loss." Robert D. Hamner, in contrast to Dash's focus on a single poem, ranges across Derek Walcott's output to suggest how insistently the father-figure recurs in his writing as a site of negotiation and inspiration. The death of Walcott's father Warwick in 1931, when the poet and his twin brother were only a year old, is the starting-point for a poetic journey and return that employs the theme of the absent father through negotiations with Joyce, Homer and *Hamlet*,

⁶ Cited in Elleke Boehmer and Rosinka Chaudhuri, eds. *The Indian Postcolonial* (Routledge: London, 2011): 166.

and that informs Walcott's poetry from *25 Poems* (1948) to *The Prodigal* (2004). Hamner traces a rich trajectory for Walcott's poetry, which takes in his father's paintings, ancestral roots, the lure of Europe and America, and what Walcott calls "my contradicting colour." Fractured paternity proves to be a motif that Walcott deploys with great skill; as Hamner puts it:

He has delved into his divided origins, transported himself to the parts of the world that contribute to the culture of his native islands [...] in order to restore the authenticity of a Caribbean sense of being. The absence of his father is emblematic of rich but illusive roots -- be they historical, social, racial, or artistic.

Bruce King has long displayed on his wall a painting by Derek Walcott that the writer gave him, which demonstrates Walcott's skills in draftsmanship, illustration and the subtleties of colour. John Thieme's concerns, like those of Hamner and Dash, overlap with Bruce King's abiding interest in The Caribbean's greatest poet, but he emphasises the wider effects on his work of his visual sensibility in examining "'The Art of Seeing': Painting and Metaphor in Derek Walcott's Poetry." Drawing on a variety of poems from throughout Walcott's career, including *Tiepolo's Hound*, Thieme shows how that work links Walcott's "own enduring interest in pictorial art with reflections on Impressionism, the situation of the Caribbean artist and the relationship between art and lived experience, exploring the difficulty of recapturing specific visual experiences in words." Thieme's essay develops a sense of Walcott's fascination with painting and the pictorial arts as a "different art of seeing."

The last two essays in this section consider the construction of the Caribbean as both geographical location and cultural entity. Kathleen Gyssels sees it as a site of suffering, linked to two other locations that resonate for Bruce King: the United States, where he was born, and France, where he now lives. Gyssels asks probing questions about the theorisation and representation of relationships between Jewish persecution and suffering and the Atlantic slave trade, ambitiously examining the literary ramifications of "the troubled history of Black-Jewish relations." In doing so, she documents the extensive literature that explores connections between the experience of the descendants of Africans transported to the New World, the survivors of the World War II camps, and the post-war Jewish generation, as they attempt to come to terms with the past and "resist amnesia." Gyssels uncovers a surprising number of "joint ventures," whereby African American and Caribbean writers have linked Jewishness and blackness. From W.E.B. Dubois, Langston Hughes and Aimé Césaire to Edouard Glissant, Paule Marshall and Derek Walcott, she finds a wealth of writing which shares common experiences of deportation and dispossession, disruption and dislocation. Her analysis of the remarkable novel *Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes* by Simone and André Schwarz-Bart, with its recurring links between the imaginaries of post-war Jewish and African Diaspora conditions -- the

tropes of No Return, and the Middle Passage or transportation -- persuasively argues for the brilliance of its portrayal of the elderly Martinician protagonist Mariotte. Finally in this section, Bruce King's profound interest in Caribbean Writing inspires John T. Gilmore's account of "The Rock: Island and Identity in Barbados," which portrays the island's historical inaccessibility and its development as a mercantile entrepôt. Gilmore's evocation of the relative isolation of Barbados from the other islands in the Caribbean captures the ethos of Barbadian life, and his concise account of its geography and economy allows him to close with some speculations on the perceived character of the islanders – their reputed conservatism, their engagement with migration, and their sense of allegiance to their "small island."

