

Postgraduate English

www.dur.ac.uk/postgraduate.english

ISSN 1756-9761

Issue 08

September 2003

Editor: Richard Brewster

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Postgraduate English, Issue 08, September 2003

Romesh Gunesequera was born in Sri Lanka where he spent his childhood and later moved to England, via the Philippines, where he has lived and worked since. His first novel *Reef* (1994) offers a tantalising taste of exotic flavours and textures of life embedded in the familiar model of a coming of age narrative. *Reef* is the story of Triton, a boy growing up in 1970s Sri Lanka, as he works in the house of Mister Salgado, an amateur marine biologist and general dilettante. The narrative unfolds in retrospect as Triton releases his imagination from his present life in England, where he has immigrated and become a restaurateur, to the memory of his childhood in Sri Lanka. Food, the processes of cooking and the wider condition of consuming become the medium and models of self-expression and social knowledge for the young Triton. In this essay, I am concerned with the ways in which food is used to generate layers of representation within the text as well as around the product of the novel as it circulates in a global market of literary and cultural consumption. The identity of Triton, of the author, and the text itself come under consideration as the novel is positioned between multiple reading audiences, in particular the Sri Lankan and the British audience. I apply the interplay of desire and consuming as a productive dialectic, both within and around the narrative, in order to understand the creation of identity, and the dynamics of cultural exchange and consumerism in the global market.

The Identity of Sri Lankan English

Gunesequera's novel pivots between the memory of a tropical childhood in a lush island and the self-consciousness of an urbanised identity in a vibrant global metropolis. Transplanted from his village home to work in the Colombo house of Mister Salgado, Triton declares,

All over the globe revolutions erupted, dominoes tottered and guerrilla war came of age; the world's first woman prime minister - Mrs Bandaranaike - lost her spectacular premiership on our small island, and I learned the art of good housekeeping. (45) ¹

In the downturn from revolution, warfare and global instability to the intimacy of the cocooned world the novel presents, the art of cooking and of theorising about the vanishing reef that surrounds the island are greater preoccupations than the social and political events of the time period in which the novel is set. Gunsekera's writing is deeply invested in the imaginative potential his memories of Sri Lanka have given him, from his collection of short stories Monkfish Moon (1992), the novel The Sandglass (1998), to his most recent novel Heaven's Edge (2002) which draws on the physical and psychological terrain of conflict that has been Sri Lanka's reality for the past two decades. In Reef Gunsekera offers a text resonant with luminous description that expands through the mouthwatering detail of Triton's delectable ingredients, to the sensuous evocation of the ocean and Mister Salgado's whimsical tales of the mythical past. However, the surface allure generated by the descriptive passages of food, where the detail and images of food, cooking and consumption yield some of the most luscious and responsive language of the novel, can become a redundant or *superficial* aspect of the text for certain reading communities, such as a Sri Lankan audience sensitive to representation, especially from one of its diasporic sons. In Reef, the growing self-awareness of a blissfully ignorant servant boy is expressed with more immediacy than the violent coming-of-age of a whole generation of youth that culminated with the 1971 insurgency in Sri Lanka in which, along with their hopes for the future, thousands of young men and women gave up their lives.² The 'breach' between the lyrical immediacy of the text itself and the wider socio-political framework becomes particularly problematic when read against the circulating ideologies of identity and representation that are performed in a conflicted society.³

In any society that undergoes a period of intense social conflict and crisis, the function and status of the artist is a contested site. In Sri Lanka, the English language originated as a colonial import in mid-nineteenth century Ceylon and gave birth to an elite class of westernised English-educated Ceylonese.⁴ The linguistic nationalism of the 1950s culminating with the 1956 'Sinhala Only' Act by the government of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, and the consequent changes in the constitution of language education have put the status of the English language in Sri Lanka under acute duress. However, this sense of 'crisis' in linguistic and social representation has provoked a conscious search for identity by writers using the English medium, especially since the events of 1971 acted as a politicising catalyst for the writer.⁵ English language writing has been practised and maintained by a small community of writers, mainly in the urban centres and now increasingly from the diaspora. Within the context of the civil war and ethnic conflict that has scarred the country immeasurably, the responsiveness of the writer in English to contemporary problems of ethnicity and identity, social inequality and gender relations becomes an urgent question. In a country in which the majority of people primarily speak Sinhala and Tamil, the politics of expressing oneself in English and commanding a fluency of this global language is inextricably linked to issues of social privilege and to community and class identity. In conceptualising a national literature in Sri Lanka, where the notion of national identity and of individual and communal relationship to the nation have been brought into crisis by ethnic conflict and where language is a key implement in defining identity, the Sri Lankan English writer occupies an ambiguous space.

