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NATIONAL NARRATIVES, POSTNATIONAL NARRATION

Donald E. Pease

For Homi Bhabha

This is my final impression. The meanest mariners, renegades, and castaways of Melville’s days were objectively a new world. But they knew nothing. These know everything.
—C. L. R. James, Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways

If what Jean-François Lyotard has called the postmodern condition entailed the dismantling of the Enlightenment’s grand narratives, the nation, as the surface on which those master narratives were inscribed, also names the space in which that condition has become pervasive. The metanarratives nations fashioned out of them constituted the historically effective mechanisms whereby the Enlightenment’s ideals of freedom and equality were transmuted into universal “rights” rather than local demands. But in the era of postcolonialism and globalization, the once hegemonic narrative of the nation has been unseated. These asymmetrical but interdependent socio-economic formations share responsibility for the demotion of the nation-state to the status of a residual unit of economic exchange in the global economy. Once believed crucial for membership in the world system, the
nation-state has been recast as a tolerated anachronism in a global economy requiring a borderless world for its effective operation.  

Both globalization and postcolonialism begin with the assumption that while the nation-state may not be dead exactly, it has undergone a drastic change in role. The world economy requires socially and territorially more complex organizations than nation-states, which have subsequently become splintered rather than developmental in form. The time bound and enclosed nation-state whose institutional form once foreclosed other possibilities has given way to more complex patterns of interdependence grounded in the belief that the local and international are inextricably intertwined. Global tribes with widespread diaspora networks, epistemic communities with transnational allegiances, migrant labor forces, and radically pluralist groups now constitute nation-building as a provisional and highly unreliable linkage between universalism and territorial exclusion.

Although globalization and postcolonialism have both emerged at the site of the postnational, however, they differ radically in the significance they associate with the nation's change in status as well as the grid of intelligibility whereby they would calculate it. Were they to be construed as narratives, these formations might themselves be conjoined in the observation that while postcolonialism "narrows" the processes whereby anti-imperial nationalism speaks back to transnational capital in the name of disparate "peoples," globalization narrativizes the processes whereby transnational capital manages national populations in the name of the state.

As this antithetical formulation would suggest, the postnational designates the complex site wherein postcolonialism's resistance to global capital intersects with the questions the global economy addresses to the state concerning the nation's continued role in its management. The category of the "narrative" has been invoked at this juncture to represent heuristically the distinction between these discursive formations and to bring into focus the topic that organizes the contributions to this special issue of Modern Fiction Studies; namely, the role that narratives played in national formation and the deformations of the postnational.

In what follows, the term postnational will function in different registers—postnational narratives, national narrativity, postcolonial narration—that I hope thereafter to transmute into the variables grounding its terrain. It names the site in-between the nation and the state that is traversed by these multiple and heterogeneous acts of narration. These narrative activities inscribe "national peoples" within a space that is neither organic nor contractual, neither the origin nor the end of the nation, but in-between the national and these different acts of narration.

**National and Postnational Narratives**

With the intention of demonstrating that they authorize very different narrative protagonists, a distinction between national and postnational narratives might be provisionally drawn at the line demarcating the temporal from the critical inflection of "aftering." Postnational narratives might, as a consequence, be understood either to constitute related accommodations to global capital or to narrate forms of resistance. The narrative of global capital is accommodationist in that it simply recasts the state in the diminished role of manager. It redefines national narratives as instruments of state rule through the reproduction of the collective illusion that the state is an imaginative correlate of an individual's desires, the world s/he wants, rather than the world the state has already imposed.

When emplaced within a postcolonial narrative, however, the nation undergoes a dramatic change in historical orientation. Its spatial and temporal coordinates reverse their relationship to the colonialism and imperialism that played the parts of protagonists in the accommodationist narrative of global capital. Postcolonialism sorts national narratives into at least three separate but overlapping categories: national, antinational, and postnational. In establishing interlinkages between proletarian anticapitalism and nationalist anti-imperialism, postcolonialism often deploys national narratives strategically as forms of local resistance to the encroachment of global capital.

Unlike the discourse of globalization, postcolonialism emerged, in part, through an immanent critique of the nation as an ideological mystification of state power. Its pervasive recharacterization of nationalism as the fictive invention of a civic-territorial complex that did not in fact exist resulted from an analysis of the narrative elements—the national metanarrative, narrativity, and the intentionality—that conveyed this fiction.
The metanarrative aspect of national narratives, as this critique might now be summarized, constituted a metaphysical mediation between the state and the lifeworlds of its subjects. Metanarratives recast the reason of state as a teleology (a horizon of narrative expectations emanating from a national origin and organized by a national purpose) and thereby induced the state's subjects to collude in their own subjection. National narratives were structured in the (metanarrative) desire (intentionality) to recover a lost national origin whose projection onto a national future organized an individual quest in the form of a sequence of purposive events (national narrativity).

