<jennifer.yee@mod-langs.ox.ac.uk>

COLONIZING THE CANON: METONYMY AND METROPOLITAN FICTION

JENNIFER YEE

CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD

Abstract

The geographical focus of the French realist and naturalist novel is overwhelmingly on metropolitan France. A postcolonial reading of these metropolitan novels reveals, however, links to France's colonies that cannot easily be reduced to colonialist propaganda. Such a reading deploys modes that might be qualified as suspicious (Chambers) or contrapuntal (Said). It reveals off-stage spaces that can be approached in terms of Foucault's 'colonial heterotopias' or Bakhtin's distinction between adventure and everyday chronotopes. This article examines off-stage colonial heterotopias that appear through metonymy. Drawing on cultural studies and 'Thing Theory' it reads inanimate objects — imported colonial goods, or fake exotic objects manufactured in Paris — as metonymically suggesting a broader history beyond France. Such objects sometimes point to events that are usually passed over in silence, such as the Haitian revolution. They expose consumerism as imperialist voracity or nostalgia for slave-ownership. And at times they show us Romantic exotic posing as part of the July Monarchy's use of the Algerian conquest for self-publicity. Metonymy thus brings colonialism into the metropolitan text by the side door. At the same time, colonial metonymy introduces a disturbance within the realist machine. It breaks up the continuity of spatial and conceptual proximity, since an object imported from Algeria circulates within metropolitan space but points towards North Africa. And while the realist mode usually depends on

verisimilitude or familiarity, colonial metonymy self-consciously confronts the reader with something that is not familiar and does not obviously belong in the metropolitan context.

The term '*geographical* notation' is used by Edward Said to describe those moments when colonial discourse surfaces within metropolitan texts that superficially appear to ignore European colonial expansion. He argues for a contrapuntal reading that would be aware simultaneously of metropolitan narrative histories and their colonial others.[1] This 'counterpoint' reads canonical, metropolitan texts within their colonial context, either by situating them in relation to neglected contemporary texts or by (re)reading the canon in the light of later postcolonial literary reworkings. Postcolonial approaches have also taken inspiration from Pierre Macherey's argument that the silences in a text speak as loudly as what is explicit in it.[2] Naturally, the 'loudest' silences are those to which the texts themselves point directly. This pointing takes specific forms, or tropes, and can thus be analysed using the tools provided by formalist approaches such as narratology. It might be tempting to treat tropes in an ahistorical, universalizing way, but their effects and modes of deployment need not be ahistorical. Indeed, there have been attempts to situate tropes in relation to an overarching, metahistorical narrative, notably by Hayden White.[3] The present article represents a more modest proposal concerning how to read the politics back into tropological analysis. In particular, we will see that geographical notations pointing to colonialism in the

[1] *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), p. 69, p. 59; original emphasis.

[2] *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire* (Paris: François Maspero, 1974 [1966]), p. 103.

[3] *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975 [1973]).

nineteenth-century novel often appear via a trope that has attracted relatively little attention from postcolonial theory. Indeed, this trope has at times been denigrated by critics intent on valorising modernism at the expense of that quintessentially nineteenth-century prose mode, realism. I am referring, of course, to metonymy.[4] I will begin, however, by contrasting metonymy with its better-known cousin, metaphor, which has attracted more discussion from postcolonial theory. A careful reading that takes into account the differences, and the interrelation, between these tropes can inform our understanding of colonialism within the metropolitan novel. Employing the tools of formalist analysis thus helps us move beyond a one-size-fits all category of 'Othering'.

Colonial metaphor, colonial metonymy

Metaphor is most simply understood as a trope that works through analogy between the thing that is meant (the tenor) and the thing that is actually described (the vehicle).[5] Nineteenth-century prose frequently uses colonialism, race or slavery (the latter will be the main focus of the examples discussed in this article) as metaphors for class difference, power imbalance between genders, or individual psychological issues. What are we to make of this use of metaphors taken from the experience of peoples who are enslaved or colonized by the European powers, for the purpose of describing European phenomena? Unsurprisingly,

[4] Rajeev S. Patke, for example, equates the metonymic mode with realism and naturalism and thus sees the metaphoric mode as the mainstay of modernism, including 'postcolonial modernism'. See *Modernist Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 58.

