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Insurgent Testimonies

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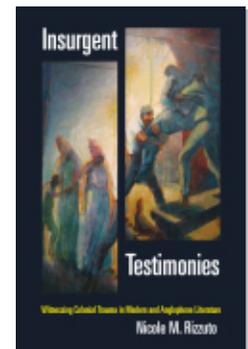
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Challenging Ruptures

Testimonial Insurgencies, Spectral Witnesses

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it “the way it really was.” . . . It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.

— WALTER BENJAMIN, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”

In this book, I examine how British, Caribbean, and African Anglophone writing elaborates an ethics and politics of witnessing events in imperial modernity that generated crises in historical memory.¹ During the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, insurgencies erupted in imperial states and colonies around the world, including Britain’s. At the time of such conflicts, England was confronting social and political unrest within its borders, undergoing cultural and economic shifts accompanying the growth and decline of empire, participating in geopolitical realignments of Europe and the global “East” and “West,” and fighting in world wars. Britain relied on legislation, trials, changes in policing, and extraordinary techniques such as indefinite detention and torture to restore or maintain order while also attempting to protect cherished narratives of national cohesion and imperial benevolence that would secure it from charges of totalitarianism and barbarism leveled at other imperial powers. The writings collected here depict these historical events and their aftereffects as

traumas that compromise such narratives. Such events are traumatic not only because they caused great pain, both physical and psychological, to individuals but because they brought to crisis representations of collective pasts, called into question the conceptual and affective underpinnings of nations, and challenged the legitimacy of empires.

The fiction and nonfiction I consider orchestrate testimonies to insurgencies, wars, and varied forms of social and political agitation while engaging cultural, state, legal, and literary discourses that sought to control them. But these works also orchestrate testimony *as* insurgent, in the narrow and general senses of the word. As such, testimony disrupts established orders, is not institutionally recognized, rises up and overflows borders, and is difficult to contain. *Insurgent Testimonies* draws into constellation works from different nations and literary-historical periods to analyze how testimony crosses and displaces boundaries between literary, legal, documentary, and autobiographical domains and thereby interrupts the dominant representations of colonial history these works also often ratify, indeed reinforce.

My aim is not to offer a comprehensive survey of testimony to trauma in twentieth-century Anglophone literature but to construct a particular genealogy of witnessing as it intersects with moments in which the stability of nations and empires as economic, cultural, and social formations were perceived to be under heightened threat. The cause of the threat is different in each of the works I consider, but in every case it is fundamentally connected to anticolonial struggle. These diverse struggles were both “successful” and “unsuccessful,” some organized and sustained under the mantle of national liberation, others sporadic and unlinked to claims for national sovereignty. Each struggle was also coterminous with other intranational and international conflicts whose structural relationship to them, these texts indicate, was often obscured. Viewed together, the writing of the Ukrainian-born Joseph Conrad, the Anglo-Irish Rebecca West, the Jamaicans H. G. de Lisser and V. S. Reid, and the Kenyan Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o testify to contested events in colonial modernity in ways that question premises underlying approaches to trauma in modernist studies and trauma and memory studies. Their modes of witnessing also invite us to reassess divisions and classifications in literary studies that generate such categories as modernist, colonial, postcolonial, national, and world literatures.

Critics working on trauma in modernist studies and those working in trauma and memory studies have tended to focus on the effects of what

are often considered the greatest ruptures of the twentieth century, the two world wars. I depart from tenets of modernist studies, which centralizes the impact of World War I on the formation of English modernism, and from methods in the field of trauma and memory studies, which long traced the impact of World War II and the Shoah on continental European literary forms. I contend that acute as well as chronic disruptions to imperial and national power and the legal and extralegal responses they inspired shape the formal practices of literatures from the modernist, colonial, and postcolonial periods. To do so, I analyze a particular body of work that has generally fallen beyond the purview of explorations of trauma, testimony, and law: novels, novellas, autobiographical and critical writings, and trial reports published in the first seventy years of the twentieth century.² This writing appears between the great nineteenth-century novels of the legal profession—Walter Scott’s *Heart of Midlothian*, Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House*, Anthony Trollope’s *Orley Farm*—and the vast body of contemporary literature that addresses suspensions of rights under neocolonialism, apartheid, and post-9/11 U.S. imperialism. Composed outside of continental Europe, this work also mostly predates the wealth of post-Holocaust poetry and prose that has attracted critical analyses since the 1990s.³ The overlooked itineraries of testimony in literatures of this time and from these places challenge the dominant definition of trauma as rupture. The deployment of this definition has diverted attention from modernism’s imbrication in colonial histories. It has also strengthened periodizing models that separate modernist from postcolonial literatures.

The narrative strategies that alternately enact and suppress insurgent testimony in the works of the modernist period analyzed here demonstrate that the structural violence of imperialism inhabiting everyday life in both colonies and metropolises is often forgotten in the midst of the spectacular violence of world war. Criticism’s articulation of the First World War as the exemplary rupture of modernity perpetuates this amnesia. Concentration on the Great War’s role in defining modernist and countermodernist articulations of memory, consciousness, and culture began with Paul Fussell’s landmark study *The Great War and Modern Memory* and was followed by the important scholarship of Modris Ecksteins, Samuel Hynes, Vincent Sherry, and feminist revisions of the period by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Bonnie Kime Scott, Trudi Tate, Margaret Higonnet, and others.⁴ Arguing that the war was the rupture that made modernism possible, Fus-

sell writes, “The Great War was perhaps the last to be conceived as taking place within a seamless, purposeful ‘history’ involving a coherent stream of time running from past through present to future,” maintaining that it “took place in what was, compared with ours, a static world, where the values appeared stable and where the meanings of abstractions seemed permanent and reliable.” Before the war “there was no *Waste Land* . . . no *Ulysses*, no Mauberly, no *Cantos*, no Kafka, no Proust, no Waugh, no Auden, no Huxley, no Cummings, no *Women in Love* or *Lady Chatterly’s Lover*.”⁵ This line of argument is reconfigured in the decades succeeding the publication of Fussell’s study. Most recently, the textual effects of the experience of the battlefield have been paralleled to those of the experience of the European metropolis, the Georgian strategies of the war poets connected to the strategies of modernist civilian writers such as D. H. Lawrence.⁶ Whether used to distinguish modernism from realist war testimonials or to read modernist fragmentation as reflective of the real, the foregrounding of war eclipses the effects of colonial life and history on modernist form.⁷ Depicting the war as rupture explicitly or implicitly characterizes the prewar past, the time of colonial conquest, consolidation, and resistances to these, as “static” rather than dynamic or violent.