National narratives might in retrospect be described as having constituted literary forms wherein official national fantasies were transmitted to a "national people" that they aspired simultaneously to consolidate and represent (see Rose). Narrativizing a relationship between a "people" and a civil-territorial complex thereafter construed as "natural," national narratives effected imaginary relations between national peoples and the states that secured them to their apparatuses. The conjunction of "nationness" with narrativity activated a two-tiered process dividing the manifest organization of the state apparatus (wherein the Reason of State was Sovereign) from the latent fantasy (wherein state subjects imagined themselves granting this power to the state).

It was this fantasy's latency that supplied the power necessary to animate the national people's longing for an imaginary relation to the state. Various elements of the narrative process supplied different links between the modality of the state apparatus—its subject positions, preconstituted norms and assumptions, the cultural performatives whereby these norms became embedded as assumptions, and the relay of sites sedimenting their iterability—with the invariant contents of the national fantasy. The property of "nationness" intrinsic to these narratives has been sorted into a range of categories whose variations on the relations—democratic, authoritarian, socialist, liberal, imperial, anticolonial—between the "national people" and the state depend upon one or another modular version of the enlightenment grand narrative from which they derive their authority.

As collectively experienced fantasies, these narratives extended the reach of state regulatory mechanisms into the individual psyche where these fantasies have historically performed functions that are both extensive and complexly interrelated. They organized collective representations of the national people, transmitted the official scenarios wherein individuals were subjectivized as its citizen-subjects, and controlled the individual citizen's relation to the state. Overall, these narratives positioned a totized community as the narratee of a story that structured the subject positions, actions, and events of that community within a masterplot that performed the quasi-metaphysical function of guaranteeing its perpetuity.

National narratives derived both their coherence and their claim to "universal" value from their opposition to "other" national narratives. These opposed narratives "face one another like images gesturing from opposite directions toward a patriotic threshold, the reader who calls one image reality and the other a reflection is, in fact, declaring what side of the mirror he or she is on" (Sommer 112). The construction of the national Other produced a totized image of the national community at the surface of this national mirror. A "patriotic" national identity was subsequently structured in the imagined relation of absolute difference from this national enemy.

But the contradictory relation between difference and sameness out of which national narratives and national identities were fashioned could only be resolved into a unity through the state's intervention. When it exercised the power to make a unity out of difference, however, the state also threatened its individual subjects' relation to this unity with disruption at the paradoxical space wherein unification was accomplished (see Bhabha, "DissemiNation"). If state power was required to constitute (and enforce) the national unity that the individual presupposed as a property intrinsic to the nation, however, that accomplished unity would always lack at least one part. Since it required the intervention of the state's power as a force external to the (not-yet-united) nation, the unified nation would always lack the part played by the state in constituting its integrity. Contrarily, insofar as an individual could only consider him or herself as a part of the nation after recognizing his or her apartness from it, her (or his) national identity could only be achieved through an act performed by this part lacking the whole. When either the state or the individual performed the action(s) necessary to make a whole out of these part actions, however, the national unity and the national identity accomplished out of these performatives were manifestly the effect of this paradoxical social
logic—the whole nation minus this part (action) or the part(ial national identity) in addition to the whole nation.

Etienne Balibar has invoked this (post)national paradox to ask whether universalism and racism are opposed or intertwined features of the nation-state. After asking this necessarily provocative question, Balibar discovers a “fluctuating gap” between “the representations and practices of racism and nationalism” (54), symptomatic of the national narrative’s effort to cover over this paradoxical space. This gap effects an externalizing action—the exclusion of national others—Balibar describes as necessary to effect the nation’s internality. Racism, under this description, constitutes “a supplement of nationalism or more precisely a supplement internal to nationalism, always in excess of it, but always indispensable to its constitution and yet always still insufficient to achieve its project, just as nationalism is both indispensable to and always insufficient to achieve the formation of the nation” (54).

