Essays and Studies 2018

Series Editor: Elaine Treharne

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Essays and Studies 2018

English: Shared Futures

Edited by
Robert Eaglestone and Gail Marshall

for the English Association

D. S. BREWER

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Contents

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Benjamin A. Brabon joined the Higher Education Academy in February 2016 as head of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. Prior to this he was Academic Courses Manager within the executive team of the School of Arts and Humanities at Nottingham Trent University. A former Reader in English Literature and Digital Education with five books to his name, he is recognised within the sector for his work on Digital Education, Gothic fiction and Gender Studies. The convenor of the UK's first undergraduate credit-bearing MOOC, he has worked with the QAA, HEFCE and the Swedish Ministry of Education in this area, and his pedagogic research has been cited by the former Universities Minister, David Willetts.

Linda Bree was until early 2018 Senior Executive Publisher and Head of Humanities at Cambridge University Press, and is now a Senior Member of Wolfson College, Cambridge. She has extensive commissioning experience in British and European literature, and her own publications include essays on a range of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writers together with editions of Jane Austen's *Persuasion* and Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*; she is co-editor with Janet Todd of the *Later Manuscripts* volume in The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen.

Susan Bruce read English at the University of Cambridge and took her MA and PhD from Cornell. She is currently a Professor of English at Keele, and between 2014 and 2017, she was Chair of UE and a member of the Higher Education Committee of EA. The idea of English: Shared Futures was mooted at the meeting that elected her to the Chair of UE, and planning it and seeing it materialise was an important (and very enjoyable and rewarding) part of her role as Chair.

Billy Clark is Professor of English Language and Linguistics at Northumbria University. His research and teaching interests cover a wide range of topics in linguistics and stylistics, with a particular focus on semantics and pragmatics. This has included work on lexical and syntactic meaning, semantic change, phatic communication, prosodic meaning, multimodal-

ity, and pragmatic processes involved in the reading, writing and evaluation of texts. He has a long-standing interest in connections between work at school and at university. He was a founding member of the UK Linguistics Olympiad committee and, with Marcello Giovanelli and Andrea Macrae, coordinates the Integrating English project (http://integratingenglish.org).

Stefan Collini is Professor Emeritus of Intellectual History and English Literature at Cambridge University, and a Fellow of the British Academy. He is the author of, among other books, *Public Moralists* (1991), *Matthew Arnold: a Critical Portrait* (1994), *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (2006), and *Common Writing: Literary Culture and Public Debate* (2016), as well as a frequent contributor to *The London Review of Books*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The Guardian* and other publications. His 2012 book *What Are Universities For?* and its sequel *Speaking of Universities* (2017) have become points of reference in international debates about higher education. He does not go to many conferences.

Jane Davis is Director of The Reader (www.thereader.org.uk), which she founded in 1997 while teaching English in the Department of Continuing Education at the University of Liverpool. In 2011 she was elected as the UK's 20th Ashoka Fellow and received an MBE for services to reading. The Reader sells Shared Reading to a wide range of commissioners in the NHS and across HM Prison Estate, as well as to local authorities, housing providers and employers. With sister projects developing across Europe, Australia and New Zealand, The Reader is currently building the International Centre for Shared Reading at Calderstones Mansion, in Calderstones Park, Liverpool.

Sarah Dillon is University Lecturer in Literature and Film in the Faculty of English at the University of Cambridge. She is author of *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory* (2007) and *Deconstruction, Feminism, Film* (2018). She is currently a Senior Research Fellow at the Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence, where she is co-Project Lead for the AI Narratives project, in collaboration with the Royal Society. She is committed to reaching audiences outside of the academy, and broadcasts regularly on BBC Radio 3 and BBC Radio 4; she writes and presents the BBC Radio 3 documentary series, Literary Pursuits.

Robert Eaglestone is Professor of Contemporary Literature and Thought at Royal Holloway, University of London, and was co-chair of 'English:

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Clare Egan is a Lecturer in Medieval and Early Modern Literature at Lancaster University. Her research interests include libel and defamation, drama, performance, and spatial and digital humanities approaches. She was previously a Research Assistant in Early Modern Literature at the University of Huddersfield, working on an anthology of ecocritical sources for the early modern period. She completed her PhD in February 2015 at the University of Southampton where she was then briefly a Visiting Lecturer in Early Modern Drama and the Law.

