The Lifting and the Lifted

Prefaces to Colonial Modernist Texts

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> This is no longer the sanctity of the cell and of the scourge; being but a lifting up, as it were, into a greater intensity of the mood of the painter, painting the dust and the sunlight. (Yeats xix)

Modernism: Totalised Space, Absolutist Textuality

The word 'modernism' suggests an aesthetic strongly associated with an idea of time. But it can also be described spatially, as a 'lifting up' (or *Aufhebung*), where the writer's goal is to conceive of the world as a totality. It is a powerful gesture, and an essential part of the modernist aesthetic, but it is nevertheless linked to a colonial power play. In fact, the 'worlding' gesture in high modernism – where writers deliberately embraced a global self-image and rejected geographical binds – was also very much a performative gesture and bound by the performative's many contextual limitations. So, however enabling the perception of authorial globality may be, the story of totalisation continues to be a troubling one. Many modernist writers (especially the canonical ones) articulate a vision for the role their work might play on a world stage. They want their work to have a face, but this face would be pointedly affixed to the universal idea of the literary text, and not the particular image of the author associated with it.

Formally, a textual preface can be such a 'face' (other faces might include: packaging, publishing house, reviews, and cover-blurbs). For the most part, modernist writers follow the Hegelian line and pose their texts as absolutes, and refuse elaborate packaging or prefaces written by more established writers. Consequently, prefaces in modernism are generally much rarer than they were in earlier literary periods.[1] And when prefaces do appear – such as the prefaces to Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) or Joseph Conrad's *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1897) – they are written by the authors themselves, and foreground the absolute qualities (timelessness, spatial universality) of the work of art that follows, eschewing any reference to the biography or positioning of the author in favour of aesthetic principles. Perhaps the aesthetic absolutism expressed in these rare modernist prefaces is belied by the supplementary quality of the prefaces themselves (one might ask why an autonomous literary text should *need* a preface). In short, and despite the occasional prefaces that do appear before major texts, the tendencies in modernism that entail the rejection of the authorising power of literary tradition also unmake the precedence of the preface.

The spatial and temporal axes of the preface become important in the debates over whether, and how, modernism may have been an international movement. Represented in a wide range of postcolonial scholarship is a growing critical awareness of the modernist movements in Africa, the Caribbean, India, and East/Southeast Asia, and questions about exactly how, or whether, to include these texts in dominant stories about 'modernism' as a whole. Many accounts of non-European modernism emphasise the derivative nature of these modernisms, and read them as a complement to the European representation of various forms of non-European alterity in primitivism. If Aimé Césaire or Mulk Raj Anand are important, they are so as the lower half of Picasso's African primitives or E M Forster's colonial crisis. They are local modernists, low modernists, or 'also modernists', rather than modernists *tout court*: discussion of writers like Mulk Raj Anand, for instance, are generally limited to South Asian studies circles.[2] It remains unthinkable for critics to think of a modernism that encompasses a day in the life of Clarissa Dalloway in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), alongside a radically dissimilar (but technically contemporaneous) day in the life of Bakha, the untouchable

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protagonist of Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935). As Johannes Fabian delineates it in his influential book *Time and the Other* (1983), the concept of time in Eurocentric modernism produces a 'denial of coevalness'. If modernism, as I have suggested, entails a gesture of lifting up, it also seems to rely on a tacit concomitant gesture of *putting down* and *pushing away*.

Under the force of this structure of thought, it may seem difficult for writers and critics from colonial locales to claim the discourse of modernism without also replicating its exclusionism. Nevertheless, new possibilities are emerging in postcolonial criticism. Even if non-European modernism is still somewhat marginal, post-orientalist and anti-racist critics, in recent years, have successfully mainstreamed their challenge to the slanted representations of Africa and India in key European texts such as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) and Kipling's *Kim* (1901). Ironically, these critiques have so prevailed that many seminal texts of modernism now need prefaces to explain historical context for contemporary readers. It is thus fitting that the recent Norton edition of *Heart of Darkness* has a preface by the Afro-Caribbean writer Caryl Phillips, while the recent Penguin edition of *Kim* has a preface by Edward Said.