The operations nationalism required to produce for itself the illusion of universalism take place as supplemental scenes in its national narratives. These supplemental scenes effect elisions of the nation’s lack of universality otherwise evident at the site of the state’s unification of the nation. Racism, according to Balibar’s model, effects a generalized misrecognition of the sovereign power the state exercised there by displacing the state’s nation-making act (making “one out of many”) with representations of the national people’s collective abjection of stateless (racialized) persons. These representations effect the related nation-making illusion that, rather than functioning as the precondition for the individual’s act of identification with the nation-state, the condition of apartness refers only to non-nationals and results from the national people’s abjection of racialized others. Racism, that is to say, effects the collective illusion of the nation as a concretized universal (of nationalism) through its occlusion of the paradoxes associated with the nation’s unification (the whole nation plus or minus the part making a whole).

Understood in Balibar’s terms, national narratives elide recognition of the paradoxical relation between the state and its subjects through their inclusion of these supplemental acts of abjection. National narratives encode these supplemental acts as at once political—racializing the national other—and psychic—internalizing the traumatic residua of these acts of abjection. In positioning an “enemy within” as the tain for the imaginary mirror linking the individual psyche to the national narrative, paranoia and narcissism became interrelated state fantasies.

Paranoia enabled national identification with already existing subject-positions through the abjection of state aliens. In thereby disavowing recognition of the individual’s own apartness, paranoia also effected the internalization of abjection as a latent national identity. 11 After paranoia became inextricably intertwined with official state fantasy, however, it could only pass from the manifest phase of an opposition between national others to the latency required for the transmission of the nation’s narrativity (the ongoing disavowal of national abjection) through its partial cathexis onto a narcissistic subject.

In the construction of abjectable and internal aliens as their shared precondition, national narratives effected a silent partnership between the nation and a state of paranoia (see Said). National narrative animated as manageable state fantasies the paranoia associated with psychic traumatata—unavowable memories, repressed experiences, drives—then rechanneled them into the abjection of (racialized) “aliens.” The overcoming of paranoia through these acts of abjecting accomplished a narcissism assignable to the state’s as well as to the individual’s sovereign powers of integration and control. Patriotism named the form narcissism assumed in its passage from an individual to a state fantasy. This structure of feeling thereafter promoted the illusion that the national patriot was also the putative center of state power.

Postcolonial and Postnational Narration

As we have already seen, national narratives established their narrativity at the site where the state concealed the sovereign power in between itself and the “national people.” Recharacterizing this display of state power as the national people’s desire to recover a lost origin, national narratives have enchaunced a series of events as the unfolding of this collectively shared desire. But as the demarcations of its limits, postnational narrations have struggled to make visible the incoherence, contingency, and transitoriness of the national narratives and to reveal this paradoxical space (see Bhabha, “DissemiNation”).

These acts of narration have neither ratified the sovereign power of the state nor effected the inclusion of stateless persons within pre-
existing narratives. They have instead materialized the postnational as the internal boundary insisting at the site where stateless individuals have not yet consented to state power and the state has not yet integrated the stateless into its national order. Performed at this site internal to the state yet external to the national narrative through which stateless persons are encouraged to perform their (narrative) consent to state power, these acts of narration take place as the double apartness (and extensive in-betweenness) of state power and peoples apart from the state.

National narratives’ power as instruments of psychic governance is best evidenced perhaps in the panic that has accompanied the desymbolization and subversion of nationalist narratives at this postnational site. Surrogate abjection and unanimous violence have accompanied the wholesale delinquencies of “national peoples” from the imagined communities in which they had previously “experienced” their imagined wholeness. The loss of national narrativity as an imaginative cushion has released the unmitigated force of the state’s repressive apparatus as a collectively shared experience (see Žižek).

To explain the panic that has emerged with the loss of national narrativity, the postnational might be understood as having opened up the gap within national narratives—in between state power and how to make sense of it—that national narrativity had covered over. This disruption has violated the belief in their timelessness that national narratives had previously solicited. It has also revealed the relation between the nation and its subjects as indistinguishable from the brute show of state force. The resulting lack of distinction between subjectivity and subjection has effected a state of panic that cannot adequately be understood in terms of the two-tiered psychic model invoked earlier to explain state fantasies. The dual relation between the manifest and the latent cannot account for the return not of the “repressed” but of the foreclosed “knowledge” of state power in whose disavowal the national order was structured.

The collective acting-out released in this panic state have included fantasized scenarios (some of which have materialized as historical fact) wherein the state has initiated the colonization of “national people.” Persons who had been abjected from within the national order have performed the “knowledges” that the national narratives had foreclosed. And the “national people” have “experienced” the re-

turn of the foreclosed as the death of the entire national order (see Pease, “Negative Interpellations”).