Elizabeth English is a Lecturer in English Literature at Cardiff Metropolitan University in Wales. Her research focuses on modernist and early twentieth-century popular fiction with a particular interest in women's writing. Her first monograph, *Lesbian Modernism: Censorship, Sexuality and Genre Fiction*, was published in 2015 (paperback in April 2017). In addition, she is the author of a number of published essays and articles, the latest of which, 'Tired of London, Tired of Life: The Queer Pastoral in Alan Hollinghurst's *The Spell*', was published in *Sex and Sensibility in the Novels of Alan Hollinghurst* in 2017. She is also the Treasurer for the newly formed Modernist Network Cymru (MONC), which brings together scholars and professionals working on modernism in Wales to encourage collaboration and communication.

Emily Ennis recently completed her AHRC-funded PhD at the University of Leeds after taking her bachelor's and master's degrees there. Her PhD explored the connections between four key authors – Thomas Hardy, Bram Stoker, Joseph Conrad and Virginia Woolf – and the rise of popular photography between 1880 and 1920. She is now a Short-Term Postdoctoral Fellow at the Leeds Humanities Research Institute at the University of Leeds, where she also works part time as an Admissions Officer. She also works as an hourly paid Postdoctoral Teaching Assistant at the University of Leeds and Newcastle University, teaching Modern Literature and Close Reading.

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Corinne Fowler is an Associate Professor in Postcolonial Literature at the University of Leicester. She is the author of *Chasing Tales: Travel Writing, Journalism and the History of British Ideas about Afghanistan* (2008), co-author of *Postcolonial Manchester: Diaspora Space and the Devolution of Literary Culture* (2013) and co-editor of *Travel Writing: Theory and Practice* (2013). She has edited a number of creative anthologies and is director of the Centre for New Writing.

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Marcello Giovanelli is Senior Lecturer in English Language and Literature at Aston University, Birmingham, UK. He has research interests in stylistics, cognitive poetics, reader response theories, and English education. Recent books include *Text World Theory and Keats' Poetry* (2013), *Teaching Grammar, Structure and Meaning* (2014), *Knowing About Language* (2016, with Dan Clayton), and *Cognitive Grammar in Stylistics: A Practical Guide* (2018, with Chloe Harrison) as well as publications in stylistics and applied linguistics in a number of leading international peer-reviewed journals. He is Chair of Examiners for A-Level English Language and Literature at a major English examination board.

Diya Gupta (www.diyagupta.co.uk) is a PhD researcher at the English Department, King's College London. Her project provides the first literary and cultural examination of Indian soldiers' experiences in the Second World War, looking at life-writing and visual culture sources, and war responses in Indian literature and intellectual thought. Her article for The Conversation entitled 'Why Remembrance of Indian Soldiers who fought for the British in World War II is so political' was the most

read piece in November 2017, with over 150,000 hits. A short film on her research, called 'The Indian Soldier's Experience of WW II', can be viewed on YouTube. She was awarded the 2017 Barbara Northend Prize for academic excellence by the British Federation of Women Graduates.

Rob Hawkes is Senior Lecturer in English at Teesside University. He is author of *Ford Madox Ford and the Misfit Moderns: Edwardian Fiction and the First World War* (2012) and editor (with Ashley Chantler) of *Ford Madox Ford's 'Parade's End': The First World War, Culture, and Modernity* (2014), *War and the Mind: Ford Madox Ford's 'Parade's End', Modernism, and Psychology* (2015), and *An Introduction to Ford Madox Ford* (2015). His current work includes a forthcoming monograph: Trusting Texts: Literature, Money, and Modernity, 1890–1990; and a book chapter on trust and uncertainty in Stewart Lee's Comedy Vehicle.