Creating Desire and Consuming Identity

In Reef, narration and the representation of identity are articulated as conditions of the relationship between desire and consuming. Triton's sense of identity is dependent on suppressing certain aspects of his past while mystifying others: he enters the narrative nameless, and becomes "Triton" only in his relationship with Mister Salgado, the master of whom he becomes a disciple. When Triton first hears Mister Salgado talk he is "captivated" (7) by the sound of his voice, whose

intonation is far removed from the "strangulation of the spirit" (7) of his uncle's speech. Mister Salgado's measured and melodic voice and his house that is the "centre of the universe" constitute the epitome of aspiration for the young Triton. Early in the narrative, Triton declares triumphantly "We would undergo a revolution" (41) for "Mister Salgado had reversed everything in our world" (41). This sense of "revolution," invoked with very different nuances from the way it is being applied and performed in the world outside the house, lies in the possibility of "reversing" and playing with meaning, as Triton fashions his identity within the space of the house and the space of the narrative. This process involves Triton placing himself in the lineage of Mister Salgado, who "came from a line of people who believed in making their own future" (24) and to whom "there were no boundaries to knowledge" (24). The master-servant dialectic is qualified by Triton's conception of Mister Salgado as *gurunanse* - teacher - and by his assertion that "I watched him unendingly, all the time, and learned to become what I am" (43).

Within the text the processes of cooking, the culinary creations and the social situations in which food is consumed constitute the main medium and register of Triton's self-expression, self-awareness and social knowledge. The central scene of the novel is the Christmas dinner party, where as the company encounter one another, the host Mister Salgado responds to the vegetarianism of one Western guest as "divinely primitive" (88) and the American guest Robert salivates more at the thought of the local women dressed in "wet skin-clingers" (86) than at the mouth-watering feast laid before him. The luscious description and presentation of food is a potent expression of the *frisson* of desire generated by the act of consuming in this social milieu and a volatile social atmosphere is created by the challenge and synthesis of identities and cultures in their encounter with one another. Triton achieves his greatest culinary feat, creating a cross-cultural fusion as he marinates, stuffs and cooks a turkey to perfection with local ingredients and spices and decorates the table with "temple flowers and some left-over Christmas tinsel" (79). Meanwhile, Mister Salgado welcomes the mixed crowd of Sri Lankan

and foreign guests and concocts an eclectic mix of familiar stories and exotic unknowns to entertain and tantalise them. Listening from the edges of the party, Triton is "spellbound" (85) by his master's story telling of the "past resurrected" (85). In typical droll manner, Mister Salgado reminds the guests that Sri Lanka was known as the Garden of Eden: "It panders to anyone's chauvinism, you know: Sinhala, Tamil, aboriginal. Choose a religion, pick your fantasy. History is flexible" (85). In the imagining of paradise, desire swiftly segues into the fantasy of choosing and claiming a history or narrative for oneself regardless of what other identities and histories might co-exist and be consumed in the process. In the context of the narratives of origin circulating in Sri Lankan social consciousness and of their application in media propaganda in bolstering stereotypical ethnic identities, and in relation to the crisscrossing histories of colonialism and the global relationships of power and cultural exchange existing today, Mister Salgado's wry comment is pertinently made.⁶