Though they generally refused prefaces to their own works, most European modernist writers did write prefaces for *other* writers' works, including poems and prose by non-European writers. There is a small body of prefaces written by white European writers to poetry, prose, and criticism in the modernist idiom by non-European writers from colonial locales. This genre of the preface is especially important, as it challenges European modernism's temporal and spatial universalism through a visible textual proximity: the modernists' preface-texts appear in *books* alongside the literary efforts of non-European writers. Such prefaces benefit the colonial writers considerably by legitimating them as serious literary authors, though the actual phrasing of the praise in the prefaces often re-delimits their range and vision. Despite the complexities associated with such forms of address which often display profound orientalism, these prefaces perform an important kind of work upon European modernism. Namely, by foregrounding a scene of exchange between Europe and non-European writing, they help to *push modernism outside of itself*. In place of an Olympian universality outside of the historical time and space of the colonial world, these prefaces model a concept of a dis-placed literary production in European literature and also outside of it. The prefaces, in short, facilitate the rethinking of modernism, from colonial internationalism to a kind of postcolonial globalism.

Though all of the prefaces I am working with here challenge modernism in this way, each of the prefaces also has qualities – problematic qualities – that set it off from the others, and each deserves to be read closely. Yeats's 1912 preface to Tagore's *Gitanjali*, E M Forster's 1935 preface to Anand's *Untouchable*, and André Breton's 1943 preface to Aimé Césaire's *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land* seem to form a group, as they are all prefaces to literary works by famous European literary modernists.[3] Each of the three participates in the dis-placing of modernism into colonial space, though each also reinscribes the political order of colonialism and leaves the coevalness of the colonial writers' texts in question. The philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre also wrote prefaces of this type, including the famous 1938 essay 'Orphée Noir', which prefaced Léopold Senghor's collection of 'Negritude' poetry.[4] He wrote a preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) — which I will generally refer to as Sartre's 'Preface'. It seems helpful to draw a historical divide between Sartre and the others because Sartre's essays, published after the Second World War, are decisively marked as part of an anticolonial (or postcolonial) political mobilisation. They are, one could say, 'postcolonial', while the earlier Forster, Yeats, and Breton prefaces are late colonial. Finally, it is impossible to consider Sartre's prefaces without referring to Fanon's response to Sartre in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) — Fanon's account of what it is like to be the subject *to* a preface, to be constituted by the prefatory.

Who is Lifting Whom? Forster, Yeats, Breton

> Hegel's objection to prefaces reflects the following structure: preface/text = abstract generality/self-moving activity. His acceptance of prefaces reflects another structure: preface/text = signifier/signified. And the name of the '=' in this formula is the Hegelian *Aufhebung*. (Spivak xi)

Before entering into a discussion of the preface-texts themselves, it would be helpful to think through the idea of the preface as a modernist performance. Here Gayatri Spivak's comment in her translator's preface to *Of Grammatology* (1967) seems apposite. Among many other things, Spivak creates an analogy between preface and text, 'abstraction' and 'activity' to demonstrate a relationship between Hegelian abstraction and the signifier in Derrida. The preface is the face, or the name, which points to the text itself that is in the signified position. The historical and continuing pervasiveness of literary prefaces certainly bears out the implications of this analogy: just as the preface is nothing without a text, the text cannot act without a face. Of course, Spivak's proper aim is to deconstruct this analogy: if the stability of the text itself as a linear entity, with a front and rear, may be questioned, the preface's position comes into question in terms that are either *spatial* (the preface in front of the text), or *temporal* (the preface must be written after the text is read). Spivak sees her preface to Derrida, as well as Hegel and Derrida's own prefaces to themselves, as ultimately both inside and outside, both preceding and subsequent to, the greater scene of the text.

However, even as it seems imperative to deconstruct the line between preface and text, the split between the two is nevertheless extended and enhanced in the colonial context, where the distinction between preface and text can be the very site of enforcement of colonial authority. For the mere presence of the preface, in the context of dominance, can challenge the independence of the text that follows. If a word from a 'Breton' or a 'Forster' legitimises a young Caribbean or Indian writer, that legitimation can also be seen as instituting dependency or vassalage: Yeats, we could say, uses the name 'Tagore' to extend the domain of his own authorship, and subsumes Tagore into his own image of a worldly modernism. On a different register, this formal divide also operates on the level of the projected audience: the preface-writer assumes a European readership and poses the non-European writer's culture as remote and unrecognisable, either because of its idealism or because of its grotesque violence. And yet each of the prefaces I am interested in also deconstructs the gap between preface and text, colonial subject and colonial centre, through the preface-writer's own reading.