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Seraphima Kennedy writes poetry, memoir and comment. From 2011–14 she taught Creative Writing at Goldsmiths while studying towards a PhD in Life Writing. In 2016, she was short-listed for The White Review Poets' Prize, and in 2017–18 she was mentored through the Jerwood/Arvon mentoring scheme. In 2018 she received a grant from the Arts Council Developing your Creative Practice Fund. She is Director of NAWE.

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Gail Marshall is Head of the School of Literature and Languages, and Professor of Victorian Literature and Culture, at the University of Reading. She was co-chair of English: Shared Futures, and is the author and editor of books on Victorian fiction and theatre, including several on Shakespeare and the Victorians. She recently completed a manuscript on 1859, and is planning a new project on George Eliot.

Lewi Mondal is a PhD student and module lecturer at Teesside University, funded by the Graduate Tutor Scheme, where he teaches a module on short fictions of the nineteenth century. His thesis explores liminality and excess as defining features in Neo-Victorian Representations of Race and Masculinity, and he is currently working on a chapter on the physical body and time travel. He was alerted to the opportunity to gain an insight into the workings of a conference by interning at English: Shared Futures by his supervisor Rob Hawkes (a member of the organising committee for the conference).

Paul Munden was Director of the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE), the UK subject association for creative writing, from 1994–2018. He has, for the past three years, been postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Canberra, working within the International Poetry Studies Institute and running the annual Poetry on the Move festival. He is the author of *Beyond the Benchmark* (2011), the research report on creative writing in the UK commissioned by the Higher Education Academy. He has published five poetry collections, most recently *Chromatic* (2017).

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Rick Rylance is Dean of the School of Advanced Study at the University of London. He previously served as Director of the Institute of English

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Harry Whitehead is Associate Professor of Creative Writing in the School of Arts at the University of Leicester. He is the author of the novel *The Cannibal Spirit* (2011), numerous short stories, and articles on subjects ranging from the global proliferation of creative writing as an academic subject, to the ethnography of the Northwest Coast of Canada. He has sat on the National Association of Writers in Education's Higher Education Committee, and was principal editor of the journal *Writing in Practice*. His current research interests include Cold War Creative Writing programmes in the Soviet Bloc.

Abbreviations

Every ecosystem within education is full of acronyms: our niche is no different. Citations from the relevant website.

AAH	Arts and Humanities Alliance	'an association of learned societies that work together to promote the interests of the arts and humanities, particularly with respect to higher-education and research policies at UK and EU level'.
AdvanceHE	AdvanceHE	'AdvanceHE was founded in 2017 through a merger of the Equality Challenge Unit, the Higher Education Academy and the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education'.
AHRC	Arts and Humanities Research Council	The quango that 'funds world-class, independent researchers in a wide range of subjects from history, archaeology, digital content, philosophy, languages, design, heritage, performing arts, and much more': includes English.
Alt-Ac	Alternative Academic	The movement which, given the shortage of academic jobs and the large number of people with PhDs, promotes alternative careers for those with doctorates.
ASLS	Association for Scottish Literary Studies	learned society
AWWE	Association for Welsh Writing in English	learned society
BA	British Academy	'the UK's national body for the humanities and social sciences – the study of peoples, cultures and societies, past, present and future'.
BAAL	British Association for Applied Linguistics	learned society
BAAS	British Association for American Studies	learned society
BACLS	British Society for Contemporary Literary Studies	learned society

BAIS	British Association for Irish Studies	learned society
BAMS	British Association for Modernist Studies	learned society
BARS	British Association for Romantic Studies	learned society
BAVS	British Association for Victorian Studies	learned society
BCLA	British Comparative Literature Association	learned society
BS18S	British Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies	learned society
BSA	British Shakespeare Association	learned society
BSLS	British Society for Literature and Science	learned society
CEF	Common English Forum	A lobbying and advocacy group which brings together various disciplinary organisations.
CWWA	Contemporary Women's Writing Association	learned society
DfE	Department for Education	Government department for education
EA	English Association	A national body, set up in 1906, which aims to 'further knowledge, understanding and enjoyment of the English language and its literatures and to foster good practice in its teaching and learning' at primary, secondary and higher education levels. It runs a range of conferences and prizes, and undertakes policy for the discipline. It has a primary, secondary and Higher education committee.
ECA or ECR	Early Career Academic *or* Early Career Researcher	Common abbreviation for an academic within five years of their PhD. We prefer *Academic* to *Researcher* because many of these early career staff are in demanding and often precarious teaching posts.

