CHAPTER 1

Decolonizing the University

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The relationship between colonization and academia is a vast topic going back many centuries, but the more particular issue of decolonizing the university was brought into sharp focus in 2015 by protests against statues of Cecil Rhodes at the University of Cape Town and then at Oxford the following year. South African scholar Grant Parker commented on the apparent anomaly of how the "offending Rhodes statue at UCT famously received little notice for . . . many years" (257), with these demonstrations taking place "nearly a generation after the establishment of democracy in the country" (256), long after the statue of Hendrick Verwoerd, architect of apartheid, had been removed from the South African parliament in 1994. But the more recent literal as well as metaphorical deconstructions of statues in many countries were spectacular visual events given heightened public impact by social media networks that did not exist twenty years earlier, and in South Africa this movement also became conflated with issues of student access through a "Fees Must Fall" movement. Within "the Oxford context," according to organizers of "Rhodes Must Fall," their "three principal tenets for decolonisation" were "decolonising the iconography, curriculum and racial representation at the university" (Nkopo and Chantiluke 137), with the movement being "intersectional" in identifying places where racial injustice overlapped with, and was exacerbated by, similar forms of inequity in class or gender.

Decolonization itself was defined by historian John Springhall as "the surrender of external political sovereignty, largely Western European, over colonized non-European peoples, plus the emergence of independent territories where once the West had ruled, or the transfer of power from empire to nation-state" (2). Geoffrey Barraclough, formerly Chichele Professor of Modern History at Oxford, observed that between 1945 and 1960 forty countries with a total population of 800 million, a quarter of the entire world's population, achieved political independence by rejecting colonial authority, and as far back as 1964 he argued that too many

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twentieth-century historians had focused their attention on European wars, even though when this history "comes to be written in a longer perspective, there is little doubt that no single theme will prove to be of greater importance than the revolt against the west" (154). It is hardly surprising that such a massive historical shift has carried reverberations in the academic world, nor that much influential decolonial theory and activism have been generated from outside more traditional universities in Europe and North America, often from the Southern Hemisphere.

Walter D. Mignolo, for example, though now based at Duke University, is a native of Argentina who has collaborated extensively with Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano and Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar to develop models of collective well-being that represent an emphatic break with assumptions of liberal society and a shift to embedding Indigenous and environmental perspectives within political systems. Mignolo's strategy of "de-linking" is directed "to de-naturalize concepts and conceptual fields that totalize A reality" ("Delinking" 459), thus dissolving purportedly universal systems into more "pluri-versal" variants ("Delinking" 499). In Latin America this outlook was interwoven in complex ways with liberation theology and given legal expression in 2008 through the valorization of nature as a subject with rights within the constitution of Ecuador (Escobar 396), and then by the ratification of Bolivia in 2009 under the leadership of Evo Morales as a "Plurinational State," one explicitly recognizing Indigenous communities (Cheyfitz 143). Working from Oceania, Epeli Hauʻofa emphasized oral fiction, local knowledge, and an experiential proximity that effectively deconstructed what Mignolo called the epistemic "hubris" associated with a mythical "zeropoint" of colonial knowledge ("Introduction" 5), thereby underlining how every angle of vision necessarily derives from somewhere specific. In Africa, struggles over apartheid and Rhodes were foreshadowed by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's 1972 essay "On the Abolition of the English Department," which discussed a proposal at the University of Nairobi to replace English with a Department of African Literature and Languages, and by his 1986 book *Decolonizing the Mind*, which analyzed more comprehensively the intellectual relation between African and European languages.

