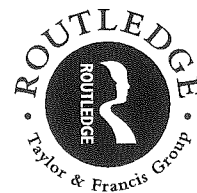


**The Language of
Postcolonial Literatures**

An introduction

Ismail S. Talib



London and New York

Contents

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1 English in (post) colonial contexts

England colonised and the importance of Latin

In the past, England has been a colony. For nearly four centuries it was ruled by Rome. The last time there was a successful invasion was in 1066, when it was conquered by the Normans. Although England might have been independent after the Norman conquest, 'it doesn't compensate for [its] shocking home record' up until then, as it was 'rolled by the Romans, Vikings and various Germanic tribes in quick succession' (Thompson 1998: 6; see also Carter and McRae 1997: 5-6; Hunter 1997: 543-5). One of the invading Germanic tribes introduced into England what was to become the English language. Thus, the language closely associated with England (or earlier versions of the language) only emerged after the Romans had left. The close connection of the English language to colonialism can thus be seen from two different angles: it spread throughout the world partly as a result of British colonialism, but was itself introduced into Britain as a result of invasion.

Latin and English language and literature

Latin continued to be a very important language in Britain long after the Romans had left. Indeed, it has a longer presence in Britain than English itself, which was only introduced after the Roman withdrawal. The continued importance of Latin, and the belief that it was more intrinsically expressive as a literary language (Jones 1953: 3-21), led many later English writers to write literature in that language.

Latin was a highly prestigious second language during the Norman French occupation (when contrasted with the lowly third language of English) and was used for religious and scholarly work. It was also used as the language for public worship until the middle of the sixteenth century. Indeed, so unimportant was English in England, especially in the first two centuries of Norman occupation, that there was a real danger that the language would simply die out (Dorian 1981: 2).

The belief that literature should be written in Latin remained long after the Norman French occupation. Among writers who wrote in Latin were famous English language poets, such as Andrew Marvell and John Milton. Milton even thought of writing what was to become his great epic poem *Paradise Lost* in Latin, but fortunately for the English language he changed his mind.

As a language that continues to be important after the collapse of the empire connected with it, English may now be playing a similar role to Latin. The English language and its literature today continue to grow after the demise of much of the British Empire, which is a situation that was seen earlier with regard to Latin. It is therefore ironic to note that English suffered earlier in its history as a result of the post-imperial importance of Latin. As Vincent Gillespie pointed out to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o on his visit to Oxford University, there are 'interesting parallels' between Ngũgĩ's concerns with the dominance of English over languages such as Ngũgĩ's mother tongue Gikũyũ, and 'those of people like John Trevisa and others who used to fight for the independence of English from Latin and French' (Ngũgĩ 1998: vii).

The English language, as Ngũgĩ (1998: vii) aptly reflects, has itself 'gone through a post-colonial phase'. The turning point came in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when there was 'a postcolonial/colonializing dynamic ... in which the English came to think of themselves and their language both as having been colonized and as potentially colonizing others' (Helgerson 1998: 289). From the seventeenth century onwards, the colonializing tendency gradually became more prominent, and today, even though the British Empire is no more, the language is still spreading across the globe.

The survival of Latin, however, unlike that of English, was partly sustained by a belief in the intrinsic superiority of classical languages. Because of their classical pedigree languages like Latin and Greek were, for a long time, regarded as intrinsically superior to other more recently developed languages, such as English. The supposed superiority of Latin led some seventeenth-century grammarians of English to think that English should be based on Latin grammar, in spite of some significant grammatical differences between the two languages. This view may seem anomalous today, but it became influential, and was to have an effect on the teaching of English grammar until the early part of the twentieth century. The supposed intrinsic superiority of Latin also led some poets in English to try to use quantitative metre for the writing of English poetry, in which metrical *feet* are measured in terms of long and short syllables. But the sounds of English resist the dominant metre of Latin poetry. The survival of English had a more practical bent, but as

will be seen later in this chapter, there have been views expressed, although less persistently than with regard to Latin, that it is intrinsically superior to other modern languages.

Ethnicity, nationality and language: a linguistic confusion

The word 'English' refers to both ethnicity and language. Its double meaning underlines a complication that is still with us. The word *English* also has a link to *nationality*, viewed in terms of residence, a sense of belonging to a community, or the citizenship of an existing political state. The last definition of nationality, at least at present, is questionable, as the political unit that matters with regard to citizenship is Britain and not England. In general, English literature is less often formally defined in terms of nationality. However, as will be seen shortly, nationality is in fact an important criterion in the attempt to define what *English literature* is. Whatever it is, the criterion of nationality to define English literature may not be helpful, but may actually increase the likelihood of more confusion.

The ethnic and linguistic split indicated by the word *English* is pretty obvious to us: although it is not common for an English person not to speak English at all, there is no logical contradiction if this happens. On the other hand, it does not mean that only an English person speaks English, as there are millions of non-English speakers of the language today. In any case, the word 'English' is arguably less confusing today than the words 'French' or 'Russian', which, in addition to language and ethnicity, are also defined in terms of citizenship. However, 'English' may suffer the same fate as 'Russian', as regards the additional definition of the word to refer to citizenship. The word 'Russian' to mean 'citizen of Russia' became a reality after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the same vein, the possibility that the word 'English' will refer to a citizen of England instead of Britain may be realised after the comprehensive devolution of Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland.

The distinction between language and ethnicity, or the decrease in the importance of language as a factor in defining ethnicity, may result in the search by the historically original speakers of the language for some kind of ethnic 'essence'. The identity of an ethnic group which carries the language's name becomes more difficult or elusive because its language has become internationalised. What results is an *identity* problem created by the split between race and language. In the case of the English, the identity problem may be linked to the search for the essence of 'Englishness', and the extent that it should be linked to the

language. This identity search is exacerbated by the decline in the political and economic power of Britain. As Terry Eagleton has noted:

Englishness has never really needed to be defined before, at least in the good old Imperial days. I think the need for national definition is felt more by the underdogs, who have to define themselves against the dominant forces.

(quoted in 'The Way We Are')

Effect on literary studies

The definition of the word 'English' is not merely a semantic consideration. In addition to its effect on political or cultural studies, it also has an effect on literary studies, for it touches on the question of what *English literature* is, and what should and should not be included within its reach. This, however, does not mean that its definition will draw the boundaries of English literature with extra clarity. John Skinner (1998: 7) has noted that the word 'English' lacks the distinction, for example, between "Arabic literature" (or literature written in the Arabic language) and "Arab literature" (literature written by Arabs). In a similar vein, Latin literature 'refers objectively to literature written in the Latin language rather than literature written by "Latins"' (Skinner 1998: 25). Although "English literature" may yet come to refer primarily, if not exclusively, to literature written in the English language, rather than literature produced within a specific area or by a particular ethnic group' (Skinner 1998: 26), that time has not arrived. The central question that needs to be asked is whether the term English literature should be defined in relation to language, ethnicity, or nationality.

Today, English literature is seldom simply defined in terms of the use of language, as this would include all literature written in English across the world. It is also not defined in terms of the ethnicity of the writer, as this would exclude writers who are not ethnically English, such as Joseph Conrad, or, for that matter, writers such as Oliver Goldsmith and Walter Scott, who were Irish and Scottish. It would also have to include writers who are ethnically English but who do not reside in England, and hence embraces many writers from the British Commonwealth and the United States.

Thus, in the attempt to define English literature, the lowest common denominator is writers resident in England. However, there are immediate difficulties with this definition, as it has to be extended to include writers from the other British countries: Wales, Scotland,

Northern Ireland and, for a period in British history, the whole of Ireland as well. So, given what has been passed off as 'English literature' in schools and universities, all British writers are included. However, this definition is inadequate in one important respect, which was touched on at the beginning of this book. As Saldívar (1997: 159), citing Raymond Williams, has reminded us, 'In the English context, ... there were at least fifteen centuries of native writing in other languages: Latin, Welsh, Irish, Old English, Norse, and Norman French'. So it does seem that the linguistic criterion has to be brought back, but only with reference to writers who are resident in Britain. For writers writing in English but who do not reside in Britain, it is generally agreed that the term *literature in English* is more appropriate.

Relativity of power and dominance: a strand in postcolonial theory

This chapter began by saying that even England had been colonised, that the English language itself was introduced into Britain by invading forces and that people who were ethnically English were once reluctant to use their language, especially for the writing of literary works. These assertions were not made to excuse British imperialism in the past. Neither were they an attempt to excuse the continued dominance of the English language today. One reason for beginning with them is to highlight the relativity of power and dominance – be it linguistic or political. This relativity is an important strand in postcolonial theory, and will play a vital part in many of the arguments in this book. In this regard, what is once central is no longer regarded as such, and vice versa. With reference to the writing of literature in English, it has been argued, in another context, that the use of the English language by those originally on the 'margins' (for example, by writers of literature outside Britain) has now resulted in the appropriation and dismantling of 'the model of centre and margin' and 'the notions of power inherent' in being at the centre (Ashcroft *et al.* 1989: 83). Thus, what was at the margin of English is now at the centre.

Dominance of language and literature may be determined by extrinsic forces

Feelings of the inferiority of a literature may be justified if they are wholly based on the intrinsically negative value of the language and literature, which is always difficult to prove with any degree of objectivity. However, the belief in the inferior position of a language

and its literature is often determined by extrinsic factors. Specifically, the rise of the use of English and its literature has to do largely with factors external to both the language and its literature. The same can be said about the dominance of Latin and classical Greek language and literature several centuries before the rise of English, in spite of claims to the contrary.

Nevertheless, there were some Britons who believed in the intrinsic superiority of English by claiming that their language was 'the finest and purest spoken' (Alberto 1997). This view extended to English speakers outside Britain, such as the American poet Walt Whitman, who believed that 'the English language is by far the noblest now spoken – probably ever spoken – upon this earth' (quoted in Bailey 1991: 110). If it was not seen in such superlative terms, it was perceived to be a far superior language to the language of those who were colonised by the British. The missionary Cotton Mather, for example, believed that 'the English Tongue would presently give [the American Indians] a Key to all our Treasures and make them the Masters of another sort of Library than any that ever will be seen in their Barbarous Linguo' and that they 'can scarce retain their Language, without a Tincture of other Salvage Inclinations, which do but ill suit, either with the Honor, or with the design of Christianity' (quoted in Bailey 1991: 73). Moving to Africa in the twentieth century, it was claimed, in a report published by the British Colonial Office in 1953, that 'without the English language to generate a correct set of values in Africa, the continent would collapse into "moral confusion and lack of integrity"' (Alberto 1997). Thus the teaching of English falls in line with the dubious civilising mission of colonialism (see p. 8).

