

Twentieth-Century Fiction I

December 9. Narayan, *Malgudi Days*, and course conclusion.

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the final

distributed Monday at 9 a.m. on Sakai under Resources
due Tuesday, December 17, at 3 p.m.

email **immediately** if you cannot access the file or any
other crisis arises, or call xxx-xxx-xxxx (phone number
given out in class)

Sakai submission: upload test doc to Drop Box by 12/12
otherwise, exam due in person to Scott 207

No e-mail submission

the final

3 essay questions, one hour each

Choose one question from each of three groups

Discuss at least seven texts

Cite evidence

Honor code

Spend no more than four hours working; record timing

Open book (including course slides)

No collaboration; all work your own

questions?

comments?

random thoughts?

review

Nightwood

language is dominated by *forms for assimilation to type*
simile, satiric characterization, absurd episode
but character-system consists entirely of unassimilables
(sexually, nationally, temperamentally, historically)
every likeness is catachretic

review

Nightwood

community and relationship are dominant themes
utopian: Bohemian, transnational, sexually open
gender, like status, nationality, becomes *performative*
it is *queered*

but also radically atomized

church “marriage” before dog at end

Barnes’s position-taking as a radically committed stylistic
performer blocks other kinds of solidarity
vanguardist mode is conspicuously not a political or sexual
identity: problem of historical succession

Narayan...

‘Swaminathan, where is your homework?’

‘I have not done any homework, sir,’ he said blandly.

There was a pause.

‘Why—headache?’ asked Samuel.

‘Yes, sir.’

‘All right, sit down.’

“Father’s Help,” 70

Swaminathan left his seat joyfully and hopped on the platform. The teacher took out his cane from the drawer and shouted angrily, 'Open your hand, you little devil.' He whacked three wholesome cuts on each palm. Swami received them without blenching....

Swami jumped down from the platform with a light heart, though his hands were smarting.

succession (?)

Leading question: Does this remind you of anything?

How does this compare to *Portrait*—how do Narayan's representational *technique* and his *distribution of attention* resemble or differ from the earlier book?

succession (?)

Parallels

scene of colonial schooling

“Sir, was Vasco da Gama the very first person to come to India?”... “That’s what they say’ (70)

disempowered child who nonetheless exerts agency
third-person narrator with ambiguous irony

Divergences

interior life represented but highly reduced

authority, instead of being a menace, is absurd

novelistic trajectory is foreshortened by short form

(Even in novel *Swami and Friends*, limited or no *Bildung*)



R.K. Narayan

1906 b. Madras (Chennai); father a school headmaster
educated in English (and Tamil); fails English exam

1930 B.A., journalism, brief career as English teacher

1935 after many rejections, *Swami and Friends* published in
London by Hamish Hamilton through intervention of
Graham Greene

Greene: "His novels increase our knowledge of the Indian
character certainly, but I prefer to think of them as
contributions to English literature" (1937)

Photo from N. Ram, "Reluctant Centenarian," *The Hindu*, October 8, 2006 (online ed.), <http://www.hindu.com/mag/2006/10/08/stories/2006100800050100.htm>

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1935 after many rejections, *Swami and Friends* published

1939–50s stories in *The Hindu* (Madras newspaper)

1942 starts Indian Thought Publications

1956 leaves India for first time (to USA, later visits yearly)

continuing production of novels and stories

increasing acclaim

prose versions of Mahabharata and Ramayana

2001 d.

His mother said, 'Why don't you go to school in a *jutka*?'

'So that I may be completely dead at the other end?
Have you any idea what it means to be jolted in a *jutka*?'

(66)

JUTKA, s. From Dak.—Hind. *jhatkā*, 'quick.' The native cab of Madras, and of Mofussil towns in that Presidency; a conveyance only to be characterised by the epithet *ramshackle*, though in that respect equalled by the Calcutta **cranchee** (q.v.). It consists of a sort of box with venetian windows, on two wheels, and drawn by a miserable pony. It is entered by a door at the back. (See **SHIGRAM**, with like meanings).

Hobson-Jobson (1903 ed.)

jhatka: (nm) a jerk, jolt, shock; lurch

(Caturvedi, *A Practical Hindi-English dictionary*, 1970)

Indian/English: many paths

A week later one of the sons of his old master came and told Velan, 'You will have to go back to your village, old fellow. The house is sold to a company. They are not going to have a garden.'...

He let out a scream: 'Stop that!' He took his staff and rushed at those who were hacking. They easily avoided the blow he aimed.