EMC	English and Media Centre	'an educational charity providing CPD and innovative & award-winning teaching materials to secondary English & Media teachers'. Publisher of *emagazine*.
ESSE	European Society for the Study of English	'a European federation of national higher educational associations for the study of English… The aim of the Society is to advance the education of the public by promoting the European study and understanding of English languages, literatures in English and cultures of English-speaking peoples'.
HEA	Higher Education Academy	The 'national body which champions teaching excellence. We work with governments, ministries, universities and individual academics in the UK, and around the globe. We provide value to the HE sector by focusing on the contribution of teaching as part of the wider student learning experience.' The HEA supports initiatives in teaching and has a Fellowship scheme that academics can join. Now part of AdvanceHE.
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England	Closed in September 2018, this was the quango that funded many aspects of Higher Education in England.
IES	Institute of English Studies	Part of the University of London's School of Advanced Study (SAS), the IES is 'an internationally renowned research centre, specialising in the history of the book, manuscript and print studies and textual scholarship'. It is developing a national remit to support the discipline.
KEF	Knowledge Exchange Framework	'The framework is intended to increase efficiency and effectiveness in use of public funding for knowledge exchange (KE), to further a culture of continuous improvement in university KE by providing a package of support to keep English university knowledge exchange operating at world class standard. It aims to address the range of different KE activities.'

LATE	London Association for the Teaching of English	Formed in 1947, 'LATE is an active branch within the London and Hertfordshire region of NATE'. Mainly for teachers in Secondary English and in English in education.
MLA	Modern Language Association of America	Founded in 1883, the Modern Language Association of America has works to strengthen the study and teaching of languages and literatures in the USA. It runs a number of journals (including its *Proceedings*, PMLA) and conventions, including the annual MLA convention.
NATE	National Association for the Teaching of English	Mainly for Primary and Secondary level teachers, NATE promotes 'standards of excellence in the teaching of English from Early Years to University… innovative and original ideas that have practical classroom outcomes' and 'support teachers' own professional development'. In addition, it runs conferences, collaborations and advocacy for the discipline.
NAWE	Nation Association of Writers in Education	NAWE's mission is to 'further knowledge, understanding and enjoyment of Creative Writing' and to 'support good practice in its teaching and learning at all levels'.
NSS	National Student Survey	Taking place in the Spring term, and focusing on final-year students, the National Student Survey 'gathers students' opinions on the quality of their courses' and so helps to 'inform prospective students' choices; provide data that supports institutions in improving the student experience; support public accountability'.
OA	Open Access	Open Access is the movement to make academic research free to access online.

OfS	Office for Students	'We regulate English higher education providers on behalf of all students. Our regulatory framework explains how we do this, and our strategy describes our objectives and priorities.' Successor to HEFCE, and (at the time of writing) its powers are still under discussion in Parliament.
OLH	Open Library of Humanities	'a charitable organisation dedicated to publishing open access scholarship with no author-facing article processing charges (APCs). We are funded by an international consortium of libraries who have joined us in our mission to make scholarly publishing fairer, more accessible, and rigorously preserved for the digital future. All of our academic articles are subject to rigorous peer review and the scholarship we publish showcases some of the most dynamic research taking place in the humanities disciplines today… Our mission is to support and extend open access to scholarship in the humanities – for free, for everyone, for ever.'
PALA	Poetics and Linguistics Association	learned society
PGR	Postgraduate, Research	A postgraduate undertaking a research degree (e.g. PhD, MPhil etc).
PhD+	Phd plus	Academics who have got their doctorates, but are not yet in full-time employment
PSA	Postcolonial Studies Association	learned society

QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education	'an independent, not for profit organisation, we check that students working towards a UK qualification get the higher education they are entitled to expect'. Crucially, QAA offers 'subject-specific guidance' in the 'Subject Benchmark Statements', which 'set out the skills and knowledge that graduates are expected to have at the end of specific degree courses'. There is one for English (2015) and for Creative Writing (2016).
REF	Research Excellence Framework	The REF 'is the system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions' and so determining research funding. It is a regular periodic exercise (the next one is 2020).
SRS	Society for Renaissance Studies	learned society
SSML	Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature	learned society
TEF	Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework	TEF 'recognises excellent teaching in UK higher education providers by rating them as gold, silver or bronze. The results help prospective students choose where to study. The TEF was developed by the Department for Education and is carried out by the Office for Students. The ratings are judged by an independent panel of students, academics and other experts.'
UE	University English	The main professional body for University departments of English. Formerly the Council for College and University English (CCUE), it was 'founded in 1993 to promote the study of English in higher education, and to provide opportunities for English lecturers to meet colleagues from other institutions and discuss matters of shared concern'.

Exploring Intersections between Creative and Critical Writing: An Interview with Elleke Boehmer

ELLEKE BOEHMER, DIYA GUPTA AND BÁRBARA GALLEGO LARRARTE

Elleke Boehmer, Professor of World Literature in English at the University of Oxford, is both a novelist, and a cultural and literary historian. Her critical and creative work published in 2015 focuses on the Indian Ocean cultural arena, teasing out its entanglements with empire and other global webs. The novel The Shouting in the Dark *(Sandstone Press, 2015) crafts a portrait of a lonely girlhood and looks at the suppression of women's voices through its narration of the inner life of a young woman in the 1970s, set against the political chaos of apartheid South Africa. Her cultural history,* Indian Arrivals, 1870–1915: Networks of British Empire *(Oxford University Press, 2015), considers the English metropole through Indian intellectual eyes, exploring the rich textures of contact between Indians and Britons on British soil at the height of empire through poetry and travel writing.*

Interviewers Diya Gupta and Bárbara Gallego Larrarte are doctoral researchers at King's College London and the University of Oxford respectively. Their conversation with Elleke Boehmer at Shared Futures *examined the points of contact between creative and critical modes of thinking and writing.*

Diya Gupta (DG): We'd like to begin this interview by considering how rare it is for academics to also be creative writers, particularly novelists – and yet you have received acclaim for both! Would you consider the critical and the creative as oppositional structures of thinking? Or are there intersections? Is it like changing hats?

Elleke Boehmer (EB): This is the question with which my work begins, or that lies at its nerve centre. I used to give a very different answer to this question to the one I give now.

In the past, I used to think that the two kinds of writing came from different parts of my experience and consciousness or 'brain'. In fact, I wrote creatively and critically at very different times of the day and of the week. The one kind of writing, the creative, seemed to have to be drawn

up like water from a deep well, whereas the other kind of writing, the critical, often arose in interaction with the writing of others.

But, as time has gone on, I see that in fact the writing comes from the same place if sometimes along different channels: from the same perceiving eye or brain in interaction with different stimuli from the world, and of course with memory.

To get me to this much happier – or at least less fractious – space, new work in cognitive theory and communication, on literature as communication, has been very helpful. I'm thinking here of some of the recent work of Terence Cave, and also of communication theorists like Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber.

It has also been helpful that creative writing has found a place on university courses in literature, and in research ratings. Whereas before creative writing was dismissed as not meeting certain scholarly standards, perceptions of what counts as scholarship, and the critical and philosophical insights that might be delivered by creative writing, have fundamentally changed.

When I began as a lecturer at the University of Leeds in the early 1990s, for example, creative writing was perceived across the academy as something that one did in one's spare time, as a lesser mode of writing, as something not entirely respectable. It certainly didn't count for the (then) RAE. But now that has changed: published creative writing was (justly in my view) counted as a kind of exploratory research on its own terms for REF 2014. These changes have allowed me to make some peace institutionally with the different modes or roles of writing that run together in my brain, or in how I see my brain.