However, although there have been many claims concerning the superiority of English (see also pp. 12–13), not many people have claimed that English literature itself is superior to other literatures in the world. The claim that European languages and literatures as a whole are superior to other languages and literatures is more often made. The latter claim came into prominence with Macaulay's notorious minute on Indian education (1835). In it, Macaulay (1952: 722) stated his belief in the 'intrinsic superiority of the Western literature', and that 'a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia'. Later scholarship has cast serious doubts on the basis of such judgments. It has been argued, for example, by Martin Bernal in his book *Black Athena* (1987) that certain important aspects of Greek civilisation itself, which was the first civilisation in Europe, were of African origin.

British expansion and the spread of English

There is no question that the spread of the English language had to do with the rise of British imperialism. This was not a unique situation, as the spread of other European languages around the world, such as Spanish and French, also had to do with the rise of Spain and France as imperial powers. The close relationship between language and empire was recognised right from the start of Western expansion. In 1492, for example, the Bishop of Avila said to the Castillian Queen Isabella, when she was presented with a book of Spanish grammar by medieval linguist Antonio de Nebrija, that 'language is a perfect instrument of empire'.

Britain and the British Isles

Before going further in the discussion on the relationship between English and the British Empire, a distinction must be made between Britain and the British Isles. *Britain* (sometimes known as Great Britain) is a political entity, whereas *the British Isles* is a geographical entity that includes England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Ireland (sometimes referred to as Southern Ireland), as it is an independent political entity, is not included when referring to 'Britain'. The term, *the British Isles*, is widely used, and will be used here, even if it is unfortunate that the word 'British' in the *British Isles* is taken from the root word 'Britain'. However, when the word 'British' is used by itself, it is an adjective derived from the word Britain, and hence is used to describe a political entity or someone's or something's association with it.

The rise of British imperialism

The British Empire began in the late sixteenth century. In the seventeenth century, sugar and tobacco plantations were established in the Caribbean and in the south-eastern part of what is now the United States. During the middle of the century, Britain expanded into India and Canada. At the end of the century, although it lost the American colonies – which were to form the United States of America – further colonies, such as Ceylon, British Guyana, Malta and the eastern coast of Australia, were added to the empire. Between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Britain expanded further into India, Africa, Asia and Australasia. Eventually, between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the British Empire was spread over about a quarter of the land mass of the world. At its height, it was one of the largest empires in the history of the world. After granting independence to the colonies, unity among the ex-colonies was

voluntarily maintained by the Commonwealth of Nations, which was founded in 1931.

The civilising mission of colonialism

Colonialism has been described by the colonists as having a civilising mission, in the sense that the colonised stand to benefit from it in educational and social terms. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) is a classic text on the pitfalls in the belief in colonialism's 'civilising mission'. Although it refers to Belgian colonialism in Africa, it could quite easily have referred to British imperialism in general: the references to London in the novella make the association quite clear. There were many who believed in colonialism's civilising mission. To some, the belief was dubiously couched in Darwinian terms. In Krebs's (1997: 429–30) description of this tendency, there was the prevalent view that 'Africans were lower on the evolutionary scale than Europeans and in need of guidance, direction, and encouragement so that they could eventually reach the Europeans' level'.

Language and empire

Language had a part to play in the expansion of the British Empire and the continued unity of the British Commonwealth. The Empire was of course responsible for the initial spread of the language. During the rise of the British Empire, the associated spread of the English language had to contend not only with Latin but also with European languages of the other imperial powers, such as French and Spanish, which are still important international languages today. However, Britain, in comparison to France and Spain, had the biggest empire, and, furthermore, colonised the United States, which in its own right was to become an important force for the spread of English. Both these factors ensured that English was as widespread as the two other imperial languages. In some senses, the spread of English today may be more extensive than the two other languages. English is the main language of commerce and of science and technology, and more people study it.

English has been viewed as a potent force for the assertion of command and control in the Empire. Paulina Alberto (1997) made the claim, for example, that 'Britain's most powerful battle standard in its competition for the domination of new continents against local inhabitants was Standard English'. A case in point is the belief expressed in print by the British philologist William P. Russel in 1801. Russel argued that:

... if many schools were established in *different* parts of Asia and Africa to instruct the natives, *free of all expense*, with *various premiums of British manufacture* to the most meritorious pupils, this would be the best preparatory step that Englishmen could adopt for the *general* admission of their commerce, their opinions, their religion. This would tend to conquer the heart and its affections; which is a far more effectual conquest than that obtained by swords and cannons: and a thousand pounds expended for tutors, books, and premiums, would do more to subdue a nation of savages than forty thousand expended for artillery-men, bullets, and gunpowder.

(quoted by Bailey 1991: 106–7)

Thus, educating the natives in English not only served the civilising mission but also – and more importantly perhaps – the imperial mission of exerting better control over them.

The fall of the British Empire

As noted earlier, the breaking up of the British Empire left a linguistic residue which may eventually last longer than the Empire itself. In the words of Minette Marrin (1998: 26), 'We may have lost an empire, but we have gained a lingua franca'. The continued significance of English after the demise of the British Empire has been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. However, too much significance should not be attributed to the British Empire as a factor contributing to the spread of English, as 'the supremacy of English may have much more to do with the American empire than with the British' (Marrin 1998: 26). Nonetheless, the United States itself was once colonised by the British, and if it was not for this fact, English might not have been as important in the United States today. Thus, even if the focus is to shift to the United States, the historical importance of the British Empire in the spread of English cannot be denied.

The rise of literature in English and the Empire

English literature can be said to have spread together with the expansion of the English language. What began as the spread of English literature later resulted in the growth of literature in the language, written by non-English writers. The attempt to view these developments in a positive light did not end with the collapse of the British Empire. In fact, there is now a retrospective process, whereby the worldwide spread of literature in English is taken as a justification for British imperialism

in the past. Of course, we can quarrel with the 'argument' on strictly logical grounds. Nevertheless, Robert Hanks (1997: 25) has expressed the view that 'a strong point in ... favour [of the British Empire] is the vast body of literature in English that it produced.' He elaborates:

[The status of English] as lingua franca of the largest empire the world has yet known means that writers and readers from opposite ends of the earth can be introduced to one another without worrying about what's getting lost in the translation – Flann O'Brien and Salman Rushdie can have a common audience. And these writers have the advantage, as it seems to be, of writing in a language that is both their own and not their own: they are native speakers, but they have, perhaps, an awareness of the language's individual quirks and an ability to work against the grain that come harder to writers who are simply English.

The above 'justification' for British imperialism is perhaps more commonly encountered in relation to the English language itself. Gaurav Desai (2000: 523), for example, who came from India and lectures on English literature in the United States, encounters not only awkward remarks about 'how well' he speaks English, but, on occasion, the further remark that 'the British really knew what they were doing when they taught Indians their language'.

English literature and the Empire

In the attempt to use the worldwide spread of literature in English as a justification for British imperialism in the past, it has been controversially claimed that 'one of the great tributes to the British Empire, and to the intrinsic quality of our literature, which obviously needed an empire to spread it, was that Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is written in English' (cited by Marrin 1998: 26). Roy was present when this sentiment was expressed by the historian Edward Chaney, and was not pleased at all. In Marrin's words (1998: 26):

Arundhati Roy's novel is in English because English is her element. It is her first language; it is 'the skin on my thought', she says, and 'the way I think'. Clearly she loves it. Using English both in speaking and in writing obviously gives her immense joy. ... And yet she speaks English only because it was imposed on her; it was imposed on her forebears by conquest, imposed on her immediate family by all kinds of painful social and religious identifications and interests, and imposed on her by them.

So the relationship of Empire to English literature, and subsequently, to literature in English, can be said to be ambivalent, and cannot be wholly seen in a positive light. According to Roy, 'being forced to identify with a conqueror, especially with a departed conqueror ... "is like being the child of a raped mother"' (Marrin 1998: 26).

Spread of the Empire led to the spread of English literature

David Armitage (1998: 99) has noted that 'English Literature and the British Empire were the twin children of the English Renaissance'. The literature grew with the Empire, and at 'the height of the British Imperial power, the relationship between literature and empire seemed self-evident' (Armitage 1998: 99). In spite of the close connection between literature and Empire, Britain did not have an epic poem on imperial expansion comparable to the *Lusiads* (1572) by Camoëns, which is a narration of Portuguese imperial expansion led by the explorer Vasco da Gama. If anything, some earlier British writers were quite critical of colonialism.

The spread of English Literature was also accelerated by its use in the classroom. The extension of English literature as a subject to be taught in schools went hand in hand with the rise of British imperialism. Literature was not merely taught for itself, but served a tacit ideological function. By 'the early twentieth century, students across the Empire were being instructed as to the world-excellence of English literature and Western rationality, and the deficiencies of their own' (Boehmer 1995: 170).

English literary education in India, for example, was a way of imparting hidden quasi-Christian religious values to Indians (Viswanathan 1989). It championed the ideal Englishman and was concomitantly a means through which Indians could become estranged from their own culture. Through the educational process, they would readily accept British culture and domination. The teaching of English literature in Indian schools was in fact carried out, after the English Education Act of 1835, long before it was done in British schools.

The spread and growing prestige of the English language had to do with the Empire, and, at least with regard to giving it the initial push, might have also enhanced the prestige of English literature. Thus its prestige remained after independence of the colonies, and also had a contributory effect on the prestige of literature from England, which was believed to represent the best usage of English. This is reflected, for example, in the teaching of literature in the language in the United States, where the belief that 'access to English Literature gave access

to “proper” language – and so to power – explains the popularity of the subject of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in North America’ (Crawford 1992: 39).

Superiority of language and dialect

One of the notions explored in the philology of nineteenth-century Europe was the superiority of the European languages when compared with the other languages of the world. But even within Europe there was a hierarchy of languages, and English was originally not as well thought of as it is today. The classical languages, Latin and Greek, as noted earlier, were once regarded as superior to modern languages such as English. However, this view underwent a change in the eighteenth century, with some views being expressed that English had a superior position among the modern languages because of its intrinsic qualities. This was the view of Macaulay, whose view on the superiority of European literature was mentioned above. With specific reference to English, Macaulay (1952: 722) has this to say in his 1835 Minute on Indian education:

The claims of our own language it is hardly necessary to recapitulate. It stands pre-eminent even among the languages of the west. It abounds with works of imagination not inferior to the noblest which Greece has bequeathed to us; with models of every species of eloquence ...

