Where the Postmodern Meets the Postcolonial: I. Allan
Sealy's Fiction after *The Trotter-nama*

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Abstract

Allan Sealy's first novel called *The Trotter-nama*, published in 1988, relocated the marginalized racially mixed Anglo-Indian community to the centre of narrative accounts of the British-Indian colonial encounter and the aftermath of independence from Empire. This novel was the subject of my research essay written in 2006 and provided the impetus for a further exploration of Sealy's successive fictional works: *Hero, The Everest Hotel, The Brainfever Bird, and Red,* which are examined in this thesis.

On reading these four novels, it became self-evident that Sealy could be considered a postmodern writer within a contemporary literary theoretical framework. His postmodern aesthetics are manifested through the novels' experimentalist narrative structures, which feature the production of multiple linguistic referentialities, a depthlessness of signification, and the relentless use of metafictional self-reflexive devices for interrogating the relationship between fiction and a supposed reality. Sealy exploits both Western and Indian intertexts in a bid to unravel Orientalist discourses about Eastern cultural and literary traditions. He positions subjectivity as fluid and unstable, as well as being linguistically and culturally constituted.

Sealy's postcolonial concerns in these four novels are not as immediately explicit as his use of postmodern tactics. This is in part because Sealy does not seem to endorse traditional ideas of what the term "postcolonialism" has come to signify. His uppermost preoccupation in the four novels is with multifaceted layers

of power that include but do not privilege colonial power. Postcolonial ideals of nationhood, independence, and democratic principles do not find any hegemonic fictional sanction. Instead, a number of power centres are scrutinized, including narrative and authorial omniscience, those dictating race, class, and gender oppression, and by implication the metanarratives of humanism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism themselves.

The productive outcome of this intersection of postmodern aesthetics with a redefined postcolonialism is an innovative synthesis of Western and Indian literary forms and cultural knowledge that represents both Indian and postcolonial fictional constructions.

Acknowledgements

The reading and research of Allan Sealy's first novel *The Trotter-nam*a resonated at a very subjective level for me and inspired me to explore on a deeper level his subsequent novels. While a number of journal articles have been written on his first novel, I discovered during my literature search on these later novels, a real scarcity of secondary research material. So this thesis is breaking new ground on different levels.

I am indebted to my supervisor Dr. Doreen D'Cruz for her unfailingly critical insight, her penetrating questions, and her searching intellect. I extend also my heartfelt thanks for her kindness and encouragement throughout what has seemed like a very long and at times unpredictable production.

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Introduction

In 2006, I presented a research essay called "The Forms and Functions of Hybridity in Allan Sealy's *The Trotter-nama*," which examined how the concept of hybridity served to dismantle the hierarchical binary logic of concepts such as pure/ impure, original/ copy, authentic/ inauthentic, whole/ half, real/ unreal, true/ false within the context of the colonial encounter in British India. *The Trotter-nama*, published in 1988 and written in magical realist style, explores the fates and fortunes of seven generations of Trotters, an Anglo-Indian family whose lineage in India began in the 1750s with Justin Trottoire, a French mercenary, and continued after independence as the family dispersed throughout the world. Anglo-Indians, the hybridized product of sexual liaisons between Europeans and Indians, became increasingly invisible and marginalized in post-independent India. Neither European (British) nor Indian, they were not recognized as a specific racial or cultural group within the new India and many emigrated to all parts of the globe. In *The Trotter-nama*, Sealy writes Anglo-Indians into the centre, in order to recontextualize them from the marginal spaces allocated by traditional histories, exposing thus that what is known as History is itself a narrative discursive construction, that is not founded on definitive "truth." It is itself a story, one of multiple stories, told from different points of view. Through rewriting Anglo-Indian history and in a fashion British-Indian history, Sealy situates *The Trotter-nama* within a postcolonial framework of "writing back to empire" (Ashcroft et al. 32), in

which the marginalized and oppressed Anglo-Indians are given a fictional voice through literally being written back to the centre of imperial British India.

This thesis is a further exploration of Allan Sealy's fiction, published after *The Trotter-nama,* and includes the following novels: *Hero: A Fable*, 1991; *The Everest Hotel: A Calendar*, 1998; *The Brainfever Bird*, 2003; and *Red*, 2006. Allan Sealy may be considered a postmodern writer, since he uses a variety of postmodern literary devices in his novels to interrogate multiple centres of authority or power and their reproduction or recirculation within different contexts. From *Hero* through to *Red*, Sealy is problematizing the sustainability of a range of totalizing monoliths, including the term "postcolonialism," which is reconceptualized in a number of ways from its traditional binary relationship with simply British or European imperialism. The central contention of this thesis is that Sealy's use of postmodernism's self-undermining duplicitous tactics at once interrogates the grand narratives of postcolonial independence, and at the same time reinstates through fictional form postcolonial cultural specificities that keep pace with global trends and cyberspace technology. In each of his four novels under discussion in this thesis, the focus of Sealy's postmodern aesthetics differ; however, his overarching concern is with multi-layered facets of power formations at a variety of interfaces ranging from the political, colonial, racial, class and gender power hierarchies of India to Western cultural hegemonies. Sealy is, therefore, perhaps less concerned with the specific lived material conditions of postcolonial India, since his primary engagement throughout the four novels is the dismantling of intellectual, narrative, and authorial centres of privileged discourses, including the very terms "postmodernism" and "postcolonialism."

Integral to the deconstruction of these hierarchical power formations is the examination of whether the intersection of the postmodern with the postcolonial in Sealy's novels creates an aesthetic space that compels a reconfiguration of unitary notions of both colonial and postcolonial "grand narratives" in the contemporary globalized world. In answering this question, I shall include the exploration of the postcolonial condition as epitomized through Anglo-Indian representations. Anglo-Indians in these novels occupy more subtle spaces than in *The Trotter-nama*. Nevertheless, this thesis will consider their fictional articulations and whether these disrupt or reinforce traditional binaries and fixed signification, since their presence in the novels appears to indicate a heritage that seeks to preserve, in some form, what would be considered an outdated Anglo-India. Sealy, however, does remind the reader, through his use in the novels of pre-colonial myths and legends, that in India historical injustices and power imbalances predate European colonization, letting us know that a restoration of an idealized social justice is not plausible.

Sealy never mentions the term "postcolonialism" in any of his novels, although the historical setting for his novels is after Indian independence. But he is concerned with postcolonial ideals of democracy, freedom and self-rule and whether these are viable ideological foundations for a contemporary India that is at times more concentrated on keeping its national borders secure from fracturing under internal dissension than from fighting some alien invasion. In each novel, however, Sealy's experimental postmodern aesthetics produce a different type of postcolonial aesthetic, an Indian literary hybridity that embraces both Western and Indian literary traditions and knowledge.

Methodology

This thesis explores the relationship between the two principal literary theories, postmodernism and postcolonialism, in Sealy's latest four novels. Postmodernism and poststructuralism are often used interchangeably in literary criticism. In the context of this thesis, poststructuralism will feature as a contributor to the broader term postmodernism and deconstruction as a strategy used by both of these principal theories. Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes are among the foremost poststructuralist theorists. Derrida is particularly noted for his work on deconstruction, which dismantles the underlying assumptions of linguistic binary oppositions, while Barthes is recognized for his work on the "Death of the Author" in which the authority of the author is displaced and the reader's role is installed in creating multiple textual significations. Terry Eagleton provides a readable overview of poststructuralist theory, so his writings have also been consulted. The major postmodernist theorists referred to in this thesis include Jean Francois Lyotard, in the context of his contentions about grand theoretical positions or metanarratives; Fredric Jameson, in relation to his argument on a postmodern depthlessness and the loss of symbolic meaning; Jean Baudrillard, for his work on simulacra and hyperreality; Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, for their ideas on rhizomatic connections; Patricia Waugh and Linda Hutcheon, for their discussions on metafictional techniques, including parody, in narrative. Humanism and the enlightenment period are also discussed in relationship to modernist and postmodernist theory, and Mary Klages is a major source for her historical synopsis of these movements.

The three major postcolonial theorists who have influenced this thesis are Homi Bhabha, specifically his work on hybridity and the "Third Space of enunciation" (*The Location of Culture* 37); Gayatri Spivak, in relation to her gender analysis of colonial oppression; and Edward Said, with respect to his work on "Orientalism," or the production of Western cultural imperialism. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Arif Dirlik are also cited and consulted with reference to the terms "postcolonial," "neocolonial," "globalization" (Loomba 205-07), in the context of nations that were once colonized and have gained formal independence from the colonizing nation. Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge in their article "What is Post(-)Colonialism?*"* provide a critique of the widely accepted notion of the term "postcolonialism" posited by Bill Ashcroft et al. in *The Empire Writes Back.* As such, their ideas have been most useful in the interrogation of the traditional meaning of "postcolonialism" from a "writing back to the centre," and its refiguration in the direction of an exploration of multiple privileging centres and repositioned margins.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism is a contested term, and there is no unequivocal meaning that can be attributed to one particular theorist or group of theorists. Following on from, or providing a break with modernism, postmodernism began to gain prominence in academic literary criticism in the 1950s and 1960s. Building on Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic theory of structuralism, in which the relationship between the sign and its referent is arbitrary, a number of French philosophers in the 1960s and 1970s introduced poststructuralism, effecting to destabilize the authority of the

traditional institutional power bases of academia and the state. Poststructuralists took structuralist theory further, arguing that there is no "transcendental signifier" or centre of truth or meaning that exists outside of the linguistic and cultural structures we inhabit (Eagleton, *Literary Theory* 112). Building upon this argument is the key tenet of postmodern theory that concerns issues of representation, in particular how what we consider to be "reality" or "truth" is actually linguistically and culturally constructed, and therefore not fixed in stable, unitary or universal meaning.

Ihab Hassan, who began writing about postmodernism over thirty years ago, states that he knows less about it now (in 2000) than in former times [1].[1] He examines the contexts in which postmodernism is applied, and produces a family of related words and attitudes that have come into currency through the cultural phenomenon called "postmodernism": "fragments, hybridity, relativism, play, parody, pastiche, an ironic anti-ideological stance, an ethos bordering on kitsch and camp" [3]. He also includes "indeterminacy, immanence, textualism, high-tech, consumer, media-driven societies" [5], generating the possibility that "perhaps, after all, postmodernism can be 'defined' as a continuous inquiry into self-definition" [6]. Since a multiplicity of meanings is integral to the process of postmodernism, it is not surprising that the term cannot be fixed to an essentialist position. Hassan also distinguishes between the terms "postmodernism" and "postmodernity." Postmodernism belongs to cultural activities such as the arts, literature, philosophy, architecture, whereas postmodernity refers to what he calls the "geopolitical scheme, less order than disorder, which has emerged in the last

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[1] No pagination in original text. The numbers in square brackets indicate my insertion of page numbers.

decades. The latter, sometimes called postcolonialism, features *globalization* and *localization*, joined in erratic, often lethal ways" [3]. Hassan is arguing that postmodernism is now our shadow, that it has died but still remains the lens through which we view our world and ourselves. He suggests that "postmodernism mutates into postmodernity which is our global/ local condition" [10].

Postmodernism is sometimes labeled as apolitical, which amounts to not acknowledging that we are affected by the material, economic, and political conditions of the systems that govern our lives, such as capitalism, communism, socialism. Fredric Jameson, who expresses concern about its lack of a political arm, locates postmodernism within late capitalism or what he calls third stage capitalism, the "world space of multinational capital" (54). He claims:

> The argument for a certain authenticity in these otherwise patently ideological productions depends on the prior proposition that what we have been calling postmodern (or multinational) space is not merely a cultural ideology or fantasy, but has genuine historical (and socioeconomic) reality as a third great original expansion of capitalism around the globe (after the earlier expansion of the national market and the older imperialist system, which each had their own cultural specificity and generated new types of space appropriate to their dynamics).(*Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 49)

Late capitalism is often equated with post-industrial society. However, Jameson notes the use of interchangeable labels for this postmodern world, which include "consumer society, media society, information society, electronic society or high tech and the like" (3).

> Besides the forms of transnational business[…], [late capitalism's] features include the new international divisions of labor, a vertiginous new dynamic in international banking and the stock exchanges (including the enormous Second and Third world debt), new forms of media interrelationship (very much including transport systems such as containerization), computers and automation, the flight of production to advanced Third World areas, along with all the more familiar social consequences, including the crisis of traditional labor, the emergence of yuppies and gentrification on a now-global scale. (xix)

A significant connection he makes is that aesthetic production and commodity production have merged, so that ever increasingly new forms and models are required to be made available in the marketplace for mass consumption. He outlines features of postmodernism, while highlighting its own paradoxical position as contradictory and unavailable to logical reasoning. He argues that postmodernism produces a new depthlessness or multiple surfaces, what is known as intertextuality; that the alienated, anxious subject has been decentred by a fragmented non-self; and that individual style has been replaced by a pastiche of styles. The boundaries between fact and fiction are blurred. History can no longer conspire to be a true record of what actually occurred. What remains are simulacra of a history that is always unavailable (25).

> In faithful conformity to poststructuralist linguistic theory, the past as "referent" finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts. (18)

Jameson appears to be resigned to the condition of postmodernism as an historical event, but is ambivalent about its status and worth in the global space it occupies today.

Jean Francois Lyotard is another important postmodern theorist who defines the postmodern as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (xxiv). In part, he refers to this in the context of the Enlightenment narrative, "in which the hero of knowledge works towards a good ethico-political end – universal peace" (xxiv). Lyotard was profoundly affected by the terror of Auschwitz, representing for him the end of the narrative of humanism, falsely premised on the notion that we are all working toward the common good of humankind. It destroyed his belief in the story of a rational human race evolving towards a more compassionate, humane society through increased enlightenment or knowledge.

> The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyagers, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements—narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on. (xxiv)

For Lyotard, there is no transcendental truth or justice. The authority of traditional epistemologies is eroded and displaced through world events that have collapsed the hegemonic discourses and ideologies, such as Humanism, Marxism, neo-liberal Capitalism, underpinning Western European structures.

> Where after the metanarratives, can legitimacy reside? The operativity criterion is technological; it has no relevance for judging what is true or just […]. Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert's homology, but the inventor's paralogy. (xxv)

Lyotard's use of "paralogy" is in the context of research and involves the creative play of language in which traditional frameworks and concepts are reworked in new and experimental conversations that express plurality, diversity and paradox. For him, "paralogism" becomes the legitimating principle of knowledge that resists the stable paradigm.

Other theorists challenge Lyotard's claim that postmodernism is the end of all metanarratives, arguing that such a claim in itself becomes yet another metanarrative. Lyotard also omits to mention that other totalizing narratives, such as those which sustain patriarchy and globalization, still pervade and are experienced at the material and political layers of society throughout the developed and developing nations of the globe. However, what is useful to the discussion in this thesis is Lyotard's perception that

> The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself […] that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable. A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. (*The Postmodern Condition* 81)

It is postmodern aesthetics, as represented by the fictional vehicle, which presents meaning, which configures plurality and heterogeneity, to produce what is hitherto unimagined or understood. The medium becomes as important as, or more important than, the message, or it becomes the message itself. This will be further

explored in the context of Sealy's postmodern aesthetics in the four novels under inquiry in this thesis.

Terry Eagleton, in an excerpt from his work *Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism*, maintains the view that postmodern art does not reflect reality because there is no reality to reflect. He states:

> The aesthetics of postmodernism is a dark parody of such anti-representationalism: if art no longer reflects, it is not because it seeks to change the world rather than to mimic it, but because there is in truth nothing there to be reflected, no reality which is not itself already image, spectacle, simulacrum, gratuitous fiction (363).

He counters Lyotard's claim that postmodernism is the end of the metanarratives, pointing out that Lyotard has merely inverted the binary opposition of enlightenment metanarratives with paralogism, or localized mini narratives, in order to explain how we negotiate our lives. While Eagleton acknowledges the condition of a contemporary postmodern fractured, unstable subjectivity, he argues that human beings still search for truth and meaning in our lives; we have not dispensed with the humanist search for metaphysical depth. He gives the example of being both a father and a consumer, which may produce conflicted roles. He states:

> The subject of late capitalism, in other words, is neither simply the self-regulating synthetic agent posited by classical humanist ideology, nor merely a decentred network of desire, but a contradictory amalgam of the two. (158)

As an ideal father, he is required to express authority, agency, responsibility, and yet as an ideal consumer in late capitalist society, he may have to override such values and ideals.

Jean Baudrillard's theories on simulacra and hyperreality contribute to the discussion in this thesis on representations concerning the relationship between fiction and reality. His theories emerge out of the increasing dominance of reproductions or copies in a technological society that overvalues simulation. He contends, "Whereas representation tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum" (405). He notes, "There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality" (405). He posits the view that the mimetic quality of representation through mass production of copies has been superseded by propagating myths that there are original and authentic texts. Hence, rather than an explication of the "fiction of reality," the simulacra or copies are seen to signify the "truth of a reality" that must be preserved at all costs.

One of the most prominent contemporary manifestations of postmodern aesthetics that Sealy employs throughout the four novels is a literary technique called "metafiction," defined as "a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh 2). In traditional realist narratives, a predominant nineteenth-century novelistic style, distinctions follow between representations of what is considered life and what is deemed as art, as though they belong to separate realms. Metafiction's self-

referentiality however, confronts the reader with the realization that there is no such separation. Linda Hutcheon points out :

> [Metafiction's] central paradox for readers is that, while being made aware of the linguistic and fictive nature of what is being read, and thereby distanced from any unself-conscious identification on the level of character or plot, readers of metafiction are at the same time mindful of their active role in reading, in participating in making the text mean. (xii)

The concern over representation is a constant problematic in Sealy's works, and at times rather than privileging self-reflexive over mimetic representation, he dismantles the binary opposition between both representations through an interplay between realistic and blatantly fictitious narrative. The two major theorists whose works have been consulted on metafiction are Patricia Waugh and Linda Hutcheon. Patricia Waugh considers that although the term "metafiction" and its deliberate practice is of recent emergence, the device has been functioning in the novel to varying degrees since its inception (5). Linda Hutcheon acknowledges that metafiction is largely regarded as postmodern. However, she prefers to reject that association, since she situates postmodernism within a wider philosophical and ideological debate and restricts her use of metafiction to "textual forms of self-consciousness" (4). Sealy's use of metafiction as an aesthetic device is firmly located within the narrative form and serves to accentuate the notion that what we are reading is fiction that does not represent any extratextual reality.

Although Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari did not label themselves postmodern theorists, some of their works have been appropriated under the postmodern brand. In their work *One Thousand Plateaus,* they argue the case for a

rhizomatic structure of signifying connections that differs from the traditional hierarchical tree-like model. According to Deleuze and Guattari's model, language is an open-ended system, unlike the closed binary system of conventional linguistics. The significance of their theory in the context of this thesis is the application of a rhizomatic model of interconnectivity in rescuing the term "postcolonialism" from a polarized colonial/ postcolonial status to one in which relationships are multi-alliance based, momentary, and indiscriminate, reflecting the current status of global information technology and the internet.

Poststructuralism and Deconstruction

Deconstruction, as a postmodern literary aesthetic, is a critical strategy used by Sealy throughout the four novels central to this thesis. According to McQuillan, deconstruction works through examining the inferior term of the binary opposition as an integral part of its recuperation, while exposing the hegemonic discourse predicated on the superior term. As McQuillan states, "The point of reading [the secondary term] would not be merely to reverse the operation of exclusion […]. Rather it would be to interrogate the ways in which this act of exclusion structures the entire text […]" (24).

Deconstruction, commonly attributed to Jacques Derrida, is most closely associated with poststructuralism. As such, deconstruction examines the underlying structures and assumptions of Western philosophy and thought. According to structuralist theory, systems of language construct human thinking, or in other words, language constructs who we are and the world we live in, which is very different from the humanist position that believed the subject transcends

linguistic and cultural systems. The structuralist position also assumes that these language structures or systems could be viewed objectively, from outside the system. However, poststructuralism deconstructed this position by positing that we cannot look at the systems from the outside because we are already inside the system of language. Therefore, in a sense, we are already in the text. Derrida is often quoted as saying, "Il n'y a pas de hors-texte," translated by Gayatri Spivak as "There is nothing outside of the text" (McQuillan 35-36). Sometimes misrepresented as meaning actual physical writing, Derrida is using "text" in its broad sense, that we are all texts, structured by logos or the word.

Derrida challenged traditional Western thinking by revealing the hierarchical binary oppositions that have underpinned Western thought since Plato and Aristotle. Such binary oppositions are so central to our thinking, that we often take them to be referentially "true," rather than representations which through use and habit come to be seen as natural or real (McQuillan 8-9). Binary oppositions, which privilege the first term over the second, produce dualistic concepts such as, Man/ Woman, Sun/ Moon, White/ Black, West/ East and so on. The privileging of one term over the other is called logocentrism (derived from the Greek word "logos" meaning "word," "reason" or "god"), and is premised on the assumption that there exist absolute, universal truths and meaning. Derrida used the example of the privileging of speech over writing, whereby speech is supposedly more present, immediate, and therefore more important than writing. Deconstruction involves exposing the underlying binary and the structures or discourses that support it. Rather than merely inverting the opposition, which leads to a simplistic reversal in power relations, deconstruction destablizes the binary opposition to produce

another way of thinking.   For example, Derrida deconstructed the binary speech/ writing by exposing the underlying thinking about presence/absence. The term "presence" is predicated on the notion that meaning or reality may be known directly, that it has a true centre or origin. "Presence" works its privilege through speech, which is regarded as coming directly from the speaker, in the moment and therefore true, whereas writing is always after or interpreting the "present" moment, and consequently a representation only. Derrida, however, argues that both speech and writing are mediated through language; meaning and truth are therefore always representations, and hence both terms are absent, making presence known through absence and vice versa (Bell).

Roland Barthes's work on "The Death of the Author" is aligned with the poststructuralist dislocation of binary structures. Authorial omniscience as the originator of fictional realities represents another centre of authority or power base that Sealy problematizes as part of his overall enquiry into imperial structures and their binary formations; hence Barthes's work is relevant to the enquiry into power in this thesis. Barthes argues that every text is created as it is being written; that there is no prior author or stable text in which meaning originates. It is our linguistic and cultural systems, therefore, that determine the performance of the scriptor or writer. Barthes emphasizes the role of the reader who produces multiple fictional worlds, with his famous statement: "The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (15).

The other major body of theory relevant to this thesis is derived from the field of postcolonialism, also a contested term in contemporary literary theory and one which perhaps requires a theoretical makeover, since its embedded

connection to a former empire, such as Britain or Europe, restricts its usefulness as a term that elucidates the contemporary global positioning of these former colonies. What becomes apparent throughout the intensive study of the four novels is that it is through Sealy's use of postmodernist tactics that the traditional colonial/postcolonial oppositional binary becomes disrupted, paradoxically highlighting a further stage in the postcolonial displacement of hegemonies.

Postcolonialism

Traditionally, the term "postcolonialism" has been used as an interrogation of Eurocentric power in relation to colonial territorial expansion and its consequent aftermath. However, as Mishra and Hodge in "What is Post(-)Colonialism?" argue, a "writing back to empire" or reversal of power is a tactic that focuses on overturning the hierarchic relationship between the centre and the margins. In so doing, it merely reconfigures the oppositional relationship between centre and margin. It does not affect revolutionary structural change. There is a certain complacency in postcolonial discourses posited on freedom or independence from empire in which the very structure of power is not adequately investigated, nor the replication of similar power formations within a postcolonial nation.

Coterminus with a "postcolonialism" based on a traditional interrogation of Eurocentric power is that contention that postcolonial writers whose works are written in the former Empire's language are betraying notions of a restorative postcolonial justice (Mishra and Hodge 277). Mishra and Hodge point out that the setting up of a dialectical opposition between the use of an imperial language such as English, on the one hand, and indigenous languages, on the other hand, in

postcolonial literature once again homogenizes the experiences of the formerly colonized that negates the cultural complexities of pre-colonial and colonial and postcolonial discourses (278-79). They argue instead that the inclusion of a "supplementarity" of culture-specific knowledge in postcolonial literature acts as a counter-discourse to the power inversion of "writing back to empire." This notion is explicitly exemplified in Sealy's novels since they contain references to Indian intertexts and local knowledge that is interwoven with Western cultural intertexts and literary forms.