The Discovery of Narrative

As the novel opens, an adult Triton finds himself in a petrol station on a cold English night, confronted with "almost a reflection" (1) of his own face in the figure of the young Sri Lankan Tamil refugee. The nameless refugee, alienated by language, begs Triton for help in operating the jammed till, sign of his confusion and impotence in the foreign environment. However, securely positioned as a successful immigrant, Triton is able to elide the identity and history of the refugee by rendering it a pathway into memory. The young man's reality is less potent to Triton than the memories that are initiated by the encounter as Triton's imagination reels back into the past: "I could see a sea of pearls. Once a diver's paradise. Now a landmark for gunrunners in a battle zone of army camps and Tigers" (2). His evocation reads like a typified media image of Sri Lanka - the idyll contrasted with the apocalypse - a profoundly limited representation, in which there are neither faces nor identities, as in his encounter with the refugee. Remembering his early days in England, Triton recalls an encounter with a woman who asks him whether he is a refugee fleeing Africa and "that wicked

Amin" (174) to which he eloquently replies, "I am an explorer on a voyage of discovery" (174). The attitude towards his identity and history that is revealed by this comment is the same one which leads him to deny identification with the refugee and which qualifies the entire narrative. Triton's "voyage of discovery" involves re-visioning the experience of the past even as this means obscuring other versions of identity and reality. In Triton's representation of Joseph (the elderly caretaker of Mister Salgado's house), the underside of narratives of "discovery" or identity, whether of individual, community or nation becomes apparent as he demonises and literally banishes Joseph from the house. Gunsekera invokes tropes belonging to popular religion and superstition that allow Triton to "imagine a star-chart in the sky that would cause the fall of Joseph"(11) and to project fear and hatred onto the old man's "devil-mask"(25) of a face. When Joseph disappears into town while Mister Salgado is away, Triton is elated that "some miracle whereby my wishes had been picked up by the spirits of the city" (30) has taken place and is "sure that the gods had intervened on my behalf" (31). The whimsicality of Triton's belief that "some mischievous little godling would intervene with a triple-pronged arrow and prick fate towards my desires" (34) alleviates the pervasive demonisation of Joseph in which his reality is deferred and erased and any other sense of his identity is oppressed. In terms of a narrative of identity written through desire, every detail and image of description regarding Joseph registers denial, hatred and ultimately exploitation of meaning.

Consuming Desire in the Global Marketplace

At the Christmas dinner party, Miss Nili is seated at the centre of the table and the centre of desire. She is described with sensuous detail as the edges of her ears "curled in like the edge of a puppadum when it hits hot oil" (89) and prompt a craving in Triton to "press the ears back with my hands and keep the entrances to her soul open like the lips of a glazed pink conch" (89). In the desire produced by the rise of perfume from her body, rubbed in "like honey paste to enrich the skin" (89), we get a sense of one and all rushing in to grab their piece of the feast.

Mister Salgado, Triton, even American Robert all choose Miss Nili as their taste of fantasy - significantly it is only much later that Triton acknowledges "how little I had seen of her, really" (156). When Miss Nili first enters the lives of Mister Salgado and Triton, she is introduced into the narrative in terms of food and the amount of it that she can consume. Her appetite is initially threatening to Triton and when he first meets her she is "so hungry looking. I expected her to bulge out as she ate, like a snake swallowing a bird" (64). However, food becomes the carrier of erotic charge as "huge chunks of the richest, juiciest love-cake disappeared into her as into a cavern" (64). As Mister Salgado becomes increasingly entranced by Miss Nili, Triton secures his place in their developing relationship by concocting a routine in his head whereby he prepares food for and feeds the couple and so controls the encounters between his master and Miss Nili as she comes visiting: "It was our little ritual. I would nod, she would smile and he would look longingly" (67). Watching Mister Salgado savour the cake left over from Miss Nili's visits he imagines the "scent from her fingers" (67) infusing the flavour and admits that "I too sneaked a piece from time to time" (68). It becomes possible for Triton to fulfil his desire by "sneaking" and eating the cake. The eroticism embodied by the cake allows Triton to satiate his desire without knowing Miss Nili. Her identity is negligible in terms of the exchanges enacted through the cake - it is a product that exploits her image but evades her knowledge: both in terms of knowledge of her and in terms of her awareness of the exchange that is taking place. Indeed, the play of exchange enacted with the cake has more to do with the sexual tension between Triton and Mister Salgado whereby Miss Nili acts as a mediating body between servant and master.