Proceeding out of chronological order, I will begin with Forster's preface to Mulk Raj Anand's 1935 novel *Untouchable*. Anand began the novel in Simla, worked on it on the passage to England, *S S Viceroy of India*, and completed it in Bloomsbury.[5] Whilst in England, Anand studied philosophy at Cambridge, and afterwards lived in Bloomsbury, working and writing there until the end of the Second World War. Forster's preface to *Untouchable* still appears with every American or British printing of the novel.

Forster's presentation of the text that follows his preface, Anand's novel, perfectly exemplifies the kind of modernist displacement I have been referring to, though it is not without its problems. First, Forster blurs the line between himself and Anand, but this blurring is absorptive rather than equalising. That is to say, the preface describes the subsequent literary text largely in terms of the preface-writer's own work. Forster begins the preface with a conservative European's response to *A Passage to India* (1924) — he mentions an 'indignant Colonel' who disliked a particular scatological reference in *A Passage to India*.

> Well, if the Colonel thought *A Passage to India* dirty, what will he think about *Untouchable,* which describes a day in the life of a sweeper in an Indian city with every realistic circumstance. Is it a clean book or a dirty one? Some readers, especially those who consider themselves all-white, will go purple in the face with rage before they have finished a dozen pages, and will exclaim that they cannot trust themselves to speak. I cannot trust myself either, though for a different reason: the book seems to me indescribably clean and I hesitate for words in which this can be conveyed. Avoiding rhetoric and circumlocution, it has gone straight to the heart of its subject and purified it. None of us are pure — we shouldn't be alive if we were. But to the straightforward all things can become pure, and it is to the directness of his attack that Mr. Anand's success is probably due. (v)

Forster's point of departure is the potential for scandal in Anand's book — its figuring of an untouchable toilet sweeper as its protagonist. In a way a dirty book in 1935 is an admirable accomplishment, since it is the great era of scandalous modernist fictions, including D H Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), and James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). But Forster quickly turns away from modernist scandal of dirty art to its antimodernist expiation — a cleansing that Forster's own *Passage to India* refuses. Forster suggests that Anand's passionate and direct treatment of his subject rejects corrosive irony and corrupting shock value in favour of the earnestness of religious ritual. This is damning praise if the goal is to pose Anand's text as having the potential to push European modernism outside itself. To put it narratively, by insisting upon Anand's self-purifying qualities, Forster provides a *finish* (ie a reading) to Anand's text before the reader holding the book *Untouchable* even starts to read it. But note Forster's reference to race: 'those who consider themselves all-white, will go purple in the face with rage before they have finished a dozen pages, and will exclaim that they cannot trust themselves to speak'. In this phrasing Forster stakes out a privileged position between the 'all-white' Colonel and that of the all-brown Anand — a kind of hybrid position. Forster uses Anand's novel to push forward his own worldly authority, but the terms of his preface seem to fix Anand's text in place at the periphery.

Complexion is also a major issue in Breton's preface to Césaire's *Notebook*. Breton's preface is unpromisingly entitled 'A Great Black Poet' ('Un Grand Poete Noir'). Here Breton describes his excitement at discovering a copy of the Césaire-edited literary journal *Tropiques* while in Fort-de-France in 1939.[6] Breton likes Césaire's references to French avant-gardists, and begins with an emphasis on Césaire's tone rather than his literary accomplishment or style:

> I shall not pretend that I did not at once take some pride in the fact that what he expressed was in no way unfamiliar; the names of the poets and authors he referred to would have been in themselves sufficient evidence; but even more the tone of those pages rang true. (x)

Breton's interpretation of Césaire's modernism is approving insofar as Césaire offers him what he perceives as a mirror of his own approach to modernism. The room may be different, but all of the furniture (meaning, the authors and their ideas) are in the identical locations. Breton, in short, interpellates Césaire as a satisfyingly accomplished mimic-man, but this fixing is nevertheless challenged at times in the course of Breton's own presentation.