Perhaps the most prominent of the views that English was a superior language because of its intrinsic qualities was made by Jakob Grimm in an address to the Royal Academy of Berlin in 1851. According to Grimm:

Of all the modern languages, not one has acquired such great strength and vigour as the English. It has accomplished this by simply freeing itself from the ancient phonetic laws, and casting off almost all inflections; whilst from its abundance of intermediate sounds [*Mitteltöne*], tones not even to be taught, but only to be learned, it has derived a characteristic power of expression such as perhaps was never yet the property of any human tongue ... Indeed, the English language, which has not in vain produced and supported the greatest, the most prominent of all modern poets (I allude, of course, to Shakespeare), in contradistinction to the ancient classical poetry, may be called justly a LANGUAGE OF THE WORLD: and

seems, like the English nation, to be destined to reign in future with still more extensive sway over all parts of the globe.

(S.H. 1853: 109–10)

Other positive views on English have been mentioned earlier in this chapter. However, these views may not extend to English as a whole, as there is a perceived hierarchy of dialects of the language, some of which are regarded as being more prestigious than others.

Purity and socio-economic considerations

When compared with classical languages, not only was English ranked lower in its early history, but it suffered from the perceived problem of not being a ‘pure’ language. Although generally recognised as a Germanic language, English is a compound of several languages, especially when it comes to its vocabulary, and includes many Latin and Norman French words. The high ranking given to the classical languages in philology was not determined by politico-economic factors, but more by a romantic belief that language is ‘purer’ the earlier it is in its evolutionary development.

However, the counter-argument that English is superior because of its very mixture is not only possible, but has been put forward by, amongst others, the American poet Walt Whitman (1982b: 1165):

View’d freely, the English language is the accretion and growth of every dialect, race, and range of time, and is both the free and compacted composition of all. From this point of view, it stands for Language in the largest sense, and is really greatest of studies. It involves so much; is indeed a sort of universal absorber, combiner, and conqueror.

Purity of dialects

A similar view is also held of certain dialects of English: that the further one moves backwards in time, the ‘purer’ it was, and therefore superior, or at least more praiseworthy, when compared with dialects that developed later. Therefore, dialects that are able to maintain some ancient features are regarded as purer and superior to those that are not able to do so. For example, it has been argued that ‘some isolated communities (for instance, in the east-central United States) are “explained,” and thereby approved, as retaining qualities of

“Elizabethan English” (Bailey 1991: 125). Moving closer to England, some of the Scottish dialects of English spoken in the Highlands are believed to be ‘purer’ varieties of English, as they are closer to older varieties of English than contemporary varieties of English spoken in England itself. The claim that the dialects are closer to an older variety of English is of course open to analysis, and whether this ensures the ‘purity’ of the dialect is open to question, as it cannot be scientifically verified in a systematic way.

Ranking of dialects of English

Although the maintenance of old features is a factor in the ranking of dialects, it is difficult to separate language and dialect from socio-economic considerations. The development of what is regarded as ‘good’ or ‘standard’ English is a case in point. Its development, especially with regard to pronunciation, was determined by the socio-economic dominance of certain regions within England itself. It is important to clarify this matter here, as what constitutes ‘good English’ plays a prominent part in the colonial linguistic attitude towards the literary use of other dialects of English to be discussed in the next chapter and in the rest of this book. Colonial linguistic attitudes are present internally, within England itself, and are later transferred to the English and literature in the language of the other nations of the British Isles, and to the world at large.

The norm of what ‘good’ or ‘standard’ English is, is derived from one of the dialects of English spoken in south-eastern England, which was relatively wealthier than other parts of England. The elevation of the southern dialects of English is not a new phenomenon. According to Bailey (1991: 26) ‘the notion that “good English,” the sort associated with important public business, was southern’ was believed to be there from the end of the fourteenth century. Even at that time, an important indirect factor that influenced people’s linguistic evaluation was the fact that the north was generally poorer than the south. Not all southern dialects are highly regarded of course. In Alexander Gil’s study of British dialects, *Logonomia Anglica*, which appeared in 1619 and 1621, the Somerset dialect is described as ‘barbarous’. Gil may have been influenced by the depiction in Elizabethan drama of the south-western dialect of English as peasant language (Blake 1981: 94). Yet again, the economic factor plays a part here, as the south-west was poorer than the south-east. In this regard, the Scottish writer Alasdair Gray (1990: 31), among others, is right in pointing out that what is recognised as standard English is simply another dialect of English, and, for a long time, it was ‘the main dialect of the British rich’.

There were also external considerations coming from outside England itself, which contributed to the rise of what was considered standard English. In this regard, it has been quite persuasively argued by Alberto (1997) that a good case can be made that the rise of the notion of what standard English should be developed more outside England than within it. To her, the development of this notion came hand in hand with the rise of British colonialism. Alberto specifies that the notion of what ‘King’s English’ is might have arisen as a reaction to the threat of foreign corruption of the language. Thus ‘King’s English’ is defined negatively by fears of what English should *not* be rather than what it is or should be. Another external factor is the international prestige value of the variety of English that the British themselves hold in high regard. It has been noted by Richard Bailey (1991: 124), for example, that even when the variety of English spoken outside England ‘is fully established (as in the case of modern American, Canadian, New Zealand and Australian Englishes), there remains a persistent belief that the prestige norms of south-eastern England still provide a model for the “best” English, at least for some purposes.’ It seems clear that there are both internal and external factors that converge towards the promotion of the south-eastern dialect of English as standard English.

In addition to notions of what ‘good’ or ‘standard’ English should be, there is a hierarchy of dialects in Britain, with the perception that the more prestigious dialects are associated not only with higher social and economic status but with higher intelligence as well. In Britain, a certain Glaswegian dialect is regarded as prestigious (not the Glaswegian dialect Kelman portrays in his work!):

In the vast majority of cases, the accent is perceived as being of a slightly higher calibre than most regional UK accents. Even the residual of a Glasgow accent is preferred to the residuals of Birmingham or Liverpool. There’s a perception of people being better educated and more intelligent in Scotland.

(Ewan Gowrie, cited by McAlpine 1996)

However, a person’s perceived socio-economic status may be determined by the dialect or accent used, and not by his or her job or assets. As noted by the novelist Will Self, ‘What defines you as being working class [in Britain] is having a regional accent – of whatever kind’ (Barnes *et al.* 1998: 170).

The attitude towards the less prestigious dialects is also carried over to their use in literature. This attitude is sometimes criticised as being connected to linguistic imperialism, a criticism which is increasingly

levelled against England within Britain itself. Here, for example, are the views of the Scottish novelist James Kelman, with reference to the attitude towards his use of language in fiction:

The problem with any term like 'idiom' or 'vernacular' used about my work is that it appears to be a euphemism or synonym for 'language'. I try to say at all times, let's just call the Scottish working-class way of speaking a language.

The rejection of it as a language is to do with imperialism and the language of the coloniser. This is the idea that every other culture and therefore language is going to be defined against it. The way we use language is seen as being a debased form of English. (quoted in 'Capturing Working Scots' Idiom')

Postcolonial attainment of prestige

However, Kelman's attitude towards language does not reflect the belief that there is no such thing as 'standard' English in Scotland. There is the perception there that there is a distinctive variety or dialect found in Scotland, which can be regarded as the 'standard' for Scotland, quite distinct from the standard English of England. Attainment of independence, or of some kind of self-determination, may result in more prestige being accorded to this standard variety of Scottish English. For example, the linguist Jeremy Smith believes that a Scottish parliament, which became a reality again in 1999, could boost the prestige of Scottish Standard English (cited in McAlpine 1996).

The canon and postcolonial literature(s)

In spite of the difficulty of establishing English literature itself as a viable and respectable body of texts, the works belonging to the literature became canonised once literature became institutionalised as a subject taught in schools and universities. For example Saldívar (1997: 157) notes that 'When I first arrived at Yale as an undergraduate in the early 1970s, the English department believed it was its business to teach the canon of English and American literature'. Once works of mainstream American and British literature are canonised, it is difficult to challenge them. Canonisation does not help the newer works and as many of the works in postcolonial literatures in English are relatively new, they were introduced into the curriculum only with some difficulty and resistance. Since they are not directly associated with England, postcolonial literary works face a further difficulty, especially with

English literature programmes that take a more holistic approach to the subject by including courses on British society and history. This more holistic approach to the study of English literature may not be congruent with the context for the study of postcolonial literatures. Unless it is modified by the more extensive inclusion of the history of British colonial expansion outside Britain, it may actually make it more difficult for postcolonial literary works to be introduced into the curriculum.

Definition of postcolonial literature(s)

Postcolonial literatures can be defined as literature written by colonised and formerly colonised peoples. This should include literatures written in various languages, and not only in the language of the colonisers. This is the simple definition that will be taken as the starting point. Although the approach here will be to concentrate on the English language, this is not intrinsic to the term *postcolonial literature*.

Anglocentrism and Eurocentricism

Although the use of English is not intrinsic to the term *postcolonial literature*, it needs to be noted that when the term is used to refer to the literatures of countries colonised by the British, it is too often taken to refer to literatures in English. According to Aijaz Ahmad (1992), this Anglocentric tendency smacks of theoretical imperialism. This is a situation accidentally created by the fact that much of the early interest in postcoloniality arose among scholars specialising in literature in English. The bias towards English has in turn created an irregularity that needs to be adjusted, as noted, for example, by many researchers of postcolonial Indian literature:

It is indeed true, as Harish Trivedi, Arun Mukherjee, and G.V. Prasad point out, that only texts written in English/english merit consideration as 'postcolonial' texts within the discursive framework set up by definitions of postcolonialism emerging from and published in the West. This is surely an egregious mistake especially concerning India, where superb texts both ancient and modern written in innumerable regional languages far outnumber those written in English.

(Afzal-Khan 1998: 221)

A further problem is the term *postcolonial* itself, which seems to centre the discussion of history on Europe. According to Kavoori (1998), 'the singularity of the term effects a recentring of global history around European time'. Not only does it privilege Europe, but to Meenakshi Mukherjee, it unjustifiably focuses attention on the English language:

The term post-colonial tends to confer a central position to one century of European imperialism in the long narrative of the human race, making it the determining marker of history, and without ever stating it in so many words, invests the English language with a measure of presence and influence that is somewhat out of proportion to what statistical or demographical facts would warrant.
(Mukherjee 1996: 8)

Binary oppositions

One of the difficulties frequently discussed in postcolonial theory is the rigid division of the world into two categories: the West and the East, the North and the South, the developed and the undeveloped, the First and Third Worlds, the English and the non-English. Undoubtedly, binary categorisations of the world may have positive aspects or consequences. Ashcroft *et al.* (1995: 8), for example, have rightly pointed out that 'the binarisms of colonial discourse' may help postcolonial critics to 'promote an active reading which makes ... texts available for re-writing and subversion'.

Whatever the merits of the binary divisions, however, the world is not so rigidly divided. There are, for example, some parts of the so-called 'Third World' which cannot be regarded as postcolonial, not because they have been influenced by the First World, but because they have not been touched by colonialism. Meena Alexander sees this in India:

India is currently a post-colonial society but then of course there are people whom colonialism has never touched. In fact, it is totally irrelevant to their experience. So, is their experience 'post-colonial'? Well, I don't know.