Such arguments express a temporal imaginary that takes modernism at its word when it claims to “make it new” and a spatial imaginary that posits a gap between metropole and colonies. Others, however, have dispelled these mythic visions. Jay Winter argues that “the view that there was a ‘modernist’ moment in literary history, beginning in the 1860s, maturing before 1914, but coming of age after the Great War” is a dream of order; “to array the past in such a way is to invite distortion by losing a sense of its messiness, its non-linearity, its vigorous and stubbornly visible incompatibilities.”⁸ Modernist and Great War culture and literature did not exclusively perform a radical break with the past or abide by Ezra Pound’s commandment to make it new. In mourning and remembrance, writers often availed themselves of earlier aesthetic techniques and practices, Winter asserts. The performance of testimony in Conrad’s and West’s works composed during the war illustrate that both authors do so. This performance also questions the ideology that situates modernism, and modernity, as rupture, an ideology that Fredric Jameson critiques and attributes to modernism’s commentators and periodizers. Jameson contends that a dialectic of rupture and periodization

recurs throughout modernity and comes to define it: “the foregrounding of continuities, the insistent and unwavering focus on the seamless passage from past to present, slowly turns into a consciousness of a radical break, while at the same time the enforced attention to a break gradually turns the latter into a period in its own right.”⁹ Jameson was also one of the first critics to expose how a perceived rupture between the spaces of the metropole and colonies organizes modernist literature, demonstrating that British modernism reveals its reliance upon colonialism and its inability to raise this reliance to the level of textual consciousness.¹⁰ The last decades have seen an increasing number of studies explore how British modernism alternately registers and obscures the imperial formations that enable it.¹¹ None, however, has focused on how testimony labors to raise histories of colonial trauma, violence, and law to the level of textual consciousness. Attending to this labor clarifies the Eurocentric perspective underwriting the theory of modernism, and modernity, as rupture.

That the conceptualization of trauma as rupture is thoroughly entrenched, and that modernity is often conflated with trauma, is suggested by the fact that even the critic of the ideology of modernity-as-rupture promulgates it while using the language of trauma. On the one hand, Jameson proposes that “modernity” is a trope of rewriting, a “rhetorical effect” that returns throughout history.¹² On the other hand, he insists that this trope possesses a singular referent. Instead of World War I, this referent is what he describes as the traumatic break that initiates the capitalist world system, which subsumes all differences under the standardization of a universal market order.¹³ In a passage whose significance he minimizes by calling it a “parenthesis” and whose language of trace, ghostliness, and abstraction appears to convey modernity as irreducibly tropological, Jameson negates this argument. He claims that we can

restore the social and historical meaning of the rewriting operation by positioning it as a trace and an abstraction from a real historical event and trauma, one which can be said to amount to a rewriting and a surcharging of the social itself in its most concrete form. This is the moment of the overcoming of feudalism by capitalism, and of the aristocratic social order of castes and blood by the new bourgeois order which at least promised social and juridical equality and political democracy. This is to locate the referent of “modernity” in a new way, via the ancient ghostly forms of experience itself rather than in some one-to-one

correspondence between the alleged concept and its equally alleged object. . . . In any case—and this is the deeper justification for tracing the formal operations of the trope of modernity back to its traumatic historical emergence—our situation at the beginning of the twenty-first century has nothing to do with this any longer.¹⁴

Abiding by his own premise that “we cannot not periodize,”¹⁵ Jameson adduces modernity as the consequence of a “real” new beginning, “experience itself.” His term for the rupture in history, the moment of the overcoming of feudalism by capitalism, is trauma.

Analyzing the speech act of testimony makes clear the problems with conceptualizing trauma in terms of rupture. As psychoanalysis tells us, testimony does not re-present events as “real, historical traumas”; rather, it figures traumas as sites of struggle over representation and over what constitutes reality and history. Freud never wrote a single or unified theory of trauma, but he elaborated the concept through discussions of different topics: dreams, accident neuroses, castration anxiety, and exile under fascism and religious persecution.¹⁶ His discussion of *Nachträglichkeit*, translated as “aftereffect,” theorizes that trauma is relayed through (re)telling and, therefore, is always spread across multiple times. In the process of secondary revision, trauma is figured through contingencies of enunciation and subject to the pressures that initiate that enunciation. Trauma is the effect of testimony, of which it is also a cause. Every trauma is internally split, haunted by another time, that of a potential testimony to it in the messianic formulations of the future anterior in which trauma “will have been,” will have happened. Every testimony is haunted by the time of the historically specific event outside the present of its enunciation, which it figures. The psychoanalytic theorization of trauma thus elucidates the problem with viewing a past as either entirely continuous *or* discontinuous with a present that activates testimony. This theorization can function as a reminder for the work of literary criticism that periods are not self-enclosed. Testimony in the writings I examine discloses how ruptures claimed to constitute periods dis-simulate relations between pasts and presents.

Employing as one critical apparatus the morphology of testimony psychoanalysis elaborates helps restore the importance of imperial trauma to the formal procedures of modernist and Anglophone literatures. It is worth

pointing out, however, that the institution of psychoanalysis also consolidated patriarchal, colonialist, and heteronormative narratives of subjectivity and historical development. As feminist, postcolonial, and queer theorists have taught us, using psychoanalytic models to counter such narratives also means setting psychoanalysis against itself in key ways. In recent years, others have questioned the value of trauma theory for reading postcolonial and contemporary literature and culture.¹⁷ I maintain that the psychoanalytic theory of trauma provides a critique of temporality useful for broadly describing the structure of historicity formally articulated in the writings I examine. My specific readings of texts, however, while informed by trauma theory's critiques of temporality and experience, are not solely framed by them. To address the singular enactments of testimony in the works I consider, it is necessary to turn to other critical methodologies. For example, in an idiom distinct from the psychoanalytic, Walter Benjamin, too, questions modes of temporalizing that render a past either entirely continuous or discontinuous with a present. This questioning is undertaken not with the clinical goals of healing or working through trauma but rather to articulate a critical method aimed at fomenting social and political justice.

Instead of as breaks, totalities, or periods, testimony in fiction and non-fiction written during particular moments of imperial decline codes earlier scenes of colonial conflict as something like what Benjamin calls dialectical images, that is, pasts of oppression that issue forth in a "moment of danger." These literary works do not "recover" such pasts. Staged through testimony, these pasts resist the apprehension of homogenous time that guides historicist projects of recovery. Benjamin directs his philosophical critiques of positivism and historicism toward political ends: the resistance to fascism and the control of "ruling classes." While his famous call to blast open the continuum of history prescribes the critical method through a language of violent disruption, what is blasted out of this continuum is not a totality or bounded period but, rather, a monad in which "is crystallized all the tensions of past, present, future together, at a standstill [*Stillstellung*]"¹⁸ and that therefore offers "a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past." Giving a chance to a past described not, in Freudian terms, as "repressed" but "oppressed" (*unterdrückt*—the word Benjamin uses to depict, in Marxist terms, classes in struggle) requires that one encounter the monad as dialectical image. He defines the pedagogical aim of the *Arcades Project*, therefore,

as training the “image-making medium within us.”¹⁹ The potential critical force of every image is that it is suffused by the now-time, *Jetztzeit*, which is not the present but rather undoes phenomenologies of presence: “What distinguishes images from the ‘essences’ of phenomenology is their historical index. . . . Image is dialectics at a standstill.” The dialectical image is activated in a contingent moment that forms a constellation with this what-has-been; thus, “to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was’ (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers.”²⁰ Benjamin announces the critical gesture of wresting the memory from “the conformism of tradition” in terms of class struggle, but de Lisser, Conrad, West, Reid, and Ngūgi demonstrate how class struggle is necessarily crosshatched by gender, sexual, race, and ethnic struggles as well. Each work’s compositional context—the Russian Revolution of 1905 and coincident anticolonial revolt in Russian peripheries, including Poland; World Wars I and II; uprisings against Crown colony rule in Jamaica; and the emerging neocolonial state in Kenya—is a moment of danger that spurs other, earlier moments to flash up or surge forth as dialectical images.