DG: It's interesting that you refer to these connections, as our recent reading of the two books, *Indian Arrivals* and *The Shouting in the Dark*, threw up a number of parallels between them. This suggested to us that you were probably working on the books at the same time, though the links are also quite subtle. For example, there's the idea of arrival that, of course, *Indian Arrivals*, is about. But also, has Ella – the main character whose perspective we inhabit – 'arrived' in the novel? Would you describe *The Shouting in the Dark* as a coming-of-age novel?

EB: Thank you for noticing this. It's a link that I hadn't yet spotted, and there definitely are others, though I should say they weren't always at the surface of my awareness as I was writing. They appeared largely in retrospect. But, yes, that is definitely a link between the two books – the idea of arrival – and the link speaks to those ways in which writing, whether

creative or critical, autobiographical or historical, as here, moves and flows along related channels. There is, in this sense, at least as I experience it, no 'left brain, right brain' divide.

As to the idea of arrival, this was something that was very fruitful to explore, and I probably did so in both books in interaction with V. S. Naipaul's own memoir narrative *The Enigma of Arrival* (Picador, 1987). In particular, I responded to the idea that he investigates of cultural arrival – that is, those cases where the physical touching down in a new place is preceded by anticipated arrivals in the mind. Therefore, coming to the old cultural metropolis, London in this case, or arriving in a place that has been papered over with myth and story, like South Africa in the colonial imagination, can be seen as arrival for the first time yet knowing the place from before.

This is an experience that nearly all the educated travelling Indians I look at in *Indian Arrivals* had, travelling through the Suez Canal from 1879, or arriving in Europe and then London at the end of the nineteenth century. But it is also an experience that Ella and her mother in *The Shouting in the Dark* have as they travel between Europe and Africa. The moment of touch-down has been so heavily anticipated that it is always a second-hand, déjà-vu experience.

So yes, in that sense I'd agree with you that *The Shouting in the Dark* is a coming-of-age novel. It is about Ella arriving in her anticipated future, and claiming a place for herself in the world, in Southern Africa in particular. But it is also a family drama with all the tensions and stand-offs pertaining to that form. And it is a book about writing and the formation of a writer, as is captured in this extract in which Ella discovers the power of writing –

> *Ella pulls out the drawing pad the air stewardess serving dinner gave her. The pad comes along with a pencil cunningly tucked into the spiral binding of the pad. On the first page she writes in English:*
>
> Either we fall out of the sky or we don't. Either way, no amount of crying will help.
>
> *She reads what she has written. She likes it: it makes sense and sounds wise. She has a picture of their plane up high in the sky, above the clouds, as if balanced on a pinnacle of thin air.*
>
> *Something about this thought gives her perspective.*
>
> *She writes a few more things.*
>
> Up in the air*, she writes.* Middle of a storm. Inside a bubble.
>
> *The effect is wonderful. Anything she writes down, whatever it is, one word after another, turns things quiet. What was noisy evens out, looks suddenly level and smooth.* Mam lying there like a beast*, she writes,*

> a dumb beast. *The disgust she felt at seeing her restrained ebbs away. Writing, she is both separate from herself and steady within herself. There, over on that side of herself, the part of her that is being written about still feels what, a moment ago, the rest of her was feeling. Here, over on this side, she is writing what happens. Here everything is at a distance but everything at the same time is under her control.*
>
> *She so much likes the effect of the writing that for the next couple of hours she goes on putting down words with her pencil, words like* zoo *and* beast *and* hate*. Until long after the overhead lights have been switched off, she makes up sentences*. I hate to see her lying there like a zoo beast. *She wonders about the word* hate*. It comes without thinking about it. Maybe she doesn't mean it. But as she puts down the letters* h-a-t-e *it gives relief.* (pp. 102–03)

DG: That is such an evocative piece of writing! Is the extract based on your own experiences of the pleasure of crafting words?

EB: Yes, as I have probably anticipated, I approach writing very much as a craft, as something that involves making, shaping, piecing together and then, of course, re-shaping and revising. As in that passage, writing is so fascinating because it at one and the same time involves being in the ruck of the craft, as I see it, and yet removed from it, occupying the role of the creator who stands back, surveys what they have done, and then steps back in, to mould and refine the meanings made. As for Ella in the passage, writing involves both a poise and a stilling. Yet that poise or balance is full of energy pressing in on all sides. The challenge is how to control it, but also to be subject to it.