Breton's pressing concern at the moment of his writing is of course the plight of France under Vichy, and he reads Césaire as resisting that 'darkness': [this is Breton quoting Césaire:] 'We belong . . . to those who say no to darkness' (xi).[7] But is it the darkness of Vichy France that Césaire resists and refuses, or is it France itself? An even cursory reading of Césaire's poem (which I do not attempt here) reveals that Césaire's worry is much less the government of France than the life of Martinique; it seems that Breton wants to see resemblance so strongly that he reshapes Césaire's political preoccupation to match his own. Breton writes: 'This land he was revealing and that his friends helped reconnoitre, it was my land too, yes, it was our land that I had wrongly feared obliterated by darkness.' In seeing Césaire as a comrade in the struggle against fascism, one braver than many of his own avant-gardist peers, Breton seems unable to actually read a key element of Césaire's poem, namely the latter's struggle with race and racism.

The heart of Breton's preface is a literal presenting of Césaire's face, that is to say, an account of his first meeting with Césaire in Fort-de-France in 1939. In his description of the meeting, Breton moves away from the rhetoric of 'darkness' as a metaphor for political occupation, and towards 'blackness', in the image of Césaire's face. Breton's attraction to Césaire's face is the site at which the barrier between them might be undone:

> I recall my first quite elementary reaction at finding him of a black so pure and even more unnoticeable at first because he was smiling. Through him (I already know it, I see it, and everything will confirm it later), human essence is heated to a point of maximum effervescence in which knowledge – here of the highest order – overlaps with magical gifts. . . . And it is a black who handles the French language in a manner that no white man is capable of today. And it is a black who guides us today into the unexplored, establishing along the way, as if by child's play, the contacts that make us advance on sparks. And it is a black who is not only a black but all of man, who conveys all of man's questionings, all of his anguish, all of his hopes and all of his ecstasies and who will remain more and more for me the prototype of dignity. (xii)

Césaire's blackness is pure, an immediate mark of difference that Breton addresses up-front. We can even say that for Breton, Césaire's difference *precedes himself* on the wings of stereotype. But it is a blackness that Breton finds appealing. He sees Césaire as the future, embodying a *blackness* that can possibly lighten the '*darkness*' of Vichy with his language. But note that Breton avoids using images of a sun-like 'light' in favour of other images: 'effervescence' (energy that may not be light), 'sparks' (ie light that is inconstant), 'ecstasies', and 'child's play'. In the sense that he marks Césaire as the future, Breton's preface seems to be genuinely prefatory — the text that follows is not just that signified of racial difference, it is the future of the human. But can it really be, that in Breton's attempt to posit a 'face of blackness' against the 'heart of darkness' that is the rise of Nazism, he remains unaware of the implicit semantic association between the black and the dark?

Unlike Césaire's face in Breton, Tagore's physical face is absent from Yeats's preface to his *Gitanjali*. Though this preface comes much earlier chronologically, Yeats's attraction to Tagore and his joy at discovering the Bengali poet is described by Yeats in terms that are equally salvific. Like Breton, Yeats saw Tagore as rising prophetically to the demands of the battle for truth and light that Yeats felt he, himself, had lost. As for Tagore's poems themselves, Tagore translated them from the original Bengali in roughly the same way that Anand wrote much of *Untouchable*, namely, in a brief period of activity on a ship from India to England.[8] Yeats's preface has no image of Tagore himself, but it recounts Yeats's conversation with a Bengali interlocutor present in London, who knew Tagore's work and reputation in Bengal. In contrast to Forster, Yeats generally avoids the ethnographic tone, though the Bengali interlocutor gives Yeats's claims about Bengali 'civilization' a certain stamp of legitimacy. The absence of Tagore's face enables Yeats to pose an image of the poems themselves at the front of his account:

> I have carried the manuscript of these translations about with me for days, reading it in railway trains, or on the top of omnibuses and in restaurants, and I have often had to close it lest some stranger would see how much it moved me. (xiii)

Note Yeats's emphasis on his context, the social and technological space of London. Despite the fact that he is reading Tagore not on the tops of mountains but on the tops of omnibuses, his rhetoric is intensely romantic and naturalistic. He recounts his personal experience of being moved by the poems, and uses his preface as a performance of that movement. Yet there is a paradox in his fear of exposure to the English strangers on London trains and buses — are these not the very strangers who are now holding the book *Gitanjali*, reading his preface to the same poems, witnessing Yeats being moved by Tagore? The split between manuscript and book, between the concrete William Yeats and the author-signifier named W B Yeats, is also the gap of signifier and signified, preface and text, all over again.