Because the form of testimony and the events it figures are incompatible with the logic of rupture used to characterize the aesthetic practices of modernism and the historical situations said to condition them—a logic that has been used in both similar and different ways to characterize Holocaust writings and the Shoah²¹—examining texts that stage traumatic testimony encourages, if not demands, a transnational approach with a dilated temporal perspective. Conrad, West, de Lisser, Reid, and Ngūgi reimagine revolutions, insurgencies, counterinsurgencies, treason, and war as tears in the fabric of the nation and empire, but the formal practices that constitute testimony relate that each of these events is enmeshed within historical processes that predate them and is the product of contemporaneous forces that extend beyond the particular region, nation, or continent in which they are shown to occur. Drawing together Conrad’s autobiographical and political “Polish” writings and novel of the Russian revolution of 1905, *Under Western Eyes*; West’s World War I novel, *The Return of the Soldier*, and post-World War II trial reports collected in *The Meaning of Treason*; de Lisser’s historical

romance *Revenge: A Tale of Old Jamaica* and Reid's epic novel *New Day* and young-adult novel *Sixty-Five*, all of which recount the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865 in Jamaica; and Ngũgĩ's novel about the Kenya Emergency, *A Grain of Wheat*, which I situate in the context of his critical writings on African literature and his prison writing, *Detained*, allows us to put into practice what Michael Rothberg calls "multidirectional memory." As Rothberg persuasively argues, the study of trauma is enriched by an approach that seeks out connections across time and space while preserving differences. This critical practice "posits collective memory as partially disengaged from exclusive versions of cultural identity and acknowledges how remembrance both cuts across and binds together diverse spatial, temporal, and cultural sites."²²

The works I analyze use a variety of textual strategies to bear witness to these crises in memory, including those typically identified as modernist, though only two authors would traditionally be classified as modernists and even they are not the most canonical examples of this type. Participating in ongoing critical endeavors to rethink what the term "modernism" means in the era of the new modernist studies, I turn to West and Conrad because their writings complicate received ideas about what modernism is or does. Among these is that modernism is skeptical of Enlightenment narratives that uphold nationalism as a spiritual ideal, and that it reflects a secular alienated and atomistic subjectivity produced by capitalist modernity. Each author's interest in testimony as both literary and legal acts is coupled with ambivalent attitudes toward nationalism as a basis for community. This ambivalence betrays contradictory responses to imperialism and demonstrates how a boundary between secular and religious discourse is rendered precarious by testimony.

West's works are written across high and late modernist, as well as post-modernist periods, but do not fit neatly into any of these periodizing categories. As Bernard Schweizer asserts, "West's modernist work places less emphasis on the concept of artistic crisis than it does on notions of political, cultural, and spiritual crisis," and he proposes that this "makes her work less susceptible to traditional readings of modernism as a movement driven by aesthetic and formal imperatives."²³ West's vocations as journalist and travel writer, who documented journeys through 1930s Yugoslavia and 1960s Mexico, and as a reporter of many important trials in the United States, Britain, and postwar Germany, influenced her approach to literary form and shaped

her views on nationalism, imperialism, and anti-imperialism. West's political views shifted across her career. Although she was never a member of the Bloomsbury group, her earlier writing shares some of the perspectives of its figures. *The Return of the Soldier* criticizes nationalist discourses for ratifying uneven social and class structures within England and ties these structures to imperial interests and the suppression of labor movements abroad. Over the next two decades, West's perspectives moved away from those of modernist vanguards. She became critical of communism and other forms of leftist internationalism including the cosmopolitanist ethos of Bloomsbury. She interpreted this ethos as antinationalist and the result of unexamined privilege. Witnessing the repression and destruction of nationalities in the Balkans made her sympathetic to nationalism as an affective mode and led her to see it as a form of resistance to imperial domination.²⁴ But her acculturation as an Anglo-Irish subject, combined with anxieties about the consequences of accelerating imperial contraction in the postwar period, seems to have made her less than sympathetic to other nationalisms—those targeting British rather than Eastern European powers. In her reports on the treason trials in England, West derides the anticolonial nationalism of the Irish, whom she treats as subhuman and therefore lacking the right to national independence.

Conrad's experiences traveling throughout the colonial world and his status as a colonial subject helped mold his writing, too, which, like West's, departs in certain ways from modernist practices and politics. Conrad was the son of a leading Polish revolutionary of the most radical faction of anti-colonialists, which notably did not articulate their program in ethnonationalist terms. Apollo Korzienowski was exiled by the Russian state and died while Conrad was very young, and, consequently, Conrad was raised by a maternal uncle who was highly critical of his father's revolutionary agenda. Conrad left Poland and became a citizen and supporter of the British empire and a critic of incipient globalization and emerging cosmopolitical alliances. Divided attitudes toward imperial nationalism drive his fictional and autobiographical responses to revolution in Russia and anticolonial revolt in Poland. These attitudes are crystallized in the enactment of confession in *Under Western Eyes* and the 1915 essay "Poland Revisited." Those works' employment of literary impressionism and other techniques read as modernist, but their use of confession positions them within a tradition of secu-

lar and religious expression that precedes the modernist period, is largely absent from modernist practice, and then returns in the postwar West in a multitude of discursive forms.

West's and Conrad's writings' concerns with law, testimony, and justice during struggles against imperial power connects them to the works of de Lisser, Reid, and Ngũgĩ. These are more forgotten than canonical texts of colonial and postcolonial literature. This fact might be attributed to their subjects and their treatments of them. These novels lack the plots and thematics often found in highly anthologized and popular Anglophone fiction: narratives of migration and diaspora detailing the difficulties of negotiating identity and existence among foreign communities, for example, or representations of encounters between global and minority cultures in a "modernity at large." By contrast, *Revenge*, *New Day*, *Sixty-Five*, and *A Grain of Wheat* center on insurgencies and counterinsurgencies that take place within the space of a colony and that were rooted in economic factors as much as, if not more so than, contestations over culture. Moreover, their range of responses to these events defies what we have come to expect from postcolonial literature.

Revenge (1919) and *New Day* (1949) were published decades prior to independence in Jamaica, and *Sixty-Five* (1960) two years before it. It is not only that they make insurgency their topic but also how they address it that distinguishes these texts from canonical postcolonial fiction, understood as literature written after as well as during the colonial era that takes a critical stance toward colonialism. Reid's works are highly ambivalent toward the ends of empire, and de Lisser's is opposed to Jamaican independence. These attitudes are conveyed through narrative strategies that attempt to vindicate English law. According to the Jamaica Royal Commission and the Victorian writers and jurists whose arguments, I contend, *Revenge*, *New Day*, and *Sixty-Five* engage, English law has been tarnished by the excessively brutal and lengthy suppression of the Morant Bay rebellion under Governor Edward Eyre's command. The formal protocols of witnessing in de Lisser's and Reid's novels dissect the legal concept of necessity that was at the foundation of British emergency law and at the heart of the debates about whether the counterinsurgency was justifiable. These debates occurred during what became known as the Governor Eyre controversy in England. This slippery legal concept has reemerged as the site of controversy again in the

twenty-first century, having become the focus of criticisms of the practices of policing and detention in the ongoing U.S. war on terror. The question the Morant Bay rebellion raised, which has been raised again, is whether the concept of necessity should be based on imminent threat or on deterrence.²⁵ That all three novels have fallen out of print and have garnered little to no critical attention in decades evinces they are incompatible with the Anglophone/World Literature market today and illegible within the discipline of postcolonial literary studies. But this fiction should be revisited, I maintain, because it ruminates on how justifications for legal violence intersect with uneven class and race formations. It permits us to see, then, that contemporary questions about the use of legitimate versus illegitimate force possess a history and a buried literary history.