(quoted in Mohanty 1997)

This does not mean that such binarisms can be dismissed completely. It has been mentioned above that binary categories may have positive aspects or consequences. Moreover, they may, in a sense, be impossible to discard, as they may rhetorically be needed in order to talk or write

on the postcolonial condition. Dismissing them completely may result in a lack of clarity or systematicity in presenting one's arguments, even if there is a denial of the reality of the situation as it should be. Indeed, the charges of Anglocentricism and Eurocentricism discussed above, which are legitimate, are based on just such a binary classification of the world. Binary categories have been used and will continue to be used in this book, but with some qualifications where necessary. What is essential is the recognition of their limitation, deficiency or equivocation, and they should not be presented as if they are immaculate and clear-cut representations of reality.

Problem with the 'post-'

The problem of the definition of 'postcolonial' may be focused more on the prefix 'post-', which implies that something is 'over' or completed. According to Loomba (1998: 7), 'it implies an "aftermath" in two senses – temporal, as in coming after, and ideological, as in supplanting'. It is its definition of 'aftermath' in the conceptual sense that Loomba finds more contestable: 'if the inequities of colonial rule have not been erased, it is perhaps premature to proclaim the demise of colonialism'. The non-temporal definition of the 'post-' in postcolonial is not new. Gallagher has reminded us of Fanon's definition of the term, in which 'the postcolonial is never a specific moment but an ongoing struggle, a continual emergence' (1997a: 377).

However, there are still some critics who insist that the 'post-' here has a temporal denotation. One of them is Anandam Kavoori, who defines it as such, and makes an objection to it, as colonialism has not ended. But it has been pointed out that Kavoori's understanding of the prefix 'post' is mistaken, or is, at best, a minority opinion in postcolonial studies. According to Raka Shome (1998: 204), 'the prefix "post" used in such theoretical vocabulary does not mean a final closure, nor does it announce the "end" of that to which it is appended; rather it suggests a thinking through and beyond the problematics of that to which it is appended.'

There is the prevalent understanding that the 'post' does not mean 'after' in the temporal sense or conceptual sense. This understanding is present even among academics who cannot be classified as postcolonial scholars, such as Walter Laqueur (1995: 32), to whom postcolonial theory refers to the belief that 'imperialism had, and continues to have, a negative impact on the colonial world'. According to Viljoen (1996: 63), if colonialism 'is defined as the way in which unequal international relations of economic, political, military, and cultural power are

maintained, it cannot be argued that the colonial era is really over'. Indeed colonialism may exist side by side with postcolonialism. In this regard, Viljoen (1996: 63) cites the view of Ashcroft *et al.* that postcolonialism is 'a potentially subversive presence within the colonial itself' and not really separated from it by coming after it.

2 Anti-colonialism in Scottish, Welsh and Irish literatures

One of the paradoxes of British colonialism is that it enabled the colonised to use the English language, which was in turn used in the nationalistic struggle against the colonial masters associated with the language. This type of nationalistic anti-colonialism may manifest itself in literature written in English. In the words of Bruce King, colonialism brought with it not only the English language, but 'English literary forms, and English cultural assumptions' as well (King 1974: 2). But as King has rightly pointed out, these imports can be turned on their heads, especially if there is the feeling that 'the English cultural tradition is no longer relevant outside the British Isles' (King 1974: 2). As will be seen later in this chapter, this reaction also applies to cultures which are found indigenously in the British Isles, and not only to those which are remote or significantly different from the English.

England is not Britain

England is only part of Britain, but the two are often confused. Another confusion is the view that the English are the overwhelming ethnic group and culture in Britain, to the complete exclusion of the other cultures and ethnic groups, including indigenous ones. This view, of course, is quite common outside Britain, and is even prevalent in scholarship at the international level. Robert Crawford (1992: 10), for example, has correctly noted that among 'the international array of contributors' to the book *Nation and Narration* edited by Homi Bhabha, 'only Gillian Beer seems to have a clear and explicit awareness that the words "England" and "Britain" are not synonymous'.

The assumption that Britain and England are similar is not only found outside Britain, but is also very much alive within England itself. Within England, Ann Leslie has noted in a newspaper report that:

The English have tended to use the terms English and British synonymously. We [the English] were the boss nation, the dominant culture, and the Celtic fringes were merely colourful add-ons to the prevailing English, sorry, British way of life.

(Leslie 1998: 22)

Her view is an echo of the observation of the Anglo-Welsh poet and nationalist, R.S. Thomas, to whom 'the UK is only a euphemism for England' and that '[t]he Scots, the Irish, the Welsh are just appendages' (Jury 1997). With specific reference to English poetry, John Lucas (1990: 3) observes that 'when English poets speak of Britain as a nation of the free they usually mean England'. This confusion works to the political advantage of the English, and the disadvantage of the Scots, Welsh and Irish.

Literature in English by the non-English in Britain: I

When it comes to the history of British literature, the fact that literature in English can be written by the Scots and Welsh, and not necessarily by Englishmen, is virtually a platitude. However, English was not the only indigenous language of the British Isles, and the indigenous literatures of Britain need not be in English. These facts are very often less noticed, largely because of the prevalence of the English language today. The overwhelming dominance of English obscures the visibility of these other indigenous languages of the British Isles.

Hostility towards England

Today, and in the past, the indigenous non-English peoples of the British Isles often display hostility towards England and the English, for they believe that the politically dominant English and their language will destroy or corrupt their own language and culture. Some of these sentiments have found their way into their literatures. For example, between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, some poets in the Welsh language, which is a Celtic language distinct from English, were calling upon their fellow Welshmen 'to seize the throne of England, and thereby to restore honour and glory to the Welsh people' (Parry 1955: 158). It did seem to them that only by counter-conquest could the respectability of the Welsh and their language and culture be revived. These sentiments are still current today. The twentieth-century Welsh-language poet Gwennallt Jones, for example, is described as having a 'settled hostility to England' as he believes that it

is 'for ever threatening to stifle and obliterate the language and culture of Wales' (Parry 1955: 416).

Another reason for their hostility is the supercilious attitude of the English towards the non-English indigenous groups in Britain. Some of these groups are viewed as having barbaric customs which have no place in modern society, but which they have not quite discarded:

The tribal ceremonies of the peoples of the British Isles are bewilderingly vulgar. I once attended a banquet in London which was interrupted by Scots pipers marching round the tables, going full blast in bearskins and kilts. An Italian next to me assumed it was a terrifying student prank. When I reassured him he replied: 'But I thought our Julius Caesar had helped you wipe out these people.'

(S. Jenkins 1997)

If the 'tribal' people of Britain (which would supposedly exclude the more civilised English) are not regarded as barbaric, then they are regarded as quaint, and therefore, when contrasted to the English, inconsequential. In this regard, Ann Leslie (1998: 22) has again observed that:

[To the English, the Celtic] fringes had charming accents and were good at things like making porridge, booze and male voice choirs, but Celtic nationalism itself – a sense of belonging to a separate 'race' – was regarded as somewhat childish. On a par with all those tedious Yorkshiremen who say, 'I'm a Yorkshireman and proud of it!', Celtic nationalism was regarded as the sort of bombast you get from people with a rather deserved inferiority complex.

We felt (in so far as we thought about it at all, which was scarcely ever) that to be born English was to have won the first prize in the lottery of life.

The 'Anglo-' prefix

As literature in the Welsh language continues to be written, the term 'Anglo-Welsh literature' may have to be used to refer to literature in English written by the Welsh. Although it has been said by the Anglo-Welsh poet John Davies in his poem 'How to Write Anglo-Welsh Poetry' that 'Being Anglo-anything is really tough' (cited by F. Jenkins 1997), and that some people object to the prefix because of 'the kind of cultural hybridity it implies' (Skinner 1998: 276), it is clear that the term cannot

be avoided. *Welsh literature* without the prefix may very well mean literature in the Welsh language. The same can be said about Irish literature, where it has been noted that many Irishmen 'do not regard anything written by their countrymen in English as Irish literature' (King 1974: 16). The term 'Anglo-Irish literature' is thus used for related reasons, even though literature written in English constitutes 'the dominant literary tradition of the nation' (King 1974: 16). By extension, the same situation applies to Anglo-Scottish literature.

In short, the convergence of ethnicity and language is certainly there with the word *Welsh*, and arguably, with the words *Irish* and *Scottish*. So the terms *Welsh*, *Irish* or *Scottish literature* may indicate literature written in the respective Celtic languages. The prefix *Anglo-* is thus simply linguistic, and the terms *Anglo-Welsh*, *Anglo-Irish* and *Anglo-Scottish literature* may be more precise indicators that the literature is written in the English language.

However, the use of the *Anglo-* prefix is not merely a semantic consideration, as it also has a connection to nationalism. The situation is more clear-cut in Ireland when compared with Wales or Scotland. The feeling of colonisation was, and still is, strong in the island of Ireland as a whole, but especially so among the Catholic community in the north. It is also strong, it should be emphasised, in Scotland and Wales, and cannot be dismissed, even if it has been, in the past century, historically less violent than in Ireland.

Although Scottish nationalism had been historically less intense than Irish and Welsh nationalism, it has been noticeably strong in recent years, and present in contemporary Anglo-Scottish literature as well. The intensity of Scottish nationalism today may possibly lead to the independence of Scotland from the United Kingdom. Indeed, if Scotland and Wales are considered together, it has been predicted that nationalism in these states may eventually lead to the termination of the United Kingdom itself in the second or third decade of the twenty-first century (Miller 1998).

Literature in English by the non-English in Britain: II

Literature in English in England is also written by authors of non-indigenous descent. They, or their parents, emigrated to England from the former British colonies. Many of them are rightly considered as postcolonial authors, because they continue to write about the countries they left behind, and to bring along with them certain assumptions about Britain from the eyes of the colonised. They have not fully

assimilated themselves into England, and their sense of separation does not make them completely belong to the community of English authors. Indeed, authors such as Wilson Harris, Salman Rushdie or Buchi Emecheta have often been regarded, respectively, as Indian, Caribbean (more specifically, Guyanan) or Nigerian authors as well.

These authors are important in the contexts of both literatures in English and British literature. Harris, Rushdie and Emecheta, together with V.S. Naipaul, Ben Okri and David Dabydeen among others, form a significant group of authors who cannot be neglected in the recent history of British literature (see, for example, Carter and McRae 1997: 488–9, 526–30). Naipaul has been aptly described by Carter and McRae (1997: 529) as 'the grand old man British literature', and the influence of Rushdie on contemporary literatures in English, not only in England and India but worldwide, cannot be underestimated. Rushdie was the winner of the Booker of Bookers in 1993 for his novel *Midnight's Children* (1981). Rushdie has also been described (Wong 1996: 200) as letting the novel in English go *jungli* (which is the Hindi expression for going 'native'). As most of these authors will be discussed in other regional or national contexts in future chapters, this chapter will concentrate on authors who are less likely to be discussed in these other contexts, such as R.S. Thomas and James Kelman.