It is important to recognize the subtlety of Ngũgĩ's argument in the latter work. He does not suggest English or European culture is simply redundant, but that there should be a realignment of epistemological assumptions in line with geographical reorientations. "What was interesting," noted Ngũgĩ, "was that ... all sides were agreed on the need to include African, European and other literatures. But what would be the

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centre? And what would be the periphery, so to speak? How would the centre relate to the periphery?" (89–90). As with Edward Said, whose critical work similarly invokes heterodox geographies to interrogate Western culture's hegemonic assumptions, Ngũgĩ's thinking was significantly shaped by Joseph Conrad, whom Simon Gikandi described as having a "substantive" influence on the Kenyan scholar's work (106).[1] Though one of the enduring benefits of decolonizing the university world has been to integrate Africa, Latin America, and Oceania more fully into discursive intellectual frameworks, this has involved more a repositioning than a discarding of Western cultural traditions. Nevertheless, there are important shifts of emphasis associated with this decolonial impetus. Mignolo defined it "as a particular kind of critical theory and the decolonial option as a specific orientation of doing" ("Introduction" 1), and these differentiate it in his eyes from the postcolonial theory that became very popular in English departments from the 1990s onward, which tended to leave familiar hierarchies in place. In a harsh critique of Homi Bhabha's work, Priyamvada Gopal suggested the readings of "psychic ambivalence" (15) Bhabha attributes to postcolonial texts modulate too comfortably into the kinds of equivocation associated with "Whig imperial history's own rendering of imperialism as a self-correcting system that arrives at emancipation or decolonization without regard to the resistance of its subjects" (19). For Gopal, the forms of structural hybridity foregrounded in the work of Bhabha or Gayatri Spivak were readily absorbed into a liberal system of academia where it became easy to carry on business as usual.

As with Ngũgĩ's analysis of how African literature relates to European, these are complicated (and interesting) debates, and it would seem more useful for any English department to provide the space for such ideas to be interrogated, rather than trying to impose any curriculum predicated upon the impossibility of trying to settle all such questions in advance. One of the historical advantages of Cambridge University, where Gopal is now based, is its relatively decentered structure, organized around some thirty colleges, which makes it difficult for centralized administrative authority of any kind to enjoy unobstructed sway. Salman Rushdie complained in 1983 about Cambridge's institutional use of "Commonwealth Literature," which he described as a "strange term" that "places Eng. Lit. at the centre and the rest of the world at the periphery," a notion he described as "unhelpful and even a little distasteful" ("Commonwealth" 61). However, that did not prevent him from pursuing his interest in Islamic culture during his History degree at Cambridge, with Rushdie recalling it was while studying for a special paper on the rise of Islam that he "came across the

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story of the so-called 'satanic verses' or temptation of the Prophet Muhammad" ("From an Address" 249), a story he subsequently embellished in his controversial novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988).

Following a similarly contrapuntal pattern, Caryl Phillips, who was born on the Caribbean island of Saint Lucia and grew up in Leeds before reading English at Oxford in the late 1970s, chose in his final year an optional paper on American Literature, since this gave him the opportunity to study for the first time Black writers: Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin. Though Britain at this time "was being torn apart by 'race riots,'" Phillips later recalled, "there was no discourse about race in British society and certainly no black writers" on the mainstream Oxford English curriculum ("Marvin Gaye" 35). Under the aegis of Warton Professor John Bayley and his wife Iris Murdoch, the Oxford English Faculty at that time promoted a soft Anglican ideology based around the belief that idiosyncratic "human" qualities necessarily trumped any theory of social circulation. There are, of course, respectable intellectual rationales for this approach, involving a privileging of biography and what Murdoch, a former Oxford philosophy tutor turned novelist, called in her polemical rejection of existential abstraction a stance "against dryness." But this meant that undergraduates studying American literature tended to be uncomfortable discussing questions of race, with a special paper on William Faulkner when I taught there in the first decade of the twenty-first century attracting essays that made him appear to resemble Virginia Woolf, as the students focused more confidently on stylistic streams of consciousness than on representations of racial tension in Faulkner's fiction. The same thing was true at Cambridge, where I worked between 1999 and 2002 after the early death of Tony Tanner. Tanner's inventive and courageous work had helped to establish American Literature as a viable option on the highly traditional Cambridge English syllabus, but his own emphasis on the legacy of transcendentalism, and his critical understanding of American writing as an exploration of new worlds of "wonder," had led to a synchronic understanding of the field as synonymous with a mythic quest for freedom. Many students in the third-year American Literature seminar did not know or care about the dates of the US Civil War, nor did they see distinctions between antebellum and postbellum periods as relevant to their textual close readings.