These scenarios, in fantasizing a connection between this postnational site and the postcolonial moment in which it has emerged, have symptomatically disclosed “internal colonialism” as a disavowed element in the constitution of the national narrative. In its repetition in another register (and another geographical space) of the state subjectification that the national narrativity had officially disavowed, the discourse of colonialism activated, in its relation to national narratives, the logic of supplementarity invoked earlier to explain how nationalisms constructed their illusion of universality.

Colonialism enabled the “national peoples” whose lifeworlds the nation-state had narrativized to reexperience their own subjection to the state in the form of the imaginative dominion over the lifeworlds of colonies elsewhere. While it might at first sight seem answerable to the logic of displacement, however, this “experience” of the nonknowledge of state subjection in fact condensed a series of psychosocial activities and semantic registers. In canceling their knowledge of state subjection through the practice of colonialism, the subjects of this nonknowledge linked its disavowal with the repetition of subjection elsewhere and foreclosed recognition of both disavowal and repetition through the abjection of colonialism as a form of knowledge.

The national people who involved the discourse of colonialism in their disavowal of state subjection conjoined the national narrative wherein they had established their national identity and covered over the site of state subjection with a colonialist praxis. But the national people did not—as had been their practice in their relations to racialized others within the national order—abject the colonized. In their colonial relations, the national people instead (re)performed the subjection that (they could not acknowledge) the state had exercised in the national order. Then, in order to maintain their ignorance, they abjected the discourse of colonialism (recasting it as a subjugated knowledge) in which the knowledge of state power was borne and thereby effectively disavowed as well the knowledge of national narrativity’s cover story.

Colonial narratives, that is to say, doubly encoded their subjects—as subjected to the power of the colonial state but also as the social effects of national narratives abjected knowledge. Postcolonialist narratives could not, as a consequence of this double code, represent
colonial subjects’ emancipation from the colonial state within emergent national narratives. Those subjects were, as we have seen, the bearers of the knowledge (of state power) in whose disavowal national narratives were constituted. As the bearers of the knowledge of the power of the state, postcolonial subjects have instantiated a place of betweenness, an unsurpassable interstitiaility, that can neither be assimilated by national narratives nor remain absolutely opposed to nationalism.

As figures who had been abjected by the practice (colonialism) whereby national peoples acceded to the non-knowledge of the state’s permanent externality to their national narratives, postcolonial peoples could not be narrativized in its terms. Unlike the national narratives’ people, postcolonial people recognized state force (rather than the integral nation) as the “real” historical agency of nationalization. But with colonialist abjection as their pre-national status, postcolonials could not remain utterly opposed to nationalism either. Because postcolonial subjects knew, beyond the possibility of disavowal, of the state practices (abjecting/subjection) that national orders had foreclosed in order to cohere, they could neither become assimilated within preconstituted categories of any national order nor withdraw their demand for a non-exclusivist nationalism (a nationalism, in other words, that was not one). Postcolonial peoples might, as a consequence, be described as having “subjectivized” this nonintegratable knowledge.

In Nation and Narration, Homi Bhabha has usefully complicated this description of the relation between national narratives and the discourse of colonialism by describing them as doubles whose relation is not calculable as a similitude. In the following passage, Bhabha designates the colonial state apparatus as the disavowed agent of national narrativity and postcoloniality as the limit internal to (post)national narration:

> It is precisely in reading between these borderlines of the nation-space that we can see how the “people” come to be constructed within a range of discourses as a double narrative movement . . . . In the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuitist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern soci-

Bhabha’s reading establishes an intimate distance in between national narratives and the colonial state apparatus and proposes that the rhetorical strategies postcolonials had developed in their resistance to the colonial state be understood as effective resources in the enunciative sites proper to the performance of postnational narration. What Bhabha names the “pedagogical” in this passage has a double referent—to the subjects structured within national narratives as well as to those subject to the colonial state. In subjugating persons and events to its preconstituted categories, the colonial state did not innovate but simply reproduced, Bhabha suggests, those “continuist,” “accumulative” “pedagogical” movements we already discovered supporting national narrativity (whose “subjects” can be numbered among the colonial pedagogues). The “repetitious and recursive strategy” of the people’s acts of (postcolonial) narration performatively opens up that split space in between the colonial (national) narrative and the people that also (recursively) reveals the site of the postnational.