Scottish, Welsh and Irish literatures

Scottish, Welsh and Irish literatures were of course once unequivocally treated as 'English' literature. From one perspective, this may be correct: as these literatures were written in English, they should be regarded as part of 'English' literature. Indeed, it has been asked, 'Is a poet from Wales writing in English any different from an English poet?' (Jenkins 1997).

However, the word 'English', as seen above, has several meanings, and there is an inherent ambivalence between ethnicity and language. Because of this ambivalence, the view that Scottish, Welsh and Irish literatures should be regarded as 'English' literature is by no means uncontroversial. Moreover, the other nationalities of the British Isles may actually regard English as a foreign or alien language, and not as their own language. This view may occur even among those who use English very well, and write literary works in it. For example, in an oft-quoted passage towards the end of James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* ([1916] 1960), the main character, Stephen Daedalus – who has a command of English, but not of Irish Gaelic – notes the difference between his English and that of the Dean of Studies:

The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words *home, Christ, ale, master*, on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.
(Joyce [1916] 1960: 189)

In the words of T.J. Cribb (1999: 107), Stephen 'feels provincial, inferior and dispossessed' when using English, in spite of his good command of the language.

Stephen Daedalus's comment is by no means an isolated one in other respects. The first national literature in English in the British Isles to question its status as part of English literature was Anglo-Irish literature. Irish literature had an important, if indirect part to play in the eventual attainment of Irish independence. As noted by Cribb (1999: 108), Irish literary nationalism proclaimed and carried 'into *de facto* effect a cultural independence before political independence was possible'. This is the pattern that the Scots, and to a certain extent the Welsh, are trying to emulate. At present, there is a growth of nationalism in Scotland and Wales, which has led to the interrogation of their literatures in English as part of *English* literature. Even before devolution from Britain became a serious issue in Wales and Scotland, the increasing consciousness of internal colonialism in Britain should eventually lead to the view that these literatures are to be treated separately (Thomas 1971).

Nationalism in these literatures

One distinguishing feature of contemporary Scottish, Welsh and Irish literatures is the unmistakably stronger sense of nationalism in them when contrasted to literature written by the English. Perhaps the English do not know, owing to the overwhelming dominance of their culture, what there is to be nationalistic *about*. The stronger nationalistic tendency in these literatures has been noted by, among others, Julian Barnes:

Is there a connection between literature and a sense of nationalism among the countries in the United Kingdom? Clearly in the case of Scotland, Ireland and Wales. Nationalism in England is less straightforward, more reactive and less likely to express itself through literature.

(Barnes *et al.* 1998:174)

However, at a simple level, nationalism in Scotland, Wales and Ireland may also be regarded as reactive, in the sense that it is a reaction to England and the English. With reference to Scotland, for example, it has been noted that 'A lot of people when asked what it means to be a Scot will reply in effect that it is not to be English' (Massie 1998). Nationalism in these states may also be a reaction to the disintegration or diminution of Britain as it was known several decades ago. As noted by Andrew Neil (1998: 11):

There was no conflict about being both [British and Scottish] in the Scotland in which I grew up and was educated in the Fifties and Sixties. The mood is very different today: the past two decades have seen the rise of an increasingly separatist Scottish identity and a concomitant decline in British identity north of the border.

But quite evidently, there is more to their nationalism than a mere negative reaction to the English, especially when referring to their literatures. A.S. Byatt, for example, has 'the impression that the Scots, the Northern Irish and the Welsh [when contrasted to the English] do have both strong literary communities and a strong sense of national literatures' (in Barnes *et al.* 1998: 174). Their nationalism may be due to the relatively stronger desire to define their cultural identity. In this connection, the editor of *Poetry Review*, for example, has remarked 'that whereas Scots, Irish and Welsh writers never stopped thinking about their cultural identity, modern English poetry was short on self-analysis' (Scammell 1998: 13).

Problems with nationalism in literature

One problem with nationalism, especially in relation to contemporary British literatures from outside England, is that perhaps the appropriate word to use, according to Salman Rushdie, is *nationism* rather than *nationalism*. In this regard, Rushdie (1997b: 22) has some pertinent observations to make on the Anglo-Welsh poet, R.S. Thomas. Rushdie quotes the following lines from Thomas:

Hate takes a long time
To grow in, and mine
Has increased from birth;
Not for the brute earth ...
... I find
This hate's for my own kind ...

In relation to these lines, Rushdie (1997b: 22) notes:

[It is] Startling to find an admission of something close to self-hatred in the lines of a national bard. Yet this perhaps is the only kind of nationalist ... nationalist ... a writer can be. When the imagination is given sight by passion, it sees darkness as well as light. To feel so ferociously is to feel contempt as well as pride, hatred as well as love. These proud contempts, this hating love, often earn the writer a nation's wrath. The nation requires anthems, flags. The poet offers discord. Rags.

So the 'nationalist' poet gives something more negative than the generally positive vision usually imparted by nationalism.

While recognising the presence of nationalism, especially in discussing the literatures from a postcolonial context, it is also important to realise that there are problems with this label in teaching and criticising the literature. For example, when Denis Donoghue (1997) was teaching the works of Jonathan Swift at the University of Cambridge, 'I didn't make much', according to him, 'of his being Irish'. According to Donoghue, Swift's 'styles concerned me more than his nationality or his version of nationalism'. In general, Donoghue is against the belief that: 'We are to approach a work of literature only for its symptomatic value as an illustration of some attitude already at large in the rhetoric of Irish identity'. As an example, he picks the analysis of Yeats's *Leda and the Swan* in Declan Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland*. According to Kiberd, in Donoghue's words, Yeats's poem is 'simply a poem about England's "rape" of Ireland'. However, the 'poem remains intact' in Donoghue's view, 'only because the commentary leaves its literary qualities untouched'. Thus too much interest in nationalism, to Donoghue, may deflect attention from other qualities found in the work.

Anglo-Irish, -Scottish and -Welsh literatures as postcolonial literatures

Anglo-Irish literature

William Butler Yeats, one of the great twentieth-century poets writing in English, was a senator of the Irish Free State. Indeed, Irish literature in English boasts some of the best-known writers in what is often termed *English literature*. Looking at the twentieth century alone, there were James Joyce and Samuel Beckett. Although less overtly involved with

politics when compared with Yeats, their writings can also be viewed in a postcolonial context.

Joyce, for example, has been aptly described as 'a central figure for many of the post-colonial writers in English because of the way he comes to the English tradition as an outsider and bends the English language to fit his Irish subject matter and language' (Jussawala and Dasenbrock 1992: 15). It is in this light that Joyce has been recently seen as a postcolonial author (Mays 1998), with his final novel *Finnegans Wake* (1939) – which, in the best postcolonial spirit, puts 'standard English to sleep' (Kiberd 1999) – as an example *par excellence* of how the language of the colonial masters can be used as a weapon against them. Joyce and the text of *Finnegans Wake* are certainly seen as such by Terry Eagleton (1995: 269): 'Joyce turns the medium of English against the nation which nurtured it, thus reversing the colonial power relation at the level of discourse ... In thus estranging the English language in the eyes of its proprietors, he struck a blow on behalf of all of his gagged and humiliated ancestors'.

Beckett went in a different linguistic direction: he stopped writing original works in English, and went on to write them initially in French, and to translate some of them into English later. Beckett's development can in fact be compared to that of the Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who will be mentioned again later in this book: after writing some novels in English, Ngũgĩ eventually abandoned English as a first language for creative writing, and wrote in Gikũyũ.

Towards the end of Joyce's novel *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the main character, Stephen Daedalus, after feeling alienated from the English language itself, becomes preoccupied with the idea of exile, and contemplates the prospect of banishing himself to mainland Europe. This was the path taken by Joyce himself. Beckett was also a voluntary exile in Europe. He spent much of his life in Paris. Because Beckett initially wrote many of his works in French, he is also regarded today as a French author.

It must be stressed that Yeats, Joyce and Beckett are Irish authors, even if they are often included in English literature courses. So important are they as writers in English that the need to create a separate category of Irish literature, or Irish literature in English, in order to accommodate them does not often arise. As major writers, their exclusion would be at the expense of a balanced English literature programme. It can also be argued that Ireland only achieved full independence from Britain in 1949, after the deaths of Yeats and Joyce. Beckett is less often included, although one is not sure whether this is because many of his works were produced after 1949, because he is regarded more as a French author, or because he is regarded as a lesser

author than Yeats or Joyce. However, Irish independence in 1949 was merely formal, as Ireland had regarded itself as virtually an independent state, with a parliament of its own, for several decades before that.

Anglo-Scottish literature

With Welsh and Scottish literature, however, the distinction from English literature is less clear, although, like the Irish, some Welsh and Scottish writers have been nationalists. The major Scottish poet of the twentieth century for example, Hugh MacDiarmid, was one of the founders of the Scottish National Party in 1928. What can best be described as anti-colonial sentiments have certainly not been watered down in recent years, and this is clearly seen in the views of some of the more recent Scottish writers. In some ways, these sentiments have actually grown. For example, James Kelman (1997: 13), 'felt an immediate kinship' when he 'first read *The Palm Wine Drinkard* in the early 1970s ... as when I read Sam Selvon's *Lonely Londoners*'. *The Palm Wine Drinkard* (1953) is by the Nigerian author Amos Tutuola, whereas Sam Selvon was originally from Trinidad. Kelman is of the view that recent Anglo-Scottish literature is 'a radical literature', and should definitely be associated with postcolonial literatures elsewhere, including the revolutionary aspects of these literatures:

It is easier for the likes of myself and other Scottish contemporary artists to talk about art, politics and culture with people from other countries.

We can have straightforward conversations with African writers and writers from the West Indies and black American writers or even from Southeast Asia. You're not talking as if you've landed from Mars.

You're talking about issues which are perceived as political issues: self-determination, the right of any culture to survive. These are very basic things.

I would argue that the writing I do is part of this. The art form I'm engaged in is a liberation struggle. It's no accident that there is an increasing movement for self-determination in Scotland and that Scottish literature should have such a distinguishable feature to it and be vibrant as well.

(quoted in 'Capturing Working Scots' Idiom')

This view is not unique to Kelman, but is also expressed by a younger Scottish writer who has been influenced by Kelman, Duncan McLean.