None of these pedagogical issues was insuperable, and part of the pleasure in university teaching involves encouraging students to reconsider familiar authors from a more informed perspective. Moreover, the polycentricity of both Oxford and Cambridge helped ensure these intellectual

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agendas were driven largely by productive academic debates and disagreements, rather than, as at some other places I have worked, by deans or vice chancellors who fancy themselves as charismatic leaders and wish to impose “a future vision” of their own on the university. Phillips’s own novels involve, in his words, “a radical rethinking of what constitutes British history” (Bragg), while avoiding “the restrictive noose of race” (“Introduction” 131), which as a category Phillips takes to be inherently reductive, and in this sense his fiction might be said to have internalized in paradoxical ways aspects of the Oxford idiom, even in resisting its ideological narrowness.

Mark Twain, who in *Following the Equator* (1897) directly addressed Cecil Rhodes’s legacy in South Africa, also retained a guarded attitude toward questions of race and colonization, one that combined a sense of outrage at Rhodes’s depredations with a darker fatalism shaped by Twain’s sense of Social Darwinism as an inevitable force. Twain’s presentation of Rhodes is consequently bifurcated, in line with the structural twinning that runs through much of his writing: “I know quite well that whether Mr. Rhodes is the lofty and worshipful patriot and statesman that multitudes believe him to be, or Satan come again, as the rest of the world account him, he is still the most imposing figure in the British empire outside of England” (708). Even critics who highlight Twain’s radical aspects acknowledge these contradictions: “I confess,” remarked John Carlos Rowe of *Following the Equator*, “that my representation of Twain’s anti-imperialist critique of the British in India does not account for Twain’s vigorous defense of the military conduct of the British in suppressing the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857” (132). Such ambivalence does not, of course, invalidate Twain’s engagement with colonial cultures but makes it more thought-provoking. It does no favor to either literary studies or decolonial praxis to circumscribe such writers within restrictive interpretative grooves, and Kerry Driscoll’s work on Twain and “Indigenous Peoples” perhaps misjudges the tone of *Following the Equator* in its claim Twain here “rages against the unjust dispossession of Australian Aboriginals and the genocidal efforts of colonial settlers who left arsenic-laced flour in the bush for them to eat” (11). It is true that foregrounding Twain’s darker facets can generate more pointed discussions than were customary during the heyday of *Huckleberry Finn*’s “hypercanonization,” when the novel was celebrated unproblematically as a fictional epitome of the free American spirit, and Driscoll illuminatingly expands scholarship on Twain and race to encompass questions of dispossession and Indigeneity as well as “African Americans and slavery” (4), with the latter

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having now become more familiar in critical discussions of the author.[2] There has of course been much valuable work since the 1970s to recover American writers who had been excluded from traditional canonical formations, but one of the most productive aspects of such inclusiveness has been a shift in the analytical relation between Black authors and established White figures such as Twain, Poe, or Henry James, a reorientation outlined most influentially by Toni Morrison in her Harvard lectures published as *Playing in the Dark* (1992). But Morrison's treatment of these issues is characteristically oblique, indicating how racist assumptions in these classic texts often circulate in underhand ways, and Twain's black comedy tends similarly to avoid narrative closure or polemic.[3]