Throughout the four novels under discussion in this thesis, Sealy does not directly address the British Empire and its former power over India. Instead, his focus on "postcolonialism" is a deconstructive enterprise in which notions of fixed centres and margins are questioned and undermined so that what corresponds to a "postcolonial" status becomes itself a space of shifting references and meanings; it is not represented by a fixed, single idea. Hence in Sealy's novels, the postmodern and the postcolonial become inextricably linked, since the multiple referentiality of meanings, the destabilizing of binary terms that support multiple centres of power, the inclusion of local allusions and culture-specific knowledge in his works produce a literary postcolonial Indian aesthetic that displaces a hegemonic Western literary tradition, while acknowledging its cultural legacy.

Anita Loomba in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* presents a good overview of current tensions and deliberations in postcolonial theory and traces its development after World War II, a period when a number of traditional European imperial power bases dismantled their empires, and new nation states evolved from these hitherto colonies. In postcolonial theory, ongoing debate interweaves

amongst a multiplicity of views. Does the 'post' in postcolonialism signify only the temporal aspect, indicating a separation between the period of a people's colonization and what occurs after independence? Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back* assert that this is not the case and define the term "post-colonial" as "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (2). This acknowledges that the impact of processes of imperial violence is continuous and still enacted in contemporary times.

Three of the main theorists engaged in postcolonial enquiry relevant to this thesis are Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak. Said, influenced by Foucault's discourse analysis, in his work *Orientalism*, has as his central argument that the East is a construction of the West through Western discourses such as novels, travel diaries, journals, imperial governmental records, and academic institutions. These Western imperial discourses, labeled "Orientalism" by Said, represented an East formed by Western imaginations that did not reflect the material or spiritual reality of the East. However, such discourses served as a means whereby, colonial nations maintained power over their colonized peoples through their systems of knowledge. He emphasizes that knowledge about the East can never be innocent, or based on truth or fact:

> For Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them"). (*Orientalism* 43)

Thus, binary opposition pervades Western thought, creating the self and other, besides perpetuating notions of the civilized, rational Western mind over the sensuous, exotic Eastern body.

Homi Bhabha, another of the main theorists considered here, has pointed out that such constructions were not necessarily unidirectional. Both Western colonizer and Eastern colonized constructed images of each other, and while the colonizer manifested supposedly superior knowledge and military power, the relationship between both colonized and colonizer produced ambivalent desire towards themselves as well as towards the other. Both were attracted and repelled by the differences and similarities they experienced of each other. Bhabha argues for the third space of hybridity that destabilizes the hierarchical binary structure of colonizer/ colonized:

> Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal […].

> If the effect of colonial power is seen to be the *production* of hybridization rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of the native traditions, then an important change of perspective occurs. (112)

Hybridity attests to how we really are. There is no original, authentic race or culture to return to since it may never have existed or it has been modified over time. Bhabha advocates that while the colonized have less power, they still have lines of resistance open to them from which agency may emerge. For example, the colonizer often had to rely on locals for language and cultural translation, which

could possibly have effected a site of resistance and change. In his essay, "Signs Taken for Wonders," he uses the example of the distribution of the Bible to Indian peasants in colonial India. It is not a simple cultural transaction, but becomes modified and changed in the process, in the local context. Hence, "the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference" (*The Location of Culture* 107). In his essay "Of Mimicry and Man," Bhabha discusses the menace of mimicry, "its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" (*The Location of Culture* 88). He is reframing Fanon's work concerning black skin/ white masks whereby colonial authority is imposed and enforced through the process of mimicry (thus, the colonized emulate the white colonizer, learning to desire what he has while at the same time to despise his own blackness). Bhabha suggests that this ambivalence of being "almost the same but not quite" (*The Location of Culture* 86) actually serves to undermine the authority of the colonizer, whose culture cannot be neatly replicated and consequently destabilizes the binary colonizer and colonized.

Bhabha's theories of hybridity and mimicry have been challenged as universalizing the colonial experience and relationships between colonizer and colonized, when the lived reality differed from location to location. Some argue that these theories dismiss the harshness and oppression wielded by the colonial powers, while also ignoring issues of gender and class within the various imperial encounters. It is important to remember that the colonized learned to internalize and represent themselves as the Other. What is useful in this context, however, is the sense that Bhabha conveys of the interrelationship between colonizer and

colonized and of the identity of both as fluid and unstable, multiple and complex (Loomba 150-51).

Robert Young in *Colonial Desire* points out that much postcolonial criticism has focused on the Manichean division between colonizer and colonized, thereby contributing to a potential construction of essentialist categories of Self and Other, which it is actually wanting to displace. He argues that cultural commerce has both generative and destructive components and that language and sex have been and are major points of contact between different cultures. Both points of contact produce hybridized forms that merge in the cultural encounter. From language, hybridized forms such as creole and pidgin emerge, and from sexual contact, miscegenated offspring. Examining language, he states:

> The structure of pidgin – crudely, the vocabulary of one language superimposed on the grammar of another – suggests a different model from that of a straightforward power relation of dominance of colonizer over colonized. (5)

However, in the nineteenth century, both forms of hybridity or cultural fusion were regarded as degenerative, disrupting notions of pure, original, authentic races and cultures. The term hybridity was traditionally used in a biological or botanical sense as "the offspring of two plants or animals of different species or varieties such as a mule" (Concise Oxford Dictionary), which served to reinforce a racist, conservative ideology that different races were different species and therefore not necessarily equal (Young 9). Such thinking assisted in propagating a flourishing trade in human slavery in Victorian Britain and the United States. Young states:

Today, therefore, in revoking this concept [hybridity], we are utilizing the vocabulary of

the Victorian extreme right, as much as the notion of an organic process of the grafting

of diversity into singularity. (10)

Young also discusses the concept 'linguistic hybridity,' developed by Mikhail Bakhtin which is perhaps more pertinent in the context of Sealy's postmodern aesthetics. Young points out that according to Bakhtin, "hybridity delineates the way in which language even within a single sentence, can be double-voiced" (20). It is the process of "the authorial unmasking of another's speech through a language that is 'double-accented' and 'double-styled'" (20). Bakhtin divided hybridity into "organic " and "intentional". Organic hybridity is the process whereby language mutates and fuses but at an unconscious level; it just happens through everyday use, importing new words, phrases and structures from other languages to produce new forms, new ways of seeing the world. Intentional hybridity, however, is political and conflictual, pitting different points of view against each other and undermining hegemonic discourses. Therefore, hybridity functions as both a bringing together or fusion and a distancing or keeping apart. Young posits that it is Bakhtin's "intentional" hybridity that Homi Bhabha has translated into a colonial context. As previously discussed, this form of hybridity represents Bhabha's third space which acts as a site of resistance against colonial authority and power (23). While it may be argued that the term "hybridity" used in a colonial context presupposes the existence of pure, original and authentic forms, in postcolonial theory, it is read as a challenge to such notions, underscoring rather, the productive possibilities of fusion and contestation at the cultural, ethnic, and linguistic interface. Young acknowledges Stuart Hall's suggestion that such

processes are not consecutive, but work simultaneously at many levels (24).

Gayatri Spivak, also an influential postcolonial critic, has asked the question, "Can the subaltern speak?" in the colonial context (qtd. in Loomba 194). She answers that it is not possible to recover the voice of the oppressed colonial subject and uses the example of the brown woman who is oppressed by colonizer and colonized alike. The intersection of hegemonic patriarchy with the violence of the colonial project is such that it is not possible to summon the speech of those who are already silenced (Loomba 194-95). However, critics of this viewpoint, such as Benita Parry, consider that Spivak's position denies any form of female agency or the effect of nationalistic counter-colonial discourses (196).

Since this thesis is concerned with the impact of Sealy's postmodern aesthetics upon interrogations of the postcolonial and its relationship to empire and nation, it is useful to examine the intersection of both postmodernism and postcolonialism as theoretical models in regard to the literary text. Kwame Anthony Appiah contends that postcolonial theory in its current stage is a product from an elite Western-educated intelligentsia that trades in intellectual commodities and creates, using his example, images of Africa for the world, themselves, and Africa itself:

> Postcoloniality is the condition of what we might ungenerously call a compradour intelligentsia: a relatively small, Western-style, Western trained group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery. In the West, they are known through the Africa they offer; their compatriots know them both through the West they present to Africa and through an Africa they have invented for the world, for each other, and for Africa. (432)

He suggests that in contemporary fiction "postcoloniality has become a condition of pessimism," pointing out that the 'post' in both postmodernism and postcoloniality contest former hegemonic narratives. He argues, however, that postcoloniality contests these narratives through its concern for human suffering and the exposition of its underlying causes in postcolonial locations. He calls it a humanism, a human impulse that is historically contingent rather than essentialist and universal, and considers that this is the point at which the two 'posts' diverge, proposing that we could "recover within postmodernism the postcolonial writers' humanism" (438). However, it is arguable that a concern for human suffering is a human impulse, or a constant, motivating postcolonial politics, the concerns of which may change from moment to moment depending on the context. It is not that postmodernism is not concerned with human suffering per se. Rather, it views such concerns as social constructions, multiple, contradictory, and fluid.

Arif Dirlik, another critic of postcolonialism, calls it a "child of postmodernism" (qtd. in Loomba 205) that reflects yet another invention of the First World academy. He states: "Postcoloniality is the condition of the intelligentsia of global capitalism" (qtd. in Loomba 206). Indeed, it is difficult to escape the claim that postmodernism, postructuralism, and postcolonialism are Eurocentric models, implicit in their construction of Western modes of ontological and epistemological thought and knowledge. Keeping this in mind, Loomba argues that while literary texts may reflect hegemonic cultural and political ideologies, "literature is also an important means of appropriating, inverting or challenging dominant means of representation and colonial ideologies" (63). Ian Gregson in *Postmodern Literature* points out that postmodernism and postcolonialism are separate theoretical

debates. He claims that postcolonial or "anticolonial" writings predate postmodernism, and that postmodernism's skepticism is problematic to the politics of postcolonialism (91). He says, however,

> Postcolonialism has made a major contribution to postmodernist undermining of traditional hierarchies, and to its deconstruction of hegemonic assumptions and multiplying of alternative perspectives. (91)

He cites the use of Said's discourse on "Orientalism," and Bhabha's work on hybridity and 'liminality,' which expose the underlying hegemonic structures of Western imperialist power and its consequent creation of the Eastern other, which have contributed to the formation of postmodern subject identities that are multiple, fluid, and non-essentialist (92-94).

While postcolonial theory seeks to undermine traditional colonial power structures, thereby enabling the expression of structural and personal agency, globalization is often read as antithetical to this process. Some critics such as Dirlik, however, criticize postcolonial theory for not taking into account the conditions of global capital that influence postcolonial nations at the local and global context. Loomba points out that:

> Globalisation seems to have transformed the world so radically, many of its advocates and critics suggest that it has rendered obsolete a critical and analytical perspective which takes the history and legacy of European colonialism as its focal point. (213)

The suggestion is that theorizing about the world in terms of centre and margins is no longer meaningful when the contemporary globe is configured by multinational capital, transnational networks, and the dissolution of cultural and ethnic

boundaries. There has been a huge global movement of people, voluntary and involuntary, shifting notions of home, belonging, and nation in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. While some argue that the old Empire has been replaced by a new global Empire, sometimes positioning the United States as the holder of economic power, the reality is much more complex. We are still clinging to vestiges of the Eurocentric model by ignoring the developing economic power of countries such as China, South Korea, and India and the influence they wield in Asia. Historically, a number of Asian countries have been invading each other over the centuries, so that their peoples were already hybridized racially and culturally before European colonization took hold and their most influential relationships today are with one another, not with Europe, nor even necessarily with the United States. World aid and financial agencies such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund are also major players in the global economic and political scene, hence discerning who the masters are is irreducible. While remaining fervently nationalistic, these countries are enacting and producing multifaceted models of power relations and dependencies that are not necessarily stable or predictable.

Stuart Hall in his essay, "Thinking the Diaspora," posits:

> There are two, opposed processes at work in contemporary forms of globalization, which is itself a fundamentally contradictory process. There are the dominant forces of cultural homogenization, by which, because of its ascendancy in the cultural marketplace and its domination of capital, technological and cultural 'flows,' Western culture, more specifically, American culture, threatens to overwhelm all comers, imposing a homogenizing cultural sameness […]. But right alongside that are

processes that are slowly and subtly decentring Western models, leading to a
dissemination of cultural difference across the globe. (557)

Examining the operations of globalization in contemporary India may reveal a nation state that can no longer be considered "postcolonial." Central power is concerned with maintaining the nation's borders against internal independence movements, such as in Kashmir and Assam, rather than its relationship with its former imperial master. Independence from Britain occurred over sixty years ago and the majority of the country still lives in uneducated poverty. At the same time, India has an established, global Information technology industry and call-centre operation, utilizing cheap labour, but also providing more employment and material opportunities, thereby retaining a skilled workforce who might otherwise leave in pursuit of Western affluence. Perhaps rather than continuing to divide the world as we now experience it into "neocolonial," or "postcolonial" or "global," it would be preferable to hold all these positions as possibilities in the international context, in recognition of complex problems that require complex solutions at the global and local interfaces.

Linda Hutcheon, in "The Post Always Rings Twice," argues that postcolonial theory is concerned with the examination of the objects of human construction or ideologies in the colonial/ postcolonial context (206). In the context of this thesis, these include the texts themselves, and interrogation of power relations in the postcolonial literary context. One form of identity creation from colonial power relations are the hybridized Anglo-Indians. According to McQuillan, Anglo-Indians represent a non-space. They are neither English nor Indian. They are a

"dramatically visible example of the way in which one identity installs itself in another through a logic of neither/nor […]" (22), and in so doing displace inside/ outside oppositions. However, he is arguing that all identity is hybrid. He states that in order to identify as a Scotsman, one must presuppose that there is something outside of the borders defining what it is to be Scottish. As soon as this outside is recognized, for example, Englishness, the boundary begins to dissolves. Paradoxically, purity depends on impurity, on the very term it is excluding. A notion of hybridity, therefore, in which rigid racial, cultural or literary demarcations disintegrate or at the very least are brought to our attention, may create a space of negotiation or reconciliation of polarities. Further exploration of hybridity in relation to the four texts will feature throughout the thesis and in part with reference to how this situates the hyphenated Anglo-Indians after *The Trotter-nama.*

The next four chapters of the thesis will focus on each of the four novels. Arranged chronologically by the novels' publication dates, they examine in detail how Sealy's varying postmodern devices produce different postcolonial aesthetics that intertwine Indian and Western literary techniques, cultural knowledge, and political concerns.

Chapter 1: Parodic Inventions in *Hero*: Heroes and Villains from Bollywood to Delhi

Hero: A Fable succeeds Sealy's first novel *The Trotter-nama*, which recontextualized the history of Anglo-Indians in British India, by inserting them into the narrative centre of his unfolding historical drama, and thus shifting them from their historically silenced position along the sidelines during the period of the British Raj and after Indian independence. Written in 1991, *Hero* is a parodic narrative that exposes the fragility and excess of the Bollywood film industry and the Machiavellian tenor of Indian politics set in postcolonial India. The novel relates the life of Hero, an unknown actor from a small town in Southern India, who rises to stardom in the Bollywood cinema, then for purportedly idealistic motives turns his hand to Indian politics, eventually becoming Prime Minister of India. However, his initial desire to improve the lives of the poor millions and to eradicate the corruption that permeates every layer of Indian society metamorphoses into a fanatical need to control every facet of actual and potential opposition. Thus the hero becomes a tyrant, as his desire for absolute control dispenses with democratic process and installs in its stead the autocratic authority of a "police state." Hero's story is told by Zero, who, introducing himself as coming from the "caste of Bluffers," says: "It is our duty to deceive. Not the thuggee way, not that sort of deceiver. No lethal scarves; we're quite harmless" (48). Zero was educated at the "Silver Spoon" in Dehra Dun, an elite school for the Indian wealthy, where he spent most of his time learning to act, but afterwards turns his hand to scriptwriting. As scriptwriter and later political speech writer, Zero, living up to his supposed caste identity, literally

inscribes Hero's fictional existence, at first as superhero movie star, then as a powerful politician.

Sealy's parallel construction that sets up Delhi politics as a mimicry of the Bollywood screen is explicitly parodic. However, it is important to identify how parody as a literary device works in *Hero*, since, as Linda Hutcheon states in *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, it can be confused with other forms such as "pastiche, burlesque, travesty, plagiarism, quotation, allusion and especially satire" (25). Hutcheon argues that "parody's 'target' text is always another work of art, or more generally, another form of coded discourse" (16), a relationship of art to art rather than art to reality (20). Parody is always double-voiced in the sense that "it is a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion" (6), which can be both progressive and regressive. While parody has been used in a variety of ways over the centuries, she states that "the postmodern period has witnessed a proliferation of parody as one of the modes of positive aesthetic self-reference as well as conservative mockery" (82). Ironically, parody as a postmodern convention exerts a form of control or power over a work of art or text through the use of mimetic repetition, and yet it simultaneously involves an implicit critique of hegemonic practices. Hutcheon is at pains to distinguish between parody and satire, contesting that while they interact in a piece of work, "parody is an intramural form with aesthetic norms" (25) since its target is another discursive text, while "satire is extramural (social, moral) in its ameliorative aim to hold up to ridicule the vices and follies of mankind, with an eye to their correction" (43). In *Hero*, Sealy provides a humorous commentary on the aesthetics of Indian Bollywood cinema by incorporating in

parodic mode into his novel the formal conventions utilized by Hindi movies alongside a self-referential hyperbolic exposure of the artifices of fiction. He structures his novel in the form of a traditional Bollywood movie that includes the creation of archetypal heroes and villains, who are later relocated in a satiric critique of Indian politics, when Hero the actor, having been literally wounded by the stage villain Nero, retires from the movies to take centre stage in Delhi politics, where he is finally shot dead by Zero, movie and political scriptwriter.

Sealy is utilizing the postmodern devices of parody and metafictional self-referentiality both to expose and to subvert the practices and ideologies of "normative fictional techniques," reframing them in the Indian context of Bombay art and Delhi politics, which provide the excess or supplement to conventional Western literary forms. *Hero* is without doubt a postmodern novel but can it be considered postcolonial? Or perhaps more to the point of this discussion, in what sense can Sealy's postmodern practices in *Hero* sustain a postcolonial ideological stance? The term "postcolonial" is fiercely contested in contemporary literary theory. Some writers, such as Arif Dirlik and Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, argue that such a concept does not acknowledge the continuing processes of colonization in the guise of global capital in our contemporary world. Others, like Kwame Appiah, refer to the term as the "condition of what we might ungenerously call a comprador intelligentsia" (qtd. in Loomba 204), mediating the trade in ideas and cultural goods between the West and its former colonies. Ania Loomba in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, argues:

It has been suggested that it is more helpful to think in terms of postcolonialism not just

as coming literally after colonialism and signifying its demise, but more flexibly as the

contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism. (16)

Loomba is advocating a focus on both historical and contemporary resistances to colonial rule and ongoing Western hegemonic imperialistic practices, which broadens its scope to include also the response to the impact of global capital power imbalances. In historical terms, the "post" aspect of "postcolonial" is positioned as coming after formal independence from empire or as after the historical period of colonialism, both instances of which can include a focus on "writing back" to empire. Mishra and Hodge, in their address to the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*, highlight the difficulties inherent in a postcolonialism solely based on "writing back to empire," which "foregrounds a politics of opposition and struggle and problematizes the key relationship between centre and periphery" (276), and which therefore involves a degree of enduring complicity with the colonizing project. Warning against a grand narrative of the postcolonial, they argue that it is important not to homogenize both the colonial and postcolonial experience, for what emerges are many petit récits or "postcolonialisms," which may in turn be called something other than "postcolonial" depending upon the specific circumstances of each location (289). *Hero* is located within an historical context that is after Indian independence from the British empire, and while there are occasional intimations of a "writing back to empire" position or reversing the imperial/ colonized power formation, as in the return of the Kohinoor Diamond to India, this is overridden by the overarching parodic tenor and self-reflexive

character of the novel, which continually problematizes issues of representation through the fluctuating thresholds of fact, history, and fiction.

Sealy is concerned with linguistic, cultural, and ideological binary power formations. He is questioning different kinds of power formations or monolithic constructions of which the ideological status of the postcolonial position is one. Although Sealy does not mention the term "postcolonial," in *Hero* there are hallmarks of a postcolonialism in the form of a culture-specific supplementarity, to use Mishra and Hodge's term (280), since there are many local allusions which presume an intimacy with aspects of Indian literature, history, contemporary society, and, I would suggest, humour that evade the outsider, including myself. Having stated this, there are also allusions to Western cultural aesthetics and literary techniques, which presume a familiarity with Western forms of knowledge that may or may not be available to Indian readers. It is important to note that Sealy is writing from within India, for an Indian audience, and therefore not from an objectifying point of view, in which Indian cultural aesthetics become an object of knowledge. Sealy is instead producing an Indian cultural aesthetic in its own right, one that resonates with local Indian culture. It is tempting to argue therefore that *Hero* is an Indian novel rather than a postcolonial novel. However, perhaps it can be both, rather than one or the other. For in *Hero* there are issues concerning ideals of post-colonial freedom, or Indian independence and democracy, which are satirized through the Delhi political drama and become an excessive fanfare of political intrigue and tyrannical power, playing out its own self-referential fantasies and bearing a strong resemblance to those of the Bombay movies. Rather than looking back to empire, the term "postcolonial" may be better positioned as an

ongoing series of power transmutations and recirculations as in the novel, where like heroes and villains, binaries recreate themselves across different contexts, inversing roles, and shifting referentiality. The referents for the binaries may change but their basic structural configuration prevails, so that rather than a radical dethronement of imperial power, there are mutations of similar hierarchic power within the Indian nation, after independence from Empire.

This chapter will argue, therefore, that through a parodic metafictional exposé of Bollywood cinema and Delhi politics, Sealy interrogates in *Hero* the creation and recirculation of monolithic power structures, which include in their ambit the terms of production of a postcolonial status that is posited on notions of freedom, independence, and democracy. This interrogation occurs through a culturally specific Indian aesthetic that as a corollary undermines privileged Western knowledge formations. In *Hero,* Sealy's metafictional practices and satirical deconstruction of specific binary formations undermine the foundational viability of both colonial and postcolonial discourses, since as Mishra and Hodge point out, these discourses are constituted through a realism derived from fixed representations of what it means to be colonizer and colonized (281), and what the ideals of independence or freedom from empire are based upon.

Postmodern Metafiction and Postcolonial Aesthetics

Narrated by Zero, scriptwriter, in a very ironic, self-deprecatory fashion, *Hero* on one level, could be considered as a satire on contemporary Indian politics through the parodic parallel that is drawn between it and the predominant Indian cultural aesthetic, the Bollywood film. At another level, it is a self-reflexive metafictional

enquiry into how fiction and the worlds outside of fiction are constructed. Metafictional practices underscore an external non-referentiality, where "narrative is presented as only narrative, as its own reality – that is artifice" (Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* 31). Hence the narrative becomes enclosed in its own fictional world. This fictional world in *Hero*, which draws upon the Bombay movies and Delhi politics, introduces local allusions and culture-specific knowledge, which shift the power formations of colonialism and the traditional privilege accorded to colonial knowledge systems. This merger of a culture-specific aesthetic with metafictional practices produces a hybrid work shuttling between the two "posts" — postmodernism and postcolonialism.

The overarching tone or intent of *Hero* is self-reflexive parody, while its self-conscious mode of fiction qualifies as "metafiction," one of the major trademarks of postmodern aesthetics. Metafiction in the literary context focuses on the novel's narrative processes, rather than on the content, thereby examining how fiction is actually constructed, partly in order to explore the relationship between the narrative text and what is considered to be outside of the text. Patricia Waugh in her book *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* provides a succinct definition:

> Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. (2)

She argues that understanding how fiction is created gives us insight into how the world we live in is constructed:

> If our knowledge of this world is now seen to be mediated through language, then literary fiction (worlds constructed entirely of language) becomes a useful model for learning about the construction of 'reality' itself. (3)

Waugh explains:

> The simple notion that language passively reflects a coherent, meaningful and 'objective' world is no longer tenable. Language is an independent, self-contained system which generates its own 'meanings'. Its relationship to the phenomenal world is highly complex, problematic and regulated by convention. 'Meta' terms, therefore, are required in order to explore the relationship between this arbitrary linguistic system and the world to which it apparently refers. In fiction they are required in order to explore the relationship between the world *of* the fiction and the world *outside* the fiction. (3)

The ongoing dilemma for the novelist is therefore that there is no objective, concrete world outside of the narratives to represent. "In literary fiction it is, in fact, possible only to 'represent' the *discourses* of that world" (Waugh 3).