Again, McLean's assertion of Scottish nationalism is merged with his ideas on literature and culture. He is of the view that Scotland:

is effectively a colony of England. Its schools and universities teach English, not Scottish, literature, and books, magazines and television are largely controlled by an English middle-class mentality. Scots seethe with resentment under the English yoke.

(quoted in Downer 1996)

The sense of Scottish nationalism is certainly not dormant, and is in fact growing in some quarters. It does not merely manifest itself in the cheers of some Scotsmen whenever England loses a European or World Cup soccer match. However, Scottish nationalism as something much stronger than the support of the Scottish football team is a recent phenomenon, and can be traced to the period of Margaret Thatcher as British Prime Minister, as recounted by the reporter Ian Jack (1997: 1):

... in 1978, when Scotland are ejected from another World Cup, I write a piece for the Sunday Times which includes the phrase 'the great Caledonian bubble has burst'. A history professor at Glasgow University writes to the paper to say that the great Caledonian bubble will float on; nationalism has more complicated causes than football. But he is proved wrong, at least until Margaret Thatcher arrives.

Anglo-Welsh literature

We have seen the example of R.S. Thomas above, who is perhaps the most prominent Welsh nationalist writing in English. In one of his early poems 'The Old Language' (Thomas 1993: 25), he laments:

England, what have you done to make the speech
My fathers used a stranger at my lips,
An offence to the ear, a shackle on the tongue ...?

However, Thomas is a paradoxical figure:

Thomas hates the English language, yet writes his poetry in it ... His fanatical nationalism, it turns out, was a midlife growth. As a boy in Holyhead, he ... showed no inclination to learn the language, and quickly forgot the little that was taught at school ... Thomas's enemies, keen to sniff out hypocrisy, note that his much-trumpeted

Welshness did not prevent him sending his son to an English public school, Sherborne. Nor did the boy learn Welsh (though Thomas is so keen on everyone else doing so that he would not answer his parishioners if they addressed him in English).

(Carey 1996)

In fact, Thomas does not regard anyone who does not speak the Welsh language as ethnically Welsh. It can also be noted that Thomas's Welsh, which he started to learn seriously in his late twenties, suffers from being acquired late. According to some informants, it is 'stiff and academic', in contrast to the Welsh of the hill-farmers, which he admires, as it is spoken naturally, as if it bubbles 'out of them like birdsong' (Carey 1996). His Welsh can also be contrasted to his English: he speaks Welsh 'in a markedly Anglicised accent', whereas his English is spoken 'without a trace of Welsh' (Heptonstall 1997: 216). Incidentally, English was also the language he spoke with his Canadian-Irish wife at home.

Yet, in spite of the complications of his nationalistic feelings and stance, his espousal of extremist Welsh nationalism appears as plainly negative, even rabid, which, as seen earlier, led Rushdie to coin the word *nationism* to describe it. In this regard, it is understandable for Thomas to be angered when the Welsh valleys were flooded to provide Liverpool and Birmingham with drinking water. It is also understandable for him to be displeased at 'the use of the Llyn peninsula as a practice ground for RAF fighter bombers and as a rest and recreation facility for the English urban masses' (O Drisceoil 1997: 9). However, his support of violent Welsh nationalism is not always easy to understand. For example, he notoriously refused to condemn the burning of English-owned holiday cottages by Welsh extremists. When asked if he could reconcile his profession as a clergyman with his pro-extremist stance, he was rumoured to have said, 'what is the life of one English person compared to the destruction of a nation?' (Carey 1996). He is against the English who own second homes in Wales 'because their presence brought the intrusion of an unwanted alien language' (Jury 1997). As an extension of this, he believes that the Welsh should rise in armed resistance against the English. He is envious of Ireland, where, in his view, 'the English handling of the Easter 1916 uprising created martyrs who acted as the catalyst for a great nationalist movement' (Jury 1997).

Extreme nationalism was a late development in Thomas. It was a meeting with Saunders Lewis, the Welsh nationalist and writer, that changed the course of his life. Thomas met Lewis after the latter had been released from prison for subversion. The following is a description of their meeting:

Lewis broke into Welsh to which Thomas could reply only falteringly. Shame galvanised his spirit. He learned how to speak to the farm people of his parish in their own tongue. He learned how to write, though only in prose, an apparently distinguished Welsh.

(Heptonstall 1997: 215-6)

Thomas is by no means alone, among Welsh nationalists, in his late acquisition of Welsh: Gwynfor Evans, another prominent nationalist, also learnt in later in life. Although Thomas did eventually learn to write successfully in Welsh, his poetry, which he did not write in the language, 'came to be written in an exceptional English, the purity of its diction equal to the perfect measure of its prosody' (Heptonstall 1997: 216). He is aware of this anomaly, and is full of regret. For him, it feels like 'salt in the wound' that his poetry is written in English. However, he confesses that 'his grasp of Welsh lacks the necessary nuances' for him to write poetry in the language (Jury 1997).

It may be claimed that Thomas's nationalism is conspicuous in his proclamations outside his creative writing, but not really evident in his poetry. Arguably, it is present, but more subtly. According to Rushdie, Thomas's 'poems seek, by noticing, arguing, rhapsodizing, mythologizing, to write the nation to fierce, lyrical being' (Rushdie 1997b: 22). It is difficult, to Rushdie, for writers 'to deny the lure of the nation, its tides in our blood' (1997b: 22). However, 'In the best writing, ... a map of a nation will also turn out to be a map of the world' (1997b: 24), which is why the nationalism in much of Thomas's poetry can only be detected with some discrimination. What Rushdie describes as Thomas's 'nationalism' is overtly presented in only a few of his poems, of which 'The Old Language', which was partly quoted above, is an example. However, it is very clear in many of his extra-poetic proclamations.

Use of dialects and linguistic violence

Although the writers may use English, one of the ways they assert their sense of nationalism is through the use of dialects of English not found in England itself. The use of dialect to assert nationalism varies in the non-English states. In a recent anthology of poetry from Wales, for example, it has been noted that only two of the poets use Anglo-Welsh dialects in their writing (Firchow 1995: 591). However, there is a clear tendency to use dialect for the expression of a national identity in the case of recent fiction from Scotland. Sometimes, this is done through what can be described as *linguistic violence*, as in the case of James Kelman and Irvine Welsh.

James Kelman

One of Kelman's novels *How Late It Was, How Late* (1994) has been described as 'expletive-filled' and 'attracted reviews that spluttered with sanctimonious wrath' (Huggan 1997: 416). One of these reviews was written in *The Times* by Simon Jenkins, who 'compared reading the novel to being waylaid in a railway carriage by a Glaswegian drunk' (Jaggi 1998). According to Jenkins, who was speaking from personal experience, the Glaswegian drunkard, who reminded him so much of Kelman, and whom he describes as 'an ambassador of that city', 'requested money with menaces, swore and eventually relieved himself into the seat' (cited by Wood 1994: 9). The following extract is quite typical of Kelman's novel (1998: 171) as a whole:

But it couldnay get worse than this. He was really fuckt now. This was the dregs; he was at it. He had fucking reached it now man the fucking dregs man the pits, the fucking black fucking limboland, purgatory; that's what it was like, purgatory, where all ye can do is think. Think. That's all ye can do. Ye just fucking think about what ye've done and what ye've no fucking done; ye cannay look at nothing ye cannay see nothing it's just a total fucking disaster area, yer mind, yer fucking memories, a disaster area. Ye wonder about these things. How come it happened to you and nay other cunt? He wasnay ordinary, that's the thing man, Sammy, he wasnay ordinary, cause if he was fucking ordinary it wouldnay be fucking happening. That's how ye've got to look at yer life, what ye did that made ye different. And it's all fucking bastard fucking flukes man fucking coincidences. Even going blind. Although it didnay just HAPPEN I mean it didnay just HAPPEN; fucking spontaneous, it wasnay spontaneous, it was these bastard sodjers, it was them, stupit fucking fuckpig bastards.

In an extract of one hundred and ninety words, the root word 'fuck' appears seventeen times, which means that it makes its appearance in every eleven words, which is probably reflective of the novel as a whole. If the words 'bastard' (thrice in the extract) and 'cunt' (once) are added, scatological words or root words appear once in every ten words, which is very frequent indeed. Stylistically, these words either have the effect of being incantatory, or, as is more likely the case, become monotonous after a while.

The negative reaction to Kelman's novel is thus not entirely surprising. Simon Jenkins called Kelman an 'illiterate savage'. However, to the surprise of some of his critics (including, presumably, Jenkins himself), there is a deeper side to Kelman. He has, for example, actually

read 'the European masters to whom he is compared – Beckett, Kafka, Joyce, Chekhov, Zola' (Jaggi 1998). *How Late It Was, How Late* won the Booker Prize in 1994. Jenkins denounced the award to Kelman and deprecated the quality of the novel by describing it as an example of 'literary vandalism'; one of the judges for that year, Rabbi Julia Neuberger, described the book as 'crap' and 'not publicly accessible' (Jaggi 1998). During his acceptance speech, Kelman denounced the English as colonialists. The Irish author Roddy Doyle also uses dialect with f-words in his novel *Paddy Clark Ha Ha Ha*, which won the Booker the year before, but he is not as interested as Kelman in politicising the issue of language use.

Irvine Welsh

Another novelist with the same tendency is Irvine Welsh, whose language in his novels has been described as 'scabrous' and 'foul-mouthed' (Downer 1996). Although he used the f-word only sixty-one times in his first work for television (Cosgrove 1997: 22) – a far cry from Kelman's novel, which was estimated to have contained 'about 4,000 f-words' (Ellison 1994: 1) – it must be remembered that television is a more conservative linguistic medium than the contemporary Scottish novel. There are certainly many more f-words in Irvine Welsh's cult novel *Trainspotting* (1993):

Now the doorbell's going. Fuckin hell. That bastard shite-arsed fuck-up of a landlord: Baxter's son. Auld Baxter, god rest the diddy cunt's soul, never bothered about the rent cheque. Senile auld wanker.
(Welsh 1996: 86)

However, in the novel as a whole, Welsh uses scatological words and expressions slightly more sparingly than Kelman, which is not saying much, as they certainly appear much more frequently than in the average novel in English.

Here is a description of the language used in Welsh's work:

A gang of Edinburgh men — heroin addicts, boozers, streetfighters, football hooligans, sometimes all four at once — make an anarchic, episodic and brutal passage through this novel.

They speak their own language, which is slangy, filthy and unwritable. But since the novel is narrated by various members of this gang, this language must be written down. It is forced to become a "literary" language, the language of fictional narration ...