The point here is simply that racial representations in literature are necessarily multifaceted and variegated. One of the qualities distinguishing the humanities from the social sciences, according to Helen Small, is their greater "tolerance for ambiguity" (50), with Roland Barthes declaring "nuance" to be synonymous with "literature" itself (11). Nevertheless, one clear benefit of decolonization for literary studies has been to demystify myths about the "universality" of American or European value systems and to interrogate subject positions whose implicit hierarchies have remained unacknowledged. James D. Le Sueur remarked on how one enduring legacy of the French–Algerian War (1954–62) was the way it generated a "fundamental reconsideration" (167) of French culture's place in the world, just as Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued for "provincializing Europe" more generally. In her account of the development of English departments in Australian universities, Leigh Dale described how old-style professors in the earlier part of the twentieth century tended to promote Anglophile ideas, with Donald Horne recalling how E. R. Holme, McCaughey Chair of Early English Literature at the University of Sydney until 1941, would use Sweet's *Anglo-Saxon Primer* "as a text for a series of sermons on the virtues of Empire" (67), with any interest in Australian literature being counted until the 1970s as, in Dale's words, "equivalent to an intellectual disability" (143). But the advent of postcolonial theory in the last decades of the twentieth century comprehensively changed these power dynamics, and conceptual intersections between different parts of the world are now an established feature of literature courses everywhere. Oxford at the beginning of the twenty-first century changed the title of its various undergraduate period papers from "English Literature" to "Literature in English," an apparently minor emendation that seemed to pass unnoticed by many college tutors, but one that resolved the previous ambiguity about whether the adjective "English" referred to language or nation and so

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allowed the possibility of studying, say, Les Murray or Adrienne Rich alongside Ted Hughes. Cambridge has retained the traditional nomenclature of "English Literature" but specifies in its outline that "the course embraces all literature written in the English language, which means that you can study American and post-colonial literatures alongside British literatures throughout." This did not necessarily mean that Oxbridge tutors who had spent half their lives teaching Dickens and George Eliot jumped at the opportunity to teach Indian or Australian literature instead, but it did allow for the possibility for the curriculum to evolve as new academic interests and priorities emerge. Decolonizing any university in substantive terms is always a long-term process rather than one accomplished by apocalyptic cleansing.

Recognition of the wide variety of colonial contexts also allows greater flexibility in understanding how a program of decolonization might be addressed. Australian anthropologist Nicholas Thomas, who now works at Cambridge, emphasizes the manifold dissimilarities of colonial situations, rejecting a "unitary and essentialist" version of "colonial discourse" (3) as "global ideology" (60) in favor of its "historicization" (19), where particular situations in, say, the Solomon Islands or Māori New Zealand are scrutinized for their "conflicted character" (3). This also leads Thomas to be skeptical about the claims of Australian Indigenous culture to any "primordial" purity (28), an idea he suggests has too often been appropriated for strategic or sentimental purposes. Concomitantly, the notion that decolonial politics should turn exclusively on a restitution of stolen lands might be said misleadingly to conflate pragmatism with philosophy. In complaining that "decolonization is not a metaphor," American Indigenous scholars Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Tang argued that "when metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters Whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future" (3). Such an emphasis does carry significant purchase in the Indian domain of land restitution that Tuck and Wang prioritize, but it is important to recognize that while land might constitute a form of "knowledge" (14) for some peoples, it certainly did not for those enslaved on American plantations, where they were not able to own land either legally or economically, nor for Jewish people who were banned from holding land in medieval Europe. To inflate a "spiritual" relation to land into an "ontology," as does Indigenous Australian academic and activist Aileen Moreton-Robinson (15), thus risks aggrandizing the legitimate praxis of specific claims grounded on the issue of territorial "sovereignty" (125) into an unsustainable universalist design.