Moving to the theme of Caribbean migration to the United Kingdom and to issues of postcolonial language in post-millennial black British fiction as it crystallises "problems of communication and identity," Bénédicte Ledent examines Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) and Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004). Language in these novels is often used in polysemous, alchemical ways to help shape human relations and define Englishness. Nevertheless, Ledent concludes, they differ: in *Small Island* Englishness emerges from a process of "occasionally painful mutual adaptation and compromise," while in *White Teeth* Smith goes further in suggesting that Englishness might express "the human diversity at the heart of contemporary London." Like Ledent, Geetha Ganapathy-Doré considers the themes of migration and relocation of diasporic communities in England. Her subject is Michael Ondaatje's sixth novel, *The Cat's Table*, a text whose locations in Sri Lanka, Canada and England aptly mirror and reflect the restless relocations of Bruce King that have stimulated and inspired his scholarship. Ganapathy-Doré's extended analysis of both the novel and Ondaatje's literary practice shows how it exemplifies the mutation of what Salman Rushdie has called the "decentred, transnational, interlinguistic and transcultural postcolonial novel" into a contemporary novel. The text's treatment of space and time, as experienced within the ship the *Oronsay* which, in a three-week journey, takes the young protagonist Michael from Colombo to Tilbury, becomes an extended and vividly-located meditation on 'passage' and identity in migration. On board the ship, power struggles related to gender and class are enacted. In the recreation of the journey, which resembles one which he himself undertook as a child, Ondaatje tests the boundaries between truth and lies, biography and fiction. Ganapathy-Doré reveals the novel to be a multilayered meditation on the paradoxes of migration, on authorial perspective, and on novel-writing as therapy.

Three essays follow which focus on South East Asian writing in English, a geographical and cultural terrain in which Bruce King's contributions seem to have been most welcome. King's early groundbreaking work in bringing Indian poetry to the attention of European and American readers took him to India in 1983-84, courtesy of a ten-month fellowship from the American Institute of Indian Studies, and in particular to Bombay, where he met, among other writers, Arun Kolatkar. He has since said that:

to have an idea of the variety, excitement, and vitality of Bombay at this time, read Arun Kolatkar's great *Kala Ghoda* sequence of poems with its delight in the ordinary, the living, the absurd, the incongruous, including the city's history, its dogs, its street lamps, its food vendors, its traffic, monuments, languages, improvisations.

Bruce King is an avowed admirer of Laetitia Zecchini's brilliant scholarship and her role in writing about Kolatkar and introducing his work to new audiences. For that reason it is doubly appropriate that her essay should be on "A Message in a Bottle": On the Pleasures of Translating Arun Kolatkar into French." Zecchini emphasises the importance of Kolatkar's inclusion in Gallimard's prestigious poetry series Poésie/Gallimard, and conveys the excitement and creativity of her two-year collaboration with Pascal Aquien in preparing the volume for publication. Her essay memorably conveys, too, the demands made on her as translator who is a lover of the poetry with which she is entrusted: "the struggle to breathe life into a poem, to be true to the 'tone' or 'spirit' of the poet, to transpose a voice and a rhythm in another language." She goes on to give authoritative insights into the form and content of Kolatkar's verse: its "anti-spectacular, anti-style idiom," and its life-affirming attention to detail, as well as its fabled allusiveness to cultural references from Charlie Chaplin and rock'n'roll to Nadezhda Mandelstam. Muneeza Shamsie draws on her wide and discerning knowledge of the world of Pakistani fiction to portray a "golden generation" of novelists in "Pakistani English Novels in the New Millennium: Migration, Geopolitics and Tribal Tales," and indirectly pay tribute to Bruce King (whom she cites here), himself an astute reviewer and critic of this genre. Shamsie does justice to the diversity of such writing since 2000, and to the way it has become a major force in world literature. With reference to Nadeem Aslam, Mohsin Hamid, Uzma Aslam Khan and Kamila Shamsie, she shows how novelists have been searching and courageous in analysing the brutal realities of life in Pakistan in an era of geopolitics, whilst others like Mohammed Hanif, Musharraf Farooqi, Moni Mohsin and Maha Khan Philips have also deployed political and social satire. The novels of expatriate Nadeem Aslam deal with religious extremism, while the evocation of experience of the USA in the aftermath of 9/11 has meant that fine novels by Hamid, Shamsie and H.M. Naqvi have attracted a global readership. As Muneeza Shamsie, points out, the conflict between a closed orthodoxy and intellectual questioning has been intrinsic to Muslim history, and its continuation in Pakistan has proved fertile ground for