Unlike de Lisser and Reid, Ngūgi is a world-renowned author today; nevertheless, his novel *A Grain of Wheat* had only recently come back into print in the beginning of the twenty-first century. This reprinting of a work about the years of the Emergency, during which the screening and detention in concentration camps and villages of tens of thousands of Kikuyu occurred, is timely. Details of the brutality and scope of the counterinsurgency were buried in British archives for decades and first unearthed in the early 2000s by historians whose studies have since punctured the British “counterinsurgency myth”: that the empire was engaged in a campaign to win hearts and minds with the goal of rehabilitating insurgents. Not until 2011, under pressure from the Kenyan government, had England begun to address in legal form its crimes under the Emergency. Ngūgi’s novel has returned to print in its revised version, which was first published in 1986. The original work, which appeared in 1967, has not. That text, which I examine here, portrays the violence of the counterinsurgency as well as that of the Kenya Land and Freedom fighters in graphic terms. The rhetoric through which violence is justified creates discomfiting overlaps and complicities among colonial, neocolonial, and even anticolonial formations. Ngūgi exposes the violence of British law in its enactment of a state of exception. This enactment normalizes indefinite detention and compelled confession, techniques of governance the Kenyan leaders will use after independence. The novel’s strategic management of silence and speech critiques these techniques and signals Ngūgi’s attempts to end a cycle of traumatic repetitions of betrayal that plague Kenyan colonial and postcolonial history. At times, however, the

text delivers its critique of violence and betrayal by justifying national independence in a language of natural rights, rights based on biological or bare life. Use of this language risks perpetuating the legacy of colonial thought the work sets out to destroy.

The connections that emerge among these modernist, colonial, and postcolonial writings are not produced by the plotting of transcultural encounters in colonial spaces or “contact zones,” therefore. Rather, these connections are produced by formal enactments of testimony to “missed encounters,” or traumas, in colonial history.²⁶ These enactments refute claims by scholars that a particular style proffers a more ethical response to trauma than another, for instance, modernist or postmodernist experimentation or, conversely, documentary and “conventional” narrative forms associated with traditions such as realism and naturalism.²⁷ Moreover, these authors’ deployments of diverse styles and various discourses challenge monolithic notions of an engaged literature of the postcolonial period that would contrast with a metropolitan modernism thought to be defined by difficulty, self-reflection, and experimentalism. West and Conrad eschew markers of innovation such as stream of consciousness and fragmented narratives and use techniques found in literary, journalistic, and popular genres whose grammars stress continuity more than discontinuity and convey a sense of coherence rather than disorientation. Instead of aspiring toward aesthetic autonomy and self-reflection, these works are directed outward: through testimony, they broach actual historical events. Ngūgi’s and Reid’s novels appear during eras in which fiction often portrayed the material conditions of everyday life through vernacular modes in the hopes of galvanizing a people toward independence and nation building. But *New Day* and *A Grain of Wheat* also employ tactics identified with cosmopolitan high modernism: nonlinear narratives, shifts in perspective, and epic forms. Raymond Williams argued that such features express modernism’s “metropolitan perception” and were a consequence of upheavals in traditional social structures accompanying deracination and migration to the European metropolis in the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁸ The settings of Reid’s and Ngūgi’s texts are not the European or even the colonial metropolis, however, but the rural estates, towns, and detention villages of the colony. What impels their formal tactics is not migration and deracination but upheavals *within* the colony or nation that are the effects of transnational, cultural, and legal forces on it.

Although Ngūgi and Reid use what could be described as modernist tactics, their works also require that we define the term “modernism” differently from the ways critical models have defined it in the past: as a recognizable category of texts associated with a specific set of aesthetic practices thought to originate in Europe and diffuse outward to colonies and former colonies, where they are copied or recycled.²⁹ Jessica Berman offers an alternative to this reading of modernism in her study of ethics, politics, and transnational modernism. She argues that “modernism . . . stands for a dynamic set of relationships, practices, problematics, and cultural engagements with modernity rather than a static canon of works, a given set of formal devices, or a specific range of beliefs,” and she proposes that “modernist narrative might best be seen as a constellation of rhetorical actions, attitudes, or aesthetic occasions, motivated by the particular and varied situations of economic, social, and cultural modernity worldwide, and shaped by the ethical and political demands of those situations.”³⁰ This understanding of modernist narrative is capacious enough to describe the strategies of works that stand outside traditionally defined high modernist and late modernist periods as well as canons. It has the added value of disputing entrenched ideas about modernism understood as works that feature a particular set of formal devices—namely that modernism is inherently colonialist or Eurocentric or, contrarily, that it inherently challenges colonial ideologies and Eurocentricisms.³¹ Envisioning modernist narrative forms as flexible, plural, and emerging in response to national and transnational forces that both foreclose and aim toward justice enables us to draw connections between literatures of different periods. These connections emerge otherwise than on the basis of empirically verifiable information, for instance, that Ngūgi wa Thiong’o read and revised Conrad’s works throughout his fiction and, specifically, rewrote *Under Western Eyes* as *A Grain of Wheat*. As Nicholas Brown reminds us in his study of modernism and African literature, a framework that seeks to analyze relationships among modernist and postcolonial literatures cannot be based on “influence.”³² This category has functioned to position colonial and postcolonial writing as secondary and belated responses to European literature. I would add, moreover, that it assumes we know what modernism and postcolonial literature are—an assumption my analyses of these colonial and postcolonial novels also questions by treating them not as copies but as works whose own historical pressures induce their formal portrayals of these events.