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Such political tensions have been particularly prevalent within Australian academia, where attempts to introduce Indigenous perspectives have often led to controversies around the definition of the subject and the question of who is empowered to articulate the field. At the University of Sydney, for example, an "Aborginal Education Centre" was established in 1989 and renamed in 1992 as the "Koori Centre," providing a focus for teaching and research led by Indigenous scholars as well as support for students; but this Centre was dissolved in 2012 in an attempt to embed Indigenous knowledge more fully within regular university curricula, with individual academics being redistributed across different departments. The problem here arises not so much from these organizational structures, for which advantages and disadvantages might be adduced on both sides: a separate Koori Centre always risked being intellectually isolationist, but attempts to integrate Indigenous knowledge across the curriculum risk such specificity becoming vitiated, particularly in an era of financial stringency and dwindling appointments. But the more fundamental difficulty turns on a potential displacement of complicated intellectual questions to rigid administrative blueprints within which such theoretical issues might find themselves prematurely foreclosed. There have, for instance, been many debates around the work of Alexis Wright, an astonishing novelist from the Waanyi people, but the reception of her fiction has often become locked within institutional tugs of war linked to proprietorial concerns, with some identifying her work specifically with Indigenous politics and language, while others have sought to associate it with global environmentalism and magical realism. Some Indigenous scholars regard the "mainstreaming" of their field as inherently hazardous, on the grounds that any "reconciliation" fundamentally involves "rescuing settler normalcy" and "ensuring a settler future" (Smith, Tuck, and Yang 15); others emphasize "the importance of relationality," with Sandra Styres suggesting that "decolonizing pedagogies and practices open up spaces . . . where students can question their own positionalities, prior knowledge, biases, and taken-for-granted assumptions" (33). These arguments will inevitably continue, but it is crucial they are allowed a viable academic framework within which to evolve over time, perhaps in ways that are currently difficult to predict.

One indisputable contribution of Australian cultural theory to literary studies over the past decade has been to make debates around settler-colonial paradigms more prominent. The work of Patrick Wolfe, Lorenzo Veracini, and others, which had heretofore been regarded as relevant largely within an Australian or Pacific Island context, is now

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deployed to elucidate settler formations in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa as well as the United States, with Phillip Round in a 2019 essay on nineteenth-century US literature describing settler colonialism as "the foundational principle of all American sovereignty discourse" (62). Tamara S. Wagner similarly wrote in 2015 of how "in the last few years, new interest in settler colonialism has helped us see what postcolonial criticism has traditionally left out" (224), while Tracey Banivanua Mar observed a year later that although the Pacific had generally been seen as "an afterthought in most overviews of decolonization," this has changed "productively" in recent times (8). However, such perspectival expansiveness has introduced concurrent anxieties about a loss of traction for Australian Literature as a discrete field, along with concern that what Russell McDougall called "transnational reading practices" might lead to "deteriorating interest in Australian Literature" and its supersession by a generic model of "world literary space" (10), in which settler colonialism manifests itself as a more amorphous phenomenon. There are no easy answers to these questions, but they are complex equations that literary studies should always be thinking through: relations between hegemony and decolonization, the promise but also potentially illusory capacity of regional autonomy, the perennial liability to cultural appropriation through economic and political incorporation.

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The third of the "principal tenets" for Rhodes Must Fall, "racial representation at the university" (Nkopo and Chantiluke 137), is in many ways more difficult to address than decolonizing its iconography or curriculum, since this necessarily involves confronting the kind of systematic racism that has long been endemic to British as well as most Western societies. The statistics in themselves are shocking: in 2016, 27 percent of pupils who attended state schools in Britain were Black, but there were only a handful of Black undergraduates at Oxford, with Patricia Daley, a contributor to *Rhodes Must Fall*, being the first Black academic to be appointed as a university lecturer at Oxford as late as 1991. The reasons for such anomalies are complex, involving what can be seen in retrospect as excessive trust during the second half of the twentieth century in the meritocratic model promoted by UK government policies after 1945, where applicants for admission were judged solely on their academic performance according to supposedly objective criteria.[4] British universities were slower than those in the United States to calibrate for different social and

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educational contexts, and apart from the overall inequity of this process it also involved a significant loss of scholarly capacity, as if professional football clubs were to base recruitment only on the number of goals students had scored for their high-school team rather than their overall playing potential.