contemporary fiction. A number of novelists have set out, like Kamila Shamsie in her third novel *Kartography* and Sorayya Y. Khan in her debut novel *Noor* (the only Pakistani English novel to graphically depict the 1971 carnage in East Pakistan), to trace the human consequences of traumatic recent events. In evoking the stylistic originality (and sometimes the stylistic sumptuousness) of recent Pakistani fiction, as well as its dynamic engagement with troubled but inspiring times, Muneeza Shamsie's essay is an invaluable brief guide to a remarkable generation of writers. Marta Dvorak's discussion of "Intertext, Architext, and Métissage: Anita Desai's Negotiation of Cultural Gaps" is inspired by Bruce King's work on intertextuality, polyphony, language and performance, and also by his 1985 essay on Anita Desai, "*In Custody: A Chekhovian Comedy.*" Dvorak emphasises Desai's extensive exploration of creolisation its widest and most interesting sense, relating it to Gérard Genette's notion of "architextual relations", as well as Julia Kristeva's suggestion that poetic language should be read "at least double." What emerges from Dvorak's reading of *In Custody* is Desai's dazzling handling of generic mix (including burlesque, the campus novel and the *fabliau* tradition), her ironic inversion of expectations, and her ability to bring different cultural and national traditions into play. Dvorak draws convincing architextual connections between Desai's novel and Chekhov's plays, which lead her to broader conclusions about the nature of cultural differences, and the way they "have always been negotiated and translated -- as literature and, more visibly, architecture and the visual and decorative arts testify -- increasingly so in contemporary global society."

The final section brings together three essays which refer to culture and politics in New Zealand Aotearoa and the Pacific, with reference to canonical New Zealand/Aotearoa writers like Bill Manhire and Greg O'Brien, the Samoan Albert Wendt and the Maori Witi Ihimaera. The Kings spent some time in New Zealand in the 1980s when he was Professor of English at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, and in recent years, despite never returning, he has renewed his connection with the country by reviewing new fiction as it has appeared.

In his essay, "Fantasy, Myth and the Pacific World: Albert Wendt's *The Adventures of Vela*," Jean-Pierre Durix examines the work of Albert Wendt, and in particular his intriguing text *The Adventures of Vela*, which combines fiction, metafiction, poetry and storytelling whilst experimenting with typography and layout. Durix's essay traces the intertextual elements in *The Adventures*, its homage to earlier writers and to Wendt's friends, and the way it "mixes the most personal [of materials] and the wildest form of fantasy". He also shows how the picaresque elements in this verse novel blend Rabelaisian humour and satire with Samoan myth, and how *Vela*'s adventures are used to criticise aspects of Samoan society whilst parodying the interventions of European colonisers. The essay shows

how Wendt's project emphasises the connections between postcolonialism and postmodernism, in the sense that it seeks to revive elements from a tribal past, but also engage with relativism, hybridity and cultural change. With its blend of embedded story-telling, oracy, and its mixture of Polynesian and Christian references, *The Adventures* alternates between mock heroic passages and highly poetic mythic evocations, to bridge the gaps between the different elements of creation and illuminate a world obsessed with its own destruction.

The Adventures dramatises the way in which the goddess Nafanua has had to compete with westernisation and the arrival of the Christian God, but is iconoclastic in suggesting that the Samoan Gods' morality can sometimes be suspect. In Wendt's writing, myth meets modernity, but the parallel worlds he creates are not designed to convert his readers to the ancient religion. Instead, the old *atua* play their part in a work that presents "parallel modes of existence slightly askew in relation to everyday reality." Durix portrays Wendt as politically-aware in his depiction of the development of a native form of capitalist Christianity, but also aware of the dangers of nostalgia.