(Wood 1996: C34)

Whatever it is, there is no question that there is an attempt to represent a Scottish dialect of English in his novel, even if, with Kelman's extra-literary pronouncements in mind, Welsh's general sense of Scottish nationalism is relatively less palpable. Although the main character of *Trainspotting* says that 'Ah've never felt British, because ah'm not. It's ugly and artificial', he also says that:

Ah've never really felt Scottish either, though. Scotland the brave, ma arse; Scotland the shitein cunt. We'd throttle the life oot ay each other fir the privilege ay rimmin some English aristocrat's piles.

(Welsh 1996: 228)

It is clear that being 'Scottish' is tantamount to being subservient to the English. The romanticised version of Scotland associated with kilts and bagpipes has no place in *Trainspotting*. There is an anarchic thrust in the novel which makes it anti-colonial, even if its sense of Scottishness does not call out for attention on the surface: 'Ah've never felt a fuckin thing about countries, other than total disgust' (Welsh 1996: 228). Nevertheless, going to London in the novel is still viewed in terms of an 'exile'.

There is one aspect of Welsh's language use that is quite different from that of Kelman's. It has been noted that while 'Kelman's characters swear in a writerly sort of way', 'Welsh's voices are the ones you would hear on the Muirhouse bus or at Easter Road when Hibs are losing' (McKay 1996). It is therefore less easy to understand, as it is closer to the spoken dialect, and even the *Guardian* reviewer Tom Shields (1996: 27) confesses that he 'needs a glossary to keep up'. However, the making of Welsh's novel into a film has helped to reverse the situation, and it is probably the case today that Welsh's language in the novel is understood better than the language of Kelman's novel.

The f-word and anti-colonialism: an Australian digression

The 'subversive' language of Kelman and Welsh can be described as anti-colonial. But what is so anti-colonial about the f-word? In order to answer that question in wider perspective, let us look at how its use was perceived in relation to a noteworthy incident in Australian theatre. In 1968, the play *Norm and Ahmed* by Alex Buzo was premiered. The performance included the f-word, and, as a result, several members of its cast were arrested. This incident must be viewed within the wider context of the use of what was regarded as 'obscene' language in

Australian literature. The Australian poet John Tranter (1996) notes, for example, that 'No poet in Australia in the late Fifties and early Sixties could get a poem published in any magazine if the editor thought that it might in any way give moral offence to the average person'. Tranter views this moral squeamishness in the use of language in Australian literature in terms of Australia's 'long and miserable tradition of subservience to authority: the ghost of our convict past'.

With regard to *Norm and Ahmed*, the Australian theatre scholars Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins (1996) have no doubt about the f-word in the play as an emblem of anti-colonialism (or the powerful expression of postcolonial anti-British sentiments). Linguistically, they view its use in the play as a potent indication of its wider usage in Australian English *vis-à-vis* what is regarded as 'standard' British English. This was how they perceive its presence in the play:

Whether or not this language [as it is used in the play] was a serious attempt to address British control over Australian affairs, it was *interpreted* as a nationalist move by which Australia declared a metaphoric independence: the ensuing furor that the arrests created assisted in the easing of Australia's censorship rules. *Norm and Ahmed*, together with many other Australian plays of the 1960s and 1970s, established as 'legitimate' on local stages the Australian colloquial and metaphoric 'dialect' of English that incorporates particular idiomatic expressions and rhyming slang.

(Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 165–6)

In this light, the f-word is seen as an emblem of a more extensive dialectal usage and as significant in the conflict with the colonial inheritance. The latter is an important consideration in the interpretation of recent Scottish fiction in terms of anti-colonial literature. Gilbert and Tompkins have also made another important point: that the dialect may be 'metaphorical', which is relevant for the analysis of Kelman, who may not give a faithful representation of any actual spoken Scottish dialect. Besides, the faithful representation of dialects in literature is always difficult, and most dialectal representations may after all be, to a degree, metaphorical.

The f-word and anti-colonialism: back to Kelman

Kelman nonchalantly asserts that the f-word is a regular part of his own language and dialect, and innocently claims that although it is frequently used in his childhood and teens, he did not know what it was

supposed to mean (or what its 'standard' meaning was) until much later. Kelman 'claims only to have been aware of the original meaning of the word "fuck" when he was in his twenties: hitherto, the word had had a hundred other meanings, a thousand different uses' (Bell 1994: 16). As in the Australian case above, Kelman's use of the f-word is emblematic of his attempt to include a non-standard dialect in his work. In this light, the language used in his work has been regarded as 'real speech, speech that only becomes controversial in the artificial environment of "official" English' (Bell 1994: 16). A letter writer in the *Observer* has also pointed out that Kelman 'and his characters are in mourning for the slow death since the 18th century of their native language: Lowland Scots', and because of the lack of 'a mature language for the expression of feelings he resorts to the poor substitute of debased English' (McLellan 1994: 28). However, so different is Kelman's English from the 'official' English that we are familiar with, that a Booker manager declared that the novel 'wasn't even written in English' (Kelman 1998: 24).

If the English refuse to accept Kelman's wide-ranging polysemous usage of the f-word – which is more widely emblematic of his own regionally based language and is abundantly exemplified in his works – then his attitude to their refusal could be described as confrontational. In this regard, Kelman blatantly repudiates the English's view of what their language should be. The prominence of the award of the Booker Prize to Kelman may also have a transformative effect on British culture, or, as is more likely, the novel confirms a transformation which has already occurred within British society, but which is not liked in some quarters. After Kelman won the award, a report by David Harrison in the *Observer* prefaced itself with the following:

WARNING: This article contains words that some readers may find offensive, although some will find them less offensive than they did a few years ago. And some will not find them offensive at all. A few may even like them.

(Harrison 1994: 9)

To Harrison, *How Late It Was, How Late* 'makes the expletive almost defunct, but not deleted', and 'confirmed what many language purists had suspected – swearing has become so common that we may have to invent new expletives in order to shock'. Harrison even coins a new word, *Kelmanism*, in order to encapsulate a new transformation that, according to him, has occurred in British popular culture:

The Kelman-word now appears brazenly on T-shirts. Comics such as *Viz* and *Smut* are studded with Kelmanisms and references to illegitimacy. The first dozen words in the film *Four Weddings and a Funeral* – hailed as the best British film for years – are loud Kelmanisms.

Harrison also notes that such 'Kelmanisms' were becoming more widespread in the newspapers in 1993:

The *Independent* and its Sunday sister have used the Kelman-word 232 times in the past year, up from a modest eight in the restrained days of 1988. The *Guardian* has done so 227 times in the past 12 months. The *Observer* had 49 examples last year.

The tabloids, however, are sensitive to their readers' feelings, and hardly ever use f-words, although 'they are partial to asterisks, stars and exclamation marks that leave little to the imagination' (Harrison 1994: 9).

The f-word, it has also been argued, has a long historical relationship with Scottish culture and literature. Thus, Kelman puts himself, at least as he probably wants to see himself, as a representative of Scottish literary tradition, under which, in Wood's words (1994: 9), 'he shelters so noisily', and this allows him to astringently pit himself against the English literary tradition:

Like most debates about language and ideology, there is a specifically Scottish dimension to the story of fuck. The word has a long and honourable literary history in Scotland, appearing in the work of the medieval poets Henryson and Dunbar, and developing through the renaissance to appear across many areas of literature and society. Robert Burns also found it a useful linguistic expression – using it sparingly in his poetry but promiscuously in his private life.

In modern Scotland, the word fuck is an invasive part of the popular vernacular, punctuating everyday conversation and multiplying in importance as it goes. It figures in whole swathes of comedy and most importantly of all is a crucial part of the grainy realism of contemporary fiction. From the bleak modernism of James Kelman's novels to the acidic fantasies of Irvine Welsh, the word fuck – and its ovular equivalent, cunt – are used not simply to reflect the cadences of working-class life, but to mark out the power of a language that is inarticulate yet profound.

(Cosgrove 1998)

Of course, it may be regarded as a caricature of the situation to say that Kelman's influence on the younger nationalist Scottish writers is centred on the f-word. It may also be counter-argued that the f-word is also part of Englishness: after all, wasn't it Philip Larkin, that 'key figure in the concept of Englishness in modern literature', 'who made the word "fuck" fully canonical' (Crawford 1992: 273, 275)? If too much can be made of the f-word and Scottish nationalism, and, more specifically, its representativeness in Kelman's language, so can too little be made of it. Whatever it is, there is something in the language of Kelman's fiction that creates an impact on younger Scottish writers. What is regarded as obscene language in his novels is, in effect, part and parcel of his influence, and should be emblematically viewed in terms of the wider usage of dialect or the representation of Scottish culture. It can be noted that even in Larkin's case, the use of 'four-letter words that play off against gentilities can be seen as [his] equivalent of dialect' (Crawford 1992: 276, citing Blake Morrison). The impact of Kelman's writing with regard to dialect and the representation of Scottish culture has been described by the writer Duncan McLean:

As soon as I came across him, I thought, 'This is it.' He was writing about a Scotland I recognised using a language I recognised.
(cited by Wroe 1997: 12)

The anti-colonial attitude of Kelman towards England, the English, and English culture has been seen earlier. This attitude is closely tied up to the survival of his language and culture: 'My culture and my language have the right to exist, and no one has the authority to dismiss that right' (quoted in Jaggi 1998). The writer A.L. Kennedy elaborates (1996: 19):

We have served England's crown, we have died for England's empire, we have seen our Gaels subjected to genocide in the 18th century, and our urban poor to needless and fatal poverty. For generations, we have been told that we are awkwardly different and expendable. We had to find this funny and fascinating, or go insane.

One of the ways to rebel against the colonial masters is to resort to language, and the language of literature in particular:

Having been drowned out by other cultures for so long, we now intend to be heard. Having been told that our languages, dialects

and accents are wrong and intrinsically subversive, we take delight in subverting.

(Kennedy 1996: 19)

It is in this respect that Andrew Neil (1998: 11) has noted (albeit negatively) that the 'foul-mouthed, anti-English rant of an Edinburgh heroin crackhead in *Trainspotting* has been made into Scotland's Gettysburg Address by fashionable bletherers.'

Suppression of the Celtic languages

Looking backwards, one of the major effects of the conquest of Wales, Scotland and Ireland and their continued colonisation over the centuries, was the suppression of the Celtic languages. The linguistic suppression was also seen in other parts of the British Isles. Some of these Celtic languages, such as Manx and Cornish – the latter was spoken within England itself in Cornwall – have become extinct, although there have been attempts to revive Cornish, which now has around 2,000 speakers. Irish Gaelic has only about half a million speakers in Ireland, and there is a corresponding number of Welsh speakers in Wales. Scotland has fewer than 80,000 speakers of Scottish Gaelic.