[5] The very useful terms 'vehicle' and 'tenor' to discuss the two parts of metaphor were introduced by I.A. Richards in 1936. See *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (London/New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 64.

postcolonial critics have tended to argue that the use of colonialism as metaphor risks reducing the real lived experience of non-European peoples to the status of mere analogy. Laura Chrisman, for example, argues that using slavery as an allegory rather than treating it in its own right effectively instrumentalizes it, subsuming it within metropolitan discourse.[6] That something else happens alongside this instrumentalization is however suggested by Susan Meyer. She argues that although a careless equivalence between gender or class domination and imperialism risks 'emptying out the specificity of slavery and race', something is nevertheless left over in the process: 'the full signification of the vehicle of metaphor remain[s] present at the margins of our consciousness as we perceive metaphors', so that the 'yoking of the two terms […] produces some suggestion in the text of the exploited or vulnerable situation of the people or the race invoked'. Part of the energy of metaphor comes from a marginal awareness of 'what remains dissonant' between its two terms, and one result is that colonized peoples, and racial difference, if used as the vehicle of a metaphor, have a way of pushing back into each novel, of making their presence felt.[7]

An example of a colonial metaphor in which the vehicle pushes back to make its presence felt alongside the tenor is the use by George Sand, in *Indiana* (1832), of slavery as a metaphor for the domination of the heroine by her despotic husband: Indiana is, for example,

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[6] Laura Chrisman, 'The Imperial Unconscious? Representations of Imperial Discourse', *Critical Quarterly*, 32: 3 (1990), 38–58. See also Grace Moore, 'Colonialism in Victorian Fiction: Recent Studies', *Dickens Studies Annual: Essays on Victorian Fiction*, 37 (2006) 251–86 (p. 272).

[7] Susan Meyer, *Imperialism at Home: Race and Victorian Women's Fiction* **(**Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 22–23. Meyer concentrates on race as metaphor, including simile in her analysis (p. 20).

described as ‘cette femme esclave qui n’attendait qu’un signe pour briser sa chaîne’.[8] That this is not a simple, straightforward instrumentalization of slavery is apparent only from a reading of the whole novel. The heroine is raised on the Île Bourbon (Reunion) where she is a first-hand witness horrified by the effects of slavery and engaged in her own silent internal resistance to authority. The end of the novel sees her, along with her loving second husband, devote her wealth to buying and liberating slaves who are ill or crippled from working the sugar plantations. In this idealist novel, then, the use of slavery as a metaphor to describe the condition of a woman in matrimony is not arbitrary or careless. In fact, this metaphor is grounded in metonymy: the analogy ‘Indiana as slave’ (metaphor) takes its strength from association (metonymy) with the context of Indiana’s youth and the revulsion she feels towards actual slavery.[9]

Naturally, this is by no means the case of all metaphors that use slavery or colonialism as vehicles, and in particular not of metaphors that might be described as ‘dead’, or, more properly, conventional.[10] Metaphor tends to get a bad press from critics committed

[8] George Sand, *Indiana* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), p. 90.

[9] Some theorists have argued that all metaphor has a basis in metonymy. See Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1985 (first publ. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979)), pp. 68–69. The issue of slavery in *Indiana* is discussed, albeit in rather broad terms, by Nancy E. Rogers, ‘Slavery as Metaphor in the Writings of George Sand’, *The French Review*, 53:1 (1979), 29–35. See also Pratima Prasad, ‘Espace colonial et vérité historique dans *Indiana*’, *Études littéraires* 35:2–3 (2003) 71–85 (pp. 74–75 on the metaphoric and metonymic treatment of slavery).

[10] Since George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s analysis of the role of metaphor in our basic thought processes, so-called ‘dead metaphors’ seem intensely alive, though part of the work

to historicist or materialist readings of cultural history. Fredric Jameson, for example, writes that metaphor's function is 'to detemporalize existence, to dechronologize and denarrativize the present, indeed, to construct or reconstruct a new temporal present which we are so oddly tempted to call eternal.'[11] Pursuing a more specifically postcolonial materialist approach, Benita Parry takes issue with Meyer's argument, cited above, that the use of race as metaphor is 'justified on the grounds that such tropological transference opens the door to the way the history of British colonialism finds its way into the fictions'. For Parry, such metaphors reveal cognitive blind spots rather than insights.[12] Now while I agree that this risk is indeed entailed in the use of colonial metaphor, one might recall much earlier arguments that 'the vehicle is not normally a mere embellishment of a tenor which is otherwise unchanged by it' and that 'vehicle and tenor in co-operation give a meaning of more varied powers than can be ascribed to either'.[13] In the example cited from *Indiana* the vehicle (slavery) is not entirely subsumed into the tenor (marital domination). Much of the remaining resonance is, as I have argued above, derived from metonymy. In this case a side door to the history of colonialism is opened, but the key is the metonymic basis of the metaphor, rather than the metaphor by itself.