In "“Read Instructions and Shake Carefully Before Use’: Fragmented Wholes in Narratives by Bill Manhire and Gregory O’Brien”, Gordon Collier analyses two New Zealand fictions from the late 1980s: Manhire's *The Brain of Katherine Mansfield* and O'Brien's *Diesel Mystic*. Both texts raise questions about the relationship between modernism, postmodernism and realism, and the viability of the distinction between the local and the parochial. The discussion starts from an analysis of three Manhire poems, which Collier sees as the verbal equivalent of semi-abstract painting, and as original explorations of New Zealand contexts and experiences. The fifty-chapter novella *The Brain of Katherine Mansfield*, with its intertextual play, and blend of New Zealand localities and references and global locations and mass culture, hinges partly on "the anxious quest of a small nation for worldwide recognition." Germanic-Scandinavian sagas co-exist here with New Zealand iconography and road movies. The story, in fact, "consists of mere fragments, albeit well-rounded ones, which have to be teased out of the various narrative strands" that both confirm and question the search for a New Zealand identity. Collier shows how *Diesel Mystic* uses a similar combination of marked regional bias (a brief stretch of road, river, and estuary northwest of Auckland in O'Brien's case) and proliferating global references, and demonstrates the way *Diesel Mystic* works as magical realism. In both books, "local history is swiftly dehistoricised into myth and contradiction," as the writers create a New Zealand that is local but far from parochial, and 'real', if not realistic.

Taking his cue from the powerful French feature film *Indigènes*, which traces the lives and deaths of a group of North African soldiers in World War II, Geoffrey V. Davis's essay "“The Biggest

Adventure': Indigenous People and White Men's Wars" explores texts by postcolonial writers which have addressed their country's participation in European wars on the side of the mother country from which their ancestors had once emigrated. The writers include the Australian David Malouf, the Canadian Timothy Findley, Sol Plaatje, who kept a diary of his experiences in the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 and Mulk Raj Anand, author of a 1937 novel of the First World War, *Across the Black Waters*). However, Davis's main focus is on the significant role played by Maori in World War II, and the parallel with First Nations soldiers from Canada, particularly in terms of the treatment of survivors on their return home. He compares Patricia Grace's novel *Tu* (2004), the story of three young men who enlist in the Maori Battalion in World War II, with Ojibwa Canadian author Joseph Boyden's bestseller *Three Day Road* (2005), set during World War I and its aftermath. The comparison reveals many parallels between the two novels, both in their determination to tell a neglected aspect of the trauma of war alongside the trauma of colonisation, and in their adaptation of family histories. Using the Canadian critic Jo-Ann Episkew's concept of 'counter-discourse', Davis examines the two books' narrative experimentation, their treatment of the complex issue of the men's motivation to enlist, and the potentially-healing qualities of such story-telling.

The creative writing contributions to this volume are evidence of King's continuous critical engagement with poetry and his friendships with many poets throughout his life. Study of the poetic endeavour has been a common thread from his earliest work on Dryden and Marvell; since the 1980s this has developed into an interest in postcolonial poetry's quest for the new, its search for forms of cultural syncreticity in the fusion of European legacies and Indigenous traditions, and the catalysing of linguistic experimentation. King's understanding of poetry's oral base and the sounds of speech finds a counterpart in his passion for jazz, about which he has also written with authority. His account in his autobiography of his obsession with drumming when a student at Colombia College in the 1950s, suggests that the two forms of artistic expression come together for him through his love of rhythm and the musicality of language. Just as the world of jazz is one to which Bruce and Adele King adhere to (they travel to New Orleans for a month every year to listen to jazz), so they have enjoyed the friendships and acquaintances of many poets such as (from his time at Leeds University) Geoffrey Hill, Jon Silkin and Tony Harrison, and, briefly, American beats like Allen Ginsberg. They have enjoyed the friendship of the generations of contemporary Indian poets writing in English, like Jeet Thayil and Arvind Mehrotra, and, over many years, that of the Guyanese poet and novelist David Dabydeen, whose prose extract heads the creative writing section. King has written on influential postcolonial