It is not my aim to relabel and reperiodize these novels of coloniality and postcoloniality *as* modernism, however, that is, to subject them to classificatory schemas of new modernist studies. It is true that compelling arguments have been made for a “weak theory” of modernism that would enable a broadening of critical approaches and promote attention to literary and cultural works that are not typically included in this category.³³ But I decline to reclassify the Jamaican and Kenyan texts I consider as modernism because today the term modernism does not register the oppositional stance that the terms colonial and postcolonial literature still do. Retaining these terms, which evoke histories of marginalization and assimilation, encourages us to question why certain texts resist or fall outside institutionally and culturally dominant circuits of criticism and publication. Retaining these terms also encourages us to notice when the influence model returns to literary studies in other guises. Reid’s, de Lisser’s, and Ngūgi’s works cannot easily enter these circuits because they express the force of the nation and nationalism linguistically, rhetorically, and ideologically and because their orchestrations of globality are not articulated in the culturalist terms of an expansive worldliness but rather in economic terms of constrictive depredation. “Modernism” in its most recent manifestations—appended to the word “global” and also occupying a central position in studies of world literature—has enabled the model of influence to regain ground while also establishing divisions and hierarchies between world literature and national literature and between cosmopolitanism and nationalism. According to Pascale Casanova’s influential theory of world literature, Anglo-European modernism serves as the example that writers from the colonies attempt to reproduce when they seek to break out of local, national, or regional constraints and enter the “world republic of letters.”³⁴ This argument reduces colonial and postcolonial literature to instances of mimicry of metropolitan modernism and reduces world literature to literature that dominates the global market and has somehow divested itself of the specificities of the “local” through which it has been constituted and also resists. While studies of global modernism do not necessarily frame their inquiries in terms of a work’s position in the world republic of letters, attention is increasingly paid to texts that are thought to enact a global perspective, to articulate modes of identification and belonging and an ethics and politics that reach beyond the nation.³⁵

A transnational approach to literatures of imperial modernity enables us to see how testimony troubles the privileging of the global over the national

and illuminates how a world increasingly structured by transnational and cosmopolitical forces also provokes the emergence of nationalisms in different forms.³⁶ This approach allows us to examine how, for Ngūgi and Reid, the nation-state is an aspirational form and nationalism an affective mode with which to challenge the legitimacy of the colonial and neocolonial state and expose the violence inhabiting dispensations of sovereign power. It also permits us to explore how for de Lissier, Conrad, and West an era marked by world wars, shifting geopolitical alliances, declining nation-states, imperial retrenchment, and incipient globalization can awaken or reawaken imperial nationalisms and ethnonationalism as reaction-formations. In their writings, such reaction-formations disavow the violence of imperial law as it struggles to legitimate its power while delegitimizing the claims of those who challenge it.

Examining works written from the metropole as well as the colony and postcolony at moments in which a nation's borders are particularly porous, or are not yet formed, or are under assault allows for both a broader and a more nuanced view of the processes through which literature responds to trauma. The effort to transnationalize trauma studies and facilitate critical encounters between trauma theory and postcolonial histories and literatures has gained momentum in recent years through the scholarship of Victoria Burrows, Sam Durrant, Anne Whitehead, Stef Craps, and Michael Rothberg.³⁷ Gabriele Schwab both adds to and modifies Rothberg's transnational theory and practice of multidirectional memory, which posits memory as generous rather than competitive and as generative of connections among rather than conflicts between traumatic histories. Schwab analyzes "haunting legacies," conflicting representations of collective memory that come into view by comparing victims' and perpetrators' responses to historical trauma.³⁸ As they testify to the nation as an ongoing project under constant revision as it hyphenates with the state and is reshaped through various economic and cultural modes of transnationalism, these writings both enact instances of multidirectional memory and also illustrate how haunting legacies engender clashes between antagonistic and uneven forces—dominant and subaltern, perpetrator and victim. Neither the modernist nor the colonial and postcolonial texts neatly align with, or stage, categories of dominant and subaltern or perpetrator and victim, however. Insurgent testimony conjures specters that displace these categories as it elaborates and negotiates impasses between ethics and politics.

In his second sustained response to Levinasian ethics,³⁹ Jacques Derrida writes of the aporetic and dissymmetrical relation without relation between ethics and politics and justice and law as a mode of spectral witnessing. Emmanuel Levinas asserts that ethics, as “first philosophy,” precedes ontology. In glossing Levinas’s theory of ethics as an underived responsibility to others that both comes before and also exceeds the prescriptions of the socius, law, or the state and that Levinas articulates as the unique encounter with the unique in the face to face, Derrida figures this encounter as testimony.

If the face to face with the unique engages the infinite ethics of my responsibility for the other in a sort of *oath before the letter*, an unconditional respect or fidelity, then the ineluctable emergence of the third, and with it, of justice, would signal an initial perjury. . . . such perjury is not accidental and secondary, but is as originary as the experience of the face. Justice would begin with this perjury. (Or at least, justice as law; even if justice remains transcendent or heterogeneous to law, these two concepts must not be dissociated: justice demands law, and law does not wait).⁴⁰

Levinas maintains that the ethical is the singular and incalculable responsibility to another, which cannot be mediated by law or the state. Derrida agrees with Levinas that there can be no dialectical synthesis of or mediation between the infinite and incalculable responsibility to others and the calculus of the state, between the ethical and political, or between justice and law. The first term of each of these couples exceeds the economy of mediation and synthesis. No political or legal action can be verified as just or ethical; the effects of actions cannot be entirely controlled or calculated. Yet, Derrida insists, every ethical encounter is haunted by the demands of the calculus from the very beginning. If the ethical is an oath, a promise that binds one to and makes one responsible to and for others, a promise that precedes consciousness or choice, the political is the perjury that necessarily haunts this originary scene as specter and interrupts, simultaneously, this supposedly “prior” ethical relation that nonetheless remains discontinuous with the political. Derrida also challenges Levinas’s privileging of the ethical over the political by arguing that without law and the calculus, without perjury, there is no possibility of anything like justice or ethics taking place, even though these institutions also enable the spectral “pervertibility” of ethics and justice: hence the aporetic relation between ethics and politics, justice and law. “This spectral ‘possibility’ is the impossibility of controlling,

deciding, or determining a limit, the impossibility of situating, by means of criteria, norms or rules, a tenable threshold separating pervertibility from perversion,” Derrida asserts. He relates that “this possible hospitality to the worst” that testimony as perjury enables “is necessary so that good hospitality can have a chance, the chance of letting the other come.” In betraying, by responding to, an other, testimony conjures specters that occasion other responses and responsibilities.

In each of the writings I examine, the insurgent staging of testimony conjures spectral witnesses, events and subjects that are focal points of negotiations between ethics and politics. And at times, it is the very institutions that seek to contain testimony, as well as insurgency, that enable or facilitate these conjurations: the courtroom, the confessional, the police ministry, the detention center. These works relate, also, that “just as the law is not simply a reactive institution that codifies existing social relations,” as Joseph Slaughter reminds us, “literature is not simply a medium for re-presenting those formations.”⁴¹ Literature and testimony are both irreducible to institutions that organize and deploy them, and they can break the frames that appear to contain them. Shoshana Felman’s insight in her and Dori Laub’s classic study of testimony is borne out in different ways in Conrad’s, West’s, de Lissers’s, Reid’s, and Ngūgi’s writings: “As a performative speech act, testimony in effect addresses what in history is *action* that exceeds any substantialized significance, and . . . dynamically explodes any conceptual reifications and any constative delimitations.”⁴² Though enlisted in the service of providing evidence, testimony cannot be reduced to evidentiary report and exceeds such “constative de-limitations.”

When I say that testimony in these works conjures specters, I do so with the various meanings of “conjure” in mind. These meanings signal that testimony convokes communities whose members are not “naturally” affiliated, as communities of race, blood, or nation are often imputed to be, nor are they gathered together by rational choice or consensus. These communities emerge as an effect of speech acts of law and the state as well as an effect of acts not decreed, indeed even forbidden, by law and state. The *OED* relates that conjure is derived from the

Middle English, < Old French *conjurere* (*conjurere*) = Provençal *conjurar*, Spanish *conjurar*, Italian *congiurare* < Latin *conjūrāre* to swear together, to band, combine, or make a compact by oath, to conspire, etc., < *con-* tog ether + *iūrāre* to

swear, make oath. The stress-mutation in Old French *conju'rer*, *con'jure*, gave two corresponding forms 'conjure, *con'jure* in Middle English, of which the former was by far the more usual, and has come down in senses.