Among the reasons for the suppression of the Celtic languages was their deficiency, it was claimed, when compared with English. As a corollary, it has been argued that the speakers of Celtic languages can improve themselves materially or professionally if they abandoned their languages and used English. On the surface at least, such sentiments did seem to be positive, as they attempted to 'improve' the well-being of people, although the means by which this could be done – by 'rescuing them from their own language' – does seem dubious. Here, for example, is the 1866 editorial in *The Times*, which questioned Matthew Arnold's advocacy of the study of Welsh:

The Welsh language is the curse of Wales. Its prevalence and the ignorance of English have excluded, and even now exclude, the Welsh people from the civilization, the improvement, and the material prosperity of their English neighbours ... [T]he Welsh have remained in Wales, unable to mix with their fellow-subjects, shut out from all literature except what is translated into their own language and incapable of progress ... Their antiquated and semi-barbarous language, in short, shrouds them in darkness. If Wales and the Welsh are ever thoroughly to share in the material

prosperity, and, in spite of Mr. Arnold, we will add the culture and morality, of England, they must forget their isolated language, and learn to speak English, and nothing else.

(cited in Dawson and Pfordresher 1979: 161–2)

Survival of the Celtic languages

In spite of their small number of speakers when compared with English, literatures in the Celtic languages continue to be written, even in the least spoken of the three surviving Celtic languages in the British Isles today, Scottish Gaelic. They need to be mentioned here, lest the impression is created that literatures in these languages have completely succumbed to the onslaught of English.

Scottish Gaelic

Among the important writers in Scottish Gaelic this century are the poet Sorley Maclean and the novelist Iain Crichton Smith. They are regarded as major twentieth-century writers in the language. Gaelic literature in Scotland has a strong relationship with nationalism, and Maclean's poetry is believed to have a significant part to play in it. It has been argued, for example, that as a result of Maclean's 'poetry more than to anything else', 'Gaelic remains central in the perception of Scottish culture shared by youthful generations' (Calder and Wilson 1996: 11). However, Scottish Gaelic, with fewer than 80,000 speakers, is a language under threat.

To be fair, Scottish Gaelic is not the only indigenous language. Scots, which has more speakers, and is not a Gaelic language, has also made a strong claim to being a native language of Scotland. Indeed, Scots has been used more often for the linguistic expression of Scottish nationalism than Scottish Gaelic, with the use of the language by James Kelman, during the presentation ceremony for the award of the Booker Prize to him in 1994, being a recent example. However, Scots is often treated as a dialect or even a variety of English (Carter and McRae 1997: 532–3), and it had a historical relationship with the English spoken in Northern England. The use of Scots in literature, as in the case of Kelman and Welsh discussed above, in fact provides interesting examples of how varieties or dialects of English can be used in literary works (for further examples, see Carter and McRae 1997: 204–7, 379–80, 532–4, 536–7).

Welsh

Perhaps the most visible literature written in a Celtic language today is found in Wales, as Welsh is more of a living literary language in the British Isles today than the other Celtic languages. A contributory factor here is the number of its speakers. Welsh is the mother tongue of about a fifth of the population of Wales. As such, it certainly has more speakers, as noted above, than Scottish Gaelic in Scotland (although there are faint hopes that the granting of more autonomy to Scotland may change that). In this regard, R.S. Thomas proudly commented that 'Language is where the Welsh outshine the Irish and the Scots' and that '“We are superior”' in the use of Welsh when compared with the Scots and Irish (quoted by Jury 1997). Perhaps, unlike Scotland, Wales does not also have a competing English-based dialect making a strong claim to being the language of nationalism.

However, the view that Welsh is a living language has been questioned. It may be a literary language, but whether it is a healthy living language like English or French is a different matter. It has been noted, for instance, that even though it is claimed that '18 per cent of the Welsh speak the language ... 82 per cent do not speak it at all' (Rogers 1997: 31). It is further noted, even though it is 'a fact ... hard to believe', 'that twice as many people speak Breton [the Celtic language spoken in France] as its sister language Welsh' (Rogers 1997: 31).

With the ideas of 'purity' discussed in the previous chapter in mind, it may also be mentioned here, that during the sixteenth century, the Welsh were regarded as the descendants of the original pre-Roman population of the British Isles. The Tudor dynasty in fact legitimised itself as the ruling dynasty in Britain by appealing to their remote Welsh ancestry. However, this did not do much to enhance the status of the Welsh people and the Welsh language over the centuries, although the idea of purity, in terms of both ethnicity and language, seems to have survived among Welsh nationalists. R.S. Thomas, for example, laments that 'The ties between the Welsh and the English are too many': 'The people inter-marry, they barely notice they are crossing the river Severn – or Hafren in Welsh' (quoted by Jury 1997).

Irish

The Irish are usually happy if writers write in Gaelic in general, even in Scots Gaelic. However, this does not mean that the situation with Irish Gaelic in Ireland itself is completely rosy. Although literature in the language continues to be written, songs (including popular songs)

continue to be sung in it and Irish is the first official language of Ireland, some doubts on the staying power of the language have been expressed. Like the situation in Wales and Scotland, many Irish writers prefer to write in English. Yeats and Joyce have been mentioned above; they wrote in English so well that they give further credence to the observation that 'the English gave us their language and we gave them literature.' Even when the mother tongue of the writer was Irish, some of them preferred to write in English, as in the case of Flann O'Brien, who chose to write most of his novels in English.

On a lighter note, the following is a short account of the experience of two linguists when they were in Ireland. The anecdote refers to a single occasion, but it does appear to be reflective of the situation of Irish in Ireland today:

Late one night, eminent linguist Joshua Fishman and a colleague were crossing the lobby of their Dublin hotel when the cleaner leaned on his mop and exclaimed 'God love you. Two sons of Ireland speaking the language of their fathers.' Fishman and Robert Cooper, who had just flown from Tel Aviv, paused from speaking Yiddish, thanked the old man, and went on to the bar.

(Maher 1998)

On a more serious note, it has been argued by Maher (quite contrary to the anecdote he presented above) that while 'fewer primary school students [in Ireland] study Irish intensively in bilingual programs, more children study Irish as a school subject over a longer period (i.e. to 18 years)'. He believes that there is a resurgence of the language via the educational system, as 'the higher percentage [of Irish speakers] within younger age groups reflects the initial impact of revival strategies'. However the continued survival of the language, and the role educational institutions play in ensuring its survival, have been put into serious question by some specialists in Gaelic. The following, for example, is the view of Shane Gallagher (1998: 15):

Irish Gaelic is in grave danger of becoming extinct despite what any politician or educationist says. That is why it is on the UN list of endangered languages. Irish education policy towards the language has systematically failed the people of Ireland for the past 75 years. It certainly failed me. This is because the policy has been created by people who clearly have had no understanding of the nature of language.

Pattern seen in other postcolonial literatures

The pattern seen here is not unique to Britain, but, in varying degrees, is also seen in some of the lands colonised by Britain (although, admittedly, there may be more positive patterns for certain languages):

- First, there was British conquest or occupation
- The native language of the colony was then suppressed, or at best became less relevant. In the case of Welsh for example, its unconditional use in the law courts was only allowed in 1967, with the passing of the Welsh Language Act.
- The native language, if it did not have a written script and a literary tradition to back it up, gradually had fewer speakers, and may eventually become extinct. Relatively speaking, this was the case with Cornish, which became extinct more than two hundred years ago, and which did not have as strong a writing tradition as the major surviving Celtic languages today.
- On a more universal scale, the colonial situation in Britain was repeated elsewhere, as eulogized in the following quotation from an anonymous article published in the middle of the nineteenth century:

The barbarism of Australia, the heathen institutions and worn-out languages of India, the superannuated hieroglyphs of China, and the rude utterances of important parts of Africa and of numberless islands in the Eastern seas, are fast giving way to the institutions and the languages of our race.

('Our Language Destined to be Universal', 1855: 311)

Extent of applicability to other postcolonial literatures

One broad similarity, however, between what is now increasingly described as the British states colonised by England and the former British colonies (except, to an extent, the United States) is the treatment meted out to their literatures in English. Their literatures, if taught at all, were either subsumed under English literature or they were simply ignored. It is only in recent years that this has changed. Even then, the similarity ends there, as there are comparative differences between them. Scottish, Welsh and Irish literatures in English are often subsumed under English literature, whereas the former colonies' literatures are more often ignored.

There are further problems if the situation in the other nations of the British Isles is faithfully applied to other postcolonial literatures. Here are some of the difficulties, with specific reference to the literature of Ireland:

According to a current and – it seems to me – naive emphasis in Irish studies, we are to think of Ireland as a postcolonial country and bring to bear upon it the vocabularies of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Fredric Jameson, Chinua Achebe, and other political thinkers. The fact that those vocabularies were designed to deal with historical and political conditions in Africa, India, Algeria, and the Middle East rather than in Ireland is not allowed to count.

Yet England has not been an imperial force in Ireland in the way that it was in India; by the same token, the historical relations between England and Ireland are quite different from those between Belgium and the Congo. To treat the situations intellectually as one and the same is flagrant distortion.

(Donoghue 1997)

However, the extent of the similarities should not be under-emphasised either. In a fine book-length discussion of the devolution of Scottish literature and other literatures in English, Robert Crawford points out that Scottish literature ‘offers the longest continuing example of a substantial body of literature produced by a culture pressurized by the threat of English cultural domination’ (Crawford 1992: 8). Irish and Welsh literatures also have long histories of being pressurised by English cultural domination. Their literatures can thus be associated with many of the problems in the other literatures to be discussed later in the book.

3 Anglo-Saxon transplantations

The pattern noted at the end of the previous chapter was clearly seen in the United States. After British occupation, many of the Native American languages were suppressed, and some eventually became extinct. Another linguistic effect of British colonialism was on English itself. In the United States, there was the belief that American varieties of English were of lower prestige than some varieties spoken in England, or that they were degraded versions of English. A similarly negative attitude was displayed towards American literature. In a wider context, comparable attitudes towards language and literature were seen in the other white settler colonies, such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

Clearly, a more positive image of their language and literature was needed. It was America that led the way by increasing the prestige of its language and literature during the course of the twentieth century, and, as such, it will form the focus of the discussion in the early part of this chapter. In the later decades of the twentieth century, the growth in the prestige of the varieties of English and literatures of the other settler colonies followed the American example. Their growth eventually had an effect on, or set the example for, the other varieties of English and literatures in the language across the globe. America is also of interest because, in spite of its anti-colonial and postcolonial credentials, it is the country which is often described today as colonial, or as displaying colonial attitudes towards other countries in the world.

In this chapter, there will also be a brief discussion of a linguistic thread that runs through the literatures of the white settler colonies. When compared with the other former British colonies, there is a stronger desire in the settler colonies, in spite of some notable exceptions, to preserve the English language as it is and not to make radical changes to it. In order to see more striking linguistic experimentations, usually influenced by other languages, one has to turn to the minority authors, or authors who are not of Anglo-Saxon