In the "Entrance" of the novel, Zero draws the reader's attention to the narrative construction of *Hero*, inviting us to watch the story. He writes:

> Come. It's time. We've missed the ads, the trailers, the stills, the burning red hole of the crossed-out cigarette in the No Smoking slide which invariably has the front row lighting up. With a little luck we'll miss the censor's certificate.
>
> Here's the Byculla Talkies.

> Notice the sloping tiled roof, surely the last in India. Wide verandahs. You can hear the
>
> electric trains on the other side of the wall behind the screen. There are some murals in the
>
> verandah, fading mementos of Europe in India, but we can look at those in the interval.
>
> Through the black curtains. The credits have started. Watch your step. There. The best
>
> seat.
>
> Zero's a scriptwriter. He tells the story. His script is called STAR. Here's Hero. (19)

The narrative begins by presenting the split between Zero as narrator and as a character who is a writer, while the reader is reading the novel *Hero* and watching the film *Star* at the same time. Zero's ongoing self-consciousness as the narrator/ constructor of Hero's existence serves to interrogate the relationship between representations of what is known as real life, for example Indian politics, and what is considered art, such as the Hindi movies or the novel itself. Zero states:

> But there's more Delhi than Bombay in Hero. Politics in the novel, says Stendhal, is
>
> like a pistol-shot at a concert. A Delhi novel without politics is like a Bombay movie
>
> without the masala. So I'm sorry to have to spoil the concert, but shots will be fired.
>
> And one or two questions asked, not in parliament, about leaders and followers. (17-
>
> 18)

Hero may be considered a piece of political fiction for a number of shots are fired, including the pistol shot that gets rid of Hero and thereby ends the story, which may represent a metafictional gesture that accentuates the plotted fictional nature of the events and Zero's capacity to terminate the plot.

Sealy bases the structure of the novel on the form of a "masala movie," referred to in the novel as "the adult formula to which [the producer or director]

graduates […] his masala, his curry powder. The Bombay Mix" (17), which is exemplified by the Indian Bollywood film. He divides the novel into three parts: Entrance, Intermission and Exit; each includes a mixture of scenes such as "Song, Dance, Fight, Chase." In the novel's "Entrance," Sealy states, "So my chapters are preordained, the masala beyond my control. Blame Bombay, not Dehra Dun" (17), foretelling that the Bombay Mix, the aesthetics of the Bollywood movie will be directing his fictional practice. Sealy is contesting the notion of the author as a singular creator of originality. The author has to work within the conventions and genres of the novel that have been passed down through the ages. He may be able to change them slightly, but his creative expression is still structured by the linguistic and cultural milieu he belongs to from being a part of a particular society.

Sealy's use of self-referential parody draws our attention to how his prose fiction and Hindi movies are constructed according to a series of formulaic aesthetics that reinforce the intertextual aspect of fiction, in which texts often borrow from other texts. Behind one piece of fiction there is another fiction, which, as parody must ironically acknowledge, privileges a genealogy of textual representation over the mimetic representation of reality. This is foregrounded through the mutation of the hero that is achieved in this novel. In *Hero,* the boundaries between art and politics increasingly get blurred, as Hero, the actor, mutates into Hero, the politician. Sealy connects the two contexts of heroism with his use of the "duplicitous verb," "act" (166). Zero states: "*To act.* Consider the cleavage: both action and the imitation of action, both *I kill* and *I pretend to kill*, as if in the moment of truth (action) there is already immanent make-believe (acting)"

(166). Linda Hutcheon's observation in *The Politics of Postmodernism* may have relevance to Sealy's use of the "duplicitous verb." She argues:

> It [postmodernism] is rather like saying something whilst at the same time putting inverted commas around what is being said. Postmodernism's distinctive character lies in this kind of wholesale 'nudging' commitment to doubleness or duplicity. (1)

This duplicitous cleavage is present in the two modes of heroism that engages Hero. As the hero on the screen, he is imitating a fictional or historical character, while on the political stage he is supposedly acting in some original sense. However, Sealy asks whether the hero as politician is not already playing to pre-scripted lines, written by modern day spin doctors such as Zero. Hero, Nero, and Zero play similar roles in the movies and in political life. Hero, a major protagonist in a series of film narratives, becomes the Prime Minister of India in the political narrative; Nero, the antagonist or villain in the movies, is initially portrayed as an arch enemy of the political Hero; and Zero, scriptwriter, becomes speech writer and Director of Didi T.V.

In keeping with the metafictional project of self-reflexivity about the narrative process and genre, *Hero* is in part a critique of the *bildungsroman* type of fiction, which is based on a central protagonist or hero whose life is traced from childhood to adulthood in his quest for knowledge, meaningful existence or self-improvement. Does this metafictional critique of the *bildungsroman* imply that Hero is a postmodern subject, or given the novel's Indian context, is he perhaps a postcolonial creation? Linda Hutcheon makes a distinction between the two notions of subjectivity, warning that the postcolonial subject is a product of imperial

processes of colonization, whereas the postmodern subject stems from a rejection of humanist notions of fixed, unitary identities. She argues:

> The current post-structuralist/postmodern challenges to the coherent, autonomous subject have to be put on hold in feminist and post-colonial discourses, for both must work first to assert and affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity: those radical postmodern challenges are in many ways the luxury of the dominant order which can afford to challenge that which it securely possesses. ("Circling the Downspout of Empire" 151).

Although Hutcheon advocates successive interrogations of how subjectivity is constructed, it may be that Sealy is disputing a number of imperial monoliths at the same time, including that which upholds the humanist subject who is inextricably entwined with both colonial and patriarchal notions of subjectivity.

In *Hero*, Zero writes the story of Hero's life from when he was conceived on his parent's honeymoon in Kanyakumari to his sudden and violent death, shot by Zero in Delhi. The constructedness of Hero, who as a product of plot and genre is demarcated by literary conventions, is analogous to the postmodern subject, who is determined by linguistic and cultural constructions. Hero re-invents himself from screen hero to political hero, but the buoyancy of his election, achieved on the promise of alleviating the suffering of the masses, transmutes into a fanatical paranoia aimed at maintaining control at all costs. Thus power becomes his singular focus. Underscoring the textual creation of heroes and villains, Sealy is parodying humanist notions of heroism, showing how it is founded on binary thinking that pits hero against villain, and as well as on our own narcissistic projections, whereby the hero we see on the screen reflects or is made to reflect

our own fantasies of heroism. Fantasies of the hero, the rescuer, the savior, arise from our belief in the power of human determination or agency to effect change. Sealy is intimating, however, that the hero is as much a construct of fiction as the subject is a construct of language, key tenets of poststructuralist contentions.

The use of parody and the self-reflexive artifice of *Hero* further problematize the relationship between the construction of fact and fiction, as Zero dramatizes on screen the fictional relationship between Britain and India through the restoration of the Kohinoor diamond to India. The jewel was originally appropriated by the British crown in the nineteenth century, as part of its imperial plunder, and became a feature of Queen Victoria's crown jewels. Zero, who wants to write a script for Hero that would "bring history up to date" (98), develops the plot whereby:

> Reformed diamond smuggler with comrade and moll penetrates the vault which hold
> the British crown jewels and, spurning all other treasure, brings back to India only what
> is hers, that Golconda mountain of unrivalled light. (97)

The movie becomes a sensation overnight, with its appeal to the masses' sense of justice. Zero mentions that an Anglo (Anglo-Indian) plays the Queen of England, though she did not have the appropriate Palace English. The public "refused to differentiate between fact and fiction" (98), and assisted by the media, begins to believe that the diamond has in fact been returned to India. Thus in the public imagination, a symbol of imperial oppression is supposedly recuperated to its rightful owners, the people of India. This postcolonial fantasy is based on myth but does identify the changing liminality between history and fiction.

One of the metafictional tactics that Sealy utilizes in *Hero* is "defamiliarization," initially theorized by Victor Shklovsky, a leading member of the Society for the Study of Poetic Language, one of the two schools of Russian Formalism, founded in 1916 in St Petersburg. In his essay "Art as Technique," he posits that through art and literature, especially poetry, the use of "ostranenie," or "making strange" what is familiar, renews the habitual and automatic perceptions that subsume much of daily life. Shklovsky states:

> The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.* (12)

Patricia Waugh, in *Metafiction*, discusses the concept "defamiliarization" and its application to metafictional enquiry, focusing on the notion of "laying bare the device in order to achieve defamiliarization" (65), which Shklovsky attributed to Laurence Sterne in his essay "Sterne's Tristram Shandy: Stylistic Commentary," a discussion on general laws of plot (Shklovsky 27). Waugh argues:

> Metafiction represents a response to a crisis within the novel – to a need for self-conscious parodic undermining in order to 'defamiliarize' fictional conventions that have become both automatized and inauthentic, and to release new and more authentic forms. (65)

In *Hero*, Zero is both narrator and a character; he is writing the narrative, and writing himself as a character in the novel. We take for granted the omniscient narrative point of view and its ability to reach into spaces not easily available to

ordinary human penetration. Sealy through Zero parodies this unexamined narrative convention through embodying this point of view and thus defamiliarizing the convention of omniscience. Initially as an unobtrusive narrator, Zero enters the very private space of the sleeping Ranga (Hero) and his partner UD and hovers over them or insinuates himself between them:

> When all the lights were out, I waited half-an-hour, forty minutes, forty-five, then very gently opened the guest room door and crept out along a sort of hallway. The carpeting helped. At the end of the hall was the master-bedroom (that *master* made me faint with excitement; I repeated it like a mantra) where he and my mistress slept. (35)

> Gently, protectively, I eased myself into the space my will had made, and lay or levitated there, staring at the ceiling. I remember keenly the sensation of floating above the sheets, my only contact with the world the warm flesh of my mistress and my master. (37-38)

Usually, the narrator is merely a voice telling the story, rather than a self-conscious, intrusive presence. Zero, on the other hand, is definitely intrusive as Sealy literalizes the implications of omniscience through an imaginary intimacy that breaks the bounds of decency.

Through Zero as narrator, Sealy, the author, may also have displaced, fictionally speaking, the power accruing to him as author. The fate of the narrative hangs upon Zero's decisions. Looking at the sleeping Ranga, Zero muses, "A simple knife-thrust, I realize now, would have altered history. But a knife-thrust is not simple" (37). If Zero had killed Ranga at this stage, the script he writes/ narrates would have had a different outcome, and probably played to a different

aesthetic than the one in which the notion of hero is parodied. The use of Zero as narrator and writer, with the implied power to alter fictional outcomes, may suggest that Sealy, in destabilizing the notion of the hero, also refrains from reproducing a default hero identified with the author or implied author. Instead it is Zero, narrator and scriptwriter of the plot, with his bumbling progress, lack of prestige, and supposed nullity, who nominally determines the outcome of a plot that runs to certain prescribed conventions.

At the same time, the defamiliarization of fictional conventions, as Waugh argues, may produce different or pioneering narrative forms. In the case of *Hero*, the postmodern tactics Sealy uses undermine Western literary norms, by redefining these within a culture-specific knowledge that liberates a new postcolonial aesthetic. As an illustration, in conventional postcolonial theory, the use of English in postcolonial writing has typically been viewed as a form of complicity with the colonial empire. As Mishra and Hodge contend in their address to the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*:

> In the final analysis post-colonial writers who write in the language of the Empire are marked off as traitors to the cause of a re-constructive post-colonialism. The authors of EWB seem to be conscious of this paradox, the paradox that the 'post' in 'post-colonialism' may well imply 'business as usual, only more so.' (277)

However, while the initial post-independence use of English may have been apologetic, in today's global context the use of both spoken and literary English is part of the diverse cultural spectrum of India. English is not a foreign language for many Indians, for it represents responses to different formations within

contemporary India, rather than the residue of a colonizing appropriation. It has mutated to form an Indian English. In the novel, Zero coming from an educated middle class compares his use of English with Ranga's:

> And so, while I was being taught to fork a pea and say film properly (and not *movie*, or worse, *the pictures*, as they said in Anglo-Indian schools), he said *flim-show* and went about his business. (44)

Zero also states that while language counts, he concedes jokingly that it is weight, how heavy you are, that distinguishes the classes in a country that has millions of poor. Through the redefinition of class markers, the use of English in India today may signal a positive reformulation of the term "postcolonial" rather than an inherited tool of colonial oppression.

Similarly pertinent to postcolonial delineations is Zero's question about the Bollywood movie:

> So what's wrong with Song-and-Dance? Music from fountains, six costume changes in the middle of a song, Kashmir to Kanyakumari in the middle of a dance, choreographed fisherwomen? I've never understood the objection to those sudden shifts […]. Escape is what I want entertainment. Maybe a little instant justice too. The other kind must be bought outside and how many people can afford it? Fantasy is cheaper, satisfies a need. Reality on the screen is just another luxury the sophisticate would like to add to his store. (138)

The movie's own specific Indian character and use of fantasy as an escape from lived reality and as a means to obtain otherwise elusive justice are further examples of how Sealy's use of Indian cultural aesthetics disrupts the dominance

of Western cultural capital and cultural forms. Sealy takes the stock, familiar Bollywood movie ingredients of hero/ villain, conflict between good and evil, dramatic tension and plenty of action (shot, dream, party, rape, cliffhanger and so on) and reframes them within the European novelistic form, thereby self-consciously introducing a popular form of postcolonial Indian culture into the novel as a strategy for disrupting conventional literary norms. He has also taken what is well known to Indian audiences and recontextualized it, thus making unfamiliar what has possibly become automated in both aesthetic forms — the novel and the Bollywood film.

Parodic Escalation and the Deconstruction of Binaries

Literary allusions and intertextual references proliferate in *Hero*, to the degree that one almost feels barraged by yet another intra-referential possibility, a type of slapstick humour in textual form. For as the political Hero becomes increasingly paranoid, losing touch with reality, Sealy's use of parodic intertextual referentiality escalates. Hero asks Zero:

> Are you Doggy?
>
> I went right up to him and he pinched me,
>
> You are Doggy, I hope?
>
> I am saab.
>
> How lucky to be so sure. Doggy! Now myself I only think I am. I think therefore I am. No no. I think therefore I *tend* to be, Doggy. No, no. I *tend* to think therefore I tend to be, Doggy. No, no. Not Doggy. Doggyish illusion. (286)

This is an obvious reference to Descartes' famous statement, "I think therefore I am," and is therefore a critique of humanist assumptions that privilege human consciousness as being at the centre of existence. Since the certainty of existence for Descartes comes from his thinking, his proposition does not simultaneously prove the existence of the body. Hence, the binary opposition between the mind and the body is fundamental to the Cartesian proof of the self's existence. Here, as elsewhere, Sealy's use of parody is targeted towards the the deconstruction of binaries through their hyperbolic proliferation, which alerts us to the underlying ideologies, such as humanism, that the novel is unsettling.

Jonathan Culler in his work *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism* outlines the steps involved in dismantling the hierarchical binary oppositions in which one term dominates the other. He quotes Jacques Derrida, the French philosopher to whom "deconstruction" is largely attributed and who argued that it must, "through a double gesture, a double science, a double writing, put into practice a *reversal* of the classical opposition *and* a general displacement of the system" (qtd. 85-86). Sealy's use of deconstruction interrogates all hierarchies, and is distrustful of the fixed meanings through which binaries and the privileges they support are recirculated. Hence, the binary colonial/ postcolonial also comes under scrutiny, making the traditional "writing back to empire" unviable, thus unsettling the notion of the postcolonial narrative that foregrounds the oppositional relationship between the former imperial centre and colonized periphery. Sealy's proliferation of stereotypical heroes and villains, his recycling of archetypal myths and his satirical treatment of Delhi politics destabilize traditional postcolonial ideals that are premised on the nation and humanist notions of

freedom and democracy. What results from this is a mutation of privilege and hierarchy through a double gesture that both acknowledges the system in place and also makes it a target for parody.

Sealy parodies the construction of heroes and villains through the use of multiple intertextual references. As an illustration, the novel opens with a line about Sealy's hero Ranga that resonates with the opening line from Conrad's *Lord Jim*: "He stood six feet tall but it was his slouch that made him a hero" (13).[2] Embedding a possible critique of the British Empire's colonial adventure stories and heroes, the reference also forewarns us, as readers of the potential character flaws of Sealy's hero as he progresses towards his demise, an obverse of Jim's initial fall from grace and eventual redemption, although both characters die from being shot. Zero foretells Ranga's downfall:

> Hero to politician: strange, retrograde metamorphosis. As if a butterfly should turn into a caterpillar. *Hero* will tell the story of one such. It is not a true story, but it is not a lie. For example it did happen that an actor-villain shot an actor-hero in Madras not so long ago. (15)

This may also be a comment on the ambiguous relationship that lies and truth have with fictional inventions, which are bound within their own generic constraints, and do not directly represent an external verifiable reality. Hero (Ranga) and villain (Nero), two archetypal characters of the Bollywood films, play out their roles off the screen with Nero shooting Hero, smashing his left eye: "He lay where he fell on the podium, the socket a bloody mess, real blood pouring down his cheek" (140).

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[2]   See Conrad 7. " He was an inch, perhaps two, under six feet, powerfully built, and he advanced straight at you with a slight stoop of the shoulders, head forward, and a fixed from-under stare which made you think of a charging bull".

Marking the finish of Hero's acting career in the movies, Hero recreates himself as an actor-politician. Zero writes:

> Not even Ranga could remain Number 1 Hero with one eye gone. (145)

> A single bullet and the industry lost its two top men: the Good and the Bad. It lost me too (oh yes, Felix Fonseca and half a dozen others pounced on the Ugly, and the word *exodus* was played with). (145)

A parody on the spaghetti Western, "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly," now considered a classic western movie, this intertextual reference draws an implicit parallel with the heroes and villains of the Western, the strong, silent, but violent, men who developed parts of the United States and provides a further illustration of the extravagant range of sources for Sealy's parody.

Nevertheless Sealy's Hero is emphatically an Indian hero rather than one based on a Western model. Sealy humorously plays with the inversion of stereotypes between North and South India, which unsettles the privileging of Northern screen heroes on the basis of their appearance. In so doing, he is modifying the conventional "masala mix" of Bollywood movies:

> Hero's fine, our hero. Just the right mix of ugliness and beauty, bit repulsive, bit of a charmer. Southy, naturally. He's more or less a chubby boy; that's all right. The admen are busy selling us the lean European look (with understated bathroom tiles) and that's more worrying than a bit of flab. (138)

Zero continues, ironically pointing out that India has come far as a nation:

> I must put in a word about their hair. Hero, being of Dravidian stock, had the Southy's curls. Nero, an Aryan of sorts (all sorts came through the Khyber Pass) had the straight

hair of the Northy. In the one a touch of the peninsular aborigine, the negroid forest tribals; in the other the Scythians, Huns, Turks, Carpathians, Iranians, Mongolians, and every invader as far back as those doubtful Aryans. You would expect Hero's hair to be straight, the villain's curly, and so it was in the old days, but we have come far as a nation. Behold, then, my master's curls, combed back without a parting, one ringlet at each sideburn and a wayward tendril at the centre of the forehead; no sign of battle there. Observe too, Nero's locks, blown dry from right to left, puffed at the front and bushy-bevelled at the back, fresh and virginal all round. (92)

We may note, Zero's aside, that "all sorts came through the Khyber Pass," which not only disturbs the binary construction that depends on a monolithic identification of the Northerners with the Aryans, but also awards Hero an indigenous status. Hero, as actor and politician, is a native construction: poor Southy boy goes from rags to riches, and not only rises to stardom on the Bollywood screen but also makes it to Delhi, as champion of the poor, thereby serving the dreams and fantasies of the Indian postcolonial nation that is partially premised on humanist ideals of empowering the poor and dispossessed.

As characters in *Hero* mutate between hero and villain, increasingly the opposites merge, thereby causing an instability of meaning, and often collapsing any substantial difference despite the nominal polarities. These mutations indicate shifting formations between protagonist and antagonist, and the ideals they represent in conventional fiction and Bollywood movies. Whereas, Nero in the movies, "reigning villain, was a credible, even popular figure, absconding, he became a demon overnight, responsible in the nation's psyche for every pother and calamity" (146). Once captured, Nero is unmasked as a woman, hence

changing gender in a matter of minutes. When released, she becomes Hero's intermittent lover, and subsequent, procuress of young women to satisfy his sexual appetites. By the end of the novel, Hero becomes increasingly villainous, having to retain power at all costs fending off potential coups, and attempting to restrict the people's freedom in thought and action. What this semantic volatility produces is a disruption of the reader's emotional involvement with the ideals represented by the hero and contested by the villain, or with the identification with stereotypes of good and evil. It possibly forewarns us of a final twist in the narrative's conclusion.

In a similar vein, the fiction that shifts between Bollywood cinema and Delhi politics presents the narrative form as an ever changing field of reproductions or artistic recycling that represses the binary formation of original and copy. Traditionally, an authentic original has usually been valued aesthetically and commercially over a copy or an imitation. However, in the current postmodern climate, according to Jean Baudrillard, there are mostly identical copies or reproductions (for example CDs, DVDs, photocopies), which he calls "simulacra," and virtually no originals (405). The recycling of art forms within a postcolonial context, however, does elicit another form of intervention that complicates the privileging of a postmodern reading. The use of local intertextual references such as pre-colonial myths and narratives and postcolonial cultural forms, including Indian cinema, demonstrate "culture-specific knowledges," as Mishra and Hodge illustrate (283), which disturb Western cultural and literary monopolies. They argue that the bi-lingual reader with specific cultural knowledge will read the postcolonial text at a different level from the reader without knowledge of local allusions (280).

Naming this supplementarity (with reference to Derrida's notion of the supplement), they contend:

> The supplement, the anecdotal invasion or culture-specific power, is, however, a form of intervention that questions as supplements do, the very adequacy of a theory of the centre and its periphery. At the moment that the narrative is invaded by an intertext from a different centre – [for example] the centre and centrality of the Bombay commercial cinema, India's pre-eminent contemporary cultural form – the focus shifts from a fixed centre and its satellite system to a multiplicity of centres in the culture itself. (280)

This notion of multiple centres is an important point, because it pre-empts the ease with which the postcolonial can become inexorably tethered not only to its colonial past, but also to the postmodern present, at the expense of being securely implanted in the cultural forms and conventions of the postcolonial nation itself. The idea of multiple centres, locally based, thus moves the postcolonial away from always looking in the direction of Western types of knowledge and cultural discourses and towards those that are indigenous to the nation itself, while integrating new aesthetic forms that arise from being located in a global context.

Sealy is, therefore, deconstructing the binary power relations in all forms of monolithic structures, including those of postmodernism, and postcolonialism, since what emerges are endless recreations of power formations that can be temporarily dislocated, only to be found resurfacing in another guise. This may be what McQuillan means by his claim that deconstruction is never complete; it is always present in the text (41). The privileging of terms in the binary operation is endorsed by "logocentrism," which, philosophers, such as Jacques Derrida, have

argued, has structured Western thought since Plato (McQuillan 8). Logocentrism presumes that a higher power such as God or Truth creates absolute, universal truths and meaning. Sealy, however, does not sanction logocentrism; an instance of his undermining it is provided through the parodic treatment of the first Indian feature movie called "Raja Harishchandra" (produced in 1913), which was itself based on the ancient Hindu text "Harishchandra."

Zero relates the story of "Raja Harishchandra," which his own script for the movie "Neta Harishchandra" will bring up to date:

> Good King Harishchandra cannot tell a lie. With Queen Taramat he runs a just kingdom, true to himself and to the old laws. Now, Sage Vishwamitra, whose penances have made him a power, is not convinced by the king's untried goodness. This man's truth – everyman's truth – he tells his forest colleague, Sage Vashista, will buckle under pressure. Truth, counters Sage Vashista, is made of sterner metal; do your worst and see. Vishwamitra does, and Harishchandra's ordeal begins. He loses his throne, his son, his caste, is reduced to a grave-digger. Finally he steels himself to execute his cherished queen falsely accused of murder – when, lo: the heavens open and Shiva intervenes. All is made good, and Truth stands vindicated. (126-27)

Thus Truth is defended through the intervention of God. However, Zero continues:

> Notice Truth, overarching Truth, in fact nowhere in serious jeopardy. It is small-t truth, the hero's truth, which is tested in the name of Truth. Notice too, Vishwamitra is not proved wrong – even when the hero is proved right. As exemplar, Harishchandra is faultless; but so is Vishwamitra. No *either/or* here. The invisible hand of *both/and*, that nice quibble of lax civics and quantum physics, is at work softening the blow for mortals like you and me. (127)

Zero claims that despite Shiva's intervention, the contestation between Vishwamitra's truth and Vashishta's Truth is a draw — a matter of both/ and rather than either/ or. This, along with the use of the Harishchandra narrative that acts as a culture-specific supplementarity, suggests an undermining of logocentrism and the hierarchies through which it is held in place, for there are many truths, as well as many centres that co-exist concurrently.