In contrast to the analogical working of metaphor, metonymy works through association and it is, as we shall see, a more open trope than metaphor. While metaphor does in general imply a hierarchy, and a more or less bilateral relationship, between vehicle and

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of the literary text is clearly to revitalize metaphors that are so conventional they tend to pass unnoticed (*Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003 [1980])).

[11] *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013), p. 26.

[12] *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (London/New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 110–11.

[13] Richards, p. 67.

tenor, metonymy's reliance on association means that it can operate in more than one direction at a time. This has a significant impact on how we read texts' political implications. Overtly political readings of nineteenth-century novels have tended to focus on metaphor or even allegory (for example, Zola's eponymous heroine in the novel *Nana* (1880) can be understood as an embodiment of the Second Empire). But this reading belies the fact that the great — though now often under-rated — resource of fiction in this period is its sheer contextual *detail*. One of the most striking stylistic traits of nineteenth-century prose is the space devoted to descriptions of settings, clothing and inanimate objects. Balzac himself declared that his description of humans as various social species differs from naturalists' descriptions of animal species in that it necessarily includes objects alongside men and women: objects, he claimed, give us the material representation of human thought.[14] So the material object is a key to understanding the novel from the 1830s onwards, and indeed its rise corresponds with that of the propertied middle classes. Objects no longer enter fiction primarily to serve a plot function, or as metaphors for an invisible inner world or a transcendent truth; they convey meaning through metonymy. According to Roman Jakobson's famous analysis contrasting metonymy and metaphor, it is in fact this importance of metonymy that sets realist writing, the central prose form of the nineteenth century, apart from both romanticism and symbolism.[15]

This wealth of detail opens up nineteenth-century prose fiction to the realities of the wider world. The colonies are, notably, evoked by passing references in conversation and by

[14] 'Avant-Propos' in *La Comédie humaine*, ed. by Pierre-Georges Castex et al., 12 vols (Paris: Gallimard 'Pléiade', 1976–81), vol. 1, p. 9.

[15] Roman Jakobson, 'Two Aspects of language and two types of aphasic disturbances', in *Language in Literature*, ed. by Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 95–114 (pp. 58–9) (first published in 1956).

imported objects or goods. Colonial objects have inspired critical attention recently, as part of a new interest in the everyday and material culture inspired by cultural studies, given focus by Bill Brown's coining of the term 'thing theory' in 2001.[16] Elaine Freedgood, for example, invokes Macherey's emphasis on the splitting within the novel by which objects point to '"the play of history beyond its edges, encroaching on those edges"'. She calls for a 'strong, literalizing, or materializing, metonymic reading' rather than the standard weak one in which the object simply tells us something about the subject/character. Placing the object back in its material context reinstates it within multiple meanings. It has a 'subversive ability to disrupt meaning, to be endlessly vagrant and open ended' and at times 'recuperate[s] historical links that are anything but random.'[17] This cultural studies approach points us towards understanding in a new, and more political, light the sheer density of description that characterizes so much nineteenth-century fiction.

Open-ended, multi-directional metonymy

[16] Special issue of *Critical Inquiry*, 28:1 (2001), later published as *Things*, ed. by Bill Brown (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). See for example critics such as Susan Hiner (*Accessories to Modernity: Fashion and the Feminine in Nineteenth-Century France* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010)) and Elaine Freedgood (*The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006)), as well as *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), ed. by Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose.

[17] Freedgood, p. 3, p. 12, pp. 15–16.

My argument for the need to see metonymy as a more 'open' trope than metaphor is based on its multi-directional nature.[18] Such openness has been described in other terms: Roland Barthes, for example, argued that we should study the role of connotation in 'classical' (i.e. 'lisible') literature and suggested that it can be analysed as 'un espace agglomératif, certains lieux du texte corrélant d'autres sens extérieurs au texte matériel et formant avec eux des sortes de nébuleuses de signifiés.'[19] Barthes here gives us a metaphor — an agglomeration of signifieds forming nebulae — to suggest the multidirectional links between the text and the exterior world, and it is one that can usefully be applied to the role played by colonial metonymy in some 'classical' metropolitan prose. A rather different disciplinary approach, and one that is more immediately applicable to cultural diversity, is offered by Clifford Geertz's discussion of what he calls 'thick description' in anthropology. His arguments in favour of 'protracted descriptions' as a tool for anthropologists seeking to decode the functioning of different cultures can be applied almost directly to nineteenth-century prose. He praises a mainly qualitative and 'almost obsessively fine-comb field study' undertaken 'in confined contexts' as allowing a realistic, concrete and creative engagement with much broader issues or even 'mega-concepts'.[20]

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[18] Hayden White, in contrast, sees metonymy as a closed or 'reductive' trope that corresponds with what he calls 'Mechanistic' accounts of history. This is however based on his use of the word metonymy to refer to a limited type of synecdoche, in which a part stands for a whole physical entity rather than a quality or concept. He does not discuss metonymy as a trope of association (*Metahistory*, p. 36).