Equal access to higher education is crucial to the health as well as integrity of any academic system, but often resistance to change was linked to forms of unconscious bias that the Black Lives Matter movement has effectively highlighted. As Chakrabarty noted, while "racism" as a theoretical concept may no longer be viable, subtler forms of racial profiling and discrimination have nevertheless proliferated (*Crises* 142).[5] Sara Ahmed has written about how ubiquitous university offices of "Institutional Diversity" remain blind to what she called "kinship logic: a way of 'being related' and 'staying related,' a way of keeping certain bodies in place. Institutional whiteness," Ahmed concluded, "is about the reproduction of likeness" (38). Again, this emphasis on "kinship" is by no means a recent or exclusively British phenomenon, nor one arising solely from the idiosyncrasies of the English class system; in 1666 at the University of Basle, for instance, all but one of the professors were related to each other, while in the 1790s at Edinburgh six chairs in the medical faculty changed hands, with five of them going to sons of former professors (Vandermeersk 228). Less blatantly, however, Oxbridge often accepted students with whom it felt "comfortable" through the narrowness of its own perspective about what constituted academic value. Since this is an issue embedded historically within the social structures of British life, it is not readily susceptible to amelioration simply through educational reform. In his chapter on university life in *English Traits* (1856), Ralph Waldo Emerson described Oxford and Cambridge as "finishing schools for the upper classes, and not for the poor," with England regarding "the flower of its national life" as "a well-educated gentleman" (117). It was this emphasis on individual character and manners as the epitome of cultural value that contributed for so long to social and racial circumscriptions of the student population.

Such pressures toward conformity can also be attributed in part to the notion, common since medieval times, that the academic world should properly be subservient to the jurisdiction of a secular state. Conflicts between the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire were famously replicated in England in 1535, when Henry VIII sent royal visitors to scrutinize the Oxford and Cambridge curricula, with a view to realigning it in accordance with new state priorities by eliminating the teaching of systematic theology and abolishing degrees in canon law (Logan). In this light, more recent

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political moves to make universities serve what Bill Readings called "the force of market capitalism" (38) have a venerable antecedence. Back in the twelfth century, as R. W. Southern observed, the great majority of students went on to become "men of affairs" (199), and for most students, then as now, university was more important as an opportunity for enhanced social and economic status rather than intellectual inquiry. This, of course, is one reason the middle classes have been so desperate to protect university space in order to benefit their own children's future, with class mobility in academic environments being no less a source of potential friction than racial equity, and Matt Brim describing "top schools" in the United States as "unambiguous drivers of class stratification" (86).

Since national economies started to become increasingly dependent on information technology in the 1990s, there has been exponential pressure from national bodies for universities to produce graduates adept at gathering and organizing data, with all developed nations rapidly expanding their student populations in the interests of supporting their economies. In 2013 there were some 160 million students enrolled globally (Schreuder xxxiv), and this has led to even more pressure for higher education to serve the interests of the state. This in turn has produced a more *dirigiste* version of academia as comprising "managed professionals" (Slaughter and Rhoades 77) employed to execute research agendas often dictated by a university's upper administration, in line with government funding priorities. Symbiotically intertwined with these systematic pressures toward conformity has been the fear among some observers "in every generation," as Collini commented, that the university world "was all going to the dogs" (33). John Henry Newman in 1852 declared: "A University, I should lay down, by its very name professes to teach universal knowledge" (33); but this etymological link between universities and universalism has always been fractious and contested, particularly given the perennially tense relations between academic and political worlds. In the Middle Ages, *universitas* was a term derived from Roman law that described a union of people bound together by a common occupation, an arrangement that gave it immunity from local systems of justice under the merchant code; but in 1205 Pope Innocent III cannily expanded this corporate meaning to embrace his vision of the *universitas* as engaged in universal learning, addressing a papal letter to "universis magistris et scholaribus Parisiensis," to all masters and students in Paris (Pedersen 101, 151). Nevertheless, medieval universities always had to fight to retain some measure of freedom, with their leaders often attempting to play off civic and religious authorities against each other.