The reinvention of this archetypal tale into a contemporary political fiction, not only makes the narrative more accessible, but possibly more acceptable. Zero rewites both film and legend, substituting Neta or leader, for Raja or king, and reformulating it within the corrupt practices of contemporary Indian politics where it can be difficult to tell the truth from the lies:

> In the script two Bombay rag-and-bone men, Kabadiwala Vishwamitra and Kabadiwala Vashista, sage avatars, come cycling down a suburban road one behind the other, calling *Raddi! Raddi!* to right and left […]. They dismount in the shade of a hoarding and rest a while, discussing their new leader, Neta Harishchandra. Leader Harishchandra, thug-turned-politician, represents Andheri, the dark constituency. Can he be made to tell the truth? *I can blackmail him into telling the truth*, Vishwamitra says. *Here is an incriminating document I found among his old newspapers. Fat chance,* scoffs Kabadiwala Vashista. *He is a congenital liar, this Harishchandra, committed to lies. The truth will not pass his lips.* (127-128)

The "incriminating document" suggests that Neta Harishchandra sometimes does tell the truth. However, if he responds to the blackmail, how do we know he is then telling the truth? He is telling what the blackmailer wants to hear. Truth is constructed by power, by those who control the discourses, and is as a

consequence sacrificed to it. Neta Harishchandra does confess all his wrongdoings in the end, after his wife commits suicide. "*Is his truth less valuable than Raja Harishchandra's?* Vishwamitra asks Vashista *No, but then, what good is this Truth business?* Vashista wants to know as they cycle away, their sacks, full to the bursting, spilling tins, bottles, newspapers" (128). Sealy shifts our attention to the genealogy of representation that makes "truth" inaccessible. Zero tells us that his original script was in fact rewritten by numerous people — "Producer, director, lensman, mock-up gaffer, lights, the very clapper-boy chipped away at the original until its resemblance to the finished product would have challenged a Prague structuralist" (128). Hence, there is no central, authoritative scriptwriter; the product is the creation of many minds, builds upon previous texts and undermines its own ontological existence. "Truth" as an originating centre over time loses its value and is consequently replaced by representations reliant on a number of contingent factors.

Sealy's parody of Bollywood movies and the construction of heroes and villains continues into his satire of Delhi politics and political structures of power in post-independent India. The self-referential drama that unfolds on the political, screen in Delhi shows there is very little substance to the postcolonial nation's ideals of independence, freedom, and democracy. In such a system, political processes provide an illusion of humanism's grand project of working towards a better life, playing to the dreams and fantasies of ordinary people, while undermining this through the invidious desire for power at all cost. The centres of power, whether secured to colonialism or nationalism, exhibit comparable configurations. Hero's increasingly despotic behavior and control of media and his

use of karmascope to control people's very souls, have an underlying bite, but are so excessively overplayed, they become dramatically outrageous, reminding us that we are reading a story or watching a movie, which carries no direct referentiality to anything beyond the work of fiction.

Ranga, as Bollywood actor, discusses with Zero, the concept of Karmascope, or constructive day-dreams, as a way for the people to cleanse their souls and erase their karma through the construction of an ideal, pure self on screen. Ranga states: "For the price of a film ticket you can have a new soul" (67). The political corollary of this is the nationwide television system, Didi (meaning "sister," thereby redefining a familiar relationship). It features dharmadramas and political propaganda, promoting the illusion that Hero and his government are alleviating their people's daily suffering. Zero is given the Media portfolio and becomes the Minister of Screens. He exclaims that in this new role,

> I – Zero! – would sanction those vulgar dharmadramas. I - imagine! - would issue the ban on newspapers. And I, when the time came – O my master was a clever man! Would be responsible for banning the big screen! I was it seemed the chosen hangman of the past. But I was also, I realized, the midwife of a monstrous future. For as things got worse out there I would have to see that they got better on the screen. (275)

The parallel between the Bollywood screen and Delhi politics is very explicit, for both create dramas that fuel the nation's dreams and fantasies.

Ranga's elevation to heroic status in the screenplay by Zero, through appealing to national pride, creates an illusion or fantasy in people's minds that he can effect change in their lives, hence his political success. However, as Ranga's

inability to change the harsh conditions of people's lives becomes increasingly apparent, it also becomes more evident that simple change of power does not necessarily guarantee freedom from oppression, nor is Indian rule able to alleviate the injustices of the past. As Hero becomes more tyrannical and paranoid, more people begin to disappear. Zero muses:

> The enemy within, Didi said – and I now watched her morning and might; her broadcasting house had moved with me into the fort – was more insidious than the enemy without, who at least looked honourably different and fought like a man. Democracy, Hero, said, from under a white scroll wig, was in peril; we must be vigilant if we valued our freedom, for there were those who sought to pervert it in the name of justice […]. The country would be best served if every man did his appointed job, his dharmic duty. (281)

From this statement, it would appear that Hero views the judiciary as a threat to his power and has appropriated it as well as the media, rationalizing the curbing of freedoms in order to ultimately preserve them, thus making a total mockery of democracy and notions of freedom. Freedom for mankind is part of humanism's myth of the autonomous subject, who expresses agency and is able to produce change as part of the human endeavour towards enlightenment. Zero, commenting on the politics leading up to the general election, reveals the duplicity behind party politics. He exclaims: "The rights of man! In this country we hadn't yet plumbed the depths of his wrongs" (231).

Sealy is playing with the conventions of fiction in having the hero shot at the end; Hero does not live happily ever after. However, this does not eradicate the concept of heroism, for there is always another hero to be found. The shooting

suggests an entrapment within a particular narrative structure with few options for change; the masala can be modified but only within the linguistic structures that already exist. Concepts such as heroism are sustained through political and ideological structures that are perpetually reformulated. At the end of the novel, after he has shot Hero, Zero "Looks forward to the day when we will need no heroes. When every man will find pleasure (and a little pain) in his job – when every man will *have* a job. Hero must have had his dreams too before he gave up, or gave in" (317). Zero desires an India that is "not a power, or a force, but simply a people who do things right, who have faith in themselves" (317). These, however, are only dreams, produced in response to the excessive fantasies of Delhi politics and popular Indian cinema within a piece of fiction.

Conclusion

In *Hero*, Sealy employs the postmodern devices of metafiction and deconstruction, along with parody and satire to interrogate an underlying postcolonial ideology predicated on self-rule, democracy, and freedom from empire. The very fabrication of power is challenged through the parodic interface between the fantastical excesses of the Bollywood cinema and Delhi political machinations. In the process, other constructs such as humanism, postmodernism, and conventional European and Indian creative forms are scrutinized, for these terms and conventions can fall prey to a literary lethargy through which they continue to promote themselves. The question that arises, therefore, is whether Sealy's postmodern practices produce an aesthetic that is postcolonial, or is it something different? The culture-specific knowledges, including that of the Indian cinema and politics, along with the

reframing of English as a literary and spoken language within a local Indian context, indicate that *Hero* can be considered as belonging to both an Indian and a postcolonial aesthetic: one that destablizes Western cultural imperialism or the dominance of Western cultural forms, knowledge, and points of view, as well as the grand narratives of postcolonial independence. From the latter perspective, Sealy may be postmodernizing postcolonialism, but equally his postcolonial aesthetic can be claimed to modify his postmodern fictional practices.

Chapter 2: Towards a "Third Space" of Enunciation in *The Everest Hotel*

The Everest Hotel is a narrative or, more precisely, a multiplicity of narratives that conveys the lives of a group of eclectic and eccentric people, including an order of nuns, who live in the Everest Hotel, and of those connected with them in various ways, set in the context of a temporal pattern that corresponds to the cycle of the seasons. Written in 1998, and located in postcolonial India, the novel summons remnants of a former British India that still survive in the Anglo-Indian characters, in the Hotel itself, and in the memories of its residents, as well as through the gravestones of the British people laid to rest. Does this connection to a colonial past interpose in the novel an implicit postcolonial response to Eurocentric power, which, in the terms of Mishra and Hodge, "implicates both the colonizer and colonized?" (281). In the previous novel *Hero,* postcolonial ideals of self-rule, democracy, and freedom were dismantled through a self-referential parodic and satiric undermining conveyed through contemporary Bollywood cinema and Delhi politics. This produced an Indian postcolonial aesthetic that positioned itself within a postcolonial centre that recirculated similar structures of power as its colonial precursor. *The Everest Hotel* continues Sealy's isolation of the reproduction of centres of power, but it also advances the idea that perhaps a postcoloniality driven by the interrogation of such an increasingly obsolete construct as the British Empire is now less relevant. The Everest or "Ever-rest" cemetery (49), which shares a boundary wall with the Hotel is mostly full of dead British people who died during the period of British India. Now a haven for gamblers, who "prefer the

newer, lower tombstones" (49) to the older mausoleums, there are only two plots left, one of which is allocated to Jed, the ninety-year-old Anglo-Indian owner of the Hotel and the cemetery's secretary. The cemetery thus becomes a symbol for dying Anglo-India and with it the vestiges of an era of British colonization, an historically brief, though highly significant, period of time in India's history.

In their discussion on "What is Post(-)colonialism?" Mishra and Hodge assert that a "grand theory of post-colonialism inevitably throws up comparisons with another totalizing form of scholarship, orientalism" (278).They caution: "One remembers Edward Said's well-known warning that even with the best of intentions one might, and sometimes does, give the impression that through one's own discourses the Other is now representable without due regard to its bewildering complexity" (278-79). According to Edward Said, knowledge of the Orient or the East was "almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (1). In other words, the Orient has become knowable through European representations that do not accurately reflect the material reality of those who live in what is termed the East. It is important to remember that Sealy is writing from within India and is regarded as an Indian author. However, as his use of postmodern aesthetics indicates, he has been influenced by Western literary and philosophical trends; he is therefore writing from within and without. Throughout the novel, he rewrites historical events that occurred during British Indian rule, highlighting their complexity, at the same time as undermining the legitimacy of Orientalism's totalizing discourse, by putting forward a different narrative point of view.

It would appear that in *The Everest Hotel* Sealy is questioning the construction of totalizing monoliths, and more to the point, what it is that sustains them. Thus the centralizing propensity of postcolonialism itself comes under an intense scrutiny for instead of constructing yet another hegemonic discourse, Sealy through his postmodern innovations in *The Everest Hotel*, interrogates multiple centres of authority, not focusing solely on British or European imperialism. The postmodern aesthetics in this novel differ from those in *Hero*. The events of *The Everest Hotel* are aligned to the natural rhythms of the seasons, based on "Kalidasa's ancient division of the seasons in his Ritusamhara" (Afterword), and time follows a trajectory that is indifferent to human relationships or humanist teleology. While one of the narrative threads follows a triangular love story between Ritu and Brij and Inge, there are a number of other generic leads that do not develop consistently and progressively into their respective narrative genres but devolve into a hybridized, multi-generic narrative with many endings, none of which determine the novel's closure. The novel is replete with many intertextual references to historical events that occurred during British colonial occupation of India that dismantle an underpinning Orientalist ideology; the disruption of fixed centres is negotiated through the serial extensions of margins, which undermine the mutuality of specific centres and their margins. This chapter's main argument is, therefore, that in *The Everest Hotel*, through a multiplicity of genres, the interrogation of Orientalist constructions, the displacement of humanist teleology for the interpretation of time, and the refiguration of margins, Sealy problematizes the sustainability of totalizing monoliths, including postcolonialism, which reproduce notions of fixed and stable centres. Sealy's postmodern practices are relevant to

the decentering of intellectual and transnational empires, since what emerges after *Hero* is the inconsistency of simultaneously critiquing centralizing propensities, while retaining parallel centering devices based upon a controlling subjectivity or point of view in a work of fiction. Sealy's critique points eventually towards a "Third Space" beyond the binary oppositions that sustain empires.

The novel opens in the town of Drummondganj — "neither of the plains or the hills" (16) — with Ritu (whose name means season in Hindi), a Christian nun, arriving by train from Delhi to take up duties in the Hotel, now a rest home for the disabled and elderly, as part of her experience in humility. She is met by Cecelia, the Sister Superior, and Sister Neha. However, because there is a general strike in the town and the scooter rickshaw drivers are not supposed to be working, returning to the Hotel proves to be difficult. As the sisters are waiting in a strike-breaker rickshaw, with Cecelia unable to back down from her insistence that the rickshaw should take them home, the surrounding crowd begins to become unruly and threatening. At this point, we are introduced to another protagonist, Brij, who is part of the Strike calling for a separate state "Akashkhand," and also a friend to the residents of the Hotel. He rescues the nuns from mounting hostility, but during the chaos, Ritu's suitcase is stolen, and all her possessions are lost. The suitcase is an important motif in the novel, for it signals the constraining borders of unitary identity constructions that postmodernism seeks to critique. Ritu is a nun but she is also a daughter, a sister, a friend; however, as a nun she is discouraged from having emotional attachments, including those with other nuns and her family.

Upon arrival at the Everest Hotel, Ritu is introduced to the other nuns who look after the residents, and is then taken on a tour of the house by Miss Sampson,

who was a friend of the owner Jed's deceased wife Fay, and has a long connection with the place. Rose Sampson quips: "Everest gets hotter the higher you climb. That's the local joke. On the roof, where *he* is, she jabs a nicotined finger, is 'hell'" (29). "He" refers to Jed, who is ninety, has advancing senility, and, in the final phase of his life, is writing his own Book of the Dead. Other residents include the twins, Prem and Pravin, who are "a welter of paddling hands and oscillating heads" (30), Major Bakshi who "drinks like a fish […]" (30), the seaman, "a sailor or something […]" from Latvia (31), a goongi — "she mimes a deaf mute, […] nobody knows her name" (31), and Miss Chatterjee, "pregnant if you please at sixty-nine" (31). Miss Sampson owns a pet mongoose, bemoans the incessant enemy dust, and repeatedly refers to Nehru, whom she once knew, and his goal of rural electrification, while ironically the town/ region undergoes daily power cuts in the summer heat. Ritu's first duties are to look after Jed, who has not eaten for three days, and has locked himself in his living quarters on the roof. Previously a mountaineer, collector of botanical specimens, and erstwhile ladies' man, he spends his declining days wrestling with his progressive dementia and making life difficult for his caretakers. He is almost beyond caring about what others think of him, while his mind journeys backwards over his life and loves, including that of his beloved wife Fay who died at a young age in 1942.

The Everest Hotel foregrounds marginalized communities and focuses on political issues that concern the displaced and disenfranchised. The temporal setting of *The Everest Hotel* is within post-independent, postcolonial India. However, it is not a novel whose postcolonial impetus is "writing back to centre of empire" (Ashcroft et al. 96). Sealy is careful not to replicate polarized extremes,

since they create conflict and hegemony. Resting at the foothills of the Himalayas with Mount Everest in view and bordering the Anglo cemetery suggest the Hotel may represent a place where the extremes of life and death are negotiated. For this is a novel that produces what Homi Bhabha calls a "Third Space of enunciation" (*The Location of Culture* 37), in which difference or hybridity is acknowledged as a possible site of reconciliation of opposites, or the levelling of traditional power hierarchies. Does this generate a post-colonial aesthetic? The argument pursued here is that Sealy's postmodern aesthetics revise and redefine the term "postcolonial" as an engagement with the deconstruction of totalizing empires, not restricted to the former British Empire. With this in mind, the ensuing discussion will explore Sealy's use of intertextual references as a means to unravel Orientalist discourses about historical events; it will consider his metafictional enquiry, which takes shape through the novel's hybridity, derived from its use of genres ranging from a love story to a detective fiction, and through these narratives being played out according to the passage of the four seasons, thus contributing to the dislocation of narrative time from the processes of human causality; and attention will be paid to the reiterated extendability of margins, which provides a renewing site for the negotiation between changing articulations of the place of the privileged and that of the marginalized.

Intertextuality and the Interrogation of Orientalism

While the term "Orientalism" has a number of possible interpretations, Said does contend, however, that "without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European

culture was able to manage — and even produce — the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (3). In *The Everest Hotel*, Sealy recontextualizes historical events that occurred during British colonial rule of India, thereby providing counter discourses to Orientalist imperial knowledge. In so doing, Sealy displaces the colonial discourse as the centre of authority on these famous historical events. However, all these accounts are the work of fiction. Therefore, Sealy's use of intertextual allusions may also be suggestive of the novel's own departure from realist representation as part of the postmodern inquiry into how meaning and knowledge are produced. In her discussion on "re-presenting the past" (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 59), Linda Hutcheon argues that in postmodern fiction,

> the narrativization of past events is not hidden, the events no longer seem to speak for themselves, but are shown to be consciously composed into a narrative, whose constructed – not found – order is imposed upon them, often overtly by the narrating figure. The process of making stories out of chronicles, of constructing plots out of sequences, is what postmodern fiction underlines. This does not in any way deny the existence of the past real, but it focuses attention on the act of imposing order on that past, of encoding strategies of meaning-making through representation. (63)

A postmodern strategy therefore brings to the surface how narratives of past events are constructed and retold. While this does not deny that these events happened, it does underscore the limitations of realist representations.

In his discussion on Orientalism, Said contends that knowledge of the East or Orient, particularly prevalent during British and French colonialism, was produced by Western scientists, scholars, adventurers, soldiers, missionaries,

based on their own cultural constructions of the Other. However, these views, for this is what they were, came to be regarded as factual, rational, proven truths. Said points out that through processes of cultural hegemony, European ideas, identity, people, and culture were positioned as superior to non-European ones. He argues:

> Under the general heading of knowledge of the Orient, and within the umbrella of Western hegemony over the Orient during the period from the end of the eighteenth century, there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial and historical theses about mankind and the universe, for instances of economic and sociological theories of development, revolution, cultural personality, national or religious character. (7- 8)

According to Said, Western knowledge disciplines, including science and history, during the post-enlightenment period, promulgated Orientalist discourses, claiming accurate knowledge of the East based on their own supposedly innate superior intellect and culture.

In *The Everest Hotel*, through his re-inventions of specific nineteenth- and twentieth-century Orientalist discourses, Sealy disturbs the very foundations of the legitimacy of officially recorded historical and scientific accounts of specific events, at the same time as showing their production within the parameters of fiction's possible multiple readings. Jed, former mountaineer, recollects to Ritu his discovery of footprints, above the snowline of Mount Everest. The inference is that he thought these were the "mythical" Yeti's footprints and photographed them for the world at large. He says to Ritu:

> I photographed them. For the world. She hasn't heard, hasn't read. He's spared the
>
> ridicule then, but feels a pang all the same. He has become history, not just dubious
>
> history. (62)

Pointing out the unreliability of photographic evidence, since it can be interpreted in a variety of ways, his shift from first to third person within his thinking indicates the fluctuating border between what is spoken and what is omitted, including the sanctions of dubious history. With Inge he decides to exaggerate his achievements:

> I tracked him for years. Photographed his footprints in the snow. Even tried to shoot
>
> him once but the gun misfired […]. To cull him for science […]. (177)

Western science, however, does not allow for the possibility of a creature that evades capture within its own system of legitimacy, or authoritative centre of empiricism. The mythology of the Yeti or Abominable Snowman emerged into Western nineteenth-century narrative as European expeditions explored the Himalayan regions of Nepal and Tibet and reported sighting a creature that was unknown to them but was bipedal, walking upright and covered in long hair. The Yeti, though known under different names, had existed in Tibetan and Nepalese history and legend long before the Europeans arrived. Eric Shipton, the famous British mountaineer who led the Mount Everest Reconnaissance Expedition in 1951, discovered what he called "curious footprints" in the snow:

> Whatever it was that he had seen, he was convinced that it was neither a bear nor a
>
> monkey, with both of which animals he was, of course, very familiar. Of the various
>
> theories that have been advanced to account for these tracks, the only one which is in

any way plausible is that they were made by a langur monkey, and even this is very far

from convincing, as I believe those who have suggested it would be the first to admit.

(54-55)

Shipton photographed one footprint and published it for the world to see. Western knowledge cannot explain the footprints; they exist, but outside a Western knowledge framework, exposing the limits of Western knowing. The local Sherpas who had seen a "Yeti" at only a distance of about 25 yards were convinced it was half man, half beast. The insertion of Jed's story about the Yeti may signal that Sealy is questioning Western valorization of empiricism and rational scientific enquiry as well as commenting on the fallibility of history-making. The Yeti still lives on in popular Western culture and represents the inexplicable and fantastical but possible existence of an ancient creature that we cannot possess within realist or empirical modes of thinking.

The introduction of Inge into the eclectic milieu of those connected to the Everest Hotel is a curious addition in the context of Sealy's commentary on Orientalist power in British India. Inge Vogel is a German, from Berlin, seeking a connection with her deceased great uncle Otto Planke, who was a poet and a prisoner in Dariya Dun. Jed and Brij lead her to his tomb in the Everest graveyard, whereupon, "she is at attention, head bowed, her arm raised in a fascist salute" (129). Inge decides to make a new stonehead for her uncle's grave: "It is important. He was a poet" (132); she purchases the materials to do this. It is not certain whether Inge is actually a neo-Nazi, although this may be how she is viewed by the Hotel residents and the people of Drummondganj because of her dress and behaviour.

The Germans were never part of the European invasion of India, but because of the two World Wars were regarded as enemies of Britain, including her colonies. In the novel, Inge's great uncle was interned as a prisoner of war in Dariya Dun, a narrative that to a point, draws parallels with the adventures of Heinrich Harrer, an Austrian explorer and mountaineer who escaped from a British Indian internment camp in Dehra Dun and travelled over the mountains to Tibet where he became a tutor to the current Dalai Lama, leaving once the Chinese invaded Tibet in 1950. Heinrich Harrer wrote *Seven Years in Tibet*, first published in 1953, which relates his escape from an Indian jail with fellow adventurer Aufschnaiter, their arduous journey to Lhasa, and how they were allowed to stay in Tibet until the Chinese arrived. He also writes in great detail his first meeting with the 14th Dalai Lama, who, thirsting for Western knowledge, asked Harrer to be his tutor. While it is written from Harrer's own cultural perspectives, there is a great deal of respect for the Tibetan culture and much reverence for the Dalai Lama. The irony is that although this narrative could be regarded as an example of propagating Orientalist discourse, it also shows the important role that Harrer played in the current Dalai Lama's personal and educational development during his formative teenage years, since Harrer taught him about Western science, philosophy, and culture as well as the English language. Harrer expresses some of the curiosity that people from different cultures often experience when they first meet one another. Since he could speak Tibetan by the time he met the Dalai Lama, there was no need for a translator. He states:

He [the Dalai Lama] asked my age and was surprised to learn that I was only thirty-seven. Like many Tibetans he thought that my "yellow" hair was a sign of age. He studied my features with childish curiosity and teased me about my long nose, which, although of normal size as we reckon noses, had often attracted the attention of the snub-nosed Mongolians. At last he noticed that I had hair growing on the back of my hands and said with a broad grin: "Heinrig you are as hairy as a monkey." I had an answer ready, as I was familiar with the legend that the Tibetans derive their descent from the union of their god Chenrezi with a female demon….I found that in comparing me with an ape he had really flattered me. (281)

This cultural exchange does indicate that racial and cultural stereotypes of the Other exist on both sides, but that with understanding and respect they can be broken down and traversed. Harrer, an outsider, was a guest of the most important person in Tibet and, even though the Dalai Lama sought his western knowledge, it was always on the Dalai Lama's own terms.

Otto Planke's remains lie in the Everest grave, his life story juxtaposed with the successful adventurer's. Jed says:

He tried to follow Harrer to Tibet, you know… It's just across those mountains. Shangri La. Nirvana? (173)

Otto Planke's escape did not succeed but his imprisonment in the narrative may foretell the demise of European colonialism in the East. The intertextual reference to Harrer's successful journey and to his writings about his experience in Tibet possibly signify the failure of a totalizing Orientalist project implicit in colonialism, thereby disrupting a more traditional reading of hierarchical imperial power since it points to the complexities and interchangeability of relationships between the

powerful and the disempowered and the possibilities of a space that bridges the gaps in cultural statements.

History is complex and, although there are undeniable events that have occurred, the authenticity of the total discourse is contingent upon the locus of power, and its context, and upon which party is relating the narrative. An account of a shared historical event told by the colonizing power will not hold the same truth for those who are subjugated. In *The Everest Hotel,* as part of his project to interrogate the reliability of Orientalist historical discourses, Sealy relates Jed's memories of his ascent of Mount Everest. Jed is on the South Col, three days from base camp with two telegrams in his pocket. One is from Nehru in prison saying, "The Nation waits, all India holds her breath," and the other from Rose Sampson, containing the message, "Fay serious come at once" (236). Since Fay died in 1942, we can surmise that this attempt on Everest was in that year, pre-dating Indian national independence and the ascent of Everest in 1953 by Hillary and Tenzing Norgay. Jed ignores the second telegram and continues to climb, but bad weather sets in and he almost dies, rescued in time by his fellow climber Sherpa Dorji, but loses six toes to frostbite, "Enough foot left to hold a shoe, just" (237).