Perhaps this is where the juncture of the creative and the critical again invites attention. Writing as a critic or scholar, you do always have the voices of the tradition, or of other writers or critics resonating somewhere around the space in which you are writing. And yet you have to find a way of stilling those voices, or making a provisional truce with them, so that their potential judgement or critique doesn't overwhelm your own words and perspective. It's for this reason that revision and re-shaping is so important, to create a balance between the voices of tradition, and the new perceptions and experience you are trying to forge.

Bárbara Gallego Larrarte (BGL): Yes, and it seems that in both *Indian Arrivals* and in the novel the experience of crafting words, of constructing a narrative, often has the important function of working to counteract forms of oppression. You have argued elsewhere that the colonial process is not only characterised by exerting political and economic power, but

that it also involves wielding 'imaginative command'.[1] When you focused on colonised perspectives in *Indian Arrivals*, did you discover counter-narratives different to those formed out of colonial power?

EB: Well, the counter-narratives of the late nineteenth century would probably have been more muted than those of the independence era. And yet sometimes, for a colonised writer to tell their own story was to produce a powerful counter-narrative. So that is a further parallel between the books, the recognition that telling your story to some extent resists and overturns the stereotypes that may be imposed upon you.

BGL: It also struck me that the novel has a distinct feminist reading. Ella seems to be trying to challenge the narrative of gender imposed on her, in large part by her father. He cautions her, for example, saying that 'Cheek is very ugly in a girl' (p. 37), or that she should prepare to 'slip backwards' as the boys take over, for 'It's what nature dictates. Women begin to concentrate on the things that come more naturally. The boys, the men, succeed instead' (p. 193). Writing is described as a process of empowerment. There is that poignant scene when Ella gets one of her poems published, and we read how 'The pleasure of seeing her very own words in print grabs her by the collarbones and pulls her upright' (p. 230). I found that description powerfully vivid, and I wonder if you see Ella's use of writing partly as a feminist act? In a previous interview you talked about the novel as 'crafting rage'.[2] Is this a distinctly gendered rage?

EB: Yes, gendered rage, it powers Ella's story, it drives her forward, this sense that it is wrong to be counted as lesser because of being different from boys. But this rage is important in another respect too, as it leads Ella to form common cause with others she sees as unjustly overlooked, in particular her parents' garden worker Phineas whom she falls in love with.

DG: Yet another parallel is that both the novel and the critical work are sea-facing. *Indian Arrivals* starts with Toru Dutt's poem about a beach –

> Near Hastings, on the shingle beach,
> We loitered at the time

[1] Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 5.

[2] 'Feminism 4.0 – Debate with Naomi Wolf, Elleke Boehmer and more', <https://vimeo.com/141465995> [accessed 7 August 2017]

When ripens on the wall the peach,
  The autumn's lovely prime.
Far off, – the sea and sky seemed blent,
  The day was wholly done,
The distant town its murmurs sent
  Strangers, – we were alone.[3]

And Ella's first published poem, in Dutch, features herself on a beach, with the waves washing away her footprints. What about this image of the beach interests you?

EB: Again, thanks for pointing to the link, another one that isn't by design, or that I hadn't thought about consciously before, though it speaks to those interconnections of writing or writings we were already discussing. The beach interests me a lot, and that's obviously coming through here – the beach as interstitial zone, neither land nor sea, neither us nor them. The beach was one of the primary contact zones of empire, a place full of potential, for both positive exchange and trade, and yet also for violent encounter. The home beach or harbour was the place from where the coloniser-to-be set sail, directed to the wide horizon, with all the promise and the fear of the unknown that that represented.

Something of these associations are also, I guess, sparked in Ella's poem, and in those scenes where her father looks out to sea, and relives his days in the merchant marine, Ella standing nearby him.

But there's another interstitial place in the novel that's perhaps even more important at least for the unfolding of the story, and that is the verandah, the place where the father is most often seen: this too is a place of encounter, of memory, of exchange and story; of being neither inside nor outside, neither dark nor light.