The representation of Miss Nili in the novel allows us to consider the ways in which knowledge is removed from an identity in order to allow it to function as a medium of exchange. Triton, the adult who narrates the novel, is a restaurant owner whose skill allows him to survive in England. In a consumer-oriented cultural climate that demands difference and diversity in terms of products and processes, Triton's culinary skill, which initially provides him with a viable mode

of self-expression, becomes crucially redemptive in monetary terms. A cynical reader might compare this to the position of the author, for Gunesekera's pervasive use of images of Sri Lanka in his fiction must lead us to consider what is on offer for reader consumption and what is left opaque and unknowable in his narrative representations. When the most available representations of Sri Lanka in the global market are those written by diasporic writers and published in Britain, North America and Australia, it is important to register the desire for difference in the global marketplace and in the creation of consumer desire. In Reef, the employment of food in textual image production foregrounds the way in which the text as product becomes a cultural commodity. The author effectively employs markers of cultural difference in the text to create a very palatable product - a novel whose allure emanates from the delectable descriptions centring around food into the imagination of the reader who feels that he is able to grasp hold of a new experience of place and time. The desire for difference that finds satiation in the text that employs exotic images is similarly satisfied in varying degrees by the increasing availability and acquirability of such markers of difference in popular culture: from the recent and ongoing "Bollywood" craze in Britain that engenders tastes and trends in high-street fashion, that modifies the rhythms of pop music and that also leads to such consumer events as the Selfridges department store in central London promoting a festival of authentic Indian cuisine in its upmarket food hall in the summer of 2002. An immediate indicator of cultural commodification is the numerous television advertisements that extract certain aspects of Indian culture in order to attract viewers' attention and to create an attractive and different "identity" for their promotion. In the current Peugeot 206 advertisement on English television, a young Indian man's desire for a sleek Peugeot leads him to batter a locally produced car into its shape and form. In a slick pastiche of a Bollywood film scene, the new and improved car lends him an allure that enables him to attract the attention of the female object of his desire. In the above example there is no real relevance in tying the product to these visual markers of Indian identity and culture - the markers are used for their vibrant visual potential and popular currency in order to sell consumer products and

services.⁷ Similar to Triton's lack of knowledge of Miss Nili in Reef that allows him to consume the piece of cake and fulfil his desire is the ability of the consumer in a global market to buy into certain cultural trends or to *consume* certain identities that are offered as commodities in a socio-economic and historical vacuum.

Gunsekera's writing allows us to consider the cultural politics enacted through the diasporic text and the positioning of the diasporic writer. The dynamics of investment and/or exploitation of cultural images and markers in the text engage with certain niches of desire in the global market while complicating notions of identity as Gunsekera writes from both the Sri Lankan diasporic imaginary and the South Asian British experience.⁸ Gunsekera's literary community is at once contemporary Sri Lankan writers, based in Sri Lanka as well as in the diaspora, and postcolonial or new British voices.⁹ At a moment when creative representations by South Asians of intersections of identities and cultures makes the visual presence of South Asians in popular British culture more visible than ever, it becomes imperative to keep in mind the dynamics of desire in the global market.

The Desire for Authenticity

Late in Reef, Triton articulates his response to an increasingly consumerist culture, as he creates his own baked crab recipe where "deep inside the stuffing I would bury a seeded slice of green chilli steeped in virgin coconut oil" (120). His culinary offering is organic and unadulterated in contrast to the mass-produced cuisine of the "stuffy hotel restaurant" (120) that is beginning to appear in a country opening up to commercial tourism. In the age of the cheap package holiday and the vulgarisation of local art forms into the souvenir, tourism transmutes the desire for the 'authentic' cultural experience/image/motif into the commercial allure of the exotic, which is often largely irrelevant to the contemporary life of a society. Although we have been taught to distrust and deny the 'authentic,' in terms of the dictates of poststructuralism and postmodernism,

the exercise of consumer desire in the global marketplace discovers the authentic and exotic as interchangeable categories.¹⁰

Expatriated in England, Mister Salgado expresses the futility of his failed dreams for himself and Triton:

I used to plan it in my head: how I'd build a jetty, a safe marina for little blue glass-bottomed boats, some outriggers with red sails, and then a sort of floating restaurant at one end. You could have produced your finest chilli crab there, you know, and the best stuffed sea-cucumbers. Just think of it: a row of silver tureens with red crab-claws in black bean sauce, yellow rice and squid in red wine, a roasted red snapper as big as your arm, shark fin and fried seaweed. It would have been a temple to your gastronomic god, no? I thought of it like a ring, a circular platform with the sea in the middle. We could have farmed for the table and nurtured rare breeds for the wild. A centre to study our pre-history. We could have shown the world something then, something really fabulous. What a waste. (177)

Mister Salgado's grand vision combines conservation and consumption in a way that would have provided both master and servant a productive pathway into the very roots of their history as well as a refuge through which they could participate obliquely in the life of the island. Instead, Triton learns to earn his livelihood in an acutely diminished version of the dream:

The nights were long at the Earls Court snack shop with its line of bedraggled, cosmopolitan itinerants. But they were the people I had to attend to: my future. My life would become a dream of musky hair, smoky bars and garish neon eyes. I would learn to talk and joke and entertain, to perfect the swagger of one who has found his vocation and, at last, a place to call his own. The snack shop would one day turn into a restaurant and I into a restaurateur. It was the only way I would succeed: without a past, without a name, without Ranjan Salgado standing by my side. (180)

For Triton, living without the claims of the past becomes the means to survive in the present as he learns to integrate and become nameless in the "cosmopolitan" mingling of the city. The "cosmopolitan" becomes a deferral of particular identity in favour of an undefined sense of belonging. The shift from Triton's organic creations and Mister Salgado's dream to the urban reality of Triton's life in England requires a dilution and consumerization of the identities and sense of history imagined in youth. As Triton acknowledges from the vantage point of his immigrant self,

I was learning that human history is always a story of somebody's diaspora: a struggle between those who expel, repel or curtail - possess, divide and rule - and those who keep the flame alive from night to night, mouth to mouth, enlarging the world with each flick of a tongue. (174)

The future requires new modes of connection and habitation as a requisite of survival in a global environment - the "enlarging" of the world is enacted within the local and personal interrelations that constitute human history and that alter identity. Gunsekera employs potent images of food in his text to hint at authenticity yet manipulates these same markers to show that identity is more reliant on adaptation, on allowing different flavours to mix and combine anew. Authenticity is only as deep as the latest manifestation of identity in the global environment.

The Consuming Language

Throughout Reef, Sinhala words and phrases are interspersed and seamlessly woven into the texture of the language. The Sinhala *kolla* (meaning 'boy') is the title of the first chapter of the novel, which opens with these decisive instructions given to a young Triton: " 'Mister Salgado is a real gentleman. You must do whatever the hell he tells you.' My uncle pulled my ear. 'You understand, *kolla*? Just do it'" (5). The Sinhala word is left untranslated for the reader yet we are able to understand that it refers to the relationship between Mister Salgado - the "real gentleman" - and the young boy. Growing up, Triton models himself on Mister

Salgado, admiring and emulating this master-mentor. In a narrative embodying the process of Triton's self-awareness and realisation, the moment when Triton achieves knowledge of his place in society is at once the moment at which he comprehends the levels of meaning available in the word *kolla*.¹¹ Leading up to this moment, events in the wider world have begun to crack the veneer of his sheltered existence, such as an uneasy encounter with the socialist Wijetunga who declares that the incursions of tourism will turn Sri Lanka into a nation of "servants" (111). Wijetunga extols the "Five Lessons" (111) and it dawns on Triton that he isn't talking about the five Buddhist precepts but rather "the simplified lessons that explained the crisis of capitalism, the history of social movements and the future shape of a Lankan revolution" (111). This is a new awareness that throws Triton's sense of identity and place into confusion. Back in Colombo, the conversation in Mister Salgado's house revolves around the murder of a business magnate whose death is blamed on "conspicuous consumption" (135) and the play of black justice. As the men gorge themselves on chicken curry and beer and gossip about the American Robert buying sex on the beach in a corrupted dream of paradise consummated and consumed, Triton escapes out into the garden when he hears the order shouted from inside: " 'Triton, *kolla*, beer!'" (153) This initiates Triton's moment of socialisation - his first understanding of where he stands in a society whose dynamics are still largely opaque to him:

I shoved my arm in the air and swore at them under my breath. *Kiss the sky!* Something in the night air infected me too. Too much was going on. Wijetunga on the beach had worked it all out. I wished I *had* finished my school certificate. Stupid, stupid boy. Stupid *kolla*. I felt panic in my mouth. I saw Joseph with a poisoned skull in his hand, smeared with *bali* ash, grinning by the gate. He too seemed to be floating in the air. *Eat it, kolla, eat it.* Inside me, everything was burning up. (153-154)

Here *kolla* takes on a different meaning: instead of being employed as an affectionate name, it assumes its class-derived connotations of hierarchy and servitude. In startling evocation, Joseph reappears in Triton's momentary

apotheosis, encapsulating all of Triton's fears in the apparition of his demonic face. By introducing interplay between the Sinhala words and the English medium Gunsekera is able to refresh and expand the scope of the linguistic medium in order to express a variety of identities and experiences.¹²

The employment of Sinhala words, similar to the employment of food images, provides the text with markers of authenticity: as the author is able to access different mediums of language within the text, so he is able to connect with the reader that can understand the Sinhala words without the mediation of the text. The success of the novel is registered in the fact of its translation into Dutch, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Norwegian, and Spanish. However, the absence of a Sinhala or Tamil translation of the novel speaks louder. Gunsekera himself remarks that although he hopes to see a translation in the future, he is aware of the limited space within the Sri Lankan publishing economy for even the original Sinhala or Tamil text.¹³ Although Sri Lanka has a high literacy rate, the literary market is characterised by a paucity of publishing opportunities, monetary restraints on the writer, and a dearth of translation between the languages. Although Tamil writing has a considerable market in South India, Sri Lankan Tamil literature has particular characteristics and concerns that should be fostered and made more available to the wider Sri Lankan reading public. Sinhala is spoken only in Sri Lanka and as such, its audience is even smaller. In terms of the works in these languages of Sri Lanka becoming available on a global market it seems still a dream of desire.¹⁴ The globalisation of the market that allows cultural exchange, the enjoyment of diversity and difference, the experience of a more fluid or hybrid identity, is primarily conducted and processed through the global medium of English, the consuming language, that expands and adapts to absorb other languages and the images and experiences they seek to convey.¹⁵ While a novel such as *Reef*, is an enriching text to read, it is essential for the future and integrity of cultural exchange, that texts in local languages be both conserved and cultivated. The existence of vibrant literatures that are responsive to the contemporary reality of any society must be increasingly informed by the global

experience. However, the global market for cultural exchange is sustained by the illusion that we are at this time able to sufficiently access and understand diversity and difference without the effort of comprehensive translation between languages and without an increased cultivation of local structures of support for writers and artists. In the pathways of interaction and exchange between the arts and literatures of the world, it is imperative that we do not let the global become a consuming cultural language.

Endnotes

1 Line references are to Gunesekera: 1994.

2 See Goonetilleke: 1978.

3 See in particular Perera: 1995 and Prakrti: 1997. I am borrowing the term, the 'breach' from the Prakrti article in which it at once defines the struggle of the "post-postcolonial nation state" to find its identity *and* the disjunctive relationship of the diasporic writer to the nation, evinced by "an inability on the part of the writers who are located in an amorphous and transient cultural space, to grasp and come to terms with all ramifications of the issues that plague the present Sri Lankan state."

4 Ceylon became Sri Lanka in 1972.

5 For a discussion of the reaction of Sri Lankan English writing to 1971 and an evaluation of particular texts that attempt to deal with the issues around it see Goonetilleke: 1993.