There are a number of possible readings of this insertion of the failed ascent of Mount Everest into the narrative. The naming of the mountain Everest itself was part of the British imperial endeavour, representing an act of colonial possession. In 1857, a significant year in British-Indian history, the British Royal Geographical Society suggested the name in honour of George Everest, who had been the previous Surveyor General of India. Everest disagreed with their choice because it could not be written in Hindi, nor pronounced by the local people. He favoured an

indigenous name, but the Society, which obviously wielded a great deal of power and influence, argued that there were a number of local names that were not official and therefore not legitimate, and in 1865, adopted the name still recognized worldwide today, an enduring legacy of colonial rule. More recently, the Chinese have been advocating for the mountain to be renamed "Chomolungma," its Tibetan name, arguing this was its original one, while the Nepalese government has officially named it "Sagamatha" as part of its own nationalist reclamation project. Jed's determination to climb the mountain, and Nehru's telegram urging Jed to succeed for the sake of the nation, indicate a postcolonial nationalism that is as spurious in its hegemonic ambitions as the colonial appropriation of the mountain's naming. Significantly, it is Jed, an Anglo-Indian, who is making the ascent on behalf of Indian national pride, suggesting the fluidity of the Anglo-Indian position in both British India and postcolonial India. This may be indicative of how Anglo-Indians were positioned at the borders in the binary opposition of colonial power and nationalism. While the British ruled India, the mixed race Anglo-Indians experienced a certain amount of capricious privilege. However, after Indian independence, they became displaced and globally dispersed; for many, India was no longer a place of "ever rest" or home.

What is perhaps important to underscore in Sealy's use of counter-discursive narratives in all the above intertextual representations is that rather than reversing the privileged power of colonizing discourses, he is bringing attention to the fluid space of the excluded middle, which is usually submerged or erased by binary opposition. In so doing, he is providing an understanding of how historical

and scientific discourses are created while advancing the status of a space of cultural ambiguity and interchange.

Generic Hybridity and the Decentering of Humanist Teleology

The intertextual re-enactments of historical events in *The Everest Hotel* articulate counter-discursive narratives that highlight the cultural bias of knowledge systems such as Orientalism, while exposing the artifice of realist representations that validate unified, authoritarian structures including science and history. Metafictional inquiry as a postmodern tactic in *The Everest Hotel* continues Sealy's critique on how meaning is constructed, and on how centres of power or privilege are represented. Thus Sealy's use of metafiction works as a self-reflexive critique of the privileging that accompanies the selection of narrative form, genre, and point of view. In the novel, the boundaries of a singular genre are transgressed to produce many facets of different genres: a love story, a detective story, a narrative of political resistance, a story of dying, Jed's story, the story of motherhood as Ritu becomes surrogate mother to Masha. At the same time, the veneration of a singular narrative form and teleology is displaced by the multiple narrative strands, structured according to the seasons rather than human desire.

Realism as an aesthetic device assumes that the signs (images or words) we see in art and fiction are similar to what we experience in the real world. A realist novel creates a fictitious world that seems analogous to the actual world we live in, appealing to a supposed direct referentiality between language and what we experience. Metafiction as a postmodern aesthetic device problematizes the relationship between realism and fiction, and through reflecting back on itself

reveals that fiction is merely fiction, art merely art. Gregson, in *Postmodern Literature*, argues that:

> […] postmodern theory stresses […] issues of representation – it focuses upon how the
> 'real' is constructed through language, how it is everywhere transformed into textuality,
> and how what appears literal is in fact metaphorical. (7)

Linda Hutcheon in *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* discusses the term "metafiction" and how it has evolved within the literary context. She states, "[M]etafiction, as it has now been named, is fiction about fiction – that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and / or linguistic identity" (1). She argues that "metafiction has two major focuses: the first is on its linguistic and narrative structures, and the second is on the role of the reader" (6). The shift in focus from narrative content to narrative process compels the reader to reflect that what he/ she is reading is not true, while simultaneously engaging the reader's intellect and imagination in the creation of a fictive world (7).

With reference to linguistic structures, a common assumption about language is that signals, or words by themselves produce meaning. However, as Gregson states in *Postmodern Literature,*

> Individual signs are meaningless; they acquire meaning only because they form part of
> a much larger structure. Because this structure is imposed upon the world it means
> that the world can only be understood in structures, as opposed to a 'real' way. (3)

In *The Everest Hotel*, Sealy's decoding of how linguistic structures privilege meaning occurs through the intervention into the story of Jed's cousin or nephew, the relationship designation dependent on who is talking about him. Bunny, the

nephew/cousin, brings Jed a satellite dish to keep him occupied, although as Cecelia points out, there is no television. Bunny replies that it is coming, "First I wanted to set up the infrastructure […]. Or rather superstructure" (74). This may be a cursory allusion by Sealy to Marxist theory, a play on the concepts of base and superstructure, whereby the base or processes of material economic production in society determine its superstructure, that is, society's political and cultural ideologies, which, in turn, influence the base. Bunny is most probably setting up the communications infrastructure for when he will inherit the hotel, but it is through this infrastructure that we receive political and ideological discourses. In this particular instance, the infrastructure is incomplete, and the signals or signs cannot be transmitted. Jed wonders:

> In this desert of porcelain and rusty tanks and dish stuff. What is it? Silicon? A dish for collecting signals with no tube to decipher them. Bathtubs catching rainwater and letting it go. (82)

According to semiotics, signification, or the process of meaning-making, involves a system in which communities have to agree upon the meaning of a sign, such as a word, an image or body movement. However, such signs can only make sense within the structures of the language and cultural systems that they represent. In *The Everest Hotel*, there are many signals, but they do not necessarily make sense. This may constitute a metafictional statement about the novel itself, alluding to the many narratives in the novel, which fail to shape a coherent pattern, signifying a postmodern rejection of conventional notions of unity, including that of narrative form or genre.

In *Postmodern Literature,* Gregson discusses Derrida's interest in the paradoxical qualities of genre whereby its traditional use in literature presumes limits, norms, interdictions, what he names "textual authoritarianism" (62). Derrida, however, contends that genre also contains within itself the subversion of those rules and consequently a diffusion of textual authority. In postmodern aesthetics, the use of genre is often extended and deconstructed in such a way as to foreground the unfamiliar, thus exposing the precariousness of monolithic forms. In *The Everest Hotel*, Sealy takes this further, introducing a generic hybridity that transgresses the claim to the authorial legitimacy of one genre over another. *The Everest Hotel* contains a multiplicity of narratives, none of which is privileged. Jean-Francois Lyotard, in his discussion on the condition of knowledge, where he refers to the postmodern as an "incredulity towards metanarratives" (xxiv), argues that the failure of totalizing grand narratives leaves a plurality of competing narratives, in which one is as legitimate as the other. In *The Everest Hotel*, the hybridity of genres as a postmodern aesthetic therefore challenges through its form the hegemonic assumptions of traditional epistemologies. For, as Gregson points out, "A universal genre, which would provide the language required for resolving the dispute [between genres], is as unavailable as a grand narrative that explains all human existence" (63).

One of *The Everest Hotel's* narratives is the love story between Brij, the political activist, and Ritu, who as a nun is supposed to be "dead" to desire. There is a gradual build-up of sensual and emotional tension between the two in the novel, culminating in the episode when Brij and Ritu are flying a kite together on Jed's rooftop. Brij places his hand over hers, until suddenly he lets go:

He's let go, his eyes still carefully on the kite. She hands him back the reel, her eyes

on the vanishing red dot, too. But for days after, what she will keep seeing is the line

as it was snatched away, the darting and slackness coiled in that moment. (114)

Reading the "line" of the kite as referring to the narrative 'line,' or the novel's own textuality, we see the possibility of romantic love between Brij and Ritu being literally snatched away. The love story will not blossom and grow in this particular narrative. This incident represents the emotional climax, and hence the readers' own desires for romance are thwarted. Had the narrative at this point taken a different trajectory, *The Everest Hotel* may have had a more popular appeal.

The love story between Ritu and Brij mutates into an unspoken triangle between Brij, Inge, and Ritu, ending with Inge's death, and probable murder. With the introduction of Inspector Bisht, the novel turns into a detective story. Paradoxically, the task of the Inspector is to accumulate facts and evidence in order to solve the case and produce a definitive truth. However, this thrust of detection is at odds with the postmodern interrogation of absolutes and its insistence on plurality of meaning and a collapse in the distinction between fact and fiction. Inspector Bisht systematically gathers all the evidence and has a dream in which he recreates what may have happened the night Inge died. When he wakes up,

In the morning he lies there pining for the vanished dream, looking for crumbs of

inspiration. The spades, for example. But it's gone, and with it those tantalizing

revelations, promissory glimpses, intimations of complete knowledge.

Who can say exactly what happens? he asks the dahlia that is his morning comforter.

Nobody, certainly not the detective. It's why he's stopped reading detective stories,

and he has a shelf-ful. He can't bear their omniscience any more: an unsleeping

despot rules over that exhausted land. Bisht never read one that satisfied, he thinks

now as he mounts his Luna moped. Not one, ever. (219)

Inspector Bisht's dream provides a metafictional commentary on omniscience. Narrative and authorial omniscience are further means by which the fiction of absolute knowledge is exalted. Bisht finally reaches the conclusion that Inge bled to death from a self-inflicted knife wound while hallucinating on bhang. However, he emphasizes, he does not know for sure. This conclusion is a vital reminder that there is not always a definitive solution to a crime, and that reconstruction of the crime scene consists of conjecture as well as the gathering of evidence, which may also be fabricated and manipulated to present a particular version of the case. Sealy may also be questioning the authority of evidence-based knowledge and its privileged location in relation to other forms of knowledge such as intuition and dreams.

Interwoven throughout are also narratives of death and dying, symbolized by Jed whose dying mind recollects a life that epitomizes twentieth-century Anglo-Indian decline. Many of the residents of the Everest Hotel are elderly. In the course of the narrative Miss Chatterjee and Miss Sampson both die unexpectedly before Jed, who at one stage is actually declared dead, "The pulse is gone" (54). However, he returns to life while the nuns are preparing him for the death ritual. There are several stories of political resistance by local activist groups, one of which involves the failed attempt at blowing up the dam that has displaced thousands of people, and the surrogate mother-daughter relationship that develops between Sister Ritu and Masha, an orphaned child, which takes a surprising turn,

leaving an open-ended conclusion. Writing across multiple strands requires a fluidity of style as well as knowledge of the different genres' norms and interdictions, making it difficult for the writing subject, to retain a consistent position of authorial knowledge and control. Such a technique thereby tests traditional authorial omniscience, in which the author dictates the novel's purpose and structure of events. In *The Everest Hotel*, Sealy appears to relinquish authorial dictatorship over the novel's plot and form.

E.M. Forster defines a plot as a narrative of events arranged according to a time-sequence that is often driven by causality (*Aspects of the Novel* 143), in order to provide a sense of unity or cohesiveness. Jeremy Hawthorn, however, in *Studying the Novel* argues that "with modernism and postmodernism, the whole question as to whether a novel *should* compose a unity has been raised" (116), leading to a "denial of causality as a reliable principle by many modernist and postmodernist novelists, [which] has inevitably, affected the way they construct their novels" (116). *The Everest Hotel's* plot and teleology is driven by natural time or the rhythms of the seasons rather than by human motivations and interpretations, or through the dictates of an omniscient centre. Sealy calls the novel a calendar, and in his Afterword states that he has followed the poet Kalidasa's ancient division of seasons in his *Ritusamhara,* a short Sanskrit epic about a pair of lovers who expressed their love through the changing nature of the seasons. In the novel, the seasons are further divided into twelve months and while one of the narratives contains a love story, it is not human desire or human quests that drive the plot's temporality or sequence of events as is characteristic of more traditional plot lines. Thus time in the novel is indifferent to human ends or to the

narratives that are played out over the yearly cycle of seasons from one summer to another.

The Extendable Margin

Working with marginal characters and existences and political resistance issues, the very stuff of postcolonial politics, *The Everest Hotel* delineates the serial recurrence of margins. The terms centre/ margin are relative terms, dependent on point of view and the postulation of the place of privilege. One person's centre is someone else's margin and the position one holds is conditional upon who wields most power at a particular period and in a specific context. This destabilizes ideas of fixed authoritative centres and margins, and we are shown that sometimes there is room for negotiation across positions. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha introduced the notion of a third space, an "indeterminate space of the subject(s) of enunciation" (37), arguing that:

> It is only when we understand that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation, that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures are untenable, even before we resort to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity. […] It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew. (37)

According to Bhabha, therefore, hybridity is a third term that disrupts and subverts the notion of fixed identities, cultures, races, and power relations, enabling the "denied knowledges [to] enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis

of its authority" (114). While many people may prefer to view themselves as racially and culturally pure, adhering to rigid beliefs that reinforce traditional hegemonies of power and knowledge, a more transformative approach, perhaps, resides in the recognition of hybridity as a possible site of negotiation and reconciliation.

In *The Everest Hotel*, differences literally co-exist; there is no esteemed majority. Sealy is intimating that the idea of a majority is a political construct that may not cohere across different contexts. Inserting the traditionally politically and socially marginalized into the novel's multiple narratives creates a hybridized space of enunciation, in which the excluded or denied discourses are re-appropriated. The Hotel residents include racially and culturally hybridized people who live within a dying and stagnant environment centred on Jed, an Anglo-Indian, "who wore a raw silk Indian jacket every day the British ruled, and switched to British suits the day they left" (84), possibly denoting a continuing signification of his otherness. The nuns who care for the sick and dying are also dead in some sense. Their religious vows dictate a custody of the senses that prescribes a death to desire. They represent a religious minority in India, who look to the Christian God as their authority. However, many of the prescriptions and rules they live by are culturally constructed and enforced. Ritu is expected to conform to the privileged system of values that defines the behaviours and emotions of a nun and consequently marginalizes other human desires. However, she violates religious vows by forming an attachment to Masha and becoming her surrogate mother. In the novel, the nuns' dominant discourse is further displaced by the laughter and life of the child Masha who finally learns to speak again,

'Well, she's found her tongue', Miss Sampson notes drily. It's the opposite of death,

Ritu considers. She's come out of nowhere fully formed. A magic mushroom, a button,

sealed and perfect. (244)

As both a nun and mother, Ritu represents an example of a hybrid "Third Space of enunciation" in which seemingly contradictory roles are reconciled, so that she does not have to choose between one or the other.

The novel begins with Ritu's arrival in Drummondganj and closes with her departure. She arrives as a nun and leaves a nun but is also considering adopting Masha, the orphaned child who appeared one day, abandoned on the Hotel's doorstep. Sealy may be questioning notions of identity as stable and essentialist, particularly through the loss of Ritu's suitcase upon her arrival in the town. Outside the railway station, her suitcase and most of its contents are stolen. These are her only possessions — gifts from her parents, photographs of her family, precious books and drawings. At the end of the narrative, Ritu is packing the same suitcase (which Brij had returned to her with some of its contents), but this time she is packing for two, herself and the child. The loss of Ritu's suitcase at the novel's beginning symbolizes the deadening of desire to attachments, and yet as we follow Ritu's journey towards the repression of desire throughout the seasons at the Everest Hotel, Masha appears whom Ritu comes to love. Masha's arrival provides a great deal of healing for all the residents of the Hotel, since the death of Inge left them greatly disturbed. In the end, Ritu's love for this child cannot be repressed; she will not give this up. She decides to leave, thinking, "Be her guardian if you can't adopt" (289). It is not clear whether she will have to leave the order. However,

it is certain she will follow her heart's desire; she will be Masha's mother. Cecelia, the Mother Superior, tells Ritu the order will help her to keep the child.

Sealy's ongoing exploration of how power is constructed forces us to reconsider whether the "postcolonial" space has replicated itself into yet another hierarchical authority which is not what it has traditionally denoted. The novel's foreword gives an account of the local women coming from the forest with their bundles of firewood, discussing the changes that are happening in their foothills. While they have always traditionally lopped the trees of branches for their fuel, there are larger forces at work radically changing their environment and way of life:

> But deeper in, trees are being cut down and trucked away. Bare patches appear on the hillsides, like mange; in time a whole bare hill. The springs and waterholes are drying up, the animals have to travel further to drink. (10)

The developers are widening the highway through the forest, destroying the traditional fuel and food sources that the animals and local people have survived on for centuries.

> They talk of ferment in the hills, so many women held in the valley, so many men gone to the plains. (9)

The men have been forced from their homes to find work in the cities of the plains, while the women remain behind, eking out a meager existence in the valleys.

Both on the day Ritu arrives in Drummondganj and on the day she leaves one year later, there is a general strike calling for a separate state Akashkand, self-rule, and an end to corrupt local politicians. There are power cuts and water

rationing every day, and yet a big dam is being built to provide hydro-electric power to the plains. When Ritu asks Brij about it, he replies:

> Our village is going to be submerged by the lake. The water has reached our house. The lowest houses are submerged already. (73)

He lets her know that "the pipes lead to the plains" (73), and "would like to say that the power lines go down to the plains, too, along the canals […]" (73). It is unlikely that their local power supply will improve. Hence, the former power configurations have not disappeared; they have merely changed hands. The master/ servant relationships of colonial India are still being re-enacted within its postcolonial national borders; authority is legitimized through political corruption and brute force.

Further into the novel, there is an incident in which the people from the leper colony on the outskirts of town try to prevent the loggers from cutting down the trees that provide them with shelter and protection. Already marginalized to the town's borders, they are further displaced by the developers' and local politicians' thirst for roads and progress. Ritu offers to teach the lepers how to read and write, but meets resistance from many of the men who are reluctant for the women to learn literacy skills, since their acquisition of knowledge could upset the traditional distribution of power, according to gender, within the leper colony. Ritu finds them one morning "seething" about the logging. She asks them who is behind it and is told, "Pyare Lal, the member for Drummonganj […] and a history sheeter" (249). "History sheeter" is a term used in Indian English meaning someone with a long criminal record. She advises them to "Get your women to chipko,' asking, "Isn't this

where the movement began" (249)? The Chipko movement began in the 1970s in India, when a group of women villagers gathered around some trees to prevent their felling.

The issues that are underscored through these modes of resistance are not the sole province of postcolonial politics. They provide a backdrop to the common realities experienced by specific groups of people in a globalized contemporary India, which is now one of the major world economic and political powers. Independence from its former British colonial master has been relegated to a history that occurred over sixty years ago; hence the term "postcolonial" as an oppositional righting of imperialistic wrongs no longer measures up in the contemporary setting.

Conclusion

This chapter argues that in *The Everest Hotel* Sealy is primarily concerned with dismantling totalizing discourses and power structures including the mandate of postcolonialism. There is a "postcolonial" endurance in the remaining Anglo-Indians, in the names of the dead in the Everest cemetery, and in the name of the world's highest mountain. However, a postcolonial nationalism may be more intent on protecting its national borders from within and without, than in empowering the historically marginalized and oppressed. In the novel, it is through Sealy's postmodern practices that privileged power positions are deconstructed. The postcolonial discourse is redefined as part of the imperialistic imperative of totalizing structures that extends its own privileging propensities. The backdrop of the novel draws attention to narrative omniscience, Orientalist discourses, marginal

positions, political resistance at a local level, racial and cultural hybridity as the means of understanding power dynamics. It becomes apparent that an oppositional "writing back to empire" type of postcolonial discourse is untenable because it merely reverses the status quo, and that temporarily, for there is always another centre of authority waiting in the wings to usurp privilege. Through the expanding borders of marginalization, the novel reflects a hybrid site of compromise and negotiation, which produces a postcolonial aesthetic that holds together many diverse narrative strands while acknowledging the ideological cracks within its own structure. Thus, the postmodern and a redesigned postcolonial are for Sealy unavoidably entangled.

Chapter 3:   The Duplicitous Tactics of *The Brainfever Bird*

The Brainfever Bird, written in 2003, focuses on the triangular love story among Maya, Lev, and Morgan, spanning two cities — Delhi, India and St Petersburg, Russia — and set in the contemporary world of globally driven market forces, technological innovations, and international border crossing. Sealy's "tale of two cities" (359) operates as a covert intertextual reference to Charles Dickens's novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, which was written in 1859 as an historical-realist representation of the French Revolution and its aftermath, the Reign of Terror. Set in London and Paris, Dickens's novel portrays the extremes of a vengeful zealotry that was unleashed in the revolutionary reversal of French class oppression as well as their impact on the triangular love story, which takes in Charles Darnay, a French aristocrat of virtuous character, Lucie Manette, who becomes his wife, and Sydney Carton, an English barrister with a dissolute reputation, who is consumed by an unrequited love for Lucie. It can be argued that there are two parallelisms occurring between Sealy's and Dickens's tales: in the first of these, the failure of notional postcolonial dreams for freedom and justice in Sealy's fiction has parallels with the failure of revolutionary dreams of equality and liberty contained in Dickens's novel; in the second instance, the triangular love story of Dickens's novel connected by the themes of revolution has as its parallel the also triangular love story of Sealy's work, set in the context of the postmodern interrogation of authoritarian structures. The implied intertextuality between the two texts opens up for enquiry the gap between the post-Enlightenment belief in the role of human

agency to produce revolutionary change and the postmodern understanding of the human subject as itself conditioned by multiple formulations of abstract power.

In Dickens's tale, the political revolution acts upon the love story through the denunciation of Darnay for the crimes committed by his aristocratic family against the French peasantry. Even though he is Lucie's husband and is sympathetic to the revolutionary ideals, his imprisonment is justified as an act of atonement for his family's oppression of the working classes. In contrast to the revolutionary exaction of revenge during the Reign of Terror, Sydney Carton expresses his unrequited love for Lucie by sacrificing his life for Darnay's, in the hope of personal redemption for his sins. Dickens's work is founded on his characters' belief in personal responsibility for class oppression as well as in personal atonement through sacrifice. It also signals the failure of ideals of freedom, equality, and fraternity, which when taken to the extreme produce a regime of sacrificial slaughter and paranoia. Dickens's response to the terror is framed within a humanistic philosophy based on the assumption about the capacity of individual and collective agency to effect revolutionary or structural change, since notions of human emancipation and evolutionary progress were fundamental principles of humanist constructions (Klages 167- 68).

Sealy's fiction, however, treats the love story differently from Dickens's. Sealy is undertaking a postmodern interrogation of the underpinning formations of theoretical authoritarian structures, reinforcing a "revolution" in conceptual thinking that also queries the capacity for personal agency within the available abstract frameworks. Sealy targets a series of authoritarian intellectual centres and the hierarchies they give rise to. These range from the authority of the signifier or the

author in order to support transparency of representation to the dominance of patriarchal discourses and subject positions as well as racial and cultural hierarchies in postcolonial contexts. Thus Sealy's love story acts as a narrative device that distills the postmodern disbelief in the metanarratives that sustain class, gender, colonial or racial oppression. It would appear that in *The Brainfever Bird*, Sealy is augmenting his previous fictional interrogations of totalizing structures. In *Hero*, we encountered a displacement of Western cultural imperialism and the grand narrative of postcolonial independence in order to produce an Indian postcolonial aesthetic centred on Bollywood cinema and Delhi politics. *The Everest Hotel*, with its interplay between fixed centres and extendable margins, produced a hybridized aesthetic in which extremes and opposites could be negotiated or reconciled. This chapter pursues the contention that in *The Brainfever Bird*, Sealy through a postmodern intellectual revolution against authoritarian structures, whose manifest forms are narrative realism, class hierarchy, racial, colonial and gender power, produces an aesthetic that compels us to acknowledge the illusoriness and unsustainability of the notion of postcolonial India as a unitary entity.