[19] *S/Z*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Eric Marty, 3 vols (Paris: Seuil, 1994), vol. 2, p. 560 (first publ. Paris: Seuil, 'Tel Quel', 1970).

[20] Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 3–30 (p. 23).

The multi-directional nature of metonymy resulting from thick description in nineteenth-century prose is apparent in two examples taken from Balzac's writings of the 1830s. Here metonymy once again works alongside metaphor. In *Eugénie Grandet* (1833), Balzac's eponymous heroine never leaves the confined world of provincial Saumur, but she falls in love with her Parisian cousin Charles Grandet when the latter visits briefly before heading out to make good his father's lost fortune through trade on the high seas. Balzac recounts Charles's stay through the domestic foodstuff sugar: sugar as a noun or verb, and the Grandet family sugar bowl, are mentioned more than twenty times. A luxury good, sugar points metonymically to Charles's Parisian excess, expenditure and refinement, but since Eugénie tries desperately to offer him sugar during his brief stay in her father's house it also acts as a metaphor for love that is grounded in the metonymy of the domestic breakfast table. Eugénie strives for the sweetness of domesticity, nurture and love in the unpropitious context of salty Saumur. We are also reminded explicitly that sugar is a colonial product. Its origins are in the Caribbean slave-system, which is linked by association with the later developments in Charles's life.[21] Over the next eight years Charles in fact regains most of his lost family wealth through the (illicit) slave trade, and comes back hardened from 'le commerce

[21] The place of sugar within the slave economy has been the subject of several historical studies, from Sidney Mintz (*Sweetness and Power: the Place of Sugar in Modern History* (London/New York: Penguin, 1985)) to Elizabeth Abbott (*Sugar: A Bittersweet history* (London/New York: Duckworth, 2009)). A more literary focus in is taken by Timothy Morton ('Blood Sugar' in *Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire, 1780–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 87–106). There has been less work done on sugar in the French colonial context, but see Lawrence C. Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery: the Movement for the Abolition of Slavery in France, 1802–1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 26–28.

d'hommes', rejecting his cousin for what seems a more advantageous match. Charles's initial investment is in cheap trade goods, or 'pacotille', with which to purchase goods (or humans) in Africa for trade in the Americas.[22] The word had already been used to describe a shoddy, flashy gift offered by one of Eugénie's provincial suitors in an attempt to buy her favours. So here a colonial signifier works both as part of a broader metaphor (Eugénie's putative marriage as a financial transaction) and as a metonymy for colonial trade, in particular the slave trade. Charles's *pacotille* is funded by Eugénie's dower, a personal treasure trove made up of gold coins minted by various colonial powers (Portugal, Genoa, Spain and Holland) as well as India. As a hoard these coins stand for her father's avarice; they also suggest (metaphorically) Eugénie's own virginity and purity (the coins are 'vierges'[23]); but they point metonymically outwards, towards European imperialism and the vast geographical and political network in which human values are denied in favour of a quick fortune made by exploiting others. So in this provincial novel, with its narrow, even claustrophobic spatial range, Balzac gives us details that link domestic, feminine experience to the geographically broader range of the young-man-on-the-make and the wider world of the Atlantic slave trade.[24]

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[22] *Eugénie Grandet*, in *La Comédie humaine*, vol. 3; for 'commerce d'hommes' or 'des hommes', see p. 1181 and p. 1110; for 'pacotille' see p. 1050, p. 1065, p. 1123, p. 1127 and p. 1180.

[23] *Eugénie Grandet*, p. 1128.

[24] On critical tendencies to associate detail, especially inessential detail, with the feminine, see Naomi Schor, *Reading in detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York/London: Routledge, 2007 (first publ. 1987)). In *Eugénie Grandet* Balzac uses everyday details primarily to expose the gendered distribution of power in the household, and in doing so also develops a prolonged series of associations with Atlantic slavery.