If Yeats has to wait until the moment of the book to allow the poetry of the colonial subject to move him in public, the final question to ask might be whether his account of being moved has the potential to move incipient modernism (ie in 1912) outside of itself. As with each of the other prefaces in play here, there are two answers, or rather a double answer, Yeats sees the signs of difference in Tagore's writing as both radically other, and radically assimilable, to the desires of his concept of modernism:

> A whole people, a whole civilization, immeasurably strange to us, seems to have been taken up into this imagination; and yet we are not moved because of its strangeness, but because we have met our own image, as though we had walked in Rossetti's willow wood, or heard, perhaps for the first time in literature, our voice as in a dream. (xvi–xvii)

Yeats poses the image of Tagore as his own mirror image, and Tagore's voice as Yeats's own echo. The mirror and the echo in Yeats's rhetoric foreclose the possibility of a link to a space outside of Europe, and sustain a modernist economy that is able to assimilate others but unable to cede priority to the other. In other words, when Yeats sees Tagore as his own mirror image, he rejects the idea that his own work might be a reflection or an echo, in an economy, where Tagore (or India) could be positioned as the source of light.

However, Yeats is ultimately less interested in mirrors and echoes than he is in Tagore's worldly aesthetic, which he describes in semi-Hegelian terms:

> This is no longer the sanctity of the cell and of the scourge; being but a lifting up, as it were, into a greater intensity of the mood of the painter, painting the dust and the sunlight. (xix)

Yeats reads Tagore's refusal of Hindu *askesis* as a self-lifting that rejects the 'sanctity of the cell', and he finds in Tagore a distinctly modernist aesthetic of worldly asceticism. If for Yeats the only gesture that describes the worlding of modern literature is 'lifting up', a question nevertheless remains that figures equally for Breton and for Forster: who is lifting whom? All three of these prefaces by European modernists may aim to rhetorically lift colonial modernists into their own space — the space of European universalism. But is it not also just as viable to reverse this dynamic, and argue that European modernism does not lift, but is itself lifted, by the access to the dramatic image of alterity presented by colonial modernism. To invoke Hegel (and Spivak) again, perhaps the prefaces are thus merely European 'abstractions' that ride the back of the 'self-moving' modernist texts that follow. These various prefaces present these alternate possible readings but do so in such an ideological cloud that the issue is never resolved. In Sartre, by contrast, the ideological and formal implications of these issues are made to intersect quite directly.

'Europeans, you must read this book': Sartre

Both the 'Preface' to *The Wretched of the Earth* and 'Orphée Noir', the preface to Senghor's 'Negritude' anthology, also provoke the question of who is lifting whom into universality. However, they differ substantially from the three prefaces discussed above, largely in the substance and tenor of Sartre's approach to race and colonialism. Intensely dialectical, Sartre uses his prefaces to make strong political arguments, rather than to familiarise (or exoticise) his subject to his readers. Moreover, Sartre at no point worries over the status of his own worldly reputation, or the importance of his more substantial philosophical and political work (published without preface elsewhere). Indeed, he allows that his prefaces may in fact be superfluous, as when he writes of Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*: 'This book had not the slightest need of a preface' (Sartre, Preface 21). Despite Sartre's evident anti-colonial and anti-racist commitments, his prefaces aim to overwrite the texts that follow. Sartre's analyses of both the Negritude writers and Fanon superinscribe the latter and bind them in the time and space of his own dialectic. Fanon, of course, identifies and resists Sartre's superinscription, and critiques Sartre's preface to *Black Skin, White Masks*; I will turn to Fanon's non-prefatory text after first looking at Sartre.

Both of Sartre's prefaces foreground the politics embedded in the prefatory genre with self-referential theatricality. Early on in the 'Preface' to *The Wretched of the Earth,* most strikingly, Sartre marks the rhetorical moment in a direct confrontation with the reader who is identified as European and male. But even as he clearly identifies his audience, Sartre suggests the same audience may be in some sense superfluous. It is a playful gesture choreographed to leave the troubled European reader in a state of invisible abjection:

> And if you murmur, jokingly embarrassed, 'He has it in for us!' the true nature of the scandal escapes you; for Fanon has nothing in for you at all; his work – red-hot for some – in what concerns you is as cold as ice; he speaks of you often, never to you. (10)