poets like Kamau Brathwaite, but his ground-breaking books *Modern Indian Poetry in English* (1987 rev ed. in 1989; repr. in 1992 and 1994) followed by *Three Indian Poets: Ramanujan, Nissim Ezekiel and Dom Moraes* (1995, new ed. rev. 2005), have given him something of a cult status among poetry cognoscenti in India. In these studies he critically assessed and celebrated a field of what was then relatively little-known poetry (some of whose members are now recognised as major figures, while others are still becoming known to the west). Jeet Thayil, among others, implies that King's work broke through the silence about, and critical neglect of, this movement, caused partly by the problem of English language in writing in India and the lack of an extended audience, commenting that such poets "are known only unto themselves" and in their own country are "held accountable for a failure of national conscience."⁷ Likewise, Eunice da Sousa acknowledges that King's initial study was important because it allowed the work of the post-1947 generation of poets, especially women, to be known, by way of overcoming the systemic problems of publication and distribution of Indian poetry in English.⁸

King's studies record the stirrings of a distinctively modern/ist voice in what Laetitia Zecchini claims, with reference to Kolatka, were "fecund intercultural and interlinguistic transactions of protean belongings and identities"⁹ -- namely avant-garde poetry, black American blues and speech, rock and roll, and British Movement poetry, as well as indigenous traditions and regional languages such as Marathi and Kannada. His 'discoveries' include the triumvirate of Dom Moraes, Nissim Ezekiel and Arun Kolatkar, all of whom were dead a decade later, by 2004, and a new generation of poets such as Jeet Thayil, Adil Jussawalla, Arvind Mehrotra, Smita Agarwal, Manohar Shetty, Eunice da Sousa, Jane Bhandari, Tabish Khair and Meena Alexander. Appreciation of King's critical endorsements is reflected in the many tributes paid by these poets in this volume: these include the poet and translator Arvind Mehrotra's reflections in his prose piece "Jejuri" on the flavour of the movement's early years and his relationship with Arun Kolatkar. (Mehrotra has also edited Kolatkar's *Collected Poems in English*¹⁰) The positioning of Mehrotra's piece next to Laetitia Zecchini's gestures towards the proximity between the personal and the critical that is characteristic of King's pioneering spirit. King is a friend of both writers, more recently with Zecchini, whose ground-breaking work on Arun Kolatkar, building on the posthumous publication of his collected works and last volume *The Boatride*¹¹ and

⁷ Jeet Thayil, "One Language, Separated by the Sea (Introduction) to *Fulcrum, An Annual of Poetry and Aesthetics*, ed. Philip Nikolayev, Katia Kapovich, Jeet Thayil, Special Issue, *Poetry and Truth and Indian Poetry in English* 4-5 (2005): 232 (232-37)

⁸ Eunice de Sousa, ed. *Nine Indian Women Poets: An Anthology* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1997): 5.

⁹ Laetitia Zecchini, *Arun Kolatkar and Literary Modernism in India: Moving Lines* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014): 14.

¹⁰ Arun Kolatkar, *Collected Poems in English*, ed. Arvind Mehrotra (Hexham, Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2010).

¹¹ Arun Kolatkar, *The Boatride & Other Poems*, ed. Arvind Mehrotra (Mumbai: Pras Prakashan, 2009)

other Mumbai poets of the 1960s and 1970s, now seems set to establish him as the towering figure of Indian literary modernism.¹²

New fiction by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, and Susan Visvanathan, Professor of Sociology at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, closes the volume with pages that suggest the depth and breadth of Bruce King's artistic and academic collaborations, as well as the quality of his achievements and those of the writers he has worked with.

¹² See the special issues of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 52.5 and 52.6 (2016) devoted to 'The Mumbai Poets'.