"The Axe," 106–7

Indian/English: many paths



“Sharing a joke with Mulk Raj Anand in Chennai, 1995,” photo by N. Ram, in Ram, “Reluctant Centenarian,” *The Hindu*, October 8, 2006 (online ed.), <http://www.hindu.com/mag/2006/10/08/stories/2006100800050100.htm>

Indian/English: many paths

The anglophone Indian novel [N.B., novel] is a genre that has been distinguished from its inception by a preoccupation with both *history* and *nation* as these come together to shape...‘the idea of India’.

Priyamvada Gopal, *The Indian English Novel* (2009)

Indian/English: many paths

Those who write in the languages of India, whether that happens to be English or one of the modern 'vernaculars', do not necessarily write about 'India'...but about cultures and localities that are both situated in, and disperse the idea of, the nation.

Amit Chaudhuri, "The Construction of the Indian Novel in English" (1999)

Indian/English: many paths

[The Indian writer] hopes to express through his novels and stories the way of life of the group of people with whose psychology and background he is most familiar, and he hopes that these pictures will not only appeal to his own circle but also to a larger audience outside.

R.K. Narayan in 1953

the small; the restricted

Venkat Rao mumbled, 'Yes, sir,' and slunk back to his seat. The clock showed 5:30. Now it mean two hours of excruciating search among vouchers. All the rest of the office ha gone. Only he and another clerk in his section were working, and of course, the manager was there.

“Forty-five a Month,” 89

the small; the restricted

It was twilight. Everyone going about looked gigantic, walls of houses appeared very high and cycles and carriages look as though they would bear down on her. She walked on the very edge of the road. Soon the lamps were twinkling, and the passers-by looked like shadows. (87)

the small; the restricted

Narayan's *pathos*

compare Barnes: not misfits but simply the little people
children, the elderly, the small-time employee

who is named?

(“Attila”: the dog, the thief; “The Axe”: the old man...)

Why *are* they little people?

option one: contingency or “fate”: it’s just like that
(Narayan’s realism or naturalism)

option two

Rama Rao went out of work when a gramophone company, of which he was the Malgudi agent, went out of existence.... A series of circumstances in the world of trade, commerce, banking and politics was responsible for it.

“Out of Business,” 91

“This flower garden...H’m, it is...old-fashioned and crude, and apart from that the front portion of the site is too valuable to be wasted...”

“The Axe,” 106; ellipses Narayan’s

option two: modernity

It was a fine sight: the temple elephant yoked to the engine by means of stout ropes, with fifty determined men pushing it from behind, and my friend Joseph sitting in the driving seat. A huge crowd stood around and watched in great glee. The engine began to move. It seemed to me the greatest moment in my life.

“Engine Trouble,” 81

secular magic

Presently he grew tired of lying down there. He rose and walked back to the station. There was a good crowd on the platform. He asked someone, 'What has happened to the train?'

“Out of Business,” 95

“Have you heard of a thing called jujitsu? Well, this is a simple trick in jujitsu perhaps known to half a dozen persons in the whole of South India.”

“Fellow-Feeling,” 45

realism

He sat there in the front part of his home, bent over his clay, and brought into existence a miniature universe; all the colours of life were there, all the forms and creatures, but of the size of his middle finger...he had the eye of a cartoonist for human faces. Everything went down into clay. It was a wonderful miniature reflection of the world; and he mounted them neatly on thin wooden slices, which enhanced their attractiveness.

“Gateman’s Gift,” 28

“after” modernism

or, the doom of modernism

Woolf and Joyce claim to put paid to realist novel

Narayan exemplifies continuing vitality of realistic narrative

realism proves supple enough for many strands

Woolfian/Joycean technique takes place on shelf of tools
rather than becoming a norm

the question...

What happened to fiction in English 1900–1950?

Discussion

- (1) Lines of affinity
- (2) Lines of conflict



James



Conrad



Stein



Joyce



Sayers



Hemingway



Woolf



Faulkner



Anand



Hurston



Barnes



Narayan

Conrad, *Heart* (1899)
James, "Beast" (1903)
Stein, "Melanctha" (1909)
Joyce, *Portrait* (1916)
Sayers, *Whose Body?* (1923)
Hemingway, *In Our Time* (1925)
Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925)
Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (1930)
Anand, *Untouchable* (1935)
Hurstun, *Their Eyes* (1937)
Barnes, *Nightwood* (1937)
Narayan, *Malgudi Days* (1942–56)

what happened?

stream of consciousness, narrative fragmentation
pursuit of aesthetic autonomy
disenchantment of the world & alienated selves
traumas of the Great War

or

political commitments, realistic representation
vernacular Englishes; who does English belong to?
shifting global system of English-language writing & reading

seeing it both ways

or rather: these are major lines of struggle for
recognition, artistic prestige
power to represent and re-imagine people/situations

history of fiction in English 1900–1950 can be seen as *both*
the chronological line
and
the space of proliferation

next

Read on.