The definitions are broken into three main categories: "I. To swear together; to conspire. II. To constrain by oath, to charge or appeal to solemnly. III. To invoke by supernatural power, to effect by magic or jugglery." These definitions summarize the ways testimony convokes communities throughout the texts I address. The first definition relates that conjuring endeavors to interrupt administrative, state, or legal domains; the second situates conjuring within such domains; and the third denotes that conjuring breaks with codes of reason, operates outside the limits of the rational and secular, when it summons community. The communities that testimony convokes are those of the nation, empire, and people as "imagined" and "imaginary" social formations (although no less material in their effects) as well as the subaltern-on-the-way to the people that have been thrown into crisis by colonial and neocolonial trauma and war, insurgency and counterinsurgency.⁴³ It is to these amorphous and shifting communities that testimony, as acts launched within the forums of law and the state, as well as those that break out of those forums, also responds.

Having sketched in some detail the outline of the book, I end this introductory chapter by turning to a work whose staging of testimony exemplifies that in the works that follow: E. M. Forster's 1924 novel, *A Passage to India*. This text serves as an example because it is both similar to and different from those I address in the next four chapters. It is similar because although it is composed only a few years after World War I, the trauma to which it attests is not the effects of that war alone but also those of an imperial rule whose claims to legitimacy have become increasingly vulnerable as the consequence of state violence and a strengthening anticolonial movement. It is different because unlike the fiction and nonfiction I discuss in the next chapters, its examination of how colonial law attempts to manage an occluded event has received a fair amount of critical attention.⁴⁴

The novel depicts a struggle between colonial law and insurgent testimony that dramatizes the irreducibility of ethics to politics yet confuses clear limits between them. *A Passage to India* convokes spectral witnesses in the midst of growing unrest in colonial India. An imputed but occluded act

of violence generates a trial that sets the struggle in motion: an Indian man is accused of raping an English woman in the Marabar Caves. In the novel, the caves metonymize India. The formal articulation of the alleged rape and its adjudication in the court indicate British anxieties about colonial masculinities in the midst of ever more vocal anticolonial resistance. This articulation and adjudication also point to an increased anxiety about Britain's (self-)image as a benevolent empire. This image has become threatened by Britain's recent efforts to implement a state of exception in the colony.

The transformation of the state of exception from a phenomenon of wartime to a condition of peacetime constitutes a historical shift in modernity, and it is one backdrop against which *A Passage to India* is composed. Giorgio Agamben describes this shift in which the state of exception becomes a "technique of government rather than an exceptional measure,"⁴⁵ transforming liberal democracies and exposing their tendencies toward the "liquidation of democracy."⁴⁶ Agamben asserts that during World War I and the years immediately after it, "one of the essential characteristics of the state of exception—the provisional abolition of the distinction among legislative, executive, and judicial powers—here shows its tendency to become a lasting practice of government."⁴⁷ The philosopher discusses England in this context but does not consider how Britain's deployments of states of exception in its colonies in response to anticolonial resistance play a role in this transformation of modern biopower and sovereignty.⁴⁸

Forster writes the novel in the immediate aftermath of a brutal show of force in the colony, the Amritsar Massacre of 1919. British soldiers fired into a crowd of ten thousand unarmed demonstrators, killing 379 people and wounding over one thousand others. This violence, though excessive, was not exceptional in the juridical sense of the term. That is, it was not, *but could have been*, authorized by the very legislation of a state of exception against which the protestors were demonstrating: the Rowlatt Acts. These acts extended World War I emergency powers into the colonies during peacetime to combat "subversive activities," allowing trials without juries and detention without trial in certain political cases. The acts were never implemented. Martial law was declared following the massacre, and other acts of state violence including beatings and floggings followed, but the massacre also gave rise to Gandhi's movement of noncooperation, which successfully thwarted the implementation of the acts.

A Passage to India makes no mention of the Rowlatt Acts, the mass demonstration, or the massacre, but its handling of colonial law and portrayal of an India that baffles that law's attempts to get hold of it can be read as a meditation on Britain's waning power and changing reputation from benevolent to malevolent imperial power. Forster's elaboration of testimony as a mode contained within institutions such as the trial, and also uncontrollable by them, tells a story about how literature responds to historical trauma that will recur in singular ways throughout this book.

Through its treatment of the Marabar Caves, the novel relates English characters' desires to comprehend and get hold of India, a place that seems destined always to elude their grasp. Eventually the caves become a site of failed comprehension that compels the intervention of colonial law. The English woman Adela Quested, who is in India visiting her fiancé with her future mother-in-law, Mrs. Moore, accuses the Indian Aziz of raping her when they travel together to the caves. Before they visit them, Adela eagerly demands information about the caves from Aziz and others. Her demand sets off a vertiginous process that ends in failure. The stakes of comprehending the caves are great, for by accessing them, according to Adela, she will finally discover the "*real* India."⁴⁹ She implores the Hindu Professor Godbole and Muslim Aziz to describe these Jain caves: "Tell me everything you will, or I shall never understand India" (79). Aziz, failing to present them, encourages Godbole, "do describe them" (79). Godbole more than acquiesces to filling the role of native informant, it seems, insisting, "it will be a great honor" (79). But Adela's desire to "understand India" is left unsatisfied.

"There is an entrance in the rock in which you enter, and through the entrance is the cave."

"Something like the caves at Elephanta?"

"Oh no, not at all; at Elephanta there are sculptures of Siva and Parvati.

There are no sculptures at Marabar."

"They are immensely holy, no doubt," said Aziz, to help on the narrative.

"Oh no, oh no."

"Still, they are ornamented in some way."

"Oh no."

"Well, why are they so famous? We all talk of the famous Marabar Caves. Perhaps that is our empty brag."

"No, I should not quite say that."

“Describe them to this lady, then.”

“It will be a great pleasure.” He forewent the pleasure, and Aziz realized he was keeping back something about the caves.

(80)

It is unclear whether the novel’s dramatization of Adela’s desire and Godbole’s refusal to satisfy it criticizes or consolidates colonialist vision. Although Aziz labors to “help on the narrative,” Godbole, who masquerades as an informant, stymies it at every point. The power of silence and withholding is harnessed by the Hindu colonial subject against both Adela and the Muslim character, whom the novel presents throughout as more proximate to the English. Significantly, the passage does not relate that Godbole *cannot* represent the caves but that he *chooses* not to, perhaps even at his own expense; he “forewent the pleasure.” One might of course read that claim as ironic, but one might just as well read it as the desire to interrupt desire. That the novel declines to represent the caves not only through Godbole’s perspective but also the narrator’s suggests that one point of this exchange might be to make readers aware that their own desires can coincide with colonial desires to objectify, to freeze a complex place into an image and insert it into a body of knowledge in order to master it. But this scene might, on the contrary, support scholars’ contentions, most notably Edward Said’s and Sara Suleri’s, that Forster’s depiction of India as exorbitant to representation codes this place as irrational, a “muddle,” as the narrative frequently derides.⁵⁰

As muddle, I would argue, India also appears exorbitant to modernity and justice, a place that requires colonial knowledge and legal systems to provide both. The performative contradiction the scene cited above rehearses by declaring the caves immediately representable while refusing to represent them is repeated in reverse later in the novel. Here, the narrator’s ethnographic voice and focalization render the caves overdetermined:

There is something unspeakable in these outposts. They are like nothing else in the world, and a glimpse of them makes the breath catch. They rise abruptly, insanely, without the proportion that is kept by the wildest hills elsewhere, they bear no relation to anything dreamt or seen. To call them “uncanny” suggests ghosts, and they are older than all spirit. . . .