Balzac's novella *Gobseck* also dates, for the most part, to the 1830s,[25] and it offers an even more striking example of outward-pointing metonymy. Though now a usurer based in Paris, the eponymous Gobseck spent his youth travelling the high seas, between India and the Caribbean, the East and West Indies. Like Charles Grandet, he lost his moral integrity in the practice of the slave trade. Late in life the ex-slaver builds up a second colonial fortune by farming the debt burden of the fledgling Haitian Republic, which had agreed to pay the French ex-slave-owners an indemnity of 150 million gold francs, ten times its annual revenue.[26] Gobseck's fortune proves, however, to be no magical means to self-realisation: at his death his apartment is full of decomposing merchandise, crawling with worms and insects, including 'des caisses de thé […] des balles de café' as well as receipts for the reception of 'marchandises consignées en son nom au Havre, balles de coton, boucauts de sucre, tonneaux de rhum, cafés, indigos, tabacs, tout un bazar de denrées coloniales!'[27] This accumulation of rotting goods stands metaphorically for his life itself, but it also points

[25] An early version was published in 1830 (as *L'Usurier*) a few years before *Eugénie Grandet*; it was developed as a longer tale in 1835 and further revised in 1842.

[26] The miser is thus situated in relation to an issue that was largely neglected by French literature, in what Christopher L. Miller sees as a 'calculated plan for forgetting' about the Haitian Revolution (*The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), ch. 10, particularly p. 246). See also Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995), and Léon-François Hoffmann, 'Representations of the Haitian Revolution in French Literature', in *The World of the Haitian Revolution*, ed. by David Patrick Geggus and Norman Fiering (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), pp. 339–51.

[27] *Gobseck*, in *La Comédie humaine*, vol. 2, pp. 1011–12.

metonymically outwards towards its geographical and economic origins. Gobseck's worm-ridden merchandise is an example of the 'réalisme traditionnel' that Barthes describes in an essay that ostensibly contrasts realist objects with those of Robbe-Grillet, but which despite himself reveals his admiration for the former. In traditional realism, he says, objects have 'des formes, mais aussi des odeurs, des propriétés tactiles, des souvenirs, des analogies, bref ils fourmillent de significations; ils ont mille modes d'être perçus, et jamais impunément, puisqu'ils entraînent un mouvement humain de dégoût ou d'appétit.' This 'syncrétisme sensoriel, à la fois anarchique et orienté' founds the extraordinarily productive nature of the realist object.[28] Gobseck's pullulating and disintegrating colonial goods suggest the failure of any process of containment or appropriation.

As a further example of the open-ended and multi-directional functioning of association/metonymy, and how it works in tandem with a more defined series of analogical/metaphorical relationships, I will look briefly at Flaubert's 'Un cœur simple' (1877). In this tale the maid-of-all-work Félicité's simple heart selflessly adopts a series of diminishing love objects. Each in turn is lost and replaced with the next through a relation of substitution (that is, analogy): a fiancé, Théodore, is replaced by her nephew Victor; then her mistress's daughter Virginie; a parrot, Loulou; the dead Loulou, stuffed; and finally, the worm-ridden stuffed parrot is temporarily removed from her for the procession of the Blessed Sacrament. The ultimate term that completes this series is implicitly the immaterial divine itself, or nothing at all, depending on how one reads the tale. At the same time, however, several of the links in this analogical chain also point, via association, towards colonialism or the slave trade. Victor is a ship's boy in the Atlantic trade between France and Cuba. Virginie, along with her brother Paul, is part of an ironic intertextual reference to *Paul et*

[28] 'Littérature objective', in *Essais critiques*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 1186 (first publ. Paris: Seuil 'Tel Quel', 1964).

Virignie, the eighteenth-century colonial novel most beloved of Romantic idealism. Loulou the parrot comes from the Americas, and is brought to Félicité's household by the servant of a wealthy neighbour, a servant who is himself a 'nègre', and who hands the bird over in a cage, along with a stick, chain and lock. So Flaubert's famous parrot replaces the divine by analogy, but at the same time he points by association to the Atlantic slave trade, which in turn inflects our understanding of Félicité as subaltern.