In his construal of them as doubles, Bhabha effects a slippage in his identification of postcolonial and postnational peoples that refuses the description of the “national people” as self-identical, identifying them as victims as well as agents of the conjoined practices of abjection and subjection. When the “people” under Bhabha’s dispensation assume the national narratives’ preconstituted subject positions, their enunciations always split into that paradoxical site where the “part” played by the state in integrating the nation comes apart from a subject who cannot make that “event” a part of the whole “statement” s/he is enunciating. The enunciative moment itself splits into a non-traversable liminality in between two incommensurable subject positions. The “pedagogical” subject who, in enunciating the preexisting statements of the national narrative, discovers in the state’s act integrative of the nation an event for which there are no preconstituted categories with which to enunciate it, on the one hand, and on the other, the “performative” subject who, in enunciating postnational narrations that lack any preexisting place within the narrative order apart from the self-fading act of enunciating them as such, can only reiterate what the national narrative always is lacking.

The subversive strategies whereby postcolonial narrations delink
insurgent nationalism from the colonial state have also enabled, as we might conclude from Bhabha's pedagogical narration, a retroactive reading of national narratives capable of resituating postcolonial "knowledge" in the place of its former abjection and of thereby exposing the subject of the national narrative as the effect of the paradoxical logic—of the whole plus or minus one—I earlier described as the signifier of postnationality.

In their oppositional stance directed against imperial nationalism, postcolonial intellectuals have deployed a counter-hegemonic literary hybrid—antinational nationalism—as a strategic weapon in the struggle against cultural imperialism. When linked with postcolonialism, the various literary nationalisms that have emerged in the wake of colonialism—no matter how nationalistic their forms of address—share a postnational orientation that has redirected this released power against the state (see Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought). The external border in between the colonial state and their postcolonial (anti)nationalism might, as a consequence of the historical fact of their equiprimordiality, be understood to inhere as a (postnational) limit internal to the psyches of the "peoples" structured in national narrativity.

A Postnational Fable

Thus far I have proposed that the cultural work of postcolonial narration be construed as taking place within national narratives as the events their narrativity foreclosed, and that postnational narrations emerged as the siting of such foreclosure. In an effort to provide an interpretive frame for the essays to follow, I shall try to clarify the terms of this highly abstract formulation by way of reading the postnational narration that the postcolonial critic C. L. R. James performed on Moby Dick while detained on Ellis Island. This reading should be understood as the outline of a postnational fable, a meta-allegory of the processes of narration as already described.

James clarified the difference between postnational narration and national narrativity by turning this exemplary national narrative into the occasion for materializing what the interpretive grid of American literature had foreclosed. The postnational emerged, in James's reading of Melville’s text, at the very boundary line where the state's abjecting of James demarcated as well the dimensions of what it could not read in Melville's Moby Dick—namely, Melville’s having represented Ahab's Pequod and the cold war state as virtually indistinguishable political formations. Moby Dick, according to James, inscribed Melville’s representation of the outsiderness of the state as the force containing the insides of the national narrative. James thereafter associated this non-metabolized theme in Melville's narrative with his own non-Americanizable status and proposed that the non-assimilable be understood as the precondition for the already narrativized order.

In writing about Melville from within Ellis Island, James materialized at this administrative border the state's dual unity as a force permanently external to the nation yet absolutely immanent to the national integrity. Situating the border separating Americanness from non-Americaness, Ellis Island became, in James's reading, a personification of Melville's unreadable message. Like Melville's postnational narration (but unlike the national narrative), Ellis Island named the site where the force of state worked unconcealed.

Rather than corroborating the national narrative through which the state reproduced its power, James displaced that state fantasy with an interpretive performance animating the value of what that fantasy had to disavow. In identifying his reading with what could not be translated into the terms of its narrativity, James's commentary effected a permanent crisis in the state's power to integrate subjects within the national narrative. His postnational narration instantiated a liminality—a process of becoming American without becoming Americanized—at this border separating individuals from the state.

On 28 November 1952, now to permit the fable to catch up with its allegorization, the Trinidadian critic and writer C. L. R. James completed his book on Herman Melville, Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In, that he had begun while detained and awaiting deportation on Ellis Island. In the following passage James attests to the site from which he wrote as a significant aspect of its exposition:

Here was I just about to write, suddenly projected onto an island isolated from the rest of society, where American administrators and officials and American security officers controlled the destinies of perhaps a thousand men, sailors, "isolatoes," renegades and castaways from all parts of the
world. It seems now as if destiny had taken a hand to give me a unique opportunity to test my ideas of this great American writer. (132–33)

Throughout this passage, James has traded on antithetical understandings of the word “destiny.” The term’s connotational reach has interassociated the state’s imperial designs with the belief in “manifest destiny” through which it rationalized them as well as with Melville’s critique of this state policy. The different imaginative values he associated with “destiny” also determined James’s attitude toward his detainment. In retroactively shaping his decision to write about this canonical Americanist author into its proximate cause, James refused to subject himself to the state’s demands. Representing himself as if projected into a future from the Melvillian past, James constructed an interpretation of his present situation out of Melville’s projection and subsequently invoked Melville’s text to evaluate its descriptions as more accurate in its account of James’s present situation and as superior in the force of its surveillance to the state’s security apparatus.