Sartre singles out the complicit European reader as the subject of his address in the preface, but then suggests that the very text following the preface is in fact directed not to 'you' at all. Sartre puts it even more bluntly elsewhere, when he asks, 'What does Fanon care whether you read his work or not?' (12). In passages like these, Sartre skilfully plays both sides of the fence: Sartre's preface is alternately directed *at* European readers who are about to be shocked/scandalised by Fanon's polemic, and, simultaneously, self-inclusive in that community. Sartre is perfectly comfortable slipping between 'you, the reader' (and the presumed 'I' who occupies a different position from 'you'), and 'we, Europeans'. Sartre positions himself both in and out of Europe, as well as in and out of the idea of black subjectivity that is the issue at the heart of both prefaces here.

Sartre begins 'Orphée Noir' with a similar shock to his readers that sharply identifies the scene of address. Instead of locating his readership (derived, one would assume, from the readership of the text that *follows* the preface) in an idealised, world-space of high modernism, Sartre begins his preface by

sharply identifying the readers of the preface by their position and by their complicity in colonialism. The politics of reading is Sartre's subject here, much more than the timeless and universal qualities of the work of art:

> When you removed the gag that was keeping these black mouths shut, what were you hoping for? That they would sing your praises? Did you think that when they raised themselves up again, you would read adoration in the eyes of these heads that our fathers had forced to bend down to the very ground? Here are black men standing, looking at us, and I hope that you – like me – will feel the shock of being seen. For three thousand years, the white man has enjoyed the privilege of seeing without being seen; he was only a look — the light from his eyes drew each thing out of the shadow of its birth; the whiteness of his skin was another look, condensed light. The white man . . . lighted up the creation like a torch and unveiled the secret white essence of beings. Today, these black men are looking at us, and our gaze comes back to our own eyes; in their turn, black torches light up the world and our white heads are no more than Chinese lanterns swinging in the wind. (Sartre, 'Black Orpheus' 291)

The aggressive second-person address here, which is strongly reminiscent of the language of the 'Preface' to *The Wretched of the Earth,* aims to implicate the reader in the mythic scene of the colonial master–slave dialectic that is the subject of Sartre's essay. In Sartre, it is not simply Europeans who are culpable, but *you*, the reader, who ungagged black men and are now subject to their words as well as their gaze. Alongside this rhetorical manipulation is a theory of race and racialisation. Here, Sartre situates the present moment as one where 'blacks' (read: colonial others) are both ungagged and developing the power of the gaze. Sartre's radical perspectival reversal turns whiteness itself into a mask – a performance of itself – that is inherently illegitimate. This reversal points to one possible larger implication of the politicised reading of these and other prefaces. Namely, Sartre, Yeats, Breton, Forster, and others are experimenting with allowing the 'other', whose text follows the preface, to speak. The prefaces may aim to preserve the colonial writer as subject, but each in its own way also acknowledges the objective gaze/speech of the cultural other that Sartre is describing here.

Importantly, Sartre directs his Preface (as well as the 'Preface' to *The Wretched of the Earth*) at a reader who is a white man; he does not seem to be concerned with the probability that many readers of the negritude volume would themselves be black. In an echo of the Hegel/Spivak comment above, it is also possible that Sartre conceives the preface as the 'abstract generality' that the book's white readers will *have* to read, while the text itself will be the Hegelian self-moving activity, the organic presence, that black readers can access immediately.

The reference to dialectic is not incidental; it is in fact at the core of Sartre's idea of Negritude in 'Orphée Noir'. Sartre posits an important distinction between black self-consciousness and the class-consciousness of the European working class. The proletariat derives its argument from an 'objective' awareness of its 'position'. But racism, because it aims to attack the subjectivity of people of colour, can only be fought subjectively. It is based in the 'black soul, or, rather – since the term is often used in this anthology – on a certain quality common to the thoughts and conduct of Negroes which is called *negritude*' (Sartre's emphasis) (297). The turn to the subjective is fraught in Sartre, whose work until 1963[9] tends to reflect a strict rationalism that belies his occasional claims to subjective truth. This approach to Negritude has a number of problematic consequences, one of which is, of course, that it diminishes the value of the literary. If Sartre appreciates the urgency and sense of mission of the Negritude writers, he also suggests the subjects of negritude writing are much more limited than those found in European poetry. Sartre praises black poetry as 'evangelic', a 'revealed' literature more than a literature that is written by individuated writers (Sartre, 'Black Orpheus' 298). The subjective, however, is only one part of the process of black expression represented by negritude. There is also an objective moment, at which art is radically depersonalised. Art is ripped from the artist in an act of violent parturition that is also a conjoining of subjective and objective elements:

> And finally, *negritude-object* is snatched from Césaire like a cry of pain, of love, and of hate. Here again he follows the Surrealist tradition of *objective* poetry. Césaire's words do not describe negritude, they do not designate it, they do not copy it from the outside like a painter with a model: they *create* it; they compose it under our very eyes. Henceforth it is a thing which can be observed and learned; the subjective method which he has chosen joins the objective method we spoke about earlier: ejects the black soul from himself at the very moment when others are trying to interiorize it; the final result is the same in both cases. (Sartre, 'Black Orpheus' 313)

In becoming objective, negritude loses its personal associations with Césaire. It becomes universal, everyone has access to it, and everyone can learn it. Sartre clearly enjoys the violence in the aggressive depersonalisation that occurs in writing (it is not so clear that a black poet in the 'Negritude' anthology would see it in the same way).

Fanon responds to Sartre's 'Orphée Noir' in *Black Skins, White Masks* with seething frustration. It is not that there is anything fundamentally wrong with Sartre's conclusions; Fanon concedes that negritude is heavily dependent on ahistorical generalisations that reify race. But Sartre's critique of the absoluteness (or finitude) of negritude strikes Fanon as both insufficiently dialectical and rhetorically excessive. For

Fanon, Sartre uses his prefaces not to introduce the texts that follow so much as to *conclude* them and the movement of ideas they propose. Fanon is particularly irked at Sartre's attack on negritude as epistemology and as politics at the end of 'Orphée Noir', and he quotes Sartre at length in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Here is the passage from Sartre that Fanon cites:

> [L]ike all anthropological notions, negritude is a shimmer of being and of needing-to-be; it makes you and you make it: both oath and passion. But there is something even more important in it: the Negro himself, we have said, creates a kind of antiracist racism. He wishes in no way to dominate the world: he desires the abolition of *all* kinds of ethnic privileges; he asserts his solidarity with the oppressed of every color. . . . In fact, negritude appears like the upbeat of a dialectical progression: the theoretical and practical affirmation of white supremacy is the thesis; the position of negritude as an antithetical value is the moment of negativity. But this negative moment is not sufficient in itself, and these black men who use it know this perfectly well; they know that it aims at preparing the synthesis or realization of the human being in a raceless society. Thus, negritude is *for* destroying itself; it is a 'crossing to' and not an 'arrival at,' a means and not an end. (Sartre, 'Black Orpheus' 326–27)[10]

Sartre aims to think through the implications of the 'other' text that follows his preface as well as the meaning of his own newly marginal (ie merely prefatory) position. At the same time, Sartre insists on resolving the contradictions of the negritude position he outlines, thus denying the Negritude writers a reason for writing. Fanon reads this denial as troubling not because of its erasure, but because it is a misreading of the dialectic itself. Here is Fanon:

> When I read . . . [the passage quoted above], I felt that I had been robbed of my last chance. I said to my friends, 'The generation of the younger black poets has just suffered a blow that can never be forgiven.' Help had been sought from a friend of the colored peoples, and that friend had found no better response than to point out the relativity of what they were doing. For once, that born Hegelian had forgotten that consciousness has to lose itself in the night of the absolute, the only condition to attain to consciousness of self. In opposition to rationalism, he summoned up the negative side, but he forgot that this negativity draws its worth from an almost substantive absoluteness. (*Black Skin* 133)

Fanon sees the flaw in Sartre's reasoning as Sartre's failure to see the negative term in the dialectic as carrying a 'substantive absoluteness' of its own. Fanon's critique, softened somewhat by its anecdotal and personalised phrasing ('When I read that page'), considerably rehabilitates his own work, that of the Negritude writers, as well as that of other colonial modernists. The absolutism of the non-European, in Fanon's thinking, should not be confused with the same absolutism of one stream of European modernism. Rather, it is merely the absolutism that advocates the text as *substance*. In order for the text to perform its decolonising work, it must be read in its material particularity. Fanon does not complain that Sartre misreads negritude, but that Sartre fails to allow negritude to run its actual course. Sartre, in other words, uses his preface to *preempt* rather than *prefigure*.