The deliberately fragmentary nature of signification through metonymy can be contrasted with both metaphor and synecdoche (the part standing for the whole), which tend implicitly to claim a totalizing view. At times it can be difficult to distinguish metonymy from synecdoche, since it is not always clear whether an object signifies through association or as a part standing in for the whole.[29] And yet in their *colonial* applications these two tropes often have radically different effects. Synecdoche is generally less open-ended than metonymy, and colonial synecdoche can be extremely reductive.[30] One particular, recurrent colonial synecdoche is at the basis of 'doomed colonial romance' narratives of which we will take Pierre Loti's *Le Mariage de Loti* (1880) as a paradigmatic example. In this novel Rarahu, a Tahitian girl, is a synecdoche for the Tahitian people. Her failed love affair with a European, and her eventual demise from alcoholism, disease and nymphomania, stand for the doom that awaits her people, and the Polynesians more generally, according to contemporary pseudo-Darwinian views of the clash between strong and decadent races. Indeed, synecdoche

[29] Gérard Genette argues against the conflation of metonymy and synecdoche, while explaining how the two tropes can be easily confused (*Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p. 27).

[30] Homi K. Bhabha, who describes colonial metonymy as an aggressive trope, defines it as 'a figure of contiguity that substitutes a part for a whole', which by most definitions is in fact synecdoche (*The Location of Culture* (London/New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 54). His discussion is however useful in other ways, and I will come back to it.

is the trope at work in many key racist stereotypes, because the substitution of part for (implicit, absent) whole can so easily be used in the service of essentialism: one 'native' stands in for all of 'them'.[31] In reading colonial-era texts the difference between metonymy and synecdoche can thus carry significant ideological weight. If a text invites a synecdochic reading then the individual case suggests a totalizing gaze. In contrast, a text that frustrates part-for-whole substitutions, instead proceeding outwards via multiple chains of association, links the European experience to the wider world without claiming to offer a total, conclusive view. Flaubert's parrot Loulou does not stand in for slavery as a whole, he brings it into the domestic provincial world by association.

Colonial metonymy and defamiliarization

I have carefully been referring to metonymy as functioning by 'association', rather than employing the other word that is often used to describe it, that is, 'contiguity'[32]. 'Contiguity' is derived from the Latin *contiguus*, 'touching', and its use to define metonymy itself introduces a metaphor where *spatial* proximity stands for *conceptual* proximity, or association.[33] These two do frequently coincide. Indeed, the classic example of metonymy is

[31] Colonial discourse characterizes the colonized by this implicit plural, 'they', according to Albert Memmi (*Portrait du colonisé, précédé du Portrait du colonisateur* (Paris, Gallimard: 1985), p. 106 (first publ. Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1957)).

[32] See for example Jakobson, who contrasts metaphor and metonymy in relation to 'selection disorder' and 'contiguity disorder' respectively (pp. 100–109); he emphasizes the spatial nature of metonymy/contiguity, p. 105, p. 111.

[33] For a useful attempt to break down the various types of metonymic relation, and a critique of the vague metaphorical basis of the term 'contiguity' that is so often our starting point when thinking about metonymy, see Hugh Bredin, 'Metonymy', *Poetics Today*, 5:1 (1984),

one in which the social and economic identity of a place (or person) is evoked by referring to an object that is so close to it that it is barely distinguishable from synecdoche: Mme Vauquer's slovenly woollen petticoat, appearing beneath her skirt, famously sums up her entire person, while she in turn stands in for her whole boarding house, in *Le Père Goriot*.[34] The overlap of conceptual and spatial contiguity is however disrupted by colonial metonymy, since the latter points to a spatially distant context. Of course, the nineteenth-century French novel frequently brings into play both Paris and the provinces, but this distance is conceived as concrete and relative, and is very far from the gap or hiatus that separates the fictional metropolis from its colonies.

The nineteenth-century novel — or at least the realist novel — also makes great use of verisimilitude, that is the appearance of plausibility, in order to suggest a direct mimetic relation to the outside world. One of the main props supporting the effect of verisimilitude is the familiarity to the reader of the world that is described. The narrator goes so far as to doubt that *Le Père Goriot* can be understood anywhere but 'entre les buttes de Montmartre et les hauteurs de Montrouge'.[35] In other words the Parisian setting is not incidental; it determines a mode of signification that relies on familiarity. Colonial and exotic objects, in contrast, introduce a rupture of both spatial contiguity and comfortable familiarity, straining the principle signifying modes of metropolitan realism.

45–58. He proposes that metonymy should be thought of as an extrinsic relationship between things or objects, not words (pp. 52–53). A more thorough discussion of the narrowing of critical approaches to rhetorical tropes is offered by Genette, who points out that seeing metonymy in terms of spatial proximity alone severely limits the signifying potential of the trope of association (*Figures III*, pp. 21–40, particularly p. 28 and p. 34).