The caves are readily described. A tunnel eight feet long, five feet high, three feet wide, leads to a circular chamber about twenty feet in diameter. This ar-

rangement occurs again and again throughout the group of hills, and this is all, this is a Marabar Cave. Having seen one such cave, having seen two, having seen three, four, fourteen, twenty-four, the visitor returns to Chandrapore uncertain whether he has had an interesting experience or a dull one or any experience at all. He finds it difficult to discuss the caves, or to keep them apart in his mind, for the pattern never varies. . . . Nothing, nothing attaches to them, and their reputation—for they have one—does not depend upon human speech.

(136–137)

“Unspeakable” and “readily described,” all too ordinary and completely extraordinary, purely symbolic and marking the failure of the symbolic, the caves embody an interpretive impasse in the novel. The interpretive impasse described here and registered in the previous scene’s formal treatment of the caves prefigures the interpretative impasse that occurs during Adela and Aziz’s visit to the caves. Whether a rape happens during that visit is left indeterminate. The allegation calls forth the law in the form of a trial. The trial’s response to this indeterminate event has in turn obstructed scholars’ efforts to determine whether this work supports or challenges the ideals of imperial law and its distribution of justice.⁵¹

The scene in the caves that treats the inability to grasp India as an inability to witness an alleged transgression perpetrated by an Indian man against an English woman generates legal action whose presentation collocates formal practices of witnessing with historical problems of witnessing anticolonial resistance. Although this alleged transgression seems an act unconnected to the political sphere of national protest, as Jenny Sharpe has argued, it references the colonial discourse surrounding an earlier anticolonial revolt, the Indian Mutiny of 1857.⁵² But Forster’s text is arguably also haunted by the recent protest at Amritsar and the emergence of an anticolonial movement more sustained and organized than that during the mutiny. In light of these recent developments, the motivations for grasping an unknown, incomprehensible India extend beyond that of the apparently innocuous colonial curiosity parodied through Adela’s “quest.” Indeterminacy in India has become more threatening in the postwar years because it is now associated with the possible presence of subversives and because to manage such indeterminacy Britain must compromise what Conrad’s Marlowe calls empire’s “noble cause.”⁵³ The protest at Amritsar revealed the brutality of British colonialism in its effort to control indeterminacies in order to prevent sub-

version. The extension of emergency powers during peacetime in the colony is part of a wider series of tactics through which English law compromises its claims to operate as a vehicle of universal justice. By choreographing a trial, the novel provides an occasion to redeem English law and reassert the colonizer's supposed imperial benevolence. Rather than do so, however, *A Passage to India* shows that law includes within itself the capacity to subvert itself as well as the capacity to generate further subversions by those it seeks to control when it endeavors to maintain a political status quo. The novel relates that law does so because it relies upon testimony.

The trial is enlisted to provide justice and knowledge of what transpired in the caves, but the orchestration of time and space in that scene famously prohibits both characters and readers from determining whether or not a rape occurs.⁵⁴ It is impossible to pinpoint where different characters are located in relation to each other at each moment in the caves. The trial, by contrast, appears to be a distinct episode with a beginning, middle, and end. It is set in a space that organizes its various participants and audience into specific compartments that reflect their roles during the proceedings. Like the contested event it attempts to capture and adjudicate, however, the trial's temporal and spatial boundaries are not so neatly defined. An "uncanny" force is summoned that disrupts the time and space of the trial, disturbing chronology and eroding the walls of the courtroom and the lines that divide witnesses on the basis of gender, race, class, caste, and national and colonial identifications. As the trial commences, witness for the prosecution Adela summons her prospective mother-in-law, Mrs. Moore, through an apostrophe: "In virtue of what had she collected this roomful of people together? . . . by what right did they claim so much importance in the world, and assume the title of civilization? Mrs. Moore—she looked round, but Mrs. Moore was far away on the sea" (242). Just as the episode in the caves confuses time and clear significations of what has and what has not been experienced, of characters' presences and absences, the trial scene does, too. The novel relates that "while thinking of Mrs. Moore she heard sounds, which gradually grew more distinct. The epoch-making trial had started" (242). The summoning of Mrs. Moore obscures the beginning of the trial, which "had started" by the time we read this passage and by the time Adela turns her attention to the proceedings. The apostrophe to Mrs. Moore minimally muddles the beginning, but a different summoning of her by others disrupts

the middle spectacularly. Despite the fact that the elder English woman has already departed India for England, and despite her insistence before she left that she would remain firmly outside of the institutions of colonial law—"I have nothing to do with your ludicrous law courts,' she said, angry. 'I will not be dragged in at all'" (222)—she is brought within the system only to disrupt it again.

This second summoning of Mrs. Moore causes the law's delegates to lose control at the hands, or voices, of witnesses situated both within and outside the institutional space of the trial. When the prosecutor makes reference to, without naming, Mrs. Moore, his words "brought on another storm, and suddenly a new name, Mrs. Moore, burst on the court like a whirlwind" (248–249). The court becomes disordered, the defense storms out, "the tumult increased, the invocation of Mrs. Moore continued, and people who did not know what the syllables meant repeated them like a charm. They became Indianized into Esmis Esmoor, they were taken up in the street outside. In vain the Magistrate threatened and expelled. Until the magic exhausted itself, he was powerless" (250). It so happens that while this occurs, as we later learn, Mrs. Moore dies en route to England. No one is aware of this at the time, however. The depiction of this central character's death is both strikingly laconic and uninterested in attaining conclusiveness: "She died at sea.' 'The heat, I suppose.' 'Presumably'" (274). This depiction of her death, coupled with the temporal logic that coordinates her death with the Indians' calling of her name, invites an interpretation that seems outrageous when we consider that the novel, and the modernist novel in particular, is a secular narrative form.⁵⁵ This interpretation is that the Indians' apostrophe conjures a specter. It is around the time that she dies that Mrs. Moore returns as a liminal figure in the courtroom, situated between the poles of material and immaterial. (By having her die between India and England, the novel figures her liminality in cultural and national terms also.) The effects of the Indians' testimony during the trial, its "magic" (250), therefore interrupts legal reason as well as modernist secular reason in the novel.