6 See Coomaraswamy: 1999 & 2000.

7 Writing on the politics of cultural difference, Rutherford explains the "commodification" of language and culture, where meaning becomes "spectacle": "Difference ceases to threaten, or to signify power relations. Otherness is sought after for its exchange value, its exoticism and the pleasures, thrills and adventures

it can offer. The power relation is closer to tourism than imperialism, an expropriation of meaning rather than materials." (Rutherford: 1990)

8 As a diasporic writer, Gunesequera is writing on the cusp of different world-views, values and vocabularies and the conditions of the narrative itself are spatial and temporal distance from the Sri Lanka it creates through memory and imagination. Therefore to say in the words of one reviewer that writers like Gunesequera are "repatriating the skills and tactics they mastered in England to give new dignity and authority to their homelands" (Iyer: 1995) is not sufficient, for neither author nor text can be understood solely within the frameworks that posit subversion of the colonial dialectic as the key imperative.

9 For a discussion of the recent work of South Asian writers in Britain see Nasta: 2000.

10 In critiques of diasporic writers, the 'authentic' becomes a site of conflicting impulses, demands and desires within the cultural product. See Paranjape: 2000, for a spirited critique of the diaspora and Brennan: 1989, on the celebrity cosmopolitan whose attachment to a Third World locale functions as a "calling-card in the international book markets." Brennan argues that such writers allow a "flirtation with change," by setting aside real problems and conflicts for a "trauma by inches" ? a palatable and de-politicised tendering of cultural difference.

11 On the interplay of language in the novel, Gunesequera explains that "as Triton frees himself and achieves his independence, his identity ? as he finds himself ? he's getting his English. As the English becomes more sophisticated, his Sinhala is also coming back as important." (Davis: 1997)

12 In "Imaginary Homelands," Salman Rushdie asserts that for the postcolonial writer using English, language needs "remaking for our own purposes" and argues that is necessary to see in the "linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies." (Rushdie: 1991) Gunesequera agrees

with this imperative as he explains that he is playing with "the exotic idea, which is what using language is all about, really. It is to refresh the language in some sense." (Davis: 1997) However, it is important to note that Gunesequera does not see this as a specifically or exclusively postcolonial imperative. Instead Gunesequera conveys his resistance to being categorised solely as 'postcolonial': "what I'm doing with language, with the English language, fits into that postcolonial model, of changing the way you use language, what it means, what it can do. I would tick that box I suppose. But I would also tick that box in a different way in the sense that all good writers have always done that from the very beginning." (Jayawickrama: 2002)

13 See Jayawickrama: 2002.

14 A Lankan Mosaic, a collection of Sinhala and Tamil stories translated into English, was published in 2002 by the Three Wheeler Press, Sri Lanka and funded by Michael Ondaatje's Gratiaen Trust. There are intentions to publish two subsequent volumes: translations of Tamil stories into Sinhala and Sinhala stories into Tamil but as yet they are forthcoming. The collection is published in the hope that it may go some way in the "attempt to build connections between those disparate groups many of whom neither know nor can understand each other" in Sri Lanka. To my knowledge, this collection can presently only be found in Sri Lanka bookshops. A notable recent publication is Chelva Kanaganayakam (ed.) Lutesong and Lament: Tamil Writing from Sri Lanka. Toronto: TSAR, 2003. This is a competent and elegantly translated collection of Sri Lankan Tamil short stories and poetry.

15 Note the problematic aspects of Pico Iyer's praise in his review of Reef of the texture of Gunesequera's language, for conveying "wild and unknown booty into our mother tongue" but regretting the sound of the "gates of Eden closing" as the language spoken in Triton's Sri Lanka falls "prey to more and more of the outside world." This comment seems to register a notion that other languages are

diminished by their exposure to global influences while English is allowed to appropriate the "booty" of other meanings. (Iyer: 1995)

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First Response

This essay offers a thoughtful and attentive reading of Gunesekera's Reef. Its critical concerns are with exoticism, the globalisation of culture and consumerism, and these come to the fore in the latter part of the analysis where some of the material alluded to in the footnotes (especially footnote 10) would be certainly worth including in the main body of the text and elaborating on further. A text of particular relevance to its gradually emerging lines of enquiry is Huggan's The Postcolonial Exotic. This research, which is timely and promising, points to the need to address an internationalism beyond a postmodernist globalism.