DG: To experience such places of encounter, to understand the metropole, reading seems to become essential. You reveal very well in *Indian Arrivals* how the Indian literary imagination is shaped by reading English – for example, using Dickens as a literary lens to understand London. How, then, is reading an imaginative act? Can reading also be limiting or restrictive? In the novel, Ella is frustrated by the reference points available in her books: 'Everywhere you look, there are only English gardens, beautiful English girls with heart-shaped faces finding English love in English gardens,' she says (p. 145).

[3] Toru Dutt, 'Near Hastings', from *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan, 1876/1882* (Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1941).

EB: For me, as this might suggest, it is important to see reading as an active, not a passive activity. Reading involves an active engagement with what is being read. Ella in the novel is a reader, but an impatient one; she doesn't find enough to engage with in the reading materials available to her. But she does find enough of interest to go on reading, to persist. She is also a reciter, a performer, she collages together lines from poetry she enjoys, and her own lines. This, too, is a meaning-making process for her. Reciters are also readers.

BGL: I would like to talk a bit about the connections between narrative techniques in your creative and critical writing. I was very struck by your use of the definite article to refer to Ella's parents. Reading 'the father' and 'the mother' added a note of strangeness to the narrative – I found it very unsettling. It is such an effective distancing technique that I wondered if it perhaps afforded the critical distance of the academic to the novel writer? Is this further support that the creative and critical are closer than we think?

EB: Isn't it interesting how this question of the creative and the critical has formed one of the keynotes of this discussion, a thread to which we've kept coming back? On the definite article, certainly this represented a conscious decision, though its motivations came from the narrative itself, and had little to do with critical distance, though the usage did have to do with creating distance. I was interested in how the prose itself might hold the members of this family at arm's length. Though one of my editors didn't like it, and tried to persuade me otherwise, I was keen to keep on with the device. I wanted the reader to feel the estrangement that Ella also feels coming through in the language. It is another example of how writing, in this case creative writing, can actively engage the reader.

The definite article also connects to the translational second-language flavour I was trying to introduce to the prose. I was keen for the reader not only to share that sense of distance from her parents, 'the mother' and 'the father', with Ella, but also her sense of not being at home (of unhomed-ness) within English.

BGL: This sense of not being at home within English seems significant, not only for the colonial context, but also for your own experience of English as your second or adopted language. In the Epilogue to *Sharmilla and Other Portraits* (Jacana, 2010), you highlight how language brings to the foreground the condition of the migrant. You describe a feeling of 'linguistic outsiderness', of 'living in translation, on a borderline' (p. 175).

Could you speak, as a concluding thought, about how this outsider position has shaped your writing and how the English language in your work is shaped by other cultural awareness?

EB: It probably comes down to what it is to live bilingual, as I've tried to put it. Living bilingual (or trilingual) means that there is always more than one word hovering close by whenever we speak. Everything said has its echo in the other language, a different resonance and texture, a different aura of reference. Ella in fact experiences the two languages she inhabits as two different sensory worlds, one beige and soft, that's Dutch or Netherlands, one angular and purple-coloured, that's English.

This kind of double awareness provides incredibly fertile ground, I'd say, for the making of a story, where every new word represents a new possibility, another way of proceeding. It also represents an interesting way of creating characters, and managing the reader's relationship with the characters, either setting them at a distance or drawing them close. The father's language usage in the novel is demotic and salty, full of booming Dutch expletives, that is both quite bracing to read, or at least I hope so, and yet disturbing too. In a way, the Dutch textures of what he says allowed me to accentuate the violence of his speech and manner.

Throughout, it was interesting to explore how the story wound through different language worlds and to play on the reader's varying degrees of distance from those worlds. After all, none of us really occupy monoglot cultures; we always encounter layers and variations of dialect and register, or just different kinds of English. One reviewer even asked about a glossary, which I didn't mind, because it demonstrated that this reader at least had felt at certain points estranged from aspects of Ella's world. In this sense shared Ella's experience of feeling unhomed in English, at least at first, while also being increasingly alienated from her parents, even as she still understood their language and dreamed in it.

Index