In writing about Melville’s narrative while on Ellis Island at the heyday of McCarthyism and the cold war, James brought his personal narrative of false accusation, exile, and anticipated deportation into relationship with a national narrative that had designated them as the procedures of the totalitarian Captain of the Pequod. After finding Ahab’s will reproduced in the state’s security apparatus, James re-described the entirety of the state’s functioning as a repetition of Ahab’s will to power. He thereby reinterpreted as a brief against the state the narrative in whose terms the Americanist literary establishment had validated the cold-war state’s power.

The cold war structured two grand modernist narratives—Russian marxism and Americanist liberalism—in a relation of opposition. The postnational element James discerned in this structure operated the split in this opposition in between and as the betweenness of these metanarratives and referred the teleologies of both of these self-legitimizing narratives to an interpretation that was skeptical of their transformation into the state policies of surveillance and neocolonialism and that was affirmative of their function as merely transitional formations.

The cold war state positioned the “national people” in quasi-colonialist structure effecting a relation of false reciprocity between domestic policies and national security interests that transferred the foreign policy of Americanization abroad into an instrument for securing domestic solidarity at home. The nation’s subjects internalized this external antagonism by way of a series of figures—psychological, racialized, juridical, and political—that secured their linkages to the state apparatus. The imagined national unity—the preconstituted images, cultural performatives, and national identities sutured Americans to the nation-state—was constructed retroactively in the mirror image of the state’s foreign policy interests.

In its designation of postnationality as intrinsic to the structure of Melville’s national narrative, James’s interpretation proposed that the political work of translating this property out of the national narrative be understood to include the elision of historically intermediary terms (neocolonialism, cultural imperialism, and supra-nationalism among others) and the elevation of the composite of these elisions into the core tenet of the national mythology—American Exceptionalism. This work of elision and the political unconscious James understood it to have inscribed designated the culturally symbolic action performed by the United States’ national narrative.

As these observations would suggest, the literary strategies structuring this unconscious also revealed the internal limit of the national narrative. While it extends into the present, the limit internal to the national narrative was most evident in James’s socially symbolic actions. That limit emerged at the site where the postnation came apart from the national narrativity occluding it. Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways was quite literally composed on this site.

At the time James published Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways, Americanist critics had already invoked Moby Dick as a weapon in the cold war. In their readings of the national narrative, these critics deployed the United States’ opposition to the Soviet Union to justify neocolonialist policies in James’s Trinidad and elsewhere in the hemisphere. The United States bore the responsibility, as these interpreters argued, to colonize lifeworlds—at home and abroad—as an effort to oppose the Soviet Union’s anticipated colonization of them.

James’s reading presupposed the official interpretation of Melville’s text—opposing Ishmael’s liberalism to Ahab’s totalitarianism—but he refused to reproduce its terms. When James invoked this interpretation,
he did so to demonstrate the ways in which the state had deployed this very opposition to refashion him in the image of the enemy within:

I read Melville during the great historical events of the last seven years, and without them I would never be able to show, as I believe I have done, that his work today is alive as never before since it was written. So far, however, the contemporary references I have made have been to events on a world scale. There remains some direct estimate of the relation of this great American to present conditions in the country which produced him. (132)

In refusing to read Melville's work into the terms that had foreclosed the postnational dimension of Melville's work, James underscored the provisionality of the cold war as a frame narrative and redescribed the prerogatives of the cold war state as themselves the effects of highly contingent acts of narration.

Unlike establishment Americanists, James wrote his commentary from the standpoint of a figure who had become abjected from within American political culture: "But what matters is that I am not an American citizen, and just as I was about to write, I was arrested by the United States government and sent to Ellis Island to be deported" (132). Writing from outside that culture with an insider's knowledge of its workings, James's commentary uncovered in Melville's texts the underlayers of what Americanists concealed in the political unconscious of official literary history: the codes and assumptions informing the structures of exclusion whereby the Reason of State had secured its identification with the mythology underwriting the national canon. Understood as a structure of containment, the pivot of the national meta-narrative turned on the mythology of national exceptionalism.