The Brainfever Bird's love story features three protagonists who all embody the traces upon them of various oppressive power structures derived from gender, class, and racial difference as well as from colonial authority. Sealy indicates, however, that the identity of the subject consists of a multifaceted complexity such that a character can represent both the oppressor and oppressed, across a range of inherited power formations. Maya is a puppeteer who creates illusions through her puppet plays; but as a character in the novel she is also a puppet whose

actions are manipulated by the Author/ Narrator. This use of the puppetry motif draws attention to Sealy's metafictional enquiry on the status of fiction in the context of the dissolution of distinctions between fact and fiction, reality and make-believe. Maya has a premonitory dream that a lover is coming into her life; the man of her dreams will be tall*:*

> *Show your face!* she wants to call but doesn't because she's weird enough already to
> the neighbours. A young woman living by herself, making puppets. A man could sing
> out, shout out loud and just be a crank. A woman would be a witch. (61)

Maya's reliance on dreams and on her mendicant puppet for advice and direction blur the demarcation between the internal world of a character's fantasies and a fictional external reality. Maya makes puppets from all sorts of scraps and keeps them in the puppets' room in her house, where they hang in three tiers on one of the walls. She has a favourite puppet, which she talks to, called Babaji,

> a near life-size mendicant she's done and redone, rearranging his rags of flesh,
> unbandaging his lean arms, painting his grotesque ribcage, hanging and rehanging his
> staff, his dreadlocks and his begging bowl, while he waits for eyes with the large
> patience of his kind. (67)

The position of the puppet Babaji, a work of art created by Maya, which also acts as her confidant, suggests a mutuality in roles or agency that supports the metafictional duplicity of a fictional subjectivity that both creates and is created by other texts.

   In one sense, Maya represents a feminist independence in a traditionally patriarchal context but she is also protected in this role by the privileged status of

her parents, and her place in a class hierarchy that she replicates in her relationship with the local Muslim barber Laiq. Born into the Jain religion, she had been educated at Risingholme, an elite western-style boarding school in the Himalayan foothills and speaks English (which is really her first language) and Hindi. Her father, whom she is close to, is Chief of the Delhi Police, while her mother, who owns the apartment block she lives in, desires a conventional life for Maya, and is continuously dismayed by the eccentricities of her self-reliant, strong-willed daughter.

Lev Repin, whom Maya dreams into her life, crosses international borders with the intention of selling Russian defense secrets about biological warfare to the Indian government. He was forced to leave his job in Moscow as a scientist because he posed a security risk. With the demise in his status and finances, he decides to try his luck as a spy. However, he has been set up by more powerful political forces, and on arrival in India, has his briefcase full of secrets stolen, though his suitcase of belongings remains in his possession. His dreams of reinstatement as a scientist are thwarted as he realizes he will not get an appointment with the Indian Ministry of Defense. Becoming resigned to failure, he instead pursues a love affair with Maya, who makes him feel alive for the first time in his life, but he possibly infects her with a virus that he has unwittingly carried from Russia. In Delhi, because he is a stranger and a potential spy, he becomes a target for a racial paranoia that justifies injuring him with acid. In a cover-up, he is summarily returned to St. Petersburg.

Morgan Fitch is the third person in the love triangle. He is a handsome reader of the news on television, with a face recognized by many people. He often arrives at Maya's late at night and stays over, sleeping on a separate mattress in the drawing room. He is in love with Maya, but their relationship is not sexually intimate. While English is his first language, he also speaks Hindi and is fascinated by an idealized Russia formulated through his reading of Russian poetry. Morgan is an Anglo-Indian whose family has lived in India for a long time, yet still retains an Anglo-Indian identity. When Lev asks him whether "Morgan" is an Indian name, Morgan replies:

> 'It is now. But it's taken three hundred years. My ancestor came sailing from England? Can you blame him? Cold wet miserable little country.' (156)

Morgan's ancestral heritage results from the British possession of India during which time both British and Indian races transgressed cultural norms of miscegenation. However, in a present-day context, he is part of the racial and cultural diversity that makes up contemporary India. At the end of the narrative, he is killed on a visit to Russia as a result of racial paranoia, but his lineage lives on through the child that he and Maya have produced.

Locating the novel's love story within multiple structural frameworks such as authorial dethronement, feminism, postcolonialism, globalization, and postmodernism, Sealy invites, through a metafictional duplicity, a scrutiny of the complicity of these liberating movements in the perpetuation of binaries and metanarratives. It seems important to insist that at the very heart of *The Brainfever Bird* is the actualization of a puppetry metaphor that crosses different dimensions

of representation in which the artist's or the author's centrality as a master-puppeteer controlling the narrative is as fictional as the characters sense of being in charge of their own destiny. The author is as much a puppet of metanarratives as a puppeteer who works with puppets or characters and with inherited texts, thus rendering incredible or tentative notions of authorial agency. Further, as the characters cross nominally fixed borders, there is a converse concern with keeping boundaries secure, articulated through the containment of infection, through the eruption of race paranoia and class envy, and through the regulation of desire. However, what also occurs is a breakdown and diffusion of authoritarian centres, which signal a reiterative interplay of the same terms — power, resistance, compromise, and sacrifice — but in different contexts and with different characters. Does this produce a postcolonial aesthetic? At this point in Sealy's fiction, it would perhaps be unwise to privilege the term "postcolonial" since *The Brainfever Bird's* own postmodern displacements intersect with multiple notional frameworks.

Frameworks

In *The Brainfever Bird*, Sealy's use of postmodern intertextual and metafictional devices enables an interrogation of multiple empires, displacing the idea of a singular colonizing empire – for there are a number of hegemonies asserting their rights over conceptual as well as geographical locations. If we are to examine how the postcolonial works in the novel, we must include these other empires in our spectrum, for colonial oppression cannot be separated from issues of class, race, and gender oppression; they all operate coterminously. Thus, the term

"postcolonial" cannot be read solely as an investigation of colonial power and the redressing of imbalances in power with the former empire.

In *Postcolonial Contraventions,* Laura Chrisman examines the term "imperialism" from the perspective of three major theorists, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak, and Frederic Jameson, each of whose definitions differ from the other two. She writes that Said emphasizes geo-political domination as fundamental to imperialism: "His predominant, Williamesque concern is with metropolitan 'structures of feeling' and how geographical expansionism influences them" (52). On the other hand, Chrisman argues that "the anti-foundationalist Spivak does not offer an explicit definition of imperialism, but addresses instead its manifestation as 'a territorial and subject-constituting project' […]. For Spivak, imperialism though ideologically hegemonic is not genderless" (52). She draws attention to patriarchal constructions of imperial power, which privilege male subjectivity over female across a range of colonizing structures. The third theorist, Jameson, "defines imperialism as the departure from the 'classical stage of national or market capitalism' into an international system of production and consumption" (52), referring to market forces of globalization. The significant point for the ensuing discussion is that imperialism can exert power in many forms, marginalizing in the process whatever does not concur with the dominant order.

The identification of totalizing centres of power therefore necessitates an investigation into what lies beneath these deep seated structures. A postmodern/ poststructuralist scrutiny of power formations emphasizes an underpinning rejection of the fixed referentiality of language, a recognition of a linguistic split between the sign and its referent, or "the understanding that language does not

actually name an objective reality […]" (Quayson136). Whereas humanism posits a rational, stable, universal self that produces meaning and knowledge, poststructuralism argues that we are constructed through language and there are no absolute certainties or truths that exist outside of linguistic structures. Poststructuralism emphasizes the unstable referentiality of language, which is made up of signs that do not have a fixed correspondence to a particular referent but derive their meaning through the play of difference. As Terry Eagleton discusses in *Literary Theory*, "Meaning is the spin-off of a potentially endless play of signifiers rather than a concept tied firmly to the tail of a particular signifier" (110). This penetrates the very core of traditional theories of meaning. "For such theories, it was the function of signs to reflect inward experiences in the real world, to 'make present' one's thoughts and feelings or to describe how reality was" (Eagleton 112). Contiguous with poststructuralist notions are the postmodernist denunciations of grand theories and authoritarian positions that maintain the dominant social order. As Klages explains, metanarratives or grand theories are stories told to explain the belief systems a society or culture holds, which function to preserve order and stability (169). Humanism is one such metanarrative; however, there are others including colonialism, patriarchy, classicism, and narrative realism.

This raises the question of how these postmodern repudiations are exemplified in *The Brainfever Bird*. There is foremost the intertextual connection with Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*, which represents a Western-centric dialogue on humanistic and Marxist ideals of class agency and revolution. Co-existing with the reference to Dickens's novel are local, Indian textual references, which, as

previously encountered in the novel *Hero*, represent a postcolonial centre that assists in dismantling a Western cultural imperialism. However, since *The Brainfever Bird* signifies a negotiation of European and Indian textual junctures, perhaps what is produced by Sealy is a postcolonial literary hybridity that provides an Indian variant to a postmodern intertextuality. In Sealy's tale the issue of subject formation and expression of agency is more complex than in Dickens's since there is an underlying supposition that the puppet story, or the human story, is simply this: that we are all linguistically, socially and culturally constructed and in this sense we can never be free. There is the implication that we can work within structures or empires, such as those constructed around realism, race, class, or gender, to become aware of and to modify the conditions of power relations, but we can never escape them totally. Therefore agency, a sense of enabling action, is in effect mostly nominal.

Postmodern Representations: Puppets, Simulacra and Intertextuality

The novel's prevailing structuring device that progresses the enquiry into a number of sovereign formations, including that of personal subjectivity and agency, is the puppetry motif. Sealy reminds us through his exploration of the puppetry metaphor, which suffuses the novel, that *The Brainfever Bird* is a story, that the Author/ Narrator works within existing linguistic and cultural conventions that invent and are invented by other texts as well as by the readers' own creative processes. This is a metafictional tactic, which, as Patricia Waugh in her work *Metafiction* argues, is "constructed on the principle of a fundamental and sustained opposition: the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of

that illusion" (6). *The Brainfever Bird's* context is framed within a postcolonial India and post-perestroika Russia that creates an illusion of a referentiality to an external reality. However, what emerges from the fiction of reality is the idea that there are only simulacra, reproductions or copies, including a recycling of prior texts that, in the context of postmodern duplicity, simulate an imitation of a non-existent external world even while denying any mimetic representation. In this way, the oppositional tension between representations of reality and non-reality disintegrates since they are both predicated on illusory constructions.

In *The Brainfever Bird*, there are indications of Sealy's use of metafiction through a textual link between the fictional characters and Maya's puppets, her handiwork, which become invested with a realism, in which the puppets are given the same level of reality and identity as characters like herself. This gives fiction and the fiction-within-the-fiction the same status, which exposes the artifice of fiction-making. This duplicitous strategy is exemplified in the following incident. Mrs Jain, the curious downstairs neighbour, visits Maya on the pretext of giving her food, while really wanting to know how Maya lives and who is with her. Mrs Jain pushes her way into the puppets' room, even though Maya tries to prevent her:

> 'My workroom,' Maya says, barring the way. It's enough that the puppets have to contend with Lev. Sometimes she pictures the consternation among the puppets when she herself enters the room without sufficient warning. (270)

The puppets, textual symbolic objects, are given human emotions by Maya, who as a fictional character is also humanized in the narrative process. As Mrs Jain walks along the row of puppets,

[t]he puppet faces watch her come with fractional turns of the head. Their eyes track her with the frowning attention of an honour guard. Maya who has followed her through the flat hypnotized by her vulgarity notices the woman has fallen silent. Mask after mask refines her fear. Each time she crossed the divide from the dark side of a face she pauses and absorbs its gravity. At the sheeted papier mache group her eyes travel down the smallest puppet. Modelled in the orange light she sees a pair of calves so real they leave her faint with desire. The legs are on the wrong way: which way would the manhood point? She trembles and moves on, her arms rigid against her sides, then returns along the other wall. Past mounds of fabric scraps any of which might conceal a body. Clear of the room she breathes again, but hasn't recovered her voice. She rocks her head sideways at Maya and presses her palms together and flees. (271 - 72)

The legs pointing the wrong way actually belong to Lev who is hiding amongst the puppets, signifying a gap in the representation of what is fabricated, which allows for the intervention of a different view to that of the perceiver. Maya laughs at Mrs Jain thinking that Lev was a churail, a witch or ghost whose feet are turned backwards. However, it is Maya whom Mrs Jain thinks is a witch. The reader's attention is drawn to the interplay occasioned by the verisimilitude between puppets and characters, as Mrs Jain is excited by the appearance of calves that she thinks belong to a puppet but are the legs of one of the novel's characters. Mrs Jain's emotions and responses are aroused by an inanimate object, signalling the willing suspension of disbelief or a certain interpretation of what she has seen, which mirrors the reader's own emotional and intellectual involvement in narrative processes.

Roland Barthes reinforces the role of the reader in the production of multiple fictional realities when he states:

> Thus is revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not as hitherto said, the author. (150)

Barthes is promoting this idea in the context of a dislocation of authorial power in which he annihilates the notion of the author as the commanding creator or originator existing apart from the text. He argues that every text is continually written in the moment of enunciation, and hence there is no stable text or author who precedes it. He promotes instead the role of the scriptor who gains identity in the moment of performance, but who is also working within inherited linguistic and cultural conventions and frameworks:

> For him [the scriptor], […], the hand, cut off from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin – or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins. (149)

Hence a space is created in which many different writings and meanings are brought together, since "[t]he text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centres and culture" (Barthes 149). *The Brainfever Bird* opens with the use of the first person through the Narrator, who as a "personalized figure" (Waugh, "Metafiction" 133) states:

> Refusing puppetude, I preferred to stay away. Accustomed to the stage I became a
> puppet master instead, master of puppetry, things puppetish, kathputli. (5)

The Narrator has ostensibly usurped an authorial omniscience but the initial use of first person 'I' shifts to third person throughout the rest of the narrative, displacing the Narrator as the subject of the discourse. Early in the text, the Narrator poses the question:

> What if – impossible!; someone in your family […]? And then your eyes went quite
> round with terror as the possibility sank in. *What if you yourself were a puppet?* (6)

This points to a linguistic and structural determinism—the idea that we are all constructed by language, which breaks down the metafictional opposition between the construction and deconstruction of fictional realities and the everyday world, since there is no distinction between them.

Jean Baudrillard pursues this line of thought through his discussions on reality and simulacra. He argues that, in the contemporary world, the sign or image does not correlate with any reality in the original sense, and therefore there are only reproductions or copies of reality. He identifies four stages of reproduction or simulation:

> It is the reflection of a basic reality; it masks and perverts a basic reality; it masks the
> absence of a basic reality; it bears no relation to any reality whatever; it is its own pure
> simulacrum. (405)

According to Baudrillard, the copies or simulacra are perceived as representing the truth of reality, rather than being expositions of the fiction of reality. He states: "It is no longer a question of a false representation (ideology), but of concealing the fact

that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle" (406). In *The Brainfever Bird*, through the puppetry metaphor, Sealy is reiterating the notion of the subject as a simulacrum of images and signs, who has no fixed essence, no firm grounding in reality, being a simulation of what is real. But unlike Baudrillard's notion of simulacra as "saving the reality principle," Sealy calls this principle into question by the evident foregrounding of the puppet metaphor, and the accompanying compromise of the borders between fiction and fiction-within-fiction.

Morgan represents the notion of the subject as simulacrum. He is a face and a voice, a well known TV news anchorman who has fame and wealth but is searching for a sense of identity and peace. "But, look (behind the screen if you like; it's just a play): the ribbon of text that runs before his eyes when he's alone is cut up into discontinuous lines, the lines of his poets" (152). Referring to Morgan's identity as a game of words, language constructs, full of broken text, supports the ongoing metafictional enquiry of the novel. As a newsreader, Morgan is a vehicle of discourse, and when CV (a big time arms dealer who agrees to help Lev leave India) jokes with him, "You told three lies this morning," Morgan replies, "Just three! [...]. I must have a word with my scriptwriter" (263). Morgan is acutely aware that he is a pawn in a much larger game. This exchange occurs while CV is having a haircut, but since he does not have any hair to cut — he is bald — the haircut is pure simulation. CV sits in front of a large painting of the lake about which he tells Morgan:

'He [Art Master] sat right there at the back door and did the lake. For three days we
had to go around through the dining hall. I said, "Why the lake? I can see it any time I
want just by turning my head." He said, "Chowdhury Sahib, the real lake will now be

indoors." I said, "But I can carry the lake in my head." He says, "Now you can put it down. Or move it around, or even sell it." I said, "But it doesn't *look* like a lake," and he said, "Thank you very much." Finished?'(263)

A reproduction of the lake becomes the "real" lake, even though it does not look like the actual lake outside, reinforcing Baudrillard's notion of the "fiction of the real" (406), and indicating that reality and fiction are both linguistic constructions, which are unable to be located in any stable referent or object.

Baudrillard's interrogation of the real in the context of a poststructuralist denial of a fixed linguistic referentiality does have implications for the underlying tenets of "postcolonialism," which posits the reality of colonial oppression/ imperialism and its redress through political action. Sealy does not deny or elevate the reality of colonial imperialism; it is more exactly that his postmodern tactics draw our attention to coterminous oppressive hegemonies such as class, race, and gender, while simultaneously, through a literary self-consciousness, reminding us that we are reading a thriller, thereby displacing the privileging of narrative realism. Thus, the circularity of a number of power formations becomes increasingly inescapable. There is, however, some relief from binary polarization as Sealy mediates between the "real" of political power and the postmodern belief in simulacra through the recycling of intertexts from Western and Indian knowledge traditions, producing a new textual synthesis that may symptomize a variant postcolonial literary hybridity. Baudrillard, in noting that "there is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality" (405), indicates that the mimetic quality of representation through mass production of copies has been superseded by propagating myths that there are original and authentic texts. Sealy's use of textual intersections in

The Brainfever Bird, illustrates how building upon existing ideas and texts can produce something different, while acknowledging what has preceded. Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* is the dominant intertext that Sealy explores in relation to themes of love, sacrifice, class paranoia, and social justice. However, he intersperses this with Indian intertexts that explore the dimension of patriarchal oppression in Indian history and mythology and provide a counter-text to typically preconceived Western-type postcolonial discourses.

Through the insertion of Razia's narrative into Maya's puppet play, Sealy may be historicizing the quest for female agency, underscoring that narratives of structural female oppression and of strong women leaders are not a postcolonial feminist import. They have their own textual precedents that pertain to a specifically Indian context, which are not usually acknowledged in Western-dominated narratives about the Orient. Razia was the first Muslim woman ruler in Muslim history, appointed by her father, as heir to the Sultanate of Delhi. The reference to Razia in Sealy's novel recognizes the importance of gender in discourses on hierarchical power structures, a factor which is not always considered within imperialistic dialectics.

> '[…] At the other end of Delhi there's a thousand-year-old tower. Built by a slave king.'
> '[…]'. 'His daughter is buried here'. She points towards the old city sprawl whose rooftops begin at Delhi Gate. […]. 'She was a queen. She was the ruler of Delhi after her father. She was a capable ruler.' (101)

Razia represents a strong historical female who was enmeshed in a system of such powerful and insidious gender discrimination that she was not able to effect

long-lasting change. Maya is also a strong female character, and although she expresses female artistic agency through her creation of the puppets and their scripts, there are larger political, cultural, and religious systems and structures, operating which govern her and Lev's lives.

In Dickens's tale, the themes of love, class, and sacrifice cross over into the personal and political contexts through Charles Darnay whose impending execution as a political sacrifice at a personal level is pre-empted by the generosity of Sydney Carton's own personal ethic of sacrifice and redemption. In contrast to Dickens's story, Sealy introduces the Indian intertext about Anarkali, a significant heroine in Indian mythology, into the novel. Anarkali was a dancer who had an illicit relationship with the Mughal emperor Akbar's son, Jahangir. Akbar was so enraged by their love that he ordered Anarkali to be buried alive between two walls. Anarkali's fate is that of a woman who is murdered because of forbidden love between a slave and a prince. She is a sacrificial victim through whom the political triumphs over the personal since she transgresses hierarchical gender and class borders of traditional Indian society. This particular narrative of condemned love is supposedly legend and not based on actual historical events. However, in the Indian and Pakistani psyche, Anarkali is a much-loved character and features in many movies, representing the power of romantic desire and personal sacrifice in a context in which women do not have much access to structural power. The tale of Anarkali is reproduced by Maya in a puppet play, performed by the puppeteers Baldev and Sukhdev:

How they come to life as their fingers touch the strings! Each puppet is lifted out and

unraveled till it hangs true. Each is tested – left arm, sword arm, bend sideways, bow,

lean back, charge! – and laid down with the strings extended. (310)

Not only do the puppets come alive, so do the puppeteers, conflating multiple levels of fiction, which may be Sealy's commentary on the capacity for art to produce meaning at an intensity that belies its lack of external referentiality. He may also be alluding to the power of myths and legends within an Indian cultural system to reinforce traditional class hierarchies, while playing to romantic fantasies of freedom from such institutional restrictions. Whereas Dickens's historical tale reinforces male subjectivity and masculine exchanges enacted through the doubling and substitution between Carton and Darnay, the ancient tales about Razia and Anarkali, performed as plays within a self-conscious work of fiction, dislodges the authority of the author and of a Westernized "postcolonial" signification that excludes the complexities of gender.

The breakdown of authorial originality and controlling empires or metanarratives, including conventional "postcolonialism," opens a space for a heterogeneity of "petit recits" (Lyotard 60), multiple mutating mini narratives that become positioned within localized cultural beliefs and practices. This capacity for localized meaning is humorously demonstrable in *The Brainfever Bird*, through the missed meanings between the signifiers "signs" and "science" and the misnomer of "the brainfever bird" itself, which may suggest the indeterminacy of signifiers and their precarious meanings; these contribute to disrupting notions of a centralized control over language.

In Sealy's play with the words "science" and "signs" in a conversation between Lev and Laiq, he manages to undermine the sense of linguistic cohesion:

> 'Massage is…' Laiq recalls when they have fallen into step, continuing a discussion begun centuries ago, 'science.' Lev hears *signs*, then works it out. Science. He must listen with special care to this other English. (84)

Signs and what they represent cannot be pinned down so that meaning is in a sense always in process, unable to be determinately located – the signifiers, "signs" and "science," become interchangeable, depending upon the enunciation of the speaker and the reception of the listener. In another instance of linguisitic instability, Sealy tells us that the brainfever bird "from ancient times [is] the bird of love" (70). However, the term "brainfever bird" is itself a misnomer; the bird in the narrative is a brown partridge that belongs to Laiq, the barber, who calls it a "teetar," its Indian name. Upon hearing its call, Maya mistakenly calls it a "brainfever bird," which Morgan points out as incorrect:

> But they've come to call it what it isn't. So Morgan the birdwatcher, who has a pair of Russian field glasses at home, can no longer look at the cage downstairs and think: *partridge*. It's the brainfever bird now.

This further illustrates the changing fracture between the sign "brainfever bird" and its referent or what it represents, since there is a critical instability in a structure that depends on common assent for meaning.

Sealy's negotiation between Western intertexts and Indian ones in *The Brainfever Bird* expresses a progression from a postmodern intertextuality that privileges Western cultural knowledge systems towards producing a postcolonial

literary hybridity that provides an Indian variant that acknowledges the complexity of a number of power formations. The novel's all-pervasive puppetry metaphor that unmasks the illusory boundary between fiction and a presumed reality also breaks down distinctions between puppeteer and puppets since the author/narrator and characters shift between both roles. Thus, the dubious referent and unpredictability of meaning in language point to an increasing uncertainty and the lack of any uncontested authority within language.

Postcolonial Borders and Border-Crossing: Infection, Paranoia, Class Envy, and Desire

As these conceptual authorities are unraveled, the problem with how borders are violated and defended is accentuated since there are many ways in which borders are transgressed, and power is exerted over another. The theme of border crossing or contact between two underpins the novel and focuses on the crossing of racial, cultural, and national boundaries as well as the crossing of bodily lines through disease and infection, and through love-making. Colonization is one such offensive, invading borders at many levels. In the postcolonial setting, however, the concern is with how to keep one's boundaries secure, in order to prevent them from being overridden by those marked as alien. This may produce xenophobia or paranoid responses.

The risk of infection by a virus or by disease has escalated in a globalized context, in which people and international borders endlessly intersect. Infection not only crosses geo-spatial borders, but is also without respect for the borders of race, class, and gender. In *The Brainfever Bird*, Sealy explores the theme of infection through the character Lev who not only infects Maya with a virus that he

contracted in Russia but also flies to India with the intention of selling biological warfare secrets to the Indian government. Lev was involved in the production of Kurile-D, part of the Russian biological weapons programme based on "germ warfare [which] is the opposite of firebombing. It works from the inside out, in silence. It takes time" (30). Meschersky, Lev's colleague, pricks his finger accidentally and becomes infected with the virus, dying a slow and terrifying death. Biological warfare is less visible but totally invasive, and fortunately Lev's plan to sell such secrets fails. Little does he realize until later that he was set up, probably by Indian and Russian powers, and used as a pawn in an international game of espionage.

