

Twentieth-Century Fiction I

December 6. Narayan, *Malgudi Days* (I).

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Housekeeping

Next class

The syllabus gives the reading order you should follow in *Malgudi Days*

You will be invited to pose general questions and make overall observations about the whole course at the start of next class

Housekeeping

Evaluations

Please complete by a week from Thursday

Our thanks!

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)

Review

Nightwood

Community and relationship are dominant themes

Utopian: Bohemian, transnational, sexually open

Gender, like status, nationality, becomes *performative*
it is *queered*

But it is also radically atomized

church “marriage” before dog at end

Barnes’s position-taking as a radically committed stylistic
performer *disables* other kinds of solidarity

vanguardist mode is conspicuously not a political or sexual
identity: problem of historical succession

‘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?

Succession (?)

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Discussion: 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)

The 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.)

jhaṭka: (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

Circumscribed wills

Discussion

In “Forty-Five a Month,” what kinds of constraints do the characters undergo? What lines of force shape the world of the story? Find at least two specific examples.

Circumscribed wills

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.

“Forty-Five a Month,” 87

Circumscribed wills

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 1: contingency or "fate": it's just like that
(Narayan's realism or naturalism)

Option 2

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 2: 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

teaser

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

Also: overview and wrap-up. Bring questions!