At this political switchpoint wherein Americans were officially differentiated from aliens, James disclosed the ways in which the national security state, in enacting exceptions, in the realm of Realpolitik, to the official rule opposing colonialism and cultural imperialism, had sealed the national border of the civi-territorial complex organized in the myth of American exceptionalism: "The totalitarian madness which swept the world first as Nazism and now as Soviet Communism [and the Americanism opposed to it]: the great mass labor movements and colonial revolts... This is what Melville's vision coordinates" (7).

In interpreting this figure from the Americanist canon by way of a conceptual apparatus that uncovered colonialism and cultural imperialism as unacknowledged elements within its official literary tradition, James represented himself as non-Americanizable in the official terms of that tradition. Freely identifying with the position of the alien within, James, instead of becoming Americanized or subjectivized in its terms, directed two questions to the architects of the cold-war canon: 1) How does the literary tradition Americanize immigrants, refugees, and other stateless persons? and 2) What knowledge is foreclosed in the process?

If C. L. R. James was committed to becoming conscious of the factors structuring what we have called the political unconscious of the cold war, the literary critics who instituted the cold-war canon—F. O. Matthiessen, R. W. B. Lewis, Henry Nash Smith, Richard Chase, Perry Miller—might be understood as responsible for rendering this unconscious political. The political components of the unconscious structuring the cold-war mentality included Americanist policies of neocolonialism and cultural imperialism abroad and liberal anticommu-nism at home. The literary genre whose socially symbolic action entailed the production of this political unconscious was the Americanist romance.

The fantasy organizing the cold-war state was also structured in the romance genre. This foundational fantasy accomplished the citizenry's substitution of actual violence for a state of security through the narrative of a national people who had established a utopia through the violent overthrow of a tyrant on a virgin landscape through the efforts of an American Adam, who thereafter secured symbolic ownership of this newfound Eden in a series of errands into the wilderness under the manifest commission of divine providence.

Cold-war critics legitimated the state's usage of romance as an official state fantasy when they defined this form as, in its effect, an imaginary solution to real social contradictions and thereafter isolated it as the literary genre capable of conferring canonical value on select Americanist literary texts—Hawthorne's, James's, Faulkner's, Twain's, Melville's. The socially symbolic acts the national romance performed during the cold-war epoch would include: the elimination from literary history of signs of state violence, the promotion of the illusion that Americanist individuals were autonomous of the state, the erection of a base superstructure relationship between geopolitical modernization.
and literary Americanism, and the foreclosure of tragedy as an Americanist form of life.

The imagined domestic community through which the state conducted its policy of Americanization abroad depended for its coherence on the national romance as the metanarrative through which that doctrine was legitimated. That metanarrative’s stated fantasy involved controlling the globe’s ideological map and was underwritten by a national mythology—of a national people’s successful overthrow of a tyrannical foreign power—whose authority derived from its capacity to displace entire cultures with ritual reenactments of this mythos.

After instrumentalizing Northrop Frye’s vast interpretive apparatus to the field of American literary studies, Americanist explications of others’ cultural myths facilitated exchanges between literary and political realms and effectively transformed the field into an agency of neocolonialism. Americanist critics deployed the quest romance as a meta-allegory designed to interpret and thereafter to subsume other literatures and geopolitical spaces into a universal Americanism that re-shaped the entire world in the images and interests of the United States.

Individual Americans structured their domestic identity in a secular form of the quest romance. This literary form qualified them to deploy the literary figures from the myth symbol school to colonize the lifeworlds of “primitive cultures” by finding those figures allegorically reproduced there. Overall, the mythology of the national narrative was structured in the neocolonialist project of absorbing the rituals of third world nations into the meta-allegory of nation-formation that allegorized the entire world as in the process of developing into an American nation. The neocolonialist component of this project absorbed the rituals of the so-called “developing nations” into an allegory of nation formation underwritten by the quest romance, consigning indigenous forms to the status of “outraged rituals.” The disavowal of colonialism globally and the foreclosure of the tragic locally were interlinked practices of the national romance.

Instead of reproducing this national mythology, James examined the linkages between neocolonialism as a U.S. foreign policy and the practices of internal colonization in evidence on Ellis Island. In reversing the direction of the symbolic economy that the American literary establishment authorized, James brought the Americanist mythos to its limit. He wrote from within a Melvillian lifeworld that the myth-sym-

bol school had translated into the terms of the national mythology. Then he instrumentalized his interpretation of Melville into the lever that, in demonstrating how American myths colonized others’ lifeworlds, turned the national mythology inside out.