Preface the prefaces

Whatever their limitations, the prefaces to colonial modernist texts succeed in pointing to European modernism outside of Europe. They show a surprising self-consciousness about race and colonialism operating within European modernism, and presented by its canonical 'core', from a very early moment. The prefaces add texture to the debates occurring within modernist studies about the discourses of universalism and globalism operating at the moment of high modernism. If European modernism frequently deployed a rhetoric of universalism that aimed to absorb (or subsume) the non-European world, these prefaces show a side of Euro-modernism that is potentially more worldly and inclusive.

Though I have been critical of the rhetoric of these prefaces, I do not aim to argue that these prefaces should be ignored in contemporary readings of writers like Anand or Fanon. For one thing, the prefaces are a crucial part of the historical moment of the emergence of postcolonial writing. They tell us about the conditions of publication of these texts, and help situate and explain the rhetorical strategies employed by modernists who were African, Caribbean, and Indian. The prefaces add to the texts without supplanting them; it is possible, in a poststructuralist vein, to read the prefaces as both inside and outside the primary texts with which they are associated. Furthermore, close reading shows that these preface-texts themselves play with, and at times reverse, the categories of value produced by the split between preface and text. A preface can be either 'below' (as in, subordinate to), or 'above' (as in, authorising), the text that follows it, and this dual possibility, I have argued, is especially intense when the preface-writer is white and European, and the text that follows the preface is written by a non-white colonial subject.

Notes

1 There is a long and complex history of preface-writing, which I do not have room to address here. Many prefaces from canonical British literature, for instance, can be found compiled in Alisdair Gray's anthology, *The Book of Prefaces*.

2 A good critical source on Anand, with mainly lesser-known critics, is R K Dhawan, ed. *The Novels of Mulk Raj Anand*. Dozens of books on Anand have also appeared in the Indian academic press since the 1960s. A useful volume is C D Narasimhaiah's *The Swan and the Eagle*.

3 The texts I've chosen are generally ones first published by a European publisher with the preface attached. The one exception to this rule is the Breton preface to Césaire, which appeared in 1943, in the first American bilingual edition of Césaire's *Notebook*; Césaire's poem was first published in the Parisian journal *Volontés* in 1939, without preface.

4 In addition to Sartre's preface in the original 'Negritude' anthology, there are prefaces to each author in the anthology written by Senghor himself, as well as an 'Avant-Propos' by André Julien. None of the other prefaces are especially important in themselves, though the preponderance of prefaces does rather overwhelm the actual poetry in the volume. The 'Negritude' anthology seems to be more about the work of editors explaining the political and anthropological implications of the volume than the actual poetry that follows the prefaces.

5 Anand briefly joined Gandhi's camp before returning to Europe, where he wrote several other novels, including one novel of Indian soldiers on the western front — actually written in Madrid and Valencia during the Spanish Civil War.

6 Breton, a member of the French Communist Party, was in exile from Vichy France, and on his way to the United States with Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst. He stayed in the United States for most of the war years, except for occasional trips to Martinique with such people as Claude Levi-Strauss. See Mark Palizzotti's *Revolutions of the Mind*. For a simple biography of Breton, see <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/abreton.htm>.

7 This is Césaire's language, as quoted in Breton: 'Nous sommes . . . de ceux qui disent non a l'ombre.'

8 Unlike Anand, Tagore was coming to England in 1912 not to study (though he had studied there, earlier in his life), but to broaden an already formidable literary reputation. According to critics like Krishna Dutta, the translations do not do justice to the sound and spirit of the same poems, as Tagore wrote them, in Bengali. Tagore was only too aware of his limited skills with English verse, and allowed Yeats to select the poems he thought to be the best, as well as make some minor changes in phrasing. See Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*.

9 In 'Sartre: the "African Philosopher"', Robert J C Young argues that Sartre's work begins to go in a different direction after the Algerian War, when he begins to advocate revolutionary violence as the only way to thoroughly achieve decolonisation. Young's essay is the Preface to Jean-Paul Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*.

10 Alternate translation of the last sentence: 'Thus negritude is the root of its own destruction, it is a transition and not a conclusion, a means and not an ultimate end' (*Black Skin* 133).

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