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In this sense, Immanuel Wallerstein's view that the model of the medieval university "essentially disappeared with the onset of the modern world-system" (59) seems doubtful, since universities have always been forced to negotiate uneasily with political and economic pressures. Southern commented on how the growth of scholasticism in the twelfth century heralded a "striving towards universality," with lecturers subsuming all "local peculiarities" of time and place within universal systems of knowledge (211), but competing claims of local and global have fluctuated over time and place. Many intellectual developments occurred when scholars working in universities challenged social or academic conventions: Peter Abelard's dialectical theology, for example, was seen as heretical in the twelfth century, even though two of his students eventually went on to become pope, while in the 1790s Immanuel Kant was reproved by a Prussian superintendent for his dissemination of unorthodox ideas (Ruegg 7). There has thus been a long and distinguished tradition in universities of dodging the bullets, of exploiting university infrastructures and resources to evade institutional authorities. Such transgressive practices are common across all disciplines, from Galileo's work on astronomy at the University of Padua between 1592 and 1610, to John Locke in the seventeenth century revising the basis of empirical philosophy, to Adrienne Rich in the twentieth century recasting formal poetic traditions in feminist, emancipationist styles, a project she undertook while working in a challenging urban environment at the City University of New York. In disagreeing with Eric Ashby's claim that the scientific revolution in the seventeenth century gained its momentum from outside academia, Roy Porter pointed to how universities "provided the livings" and "posts" (545) for most of the radical figures who advanced principles of physiology, medicine, and mathematical logic during this era: Carl Linnaeus, William Harvey, Isaac Newton.

From a historical perspective, then, Claire Gallien's assertion that "decolonial studies are not soluble in the neo-liberal university" (9) would appear dubious. It is not clear why a "neo-liberal" academic framework, for all its obvious reifications and follies, should be more of an impediment to innovative work than the scholastic environment of the Middle Ages, or the gentlemanly codes of conduct that predominated in the universities of eighteenth-century Germany, when professors and students liked to don the clothes of aristocrats and knights to display their social standing (Simone 316). As Porter remarked, despite all the pressures toward standardization, universities have proved over time to be "immensely durable" sites for the pursuit and dissemination of new

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knowledge (560). One of the reasons Peter Lombard's *Four Books of Sentences* was so popular among students in twelfth-century Paris was because it was a sourcebook of excerpts assembled "so that the enquirer in future will not need to turn over an immense quantity of books, since he will find here offered to him without his labour, briefly collected together, what he needs" (Southern 198), and a similarly instrumental view of higher education is readily apparent in academic marketplaces today. Nevertheless, universities still offer scope for productive work, even if indirectly rather than programmatically, since in academia chains of cause and effect, investment and outcome, tend to be linked together more obliquely than administrators and politicians would prefer.

In humanities, Stuart Hall, who played a major role in incorporating racial questions into university curricula during the final decades of the twentieth century, moved as a Rhodes Scholar in 1951 from Jamaica to Oxford, where he stayed until 1957. Hall later found continuities between his understanding of the "always hybrid" nature of "cultural identity" ("Formation" 204), linked to a "diasporic way of seeing the world," and the "diasporic imagination" of Henry James ("At Home" 273), on whom he started but never completed a doctoral thesis at Oxford. "I wanted my PhD to be on American literature," said Hall, "because it's somewhat tangential. I'm always circling from the outside. I'm interested in the complexities of the marginal position on the center, which, I suppose, is my experience of Oxford . . . I thought, I'm a Rhodes Scholar – the whole point of Rhodes was to send these potential troublemakers to the center, to learn." Given Hall's recollection of how his pioneering Cultural Studies department at Birmingham in the 1960s was accomplished by "stealth" and "double-dealing," it is not difficult to see the circuitous influence of this Oxford experience on the development of Cultural Studies in the UK, especially as Hall described the field as initially posing "some key questions about the Americanization of British culture and where English culture was going after the War" (Phillips, "Stuart Hall"). While decolonization has been associated more explicitly with Cultural Studies, it has also been linked to the English literary curriculum in roundabout ways. Hall's contributions, like those of Rushdie and Phillips, indicate how even the most conservative academic frameworks can engender heterodox styles of progressive thought that cannot be reduced simply to the expectations of funders or the often narcissistic visions of founders. Rhodes would never have approved of Hall, but Hall was nevertheless a product of the Rhodes legacy.