In James’s account of their relationship, the nation’s myth of itself ratified the social dynamic intrinsic to domestic Americanization. He invoked his own experiences on Ellis Island to criticize that dynamic as involving the abjection of properties—ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, race, and locale—which were represented as otherwise than American. The site from which James composed his thoughts on Melville interlinked the national romance with the tragic images it had foreclosed. While some of the inhabitants of Ellis Island eagerly anticipated the romance of becoming “naturalized,” others anxiously awaited the tragedy of deportation or (in the case of “enemies of state”) denationalization.

Ellis Island, in making visible the externality of the act whereby the state made “one people out of many” materialized its internal limit. C. L. R. James, in occupying this always-already-traversed border in between being and becoming American, revealed how far apart the state’s violent practices were from the desires of individuals who wanted a social order different from the one secured in the contours of the cold war mentality. Interpreting Melville’s romance from this split site that was at once internal to the territorial United States yet external to its social order, James constructed an intersection wherein the Americanist literary tradition and the standpoint from which he interpreted it seemed at once to constitute yet also radically to dismantle one another. On Ellis Island, Melville and James become the torn halves of an integral American that never coalesces and that was not symbolizable in the terms of the national romance.

In place of utterly submitting to the Ellis Island authorities, James positioned himself as if occupying the space splitting Melville’s message from the security apparatus designed to censor it. Elucidating the difference between Melville’s message and the fact that it could not be recognized as American opened into the paradoxical space of the postnational.

In recasting his confinement within Ellis Island as if continuous with the political space Melville had imagined in 1850, yet non-synchronous with its temporality, James understood himself under the obligation to append an additional episode within Melville’s master-
work. He thereupon experienced an uncanny oscillation between Melville's imaginary Pequot and his own political exile. According to the uncanny temporality underwriting James's commentary on Moby Dick, Melville did not represent the contemporary political conditions of the Pequot's crew, but those which will have prevailed on Ellis Island in 1952. The Pequot represented what Ellis Island will have been, and Ellis Island constituted a memory of the Pequot coming from James's political present.

A certain transference of spatial and temporal properties was thereby effected that might be understood as an unauthorized postal exchange. Occupying the site about which Melville was writing as the destiny of America arising from Melville's vision of the past, James, in writing about that destiny, was also borne, in Melville's "memory" of America's future, by the traces of an America to come. Reading James's postnational narration of Melville's national narrative bears their memory of America to come into the here and the now.

Notes

1. The locus classicus for this description is Kenichi Ohmae's The Borderless World. For criticism of Ohmae's claims, see Hirst and Thompson, Globalization in Question, and Boyers and Drache, States Against Markets. See also Robertson, Globalization.

2. In Post-Fordism: A Reader, Ash Amin has gathered essays which interrelate these emergent social formations to matters of their adequate narration. See Amin's essay "Post-Fordism: Models, Fantasies and Phantoms of Transition," in particular.

3. Partha Chatterjee provides a useful account of the process in Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World. For a stern critique of this position, see Ahmad.

4. For a more expansive account of this dynamic, see Bhabha's "Introduction: Narrating the Nation" in Nation and Narration.

5. For an account of the civic-territorial complex as an analytic category, see Connolly.

6. Timothy Brennan clarifies the relationship between desire and national narrativity in "The National Longing for Form." For a critical recapitulation of the Ben Anderson argument in relation to this matter, see Franco.

7. This process is elaborated more fully in Pease's "Regulating Multi-Ad-hocerists, Fish's Rules."

8. Chatterjee criticizes this genetic model in The Nation and Its Fragments.

9. In "The Mirror Image in Soviet-American Relations," Urie Bronfenbrenner presents a mirroring theory of U.S.-Soviet perceptions compatible with Sommcr's when he observes "that the Russian's distorted picture of us was curiously similar to our view of them—a mirror image" (45–46).

10. For in important discussion of the relationship between racialization and trauma in the context of Freud's theory of the castration complex, see Lloyd.

11. Hal Foster has remarked the relation between the national abject and the state regulatory apparatus in the following succinct formulation: "the operation to abject is fundamental to the maintenance of subjectivity and society. While the condition to be abject is subversive of both formations," If subjectivity and society abject the alien within, Foster asks matter-of-factly, then "why is abjection not considered part of the state's regulatory apparatus?" (114).

12. See Spanos for a discussion of romance as the dominant cold-war genre. For a reading of tragedy as a form of political life, see Dillon. This dynamic is spelled out more fully in Pease's "New Americanists" and Corber's forthcoming Homosexuality in Cold War America.

13. This metanarrative is associated with the national identity in "National Identities, Postmodern Artifacts and Postnational Narratives." For a discussion of the political work metanarratives perform, see Norton.

Works Cited


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