There is, however, another weapon in the guise of a plague that was released into Old Delhi probably with Indian governmental sanction, which killed many people and created mass mayhem. Rumours abound that Lev is responsible for the plague:

> 'The malishwallah was here.' At the word malishwallah the boy bristles. 'He was telling bad things. About you.' Lev looks down, when he should look up. 'What did he say?' 'He say you are Plague Master, you bring plague.' Laiq looks for the word in his far-off student curriculum. 'Bacterias.' 'It's not true.' 'He say government make him follow you.' 'Maybe.' 'Why?' Lev lifts his hands in the local way. 'I don't know, Laiq.' 'It is better you go. Many people die, Lev. This boy's brother.' (290)

In retaliation for his supposed part in spreading the plague, Lev has acid thrown at his face. Morgan rushes him to hospital, but when he returns with Maya to visit, Lev has disappeared, taken away by an official authority. Maya is bewildered and blames Laiq. However, as the Narrator comments: "[B]ut fear of the stranger is

what it comes down to. Love of one's own gods" (321). Alternatively, it can be construed as keeping one's own borders secure. This is what may occur when two races, two cultures, come into contact: it can inspire a form of paranoia based on fear of what is different and incomprehensible.

A different outcome from a paranoid response to the intersection of race and culture is expressed through the notion of hybridity, which represents a specific form of colonial and postcolonial border crossing. As hybridized subjects, Anglo-Indians (people of European and Indian descent) occupied an indeterminate position between the British/ Europeans and Indians in colonial British India. They became further dislocated after Indian independence. Morgan represents the historically forbidden conjunction of two different races and cultures that arguably serves to subvert Anglo and Indian cultures by their assimilation through hybridization. According to Homi Bhabha,

> Hybridity represents that ambivalent 'turn' of the discriminated subject into the terrifying, exhorbitant object of paranoid classification – a disturbing questioning of the images and presences of authority. (113)

Bhabha's comment on the paranoid response to hybridity is illustrated by the murder of Morgan in St Petersburg, Russia, by a group of Aryan extremists, including Lev's son, Alex, in what would be considered a racial murder, since he is taken to be a Roma or gypsy because he looks of mixed race. The paranoia responds to a racial and cultural hybridity that creates non-classifiable identities and subject positions, which in postcolonial India are increasingly multiplying across racial, cultural, and class boundaries.

As racial and cultural borders hybridize, there is a counter-invigilation of power hierarchies such as those of class, the levelling of which in many post-independent nations remains a postcolonial myth. In *The Brainfever Bird*, Maya and Morgan occupy privileged positions; Maya was born into wealth and upper-class status and her education serves to reinforce these. Morgan comes from a less privileged Anglo-Indian background, but his education, and English as his first language, assist him to gain well-paid employment with a high public profile. Laiq, the local barber and healer who is Muslim, comes from an even less privileged social level, and while he has to accept this, it is not without resentment:

> Laiq sees her [Maya] coming in the distance and knows that stride at once. The brazenness of it, the raffish way the arms swings up and out, the tilt of the head. Is there any woman in this entire locality who would dream of walking that way? Hair hanging loose and blowing about, unoiled. It doesn't take a lifetime in hairdressing to know that at the great divide between the classes there stands a bottle of hair oil. (211)

Indian middle classes and the upper-class elite have access to Western fashions and Western ideas, which continue to colonize local, traditional Indian customs. If Maya had come from the poorer castes, she would be ostracized and perhaps killed for exhibiting the behaviours Laiq describes:

> The strange part is that for all his loyalties Laiq is enamoured of the other side. A lack of oil, yes, but also there's something *there*. All his life Laiq has tried to put his finger on this something. Sometimes he will be standing besides the species in the street and he'll watch narrowly – he'll actually come up close – to see what makes it different. A cop tells the next man to move on but says nothing to this one with the something. This exempt one, extraterritorial, unaccountable, unanswerable. The one with class. He

may look at Laiq and say nothing, but his glance will say *us*. Not *them*. And, just once,

Laiq would be happy to pass for one of them. (211-12)

As Laiq sees it, the higher socio-economic classes are invested with a quality that is both intangible and apparent, which exempts them from the usual mechanisms of the law, and he is not a little envious of their immunity.

Racial, cultural, class and gender borders are also contained through the institution of marriage, which ostensibly regulates desire by reinforcing traditional patriarchal roles and customs. Marriage becomes another form of imperialism in which there may be a loss of female subjectivity; it is a colonizing structure, which, often affords a degree of respectability, especially for women, but with this there are also constraints. Lev muses about Maya whose "free-spirit" he admires:

Married, she'll become ordinary, tamed. This gypsy rooted only in herself […].Her wild

dancing, her continuous present, even her love for him – she loves only what she has

made – are part of this sufficiency. Would she throw it away in marriage?

After Lev is removed back to Russia, Maya and Morgan decide to live together, but this is short-lived and their relationship reaches its end through Morgan's murder in Russia. When Maya writes to Lev, she tells him about her and Morgan's daughter, Masha, and of her life without him:

Maybe one is better alone. Marriage is an imperium, Morgan always said. He was

buried in the cemetery by the Ridge. Did he ever take you birdwatching on the Ridge?

He dragged me there once and I complained all the time. *Imperialist! Let the birds get*

on with their lives. (355)

Sealy is situating marriage within another sort of imperialist context that further challenges traditional notions of authoritarian centres.

It would appear that imperialist discourses are inescapable since they pervade every facet of our lives. They mutate accordingly across various boundaries in ways that often appear natural or normal rather than the cultural constructions that they are, designed to exert a power that feeds back on itself in order to protect the status quo. As crossing international borders and navigating across culture, race, class, and gender increase, there is the concomitant attempt to police national borders against outside forces. One of the resulting implications of such territorial fortification is that dreams of postcolonial justice become increasingly hijacked by a nationalist imperialism that disregards its own oppressive systems.

Displacing the Narrative of Liberation

Most postcolonial revolutions featured similar dreams: freedom or independence from imperialist domination, social justice, eradication of poverty. However, it is arguable that in most cases the new nation states reproduced a similar centralization of authority, a new kind of imperial centre, but one in which control is imposed from both inside and outside. In India, Delhi is the centre of political power and control, but the forces of globalization are international and create a presence that cannot be dismissed.

The French Revolution challenged the French monarchy's divine right to rule and put forward notional processes of governance by the working classes predicated on universal humanist principles of rational, objective behaviour. The

intertextual parallel of *The Brainfever Bird* with Dickens's novel serves to interrogate the underlying postcolonial promises that freedom and equality will result from the destruction of Western imperial power structures. In both revolutions, however, the narrative of liberation has failed because it has only served to reverse binaries rather than question the entrenched representations of power evident in patrolling the borders of various forms of signification such as race, class, gender, and colonial oppression. The investigation of these terms in a postcolonial context reveal they cannot be fixed into a specific location for they cross borders and intermingle with other terms, which produce an ambiguity, a plurality, in how they are performed at the material level.

There is some reprieve, notionally, if not materially, in Sealy's exploitation of postmodernism's duplicitous attributes as evident in the simultaneous identification of author as puppet and puppeteer, which breaks down the consuming tendency towards polarized binaries. Sealy's use of Western and Indian intertextual references within the novel's framework undermines notions of authorial originality and produces an Indian literary hybridity that displaces the Western intertextual command, while the tactic of multiple fictions within a fiction assist the eradication of distinctions between what is fact and what is fiction, reinforcing the inaccessibility of absolute truth or absolute knowledge. The unsettling of oppressive authoritarian structures based on race, gender, class, and colonial hierarchies demonstrate that the capture of India in all its complexity within a totalizing concept such as "postcolonial" is an illusionary construction perpetuating the very imperialistic discourse it is seeking to oppose.

Chapter 4: *Red* Between the Lines

Red is Allan Sealy's latest novel, written in 2006, in which he positions his postmodern dialectic in the cosmopolitan contexts of Russia and India. This work, Sealy's foremost postmodern interrogation, reiterates, as in his other novels, a concern with multiple centres of authority or power formations, rather than simply with British or European imperialism. His use of postmodernism's self-undermining and duplicitous inflections allow him to dismantle and reinvent the traditional framing of theoretical terms, which may carry particular implications for "postcolonialism."

The novel opens in St. Petersburg, Russia, in the famous Hermitage Museum, with Zach watching the woman, known as Red, who is looking at Henri Matisse's painting "The Red Room." Zach (Zaccheus, not Zachariah) has been invited to St. Petersburg as part of the city's 300-year anniversary celebrations. One of his compositions will be performed at a musical event, about which he had discovered through the internet. At the Museum, Zach's gaze shifts absent-mindedly from Matisse's painting to the triangle between Red's top and her trousers as she sits totally absorbed in the work of art. He returns next day to find a woman who is perhaps the same one as of the day before, but who actually turns out to be Red's mother, Aline (not Aileen), for whom Matisse is the Master. In St Petersburg, Aline and Zach become lovers, and once Zach has returned to India, they continue their contact through email. After some months of separation Aline arrives in Zach's hometown, Dariya Dun, India, where she rents a house next door to his. Aline is a wealthy American who divides her time between St. Petersburg

and New York, while Zach is an Anglo-Indian who had lived in the States for a few years, and has returned to settle in Dariya Dun, where he lives with his mother.

This chapter will complete the discussion on the outcome of the intersection of postmodern aesthetics with postcolonial concerns in those of Sealy's novels that have come after *The Trotter-nama.* Sealy pushes the postmodern boundaries even further in *Red*, structuring the novel according to a child's Abecedary or alphabet book, from A-Z, while at the same time, not strictly adhering to traditional lexical rules, since the keywords under each letter do not necessarily follow an alphabetical order. He also explores the effect of cyberspace and global communication networks on destabilizing traditional binary power systems within a contemporary international context that displaces a postcolonial focus on British colonization. In addition, *Red* compels a re-examination of the term "postcolonial" leading to an acknowledgement that perhaps the pre-colonial, colonial, postcolonial, and global all co-exist, which further displaces hegemonic polemics that promise the righting of colonial wrongs in the postcolonial context.

In each novel under discussion in this thesis, the characteristics of Sealy's postmodern aesthetics differ, while his overarching concern is the mutating and multi-layered facets of power that cannot be contained within a conventional postcolonial framework structured through imperial/ colonial relations. In *Hero*, Sealy's metafictional practices unravel a parodic narrative that satirizes repressive power whether acted out on screen in Indian cinema or in political fiction. *The Everest Hotel* is structured according to seasonal temporality rather than human motivation and desire, and problematizes notions of a fixed and stable centre through the destabilization of a dominant narrative point of view, and through the

fluctuating location of margins and their relative centres. *The Brainfever Bird's* implicit intertextual connection with Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* extends the questioning of the foundations of authoritarianism beyond class structures, as manifested by the French Revolution, to include also the interrogation of the investment in authority relayed through narrative realism, through beliefs in racial superiority, as well as through gender and colonial oppression.

It is difficult to insist on a definitive purpose or plot to *Red*, since contained within the book's two covers is a series of mini-narratives that do not complete an overall coherent story. This may be an exemplification of Jean-Francois Lyotard's notion that there are many petit récits rather than a few grand narratives that explicate human culture. Sealy's postmodern aesthetics contribute to the dismantling of traditional power structures through foregrounding the underlying systems that sustain the linguistic order within the form of the novel, which is reduced to a linear teleology and trajectory. *Red's* structure, according to "The Abecedary A-Z" like a child's alphabet book, brings to the surface the fixed and closed system that underlies the English language. A predetermined structure that stretches from the lexical to the syntactical characterizes language. In *Red*, the syntax as applied to the order of fictional plot, which produces the novel's action, has character A (Aline) travelling in search of Z (Zaccheus), intercepted by N, the Narrator and his own concerns. One wonders whether Sealy considered the plot first and fitted it around the Abecedary, or whether he subordinated it to the A-Z, or perhaps he sought a fusion of lexical and narrative approaches.

In keeping with Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of structural linguistics, in which the relationship of words to meaning, or the sign to the referent is arbitrary (Eagleton 84), Sealy exploits the arbitrary character of keywords and what they mean, as well as their alphabetical sequence. As Terry Eagleton explains, "Each sign in the system has meaning only by virtue of its difference from the others," so that "cat has meaning not 'in itself', but because it is not 'cap' or 'cad' or 'bat'" (84). For each letter, Sealy assigns a number of keywords, linking them through cross-references as in a library catalogue. Each keyword is defined or augmented and its meaning developed into a narrative segment, which turns the basic lexical structure into a type of a novel. The closed lexical structure assumes an arbitrary character through the meanings attributed to the words. Under "D is for Donut," for example, Sealy includes the lexical categories "Dariya Dun," "Dom," and "Donut" (in this sequence) and their meanings, but he also gives brief one-line definitions of "Daughter," "Death," "Delhi," "Downloading," "Dullsville" and "Dun," cross-referencing "Death" with "Dullsville," and "Dullsville" with "Dariya Dun." Hence, Sealy is playing with the capriciousness of language in which there are multiplying signifiers (the letters that make a word or sound image), which refer to more signifiers, and so on in an endless play of signification much like the world wide web's manifold interconnections. This multiple referentiality of *Red* where words and meanings cannot be pinned down signals the novel's resistance to being captured solely within a predetermined framework, which then has implications for terms such as "postmodernism" or "postcolonialism."

The setting of this novel shifts across Russia, America, and India, keeping pace with the internet and its multifaceted global connections that spawn inexhaustible networks, such is the rhizomatic non-hierarchical nature of cyberspace in which there are no finite origins or endings. According to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, "the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states" (23). In *Red*, technology, and in particular the internet, facilitates relationships amongst the various characters, levelling cultural, class, and social boundaries at intermittent points as well as expanding access to information and artistic opportunities globally that previously were possessed for the most part by the privileged few. This brings to mind the following question: how is the concept "postcolonial" to be defined in relation to *Red*, since, as with the world-wide web, it has inflated to include multiple global connections that do not privilege India's relationship with its former imperial master, Great Britain. This novel is clearly positioned on the international stage; therefore, in order to frame it within postcolonial contexts, one possible approach to adopt is Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee's perspective:

> [T]he 'post' in postcolonial marks not an end of colonialism, but an end of a particular mode of colonialism which then shifts its gears and evolves to another stage (obviously triggering a concomitant shift in the global struggles against it). The globalized ruling classes of this postcolonialism, whose interests are often embodied in gigantic transnational corporations and the labyrinthine world of speculative financial transactions, are often called the new cosmopolitans. Their presence, however, has

long been registered, especially in the theories of neo-colonialism that emerged in the 1950s in the context of the end of formal European rule in Africa. (5-6)

Mukherjee calls "the new cosmopolitans" a "cartel composed of their own [that is the former colonies] and 'core' metropolitan European/north American elites" (5), thereby acknowledging the complicity of the nation states in the exploitation of their own people. He argues that:

> Contemporary India, then, is postcolonial in the sense that it is the site of intensified exploitation (and as ever, struggle against that exploitation) by a globalized ruling class. And despite the recent, mostly post-1991 use of the term 'globalized', we should remember that this has been the signal condition of India since its gaining of formal independence in 1947. Even, and especially those achievements hailed as triumphs of the independent nation, such as the 'green revolution' that led to massive increases in Indian crop yields in the 1960's and 1970's, usually turn out to be financed and engineered by the cartel drawn from the ruling classes of the Euro-north America and India for the protection of their interests. (6-7)

In keeping with theorists such as Dirlik, Mukherjee views the "'postcolonial' as being inextricable from the condition of global capital" (7), and examines how this positions nations in the context of the uneven historical and contemporary development perpetuated by the "Euro-north American core" (7).

An analysis of the specific material concerns of a postcolonial/ global India in *Red* reveals that Sealy is perhaps more engaged with exploring and dissolving hierarchies of power at a variety of interfaces, such as at cross-cultural and racial borders, where aesthetic innovation supplants mimetic representation. In addition, he draws into play the invasive/ pervasive/ creative internet and its effects on

everyday life as it mutates across international borders. Sealy also never lets us forget that India has been the site of historical injustices, exploitation of the poor and disadvantaged, and imbalances of power that predate European colonization. He interweaves the plight of the Dom tribal people and Hindu mythology, using the tale of Ekalavya, to illustrate ancient discrimination and grievances that are manifest aspects of contemporary Indian life.

In *Red*, the global, international aesthetic context is contrasted with the ancient Indian tradition of the Blackshorts, a group of men who belong to the Dom aboriginal people of India, and who ritualize the art of robbing the rich in order to feed their impoverished lives. Gilgitan, "born a Bansberia, the pole-vaulter subcaste among Doms, father a pole-vaulter, mother of the bear-tamer subcaste" (120), is currently employed as a tiler's assistant. His path initially intersects with Aline's while he assists the tiler fix up Aline's bathrooms. On one of the Blackshorts' excursions, Gilgitan transgresses their code of ethics by stealing a painting that catches his eye and he gives this to Aline for safekeeping.

Into this international amalgam, the Narrator (capital N) of *Red*, inserts his own specific story. He is a writer, an Anglo-Indian, father of Mandalay, separated from his wife Olive and a friend of Zach's. Olive, an Hispanic-American, lives in the United States with their daughter Mandalay, who comes to visit her father in Dariya Dun. N describes himself as "In the middle station of life, middle class, middling build. Middle-aged too, halfway out but also only halfway in. A foothills man, neither plainsman nor Montagnard" (191). It would appear that there is a degree of congruence between Sealy and the self-portrait of the Narrator just as there is an identification between him and an aspect of Zach, whom the Narrator tells us is N

turned sideways: "Me. N. Halfway between A and Z. Well closer by one letter to Z. (N, as friend Zaccheus reminds me, is simply Z laid on its side.)" (191). This may be a metafictional allusion to the lack of a unified point of view in *Red.* Despite the ostensible similarity between the Narrator and Zach, they see the world differently. Further, the Narrator is just another lexical item in the fictional sequence and does not assert any privileged ownership over the novel's point of view.

A recurrent issue that surfaces throughout *Red* concerns the duplicitous facets of metafictional representation, whose reproductions break down the idea of a coherent, stable, antecedent set of referents behind a piece of art or writing. This chapter, therefore, asserts that Sealy's experimental postmodern aesthetics, including the use of an Abecedary framework, problematizes mimetic representation, and access to any hegemonic view of "reality." In the process, it also advances the recuperation of the term "postcolonialism" from an obsolete binary power formulation to embrace the sprawling possibilities of the multi-alliance rhizomatic nature of cyberspace.

As Jeremy Hawthorn states in *Studying the Novel*,

> [T]he traditional novel with its linear narrative, single fictional world, story-line linked by cause and effect, and an overall meaning relating to a plot with a beginning, middle and end, is based upon assumptions that no longer match our experience of, or beliefs about, the world. (78)

We, the readers, expect a novel to tell a story. However, with *Red*, the cause and effect aspects of the plot do not exist, and we are ignorant of its underlying logic. The storyline is skeletal, the characters fragmented without a great deal of depth,

and there is not a great deal of emotional satisfaction for the reader. We often read a story for the way it presents a world that is similar to our own. However, in the contemporary world which is dominated by cyberspace and interconnectivity across linguistic, cultural, and racial boundaries, we are confronted by constantly changing, multiple levels of representation. Through an exploration of the limits of mimetic representation in art, Sealy draws our attention to the artifice of representational frameworks, which underscore the unreliability of the referent and homogeneous points of view.

Metafiction and Representational Frameworks

Sealy's postmodern metafictional experimentations in *Red* contemplate the limits of mimetic representation in both art and writing. Whereas mimesis presumed a direct link between language and objects, or the "word and world" (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 32), and modernism decided that art existed independently from the world or referent, postmodernism assumes that language constructs our world, our reality, rather than reflects it, and hence there is no world outside of language. As Linda Hutcheon argues in *The Politics of Postmodernism*:

> What postmodernism does is to denaturalize both realism's transparency and modernism's reflexive response, while retaining (in its typically complicitously critical way) the historically attested power of both. This is the ambivalent politics of postmodern representation. (32)

Hutcheon's reference to modernism's "reflexive response" (32) presumes that modernist art reflected back on itself to the extent that it excluded any critique of how the world we live in is constructed. She argues that, on the other hand,

postmodernism's complicit tactics concerning representation, simultaneously point out the lack of transparency between the referent and the object it purportedly stands for, while undermining the maintenance of a stable point of view of representation. Consequently, in *Red*, Sealy's postmodernist reflections on representation signal the collapse of hegemonic agreements about what constitutes "reality." This breakdown is executed in the novel through Sealy's exploration of the relationship between the modernist artist Henri Matisse's use of colour and perspective in his experimentalist works, "The Painter's Family" and "The Red Room," and his own work's postmodernist innovations.

Sealy is perhaps aligning himself with Matisse, entitling his novel "Red" since as with Matisse's use of colour, his Abecedary framework is breaking conventional novelistic and literary rules, including what may respectably be regarded as postmodern. In the novel, the character Aline considers Matisse the great modernist master who broke the rules with his use of colour and perspective, even though it was Picasso who broke the lines, heralding the advent of cubism and the modernist revolution in art. She tells Zach:

> He's worked that trick already. Gert. Red did it. Colour did it, not mirrors….And not lines. Just a faint line there, see – a red line – between the red table and the red wall. Even his lines are colours. Red just broke all the rules and bedded down with red. But I guess line won in the end – *this* guy [Picasso]. Line is mind, right? Brain. Colour is animal stuff, just matter. Light. (14)

A distinction is made between Picasso's lines which represent the mind and Matisse's "animal stuff," which is colour, and there is a suggestion by the Narrator that the "line" wins in the end since lines confine space, whereas colour is

expansive: "If you confine colour within some curved black line, say, you are […] robbing it of its expansive potential […]" (184). The question surfaces, therefore, as to whether the novel in any way disrupts or endorses the binary privileging of line over colour, or of mind over matter? Despite the novel following a linear trajectory through the use of an Abecedary configuration, it is named after the colour red, suggesting that colour or "animal stuff" complicates a unidirectional teleology. The Narrator calls Matisse the "Apostle of red," and explains:

> Once colour reaches a point that is only slightly beyond its limits, this expansive power
>
> takes effect – a kind of neutral zone comes into being where the neighbouring colour
>
> has to enter once it has reached the extent of its expansion. (184)

This neutral zone may represent a reconciliation between line and colour, since colour can spill over any linear framing, and borders are thus rendered as basically impermanent and insecure structures, which are constantly disintegrating and reforming.

On the other hand, the prominence of the line remains in the novel. As the bearer of the first letter of the alphabet in the Abecedary, "A" is "for A line," at the beginning of a linear journey, in which Aline is fated to go in search of the unknown. The Narrator deliberates:

> After all, A is forever condemned to go in search while Z simply waits, godlike, half
>
> deaf (except to his own music). What if N were to stick out his foot as she goes by?
>
> (211)

Although the Narrator contemplates driving a wedge in Aline's destiny, he does not interfere with her path. Rather than expressing any narratorial authority, he is

instead chasing his own lexical delineation. As a line, Aline may be pursuing a linear fictional trajectory based on a temporal sequence ending with her death: "A is always stepping out into the unknown, one foot stuck out over the abyss, while Z is always hunched over his unfinished task" (337), since he is condemned to wait for a finale that may never happen. While linearity in this instance may produce Frederic Jameson's postmodernist ideas of depthless surfaces or loss of symbolic meaning (140), it may also represent the more conservative tradition of linear plotting. Holding these two oppositional positions together perhaps circumvents binary thinking, which in so doing undermines the realist imitative fallacy of fiction writing, the idea that the narrative is portraying some extratextual truth that can be plotted.

In *Red*, Sealy's use of the character Aline may be interpreted in a number of ways. As "A line", she is a line, able to be contained by two dimensions, since "her name condemns her to flatness" (242). However, in her own self-portraiture, she describes herself as bleeding maroon (red and black combined), where colour denotes a space or gap between the lines.

> She doesn't stop but recognizes the shape as it develops: it's herself, but as she would see herself with her lenses out. The head a bulge on a stalk, the trunk with its dangling limbs, a thumb where the brush twitched, a webbing at the stumpy feet, a gap between the legs where maroon bleeds. (243)

Hence, the chapter title's pun, "Red between the lines," disturbs the binary relation between line and colour, since the boundaries that delimit colour's expansiveness are arbitrary, a product of a particular and provisional perspective. Aline's path has

a diversion through the colour black (noted as the "Queen of colours" according to Matisse), or "the black file," another name for the Blackshorts who represent those who have historically (and predating European colonization) been denigrated on the basis of their colour and position in Indian society. The mutual fascination between Aline and Gilgitan is ignited through the exchange of a stolen painting that he gives her (so he is not caught with it) and the small paintbox that she gives him in return. Although there are cultural, racial, and class differences between Aline and Gilgitan, it would seem that the self-referential space of art provides an aesthetic link that disrupts the characters' status as mere reproductions of social signifiers of class and race, and they become lovers. This moment of interconnection, however, is temporary and Aline is poisoned by the pig girl (Gilgitan's lover) as an act of revenge, while Gilgitan ends up in jail because of the stolen painting.