[34] *Le Père Goriot* in *La Comédie humaine*, vol. 3, p. 55.

[35] *Le Père Goriot*, p. 49.

Colonial metonymy is thus an uneasy presence in the claustrophobic, narrowly determined metropolitan world. Examining it as part of a contrapuntal reading reveals that it creates a certain estrangement within the signifying process. It has been claimed that this anticipates Bertolt Brecht's defamiliarization or alienation-effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*), though often with a politically conservative purpose.[36] The sense of estrangement can also be understood in terms of what Fredric Jameson argues is a failed, or at best imperfect, 'cognitive mapping' of the world-system that emerges along with the increasingly global nature of the capitalist system because the latter is 'inaccessible to any individual subject' and thus 'ultimately unrepresentable' or 'something like an absent cause'.[37] Now metonymy is suited to evoking this imperfectly grasped system because it points outwards towards linked phenomena situated elsewhere in a fragmentary, non-totalizing way. Indeed, recent work on world-literature by Neil Lazarus for WReC (the Warwick Research Collective) suggests that the imported exotic object marks the consciousness of the emerging world-system within the novel: it is part of a 'catalogue of effects or motifs at the level of narrative form: discrepant encounters, alienation effects, surreal cross-linkages, unidentified freakish objects' that make up the 'typology of combined and uneven development'. As such, prose fiction begins to register the cultural repercussions of global combined and uneven development, a terminology that WReC borrows from Trotsky. By the 1830s writers of fiction were acutely aware of commodity fetishism and the role of commodification in the

[36] Srinivas Aravamudan, 'Response: Exoticism beyond Cosmopolitanism?', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 25:1 (2012), 227–42 (p. 230).

[37] 'Cognitive Mapping' in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London/Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 347–57 (pp. 349–50).

emerging world-system.[38] Indeed, the miser Gobseck's rotting 'bazar de denrées coloniales' seems a perfect example of the surreal and freakish juxtaposition of metonymic fragments.

These 'alienation effects' introduced by colonial and exotic metonymy could be called an *effet d'exotisme* in contrast with what Barthes famously called the *effet de réel*. For Barthes, the *effet de réel* arises with the description of something that has no other function than as a device signalling the fictional world's verisimilitude, its familiarity.[39] Introducing imported objects, in contrast, emphasizes foreignness and unfamiliarity. While the the *effet de réel*, as Jonathan Culler points out, confirms the 'mimetic contract',[40] the *effet d'exotisme* or 'alienation effect' disturbs its reassuringly smoothly workings. This effect is exploited by writers to question mimesis, but also to underline inauthenticity of various kinds.

One example, from Flaubert's 1869 *Éducation sentimentale*, shows us commodities that are of metropolitan construction but which nevertheless point to the context of colonial slavery. The disjunction between these objects and any authentic 'originating' culture is part of the point. The objects in question are two 'grandes statuettes polychromes représentant des nègres',[41] which Louise Roque, the daughter of a provincial parvenu, asks her bourgeois neighbour Frédéric to buy for her in Paris. These statuettes have a function in the plot, since to purchase them Frédéric must visit M. Arnoux's ceramics shop, where he will encounter the

[38] WReC, Warwick Research Collective, *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), pp. 17–18.

[39] 'L'effet de réel' in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, pp. 479–90 (first publ. *Communications*, 11 (1968).

[40] *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London/New York: Routledge, 2002, first publ. 1975), pp. 225–6.

[41] *L'Éducation sentimentale*, ed. by Claudine Gothot-Mersch (Paris: Flammarion 'GF', 1985), p. 321 (also mentioned p. 164).

woman he loved, Mme Arnoux again and thus — ironically — defeat Louise's ulterior aim, which is to marry him herself. But the statuettes also work metonymically in multiple directions. They are not 'authentic' imported objects but painted plaster casts mass-produced in Paris. As such they stand metonymically for Arnoux's project of 'industrial' art, and what Flaubert sees as the degraded position of the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, that is, as mere repetition of stereotypes or the *idée reçue*. These particular statues also stand for Louise's desire to imitate what she imagines to be the lifestyle of the provincial bourgeoisie, since she wants them because she saw similar ones when visiting the regional governor's house in Troyes. The statues' status as ersatz is suggested by the fact that although they are 'grandes' they are described with the diminutive '-ettes': they are not *real* statues. And of course the lifestyle of the provincial elites, to which Louise aspires, is itself based on an ersatz, a false evocation of another imagined higher class. The aspiring middle classes of the mid nineteenth century have large plaster statues of black slaves in their houses because they are themselves imitating an imagined *ancien régime*: black slaves as porters or caryatids had been a frequent motif of luxury domestic furniture and bibelots in the eighteenth century. These mass-produced statues are thus a sign of nostalgia for an imagined lost world in which distinguished elites escape from banal, bourgeois, everyday experience thanks to slavery, a magical means of replacing work with the labour of others. In the 1840s when the novel is set, between the official abolition of the slave trade and the abolition of slavery itself, the French abolitionist movement was weak and hesitant and the July monarchy seemed wedded to the status quo.[42] In the same period, imperialism and slavery appear to offer a refuge for European utopian and pastoral fantasies. What Flaubert's novel shows us is however not the fantasy *per se*, or even the wish for fulfilment of the fantasy, but an ersatz of the fantasy that is doubly derivative. Now Homi K. Bhabha's discussion of