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The opening up of the world to what Cameroonian scholar Achille Mbembe called "new cognitive assemblages" (244) – the pluriverse, the posthuman, the Anthropocene – consequently allows for "new, *hybrid thought styles*" (243), where traditional horizons can be reconceptualized. Mbembe, who has influenced the work of Judith Butler, described Africa as "a planetary laboratory at a time when history itself is being recast as an integrated history of the Earth system" (252), and the same thing is true of Oceania and Latin America, whose new visibility within the world of global scholarship effectively interrogates more calcified Western models.[6] Mignolo wrote of how "decolonial liberation implies epistemic disobedience" ("On Decoloniality" 114), implying again crossovers between decolonization and transgression. Similarly, it would be possible to recognize analogies between Hall's realignment of the epistemological foundation of White British culture by recalibrating it in relation to Black migration and an equivalent displacement of Euroamerican centers of gravity through such a "planetary laboratory."

Exactly how such global reorientations might manifest themselves will always be open to debate, as the many critical disagreements today about how to define "World Literature" amply demonstrate. Nevertheless, we should not underestimate the long-term social "impact" of the humanities. It is unlikely, for example, that Barack Obama would have been elected president of the United States in 2004 had it not been for the scholarship from the 1970s onward that worked successfully to elucidate blind spots in the American literary canon, sparking revisionist reassessments in the popular fiction of Toni Morrison and many others of how racialist assumptions had become entrenched within society. The recent exponential growth in college student numbers, rising in the United States in 2018 to around 69 percent of high-school graduates, means that university curricula now exert more influence throughout society than during the twentieth century, and the decolonization of the English literary curriculum has played an integral part in this process.

Writing from within Oxford, Patricia Daley argued: "Decolonisation is not about replacing Western epistemologies with non-Western ones, nor is it about prioritising one racialised group over another. It is to create a more open 'critical cosmopolitan pluriversalism' – where instead of Eurocentric thought being seen as universal, there is a recognition and acceptance of multiple ways of interpreting and understanding the world" (85). Such "pluriversalism" is categorically different from traditional versions of liberal pluralism, since its focus is not just on authorizing difference per se, but on how geopolitical and environmental variables frame the "pursuit of

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restitutive justice" that Robbie Shilliam regards as crucial to "the imperial world map" (19). While there are different ways of approaching questions of decolonization, they all involve, as Shilliam suggested, a "cultivation of different spatialities and relationalities" (22), a decentering of racial hierarchies that runs in parallel to a decentering of geographical hierarchies. To decolonize the university is to restore a sense of its etymological universalism and resist acquiescing in local conventions, whether political, social, or racial; yet this should involve what Wallerstein glossed as a "universal universalism," rather than a "partial and distorted universalism" (xiv) extrapolated merely from Western centers of power. While such a planetary universalism might be an evasive and infinitely receding concept, it is nevertheless one to which the idea of a university should always aspire.

Notes

1. On Ngũgĩ and Conrad, see Sewlall. Conrad was the subject of Said's PhD, which formed the basis of his first book, *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (1966).
2. On Twain's "hypercanonization," see Arac (133). On "the contradictory nature of Twain's racial and colonial discourse," see Messent (67).
3. On the complex links between black humor and slavery, see Carpio.
4. For the history of meritocracy in Britain, see Woolridge.
5. Chakrabarty was drawing here on a lecture given by Etienne Balibar at the University of Chicago in 2006.
6. In her 2021 *Time* article on dismantling "our egos and identities," Butler cites Mbembe on how "the political in our time must start from the imperative to reconstruct the world in common."

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