In keeping with the self-referential aesthetic contemplation of *Red*, we, the viewers, are asked by the Narrator to consider why Matisse used the colour red in his painting "The Red Room," what it says to us, what type of perspective he has created. In other words, we are asked to contemplate the formal relationship between the various aspects of the painting itself, rather than why the table is being set, and who the dinner is for, which are questions that arise in response to our everyday lives. Such questions about causality, motive, and emotions imagine that characters in a painting are analogous to people and therefore representational, reflecting a mimetic view that art imitates life. Similarly, with reference to Matisse's "The Painter's Family," there is a corollary assumption that the black and white reproduction of it in *Red* dedicated to "The Writer's Family"

may carry a reference to Sealy's own family, or it could perhaps refer to the Narrator's family. More to the point, however, through the examination of the relevance of Matisse's paintings to *Red*, Sealy is indicating how his and Matisse's works problematize the nature of representation by claiming to represent extratextual entities, such as the writer's family or the painter's family or self-portraiture, in a denaturalized or non-realist fashion.

Jean-Francois Lyotard argues that the painter and novelist

must question the rules of the art of painting or of narrative as they have learned and received them from their predecessors. Soon those rules must appear to them as a means to deceive, to seduce, and to reassure, which makes it impossible for them to be 'true'. (74)

Matisse and Sealy are breaking artistic rules in order to unveil their deceptiveness and to discover new combinations or possibilities of representation, thereby undermining the maintenance of fixed ideas or points of view. Sealy's use of the "Abecedary" narrative structure provides a kind of linguistic safety and comfort but also undermines the fallacy that art or fiction-writing imitates real life since all representations, including that of the artist or writer himself, are framed within structures. As with Matisse's family in the painting, we are all framed within structures and ideologies that we cannot escape; our identities are bound by linguistic and cultural frames that determine what we see and how we conceptualise the world. The Narrator says:

Zach, who accuses me of living in a picture, imagines he can somehow escape the frame, and of course I would be happy if he did. But even my computer refuses to

recognize an image unless it has a line around it. The frame is there, thank God; it's a refuge, a safe haven, because the battle is real and the lines are drawn. Class war. You come home and shoot the bolt lean up against the gate, spared. (301)

Zach is situated within the narrative frame created by the Narrator as is the narrator himself. There are only multiple frameworks, in which one frame leads to another, without any point of view or "omnipotent eye" that can exist outside of the frame.

Sealy's ongoing metafictional investigation of the relation of "fiction" to "reality" and the relationship between serial representational frames shows that we tend to read art and narrative mimetically because that is what we know or have been taught to do. It suggests we usually look for likenesses or what is familiar between different frames or structures. In the Abecedary, under the letter K (see "Kalam"), the Narrator reinforces this point through the story of the artist who, in his final painting of the queen, "laying aside all rules, all the tenets of his painter forefathers" (164), drew from the depths of his imagination, rather than from imitation. However, when he was signing his painting, a drop of ink fell on the painted queen's thighs. Upon perceiving this, the king immediately assumed that the painter had intimate knowledge of the queen, who did have a mole on her thigh. He banished her to a remote place, had the painter blinded with an ink pen, and "all mimetic art was henceforth forbidden in the kingdom" (164).

Is there a point, however, where the frames of art and life meet, or are they fated to be in binary opposition? Sealy's metafictional tactics underscore the "concept of pretence," to use Waugh's words (*Metafiction* 41), in the relationship between fiction and reality, since there is always a distillation of the object to fit its

intended purpose. In the discussion on what is framed in writing and what is framed by memory, the Narrator claims that the event in which M dropped the chocolate, and he had to rinse it rather than throw it way, is too recent to count as memory or reflection in his piece of writing. Therefore, life (the event) and art (representation) coincide:

> Annoyance from ten minutes ago when M dropped a slab of foreign chocolate in the sink. I rinsed it and rinsed it because it's too precious to throw away here. Doesn't she understand? (How could she?) But also satisfaction, ten seconds old, at the rescuing of this event, still too fresh to count as a memory, for use in the book. So finally life and art meet. Life rules. (193)

But what we get is art. There is a near simultaneity between the precious chocolate washed for consumption and the event washed for narrative consumption. Thus, what appears to be the referent for mimetic representation is only ever imaginary, since there is no solid reality outside of the text, while the intertextual representations between memory and writing are idiosyncratic, incomplete, and unstable.

Frederic Jameson argues that postmodernism produces an "aesthetic of textuality" (*Periodising the Sixties* 140), a new depthlessness or multiple surfaces, whereby there is a loss of structural depth, of affective and symbolic meaning, and aesthetic individuality is replaced by a pastiche of styles (140). Such an aesthetic is demonstrated through *Red's* lexical structure and ensuing narrative threads, which disallow any depth or significance of meaning, and the characterization is more a series of linear constructions than an exploration of the interiorities of specific characters. For the most part, we read a novel for the storyline and how it

resonates with our own lives, and represents a world that is familiar to us. Lyotard, however, speaks of a feature of postmodernism as the failure to provide the solace of comforting and familiar representations (*The Postmodern Condition* 81), which is exemplified in *Red.* Sealy disrupts the possibility of identification with the characters and narrative through the technique of defamiliarization, "[…] a means of renewing perception by exposing and revealing the habitual and the conventional" in fiction, in order to " […] release new and more authentic forms" (Waugh, *Metafiction* 65).

As with Picasso's experimentation with cubism and Matisse's play with colour, Sealy plays with the system of writing, forcing us to confront some of the assumptions about novel writing and representation. E. M. Forster, in *Aspects of the Novel*, made some astute observations as early as the 1920s about the novelist in relation to fiction writing:

> He plans his book beforehand; or anyhow he stands above it, his interest in cause and effect gives him an air of predetermination.
>
> And now we must ask ourselves whether the framework thus produced is the best possible for a novel. After all, why has a novel to be planned? Cannot it grow? Why need it close, as a play closes? Cannot it open out? Instead of standing above his work and controlling it, cannot the novelist throw himself into it and be carried along to some goal that he does not foresee? The plot is exciting and may be beautiful, yet it is not a fetish, borrowed from the drama, from the spatial limitations of the stage? Cannot fiction devise a framework that is not so logical yet more suitable to its genius? (95)

Sealy pushes the novelist's artistry even further, as he tinkers with words and meanings to produce a plurality of representations across international borders, a

serial framing between painting, writing, and what may be considered life, rather than representational depth, thereby resisting the kind of reduction that enables us to interpret the novel in familiar and comforting ways. He has imposed a linguistic structure on the novel's plot, taking to the extreme poststructuralist theory, which contends that every day reality is linguistically determined. At the same time, he toys with the system by introducing seemingly random events and sometimes sheer nonsense, according to a letter of the alphabet. Taking the novel's title *Red*, for example, and examining its possible meanings, expose a plurality of referentiality: Red is a character, a colour, an element such as paint or blood; it represents space, a positive force. It cannot be secured with a unitary meaning, and therefore renders a postmodern surface instability and indeterminacy. *Red* has a great deal of intellectual depth rather than representational depth, which makes it a difficult novel to read, for it evades playing to our fantasy world, so often an important feature of reading a novel.

Cyberspace and Rhizomatic Connections

Sealy's postmodern tactics, which play with the hierarchical binary system of language, reinforce a referential instability that undermines the belief in hegemonic constructions of reality. As these hegemonic realities breakdown, traditional binary relationships are inclined to become superseded since it becomes apparent that they are no longer keeping pace with what is current. This also applies to the term "postcolonialism," since it no longer accurately portrays the power relationships between the former colony and its imperial centre of authority, which in the case of India is Britain. Sealy is perhaps pointing to the rhizomatic quality of cyberspace

as an alternative way of perceiving relationships in the contemporary world. Throughout *Red*, modern technology and the internet provide global connections, enabling the characters to meet, to separate, to communicate across international borders in cyberspace. The cyberspace metaphor with its rhizomatic connections neutralizes the possibilities of consolidating power centres, since interconnections are accidental, momentary, alliance focused, and rapidly changing. These cyberspace formations displace traditional hierarchical thinking, including the foundational premise of the term "postcolonialism." Thus the "postcolonial" is rescued from its binary formation to engage in multi-linear, non-hierarchical, anarchic, and creative ways of thinking and perceiving. At the same time, there is an acknowledgement that, in a paradoxical fashion, the world wide web's basic foundations actually proceed from the binary digit.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari introduce the concept of the rhizome into Western contemporary thinking whereby the traditional tree-root metaphorical framework is destabilized by a rhizomatic model in which "a rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles" (8). They continue:

> There is always something genealogical about a tree. It is not a method for the people. A method of the rhizome type, on the contrary, can analyze language only by decentering it onto other dimensions and other registers. A language is never closed upon itself, except as a function of impotence. (8)

According to Deleuze and Guattari, a binary system of language, therefore, represents a sense of powerlessness, in which one term is always privileged at the expense of the other and visa versa. Deleuze and Guattari argue that:

> Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, with binary relations between the points and biunivocal relationships between the positions, the rhizome is made only of lines. (23)

However, "the rhizome has no beginning or end: it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb "to be," but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, "and…and…and…" (27-28); such is the unrestrained, inexhaustible nature of cyberspace interconnectivity.

In the novel, the Narrator describes his transition from writing by hand to writing using the computer and then to going online (yet another sense of the word 'line'). Under the chapter heading "Ever," he states: "I will buy me a C omputer And go on the Net On the World Wide Web" (50). Then he wonders why he waited ten years to do this. With the advent of the mobile phone in use everywhere in India, he muses that the landline may become extinct when previously you had to queue for six years for a connection: "At last a home computer makes sense. I still have the landline, but the balance of power has shifted" (52). This is postcolonial India in a contemporary context. The Narrator observes the changes in Dariya Dun that globalization and the advent of cyber technology are producing and understandably has some doubts, for Western-type modernization can displace cultural traditions and systems. However, he also points out that wretchedness has

not disappeared; there are still structural fault lines, but it has been alleviated. People walk differently, perhaps with a lighter step, and there is a social leveling in how people address one another.

Sealy juxtaposes the breakdown of traditional power realities through cyber connections with the ongoing infiltration and annexation of territory at international, national, and local levels. Border lines create spaces that privilege those on the inside while marginalizing the dispossessed or those on the outside, re-circulating the power dynamics of inside/ outside or centre/ margin. Under the letter E, Sealy introduces the narrative called Easement or "right of way across another's land" (96). The Narrator describes how he "enclosed a piece of land beyond our front boundary wall, public land, and planted flowering trees there, […] creating a third yard, with a private gate" (96). Boundaries establish hierarchies and exclusiveness. The Narrator states, "[T]he ragpickers – Doms to a man but usually women and children – have lost an equal share of forage territory; here is the whole history of enclosures writ small" (97), which acknowledges both personal and political culpability for territorial invasion. He mentions a third yard, or third space, but access to this is through a private gate, which does not provide any room for reconciliation between binary power structures. Similarly, in the story entitled "Walled Garden," the Narrator rejoices that inside the garden is private and secluded. With trees and flowers, it seems timeless, while outside there is noise, people, life, history: "Impossible to believe in history walled in here; impossible to believe in this garden walled out there" (301). As well as keeping certain groups of people and their histories outside, the wall or boundary represents a demarcation of a haven or refuge, but one that is not accessible to the socially disadvantaged.

In contrast to the ongoing reconfiguration of historical binary power formations, Sealy may be suggesting that the future lies in the democratically inspired, self-governing power of the internet and the ease with which virtual relationships are assembled and reassembled, and access to information and resources is available regardless of gender, race or class. At the end of the narrative, the Narrator mentions Wu Xinfu's "Almost Nonexistent Garden," which exists virtually and which can be downloaded, coming from the outside to the inside without crossing a wall or boundary:

> I look up at the sound of rain on the banana leaves and think of Wu Xinfu's 'Almost Nonexistent Garden'. This one's here all right but virtual, with millions of digits streaking invisibly down from St Petersburg and New York. Not one decent library in town, but every download is a miracle. (302)

As access to information and communication technologies becomes increasingly universal across the globe, there is a type of flattening of cultural, social, and racial boundaries. Inevitably, the term "postcolonial" and what it stands for, including notions of freedom and self-rule, must be reframed within these spawning rhizomatic, multi- alliance relationships, otherwise the term will become defunct and no longer useful.

Clear History

"Clear History" refers to the function on the computer that erases one's computer searches from memory. The Narrator states: "Clear History says a tab in the dialog box, and my finger hovers uncertainly" (302). Like the rhizomatic qualities of

computer technology, "clear history" may denote unanticipated and unconventional connections which may assist the erasure of historical borders and injustices. The sexual relationship between the characters Aline and Gilgitan goes against a proscriptive colonial and caste history. However, the erasure of history is perhaps a more complicated process as their fates suggest. With the cybernetic forging of new alliances at many points and at high speed, there is a displacing of the old dominant Western and Eastern historical discourses, permitting a reconceptualization of "postcolonial" subject positions within local narratives and opening up more possibilities for the traditionally marginalized voices to be heard.

Gilgitan, from the pole-vaulter subcaste of the Doms, is the youngest of the Blackshorts, a group of six men, who steal from the rich by raiding their houses at night. According to an ancient Dom tradition, before the "smudge"(40) or ritualized robbery, they blacken themselves and prostrate before their protectress, the goddess Nagouri, who has a female body and a snake's head. This "black file" embodies the oppressed groups in Indian society who are denigrated on the basis of their dark colour and their outcaste positions. The plight of the Dom tribal outcastes is represented in *Red* by the story of Ekalavya, a traditional legend from the Hindu *Mahabharata*, which exemplifies how hegemonic Aryan discourses have perpetuated tribal oppression in India and continue to do so. The story unfolds that Ekalavya, a Dom self-taught archer in the valley of Doon, so excelled at his art that his fame upset the warrior Arjun who wanted to be the best marksman. When Drona, the master of archery, and Arjun journeyed into the forest to find out whether the rumours about his skill were true, they found Ekalavya, who said he had owed all he had learnt to Drona. Drona then demanded payment, asking for

Ekalavya's thumb, which he cut off straightaway, thereby letting Arjun (the wheat-skinned fair Aryan) become the greatest Hindu archer (94-95).

As the Narrator points out this form of trickery by the elite happened throughout the country so that today, " Ekalavya's descendants scavenge among rubbish heaps and clean out your septic tank. When they can they steal (95). Gilgitan, who initially comes in contact with Aline when he is assisting the tiler to redo her bathroom, returns later one night uninvited. While it is not clear what his intention is for breaking into Aline's house, he is "naked except for a loincloth and smeared in some kind of blacking and grease that catches the glow of the computer screen" (260). On entering, he becomes entranced by the computer. Aline, coming upon the intruder, recognizes him:

> It's the tiler's assistant. Staring fixedly at the screen, mesmerized by the black vortex of
> an endless journey through space. And as if the moment of her recognition snaps a
> thread in his vision, the head whips around to look over his shoulder. (260)

He assures her he will not harm her, and she in turn offers him "the hopeful semblance of a smile" (261), as they work out what happens next. They both reach the realization they are attracted to each other and become lovers, and through their union, they clear a history of class and racial oppression even if only for a moment in time:

> Then looking full up at her with a broad smile that vanishes suddenly when his eyes
> take in for the first time her bare arms and shoulders, her feet.

> Now it's her turn to feel naked and she sees what it does to him and the way he
> acknowledges that too with a helpless shrug and a new gesture that opens both hands
> palms upward like moth wings parting.

They continue their sexual liaison, taking a risk that has serious consequences for both. The sexual crossing between Indian and European occurred during British colonization, sometime producing the mixed race progeny classified as Anglo-Indians. Commonly, the liaison took place between an Indian woman and a European man. The sexual relationship between Aline and Gilgitan in a postcolonial Indian context disrupts notions of racial and class power disparities, for as with the rhizomatic connections of cyberspace, there is a different sort of mediation between them, a leveling of power at the personal interface. They both become aware of their desire at the same time. However, their connection is short-lived with tragic consequences for them both. Aline is murdered by Gilgitan's other lover, the pig girl (who is not named). The pig girl tells him:

> So I blew her away for you, the bitch. Pinch of black snuff in her tiffin carrier. No truffle
> like the black one under the mulberry […]. What did you see in her anyway? (340)

Gilgitan is imprisoned for his crime (stealing the painting), but this is not the first time he has been in jail. Once he has lost his freedom, the Narrator calls him G as though he is no longer a character in the story; rather he represents a letter or an element or perhaps all the Gilgitans who steal because of poverty and are punished for this crime.

In *Red*, both the Narrator and Zach are Anglo-Indians living in postcolonial India. However, they do not hold a privileged place; their hyphenated hybridity is

not presented as a way of dismantling hierarchical binaries of pure/ impure, original/ copy and whole/ half in the postcolonial encounter. The hyphen is another line or boundary marker that creates its own enclosures, in order to retain an Anglo-Indian identity that is fixed not necessarily fluid. Mrs Wilding, Zach's mother, wants her son to marry an Anglo-Indian, the Trotter girl, certainly not Aline whom she calls the dowager. She herself becomes interested in Inspector Bisht, who she knows is Anglo-Indian from his name. Zach reveals his own caste/ class prejudices when he shows how shocked he is that Aline could actually be attracted to an untouchable like Gilgitan, who in turn did not know his place by responding in a similar way.

In today's world, there are many racial and cultural crossings that exceed categorization, further highlighting how our binary language system cannot adequately constitute our identities. In the novel, the Narrator is married to an Hispanic-American and their daughter Manda is very much a global child, for the most part brought up in the United States. While Manda is experimenting with her own sense of being of mixed race in India, it is her American identity that interests her Indian friend. This raises the question as to what racial category the child produced from an Hispanic-American and an Anglo-Indian relationship would belong. Would she have to choose between the two or is there another term to represent her?

Conclusion

Sealy, through his use of postmodern aesthetic inventions, makes us confront some of the issues that pertain to representation, for *Red* cannot be reduced to

familiar lines, since its very Abecedary structure is predicated upon   linear discontinuity and disjunction, while its title embraces the expansiveness of colour. In the novel, what Sealy achieves is a postmodern expansion of reading between the lines, highlighting a referential arbitrariness and a breakdown in hegemonic modes of constituting reality that includes the term "postcolonialism," yet pointing out the underpinning system of language that can be played with but which appears to reinvent binary power paradigms.

The question that is advanced here, therefore, is whether "postcolonial" is an adequate linguistic representation for India today? In its customary use it represents an aspect of India, but not the complete picture and until the Gilgitans of India have access to more structural power, more resources, a better quality of life, India will remain partially harnessed to its pre-colonial and colonial pasts. Sealy closes his novel with Z for "Zom, variant of Dom. A man; a human being" (344), which encapsulates what should be, not how it actually is, in the India of today. Notions of a postcolonial freedom and justice for the oppressed are worthwhile sentiments, but unless the basic power structures alter radically, there is only a recirculation of binary power formations. There is hope, however, in the levelling of hierarchical oppositional power through the rhizomatic cyberspace connections, which do not engage in power consolidations, since they fashion connections at any nodal point and just as quickly disperse. It is, therefore, more appropriate to redefine "postcolonialism" within the more contemporary paradigm of world-wide-web interconnectivity.

Conclusion

The idea for this thesis initially originated through a desire to explore the likelihood of a relationship between Sealy's postmodern aesthetics and postcolonial concerns in his four novels written after *The Trotter-nama*. Written in magical realist style, *The Trotter-nama*, in part, recontextualized the hybridized Anglo-Indians into the centre of British-Indian history, thereby retrieving a marginalized group from historical invisibility. As an example of what would be considered in literary theory a postcolonial "writing back to empire" in which an oppressed group resulting from the colonial encounter is permitted to be heard, *The Trotter-nama* initially formed the backdrop for my future enquiry into his successive works. Hence, the intersection of Sealy's postmodern aesthetics with notions of postcolonial power became an uppermost consideration. What became apparent through a more in-depth investigation of these four novels, however, was that while Sealy's use of postmodern devices was foremost, his enquiry into conventional postcolonial politics was not explicit, and yet at the same time, his scrutiny of a number of structural power issues could not be dismissed.

Sealy's postmodern tactics throughout the four novels are evident; they are manifested in the narrative structures he employs and in his unrelenting deconstruction of privileging discourses. The aesthetics he employs for each of the texts may be outlined as follows: *Hero* engages in a metafictional parody of formulaic Bollywood movies, which are extended into satiric parallels with Delhi politics that demonstrate the operations of repressive power; in *The Everest Hotel* he uses a plot driven by the seasons rather than by humanist teleology, along with

a metafictional critique of narrative omniscience that flows into considerations of genre and point of view; *The Brainfever Bird* has as its implicit focus its intertextual relationship with the love story and revolutionary ideals of Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*, while its use of the puppetry motif interrogates the question of human agency through the simultaneous identifications of author and characters as puppets and puppeteers; the Abecedary lexical structure of *Red*, by foregrounding a depthlessness of meaning and a referential arbitrariness, diffuses dominant constructions of "reality." Sealy's postmodernism usually devolves into metafictional commentary that draws attention to the self-containment of fictitious worlds and their accompanying inability to mimic what we consider to be "reality," since metafiction is primarily self-consciously concerned with narrative processes rather than content. The predominant postmodern feature examined in these novels involves issues of representation, since postmodernism's theoretical base is premised on linguistic and cultural constructions of subjectivity and the world we live in, both of which are viewed as fluid, localized, and contingent. The term "postmodernism" itself, however, is not exempt from its own self-reflexive inquest, since it is also implicated in the rigorous critique by Sealy of binary power formations and totalizing authorities throughout his narratives.

The term "postcolonialism" and its traditional meanings receive modification from Sealy's postmodern line of attack, since they replicate a binary power formation that is predicated on an oppositional relationship with a former European empire, and in the case of India, the British Empire. Colonial power based on racial and cultural superiority is but one facet, however, of multiple intersections of power in the colonizing project. Sealy appears to redefine what is conventionally

understood as "postcolonial" in this power binary, through the inclusion of gender and class oppression, as well as various forms of political, racial, and cultural hegemony. Postcolonial notions of self-rule, democracy, and nationhood do not survive intact, as Sealy's relentless expositions reveal the failure of a narrative of liberation that merely reverses the power binary, thus allowing for similar power configurations in different locations and contexts. His postcolonial preoccupation is therefore directed at the dismantling of a variety of intellectual and representational monoliths, including those of humanism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism, rather than being turned towards an exploration of the material realities of India after independence. Hence, it is through Sealy's postmodernism that the term "postcolonialism" is redeemed from potential obsolescence and recontextualized within multiple significations that point to a disintegration of various hegemonic constructions.

What emerges from the novels, through the intersection of both terms, are new and different cultural aesthetics that may be considered both Indian and postcolonial since there is a fusion of Indian and Western cultural knowledge and literary texts. In *Hero*, a recirculation of power relationships produces a form that contains Indian allusions and culture-specific knowledge derived from Bollywood and Delhi politics, which both manipulates and displaces Western cultural hegemonies. *The Everest Hotel's* hybridity of genres and its refigured centres and extendable margins create a third space of negotiation and reconciliation between Western and Indian literary aesthetics. The intertextual connection between an explicitly European text, *A Tale of Two Cities,* and *The Brainfever Bird,* with its Indian textual references, creates a literary hybridity that modifies postmodern

intertextuality, while undermining a number of oppressive power structures based on race, class, gender, and colonial hierarchies in India. The final novel, *Red,* embraces a contemporary, globalized India, which reframes binary postcolonial power within the alliance-based, horizontally locating connections spawned through information technology and cyberspace.

While the status of Anglo-Indians in these four novels was a consideration at the outset of this thesis, it became evident that they no longer occupied a privileged position in Sealy's fiction, after *The Trotter-nama*. Anglo-Indians feature as characters in all four novels, but their narratives exist alongside those of Indian and Western characters without their being valorized in any sense. At times they represent the clinging vestiges of a dying Anglo-India, while at other times they are part of the globalized mix of contemporary India after independence. It could be said that other marginalized peoples, including the tribal outcastes of India and their historical and contemporary grievances, are given more narrative prominence in the four novels examined in this thesis, signaling a clear message from Sealy that a postcolonial redress of longstanding injustice has not been and will not occur within the traditional "postcolonial" framework.

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