[42] See Jennings, p. 221, pp. 227-8.

colonial metonymy emphasizes that it follows the logic of the Derridean 'supplement', that is, it is a proxy for a (missing) presence.[43] In Flaubert's hands this role as proxy reflects the deeply inauthentic nature of the commodity: the material object (the painted plaster statue of a slave) signifies by association, and what it signifies is not slavery directly but the pretention to belong to a class that itself was pretending to belong to another class whose wealth and status did not depend on work but on the forced labour of Africans. The plaster statuettes are at once a metonym for kitsch and for the *mauvaise foi* that allowed slavery's continuation in the 1840s.

For Edward Said, in his famous essay on Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, the geographical notation that links the English country house to Sir Thomas's Antiguan slave-holdings means that the latter's return to 'productivity and regulated discipline' results in a consolidation of metropolitan order.[44] The overall effect of the colonial metonymies I have rapidly evoked here is, however, not the consolidation of order. Given how flexible metonymy is as a trope, there is no reason to think that it could not be used for such a purpose; but it is also a remarkably *messy* trope, since association works in multiple ways that are not easily contained. I am not making the opposite argument to Said's, an argument that might run along the lines of 'nineteenth-century canonical texts make implicit postcolonial arguments by including the colonies in their metropolitan texts through metonymy'. Such a claim would be naïve as well as anachronistic. On the contrary, I propose that a postcolonial reading of nineteenth-century prose should approach it via its own distinguishing characteristics, of which one is the grounding of characters and events through inessential details. In order to do so effectively we must not conflate different literary tropes. Whereas metaphor and

[43] *Location of Culture*, p. 55.

[44] *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 104.

synecdoche have more or less univocal or totalizing tendencies, metonymy works by association in fragmentary, untidy, multi-directional ways. Metonyms that point towards the circulation of money or goods within the metropolitan economy may thus also be the door by which the distant colonies enter the metropolitan canon, and as such they register the discrepancies of the emerging world-system.

I should not conclude without briefly evoking the other major trope that is often placed alongside metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche, and which proceeds by contrast or antithesis where metaphor proceeds by analogy or resemblance: irony.[45] Colonial irony is of course a vast and complex area that requires separate study,[46] but it should be noted here that it often overlaps with metonymy. In the hands of Balzac or Flaubert — though arguably not of Sand — colonial metonyms are often ironic. Gobseck thinks himself rich because he has accumulated, piled up around him, bribes from the claimants to Haiti's compensation payments; but they are worm-ridden and rotting. Eugénie Grandet believes that the gold coins that have come to her from all the great colonial nations will bring her back her cousin's heart as virgin as her own; but he returns from practising the slave-trade hardened and cynical.

[45] Genette discusses rhetoricians' disagreements over the number of tropes that should be admitted; on the inclusion of irony see *Figures III*, pp. 24–25.

[46] On the dangers of irony's 'transideological' politics, because it is a discursive strategy whose meaning 'depends on context and on the identity and position of both the ironist and the audience' see Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: the Theory and Politics of Irony* (London/New York: Routledge, 1994), ch. 1 and pp. 194–195. On the limitations of irony as a mode of contestation see Bill Ashcroft, *On Post-Colonial Futures: Transformations of Colonial Culture* (London/NY: Continuum, 2001), p. 144. See also Jennifer Yee, *The Colonial Comedy: Imperialism in the French Realist Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 141–143.

Félicité's abnegation appears to leave her soul free to embrace the divine; but the stages by which she is stripped of all earthly attachments link her to slavery. And Louise Roque seeks to assert her individual agency by aping someone who is mimicking an earlier fantasy of wealth based on the enslavement of black Africans.