Conjured through apostrophe, Mrs. Moore returns as a specter because she does not return as herself but as one disappropriated from her body and proper name. At the moment Mrs. Moore's proper name is called, it is stripped of property and, her son will maintain, of propriety. It is translated from the colonizer's English into the colonized's English as "Esmis

Esmoor.” The incantation spectralizes her because it materializes her in the courtroom, but as a “Hindu goddess” rather than in her own material form. The chant thus gives face to the dead woman while de-facing or giving her a different face at the same time.⁵⁶ The spectralization of Mrs. Moore temporarily dissolves the law’s potency and dismantles the boundaries between the inside of the institution and its outside as the chant carries into the street. Those excluded from the legal machinery, neither judge, jury, nor witnesses for defense or prosecution, become unauthorized participants in the trial by summoning and insisting, against the proscription of the court, that the specter bears witness. “‘An extraneous element is being introduced into the case,’ said the Magistrate. ‘I must repeat that as a witness Mrs. Moore does not exist. . . . She is not here, and consequently she can say nothing’” (252), he warns the defense and prosecution.

The conjuring of the specter in the voices of those subject to the British legal system but without power to determine how it dispenses justice rehearses an aberrant sexuality and an errant witnessing that clarifies that the goal of the trial is tied to broader interests of the colonial state. That goal is to police the relations between and desires of colonized and colonizers and thereby to maintain separations between Indians of various castes and classes and English and Anglo-Indian subjects. The apostrophic translation that conjures the excluded witness as specter, rendering her “sensuous-nonsensuous,”⁵⁷ is an act of subversion as well as perversion. It subverts the authority of the court but also perverts the lines of racial and sexual identification and desire the court enforces. The possibility of perversion of colonially regulated desires and identifications, which reaches its apotheosis in “Esmoor,” is signaled in the opening of the trial scene through Adela’s focalization of the only subaltern in the room mentioned, the punkah wallah, whom the narrative connects to Mrs. Moore.

Almost naked, and splendidly formed, he sat on a raised platform near the back, in the middle of the central gangway, and he caught her attention as she came in, and he seemed to control the proceedings. He had the strength and beauty that sometimes come to flower in Indians of low birth. When that strange race nears the dust and is condemned as untouchable, then nature remembers the physical perfection that she accomplished elsewhere, and throws out a god—not many, but one here and there, to prove to society how little its categories impress her. . . . Opposite him, also on a platform, sat the little assistant magistrate,

cultivated, self-conscious, and conscientious. The punkah wallah was none of these things: he scarcely knew that he existed and did not understand why the Court was fuller than usual, indeed he did not know that it was fuller than usual, didn't even know he worked a fan, though he thought he pulled a rope. Something in his aloofness impressed the girl from middle-class England, and rebuked the narrowness of her sufferings.

(241–242)

This consideration of the subaltern leads Adela to summon Mrs. Moore, for how the English justify assuming the “title of civilization . . . was the kind of question they might have discussed on the voyage out before the old lady had turned disagreeable and queer” (242). Structural links emerge between the two figures of different genders, national, colonial, and class and caste status. The “queer,” spectral Mrs. Moore and the untouchable are both outside and inside the proceedings simultaneously and are bestowed with an agency that exposes the limits of juridical power. The subaltern “seemed to control the proceedings” without consciousness, as does the specter who suspends the Magistrate’s power without intention, and not as her proper self; however, both witnesses possess no institutional agency. The punkah-wallah “had no bearing officially upon the trial” (241)—indeed, is presented as unconscious of its meaning as a political, “epoch-making” event entirely. This remark underlines that he figures a subalternity that is not yet in crisis or on the way to institutional resistance. Mrs. Moore, the court has ruled, “as a witness cannot exist.” Both characters are also eroticized by others whose social, economic, and political standing is dissymmetrical with their own. Adela’s gaze eroticizes the subaltern “god,” and the translation of the English woman into “goddess” reads as another instance of eroticism condemned by Mrs. Moore’s son as a sexual violation: “It was revolting to hear his mother travestied into Esmis Esmoor, a Hindu goddess” (250).

When Adela asks “Isn’t it all queer” (251) after the courtroom and street erupt in chants, “queer” reads in at least two ways. First, summoning the specter through translation is an act of illicit love. The summons highlights the etymology of the word translation, a carrying over and across, and literalizes it in both narrow and broad senses. In the narrow sense, the summons crosses linguistic codes (from Anglo-English into Indian English), and in the broader sense the summons carries the witness from death into an after-life or sur-vival. This double-crossing queers colonial law’s polic-

ing of heteronormative desire as a prohibition on crossing national, racial, and colonially circumscribed limits of desire. Second, the summons queers a legal and institution-bound understanding of witnessing based on the categories of the evidentiary and the verifiable and on ontologies of presence and absence. Testimony here does not provide evidence. Rather, it connects subjects that the trial endeavors to divide.

The summons subverts because it illustrates that testimony cannot be entirely contained by institutions in which it emerges; by subverting containment, it insubordinately generates a proscribed, unstable cross-cultural alliance, a strange, catachrestic friendship between colonizer and colonized. While the novel relates that institutions cannot fully control the agency of testimony, its treatment of friendship also rejects the notion that legal forums are simply mechanisms of repression and silencing: it is the trial that occasions this friendship. By occasioning the perverting of law through the misdirections of testimony, the trial enacts a futurity in the here and now that controverts the novel's last words on friendship. The work's concluding paragraphs deny the capacity for friendship between Indians and English in the present and disavow its possibility in the future by dismissing the stated necessary condition for this friendship: India as sovereign nation. In the exchange between Aziz and Fielding, characters whose gender, religion, and class identifications the novel has established—the novel, by contrast, does not establish those of the Indians who summon the English woman during the trial—the possibility of friendship is foreclosed.

India a nation! What an apotheosis! Last comer to the drab nineteenth-century sisterhood! . . . Fielding mocked again. And Aziz in an awful rage danced this way and that, not knowing what to do, and cried: "Down with the English anyhow. . . . Clear out, you fellows. . . . We may hate one another, but we hate you most. . . . we shall drive every blasted English to the sea . . . and then," he concluded, half kissing him, "you and I shall be friends."

"Why can't we be friends now?" said the other, holding him affectionately. "It's what I want. It's what you want."

But the horses didn't want it—they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it, sending up rocks through which riders must pass single file; the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath: they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, "No, not yet," and the sky said, "No, not there."

The trial operates as a forum for law's interruption through an act of witnessing that also interrupts the narrative's closure and defies laws of nature (the horses, the earth, the birds, the carrion, the sky) and culture, both Indian and British (the temples, the tanks, the jail, the palace, the Guest House). Testimony dispatched during the trial does not describe the status quo and solidify its divisions of class, caste, religion, gender, and colonial status under the dominant structuring, "in other words, literary and cultural forms (like legal forms) do not simply reflect the social world."⁵⁸ It calls forth a transcultural, -class, and -caste friendship among men and women that cannot exist in the novel's present. This alliance that perverts and subverts the law, however, is not plotted as one that either party intentionally enters into. Mrs. Moore is summoned, it seems, while she dies and enters into the alliance as a specter. The Indians do not know who it is they summon, "did not know what the syllables meant" (250) with which they call her. "Alliance" and "friendship" are therefore catachreses when used to describe the relationships the summons engenders. We would have to question Kieran Dolin's contention that while "the trial may be conducted along 'imperial' lines . . . the result affirms Mrs. Moore's faith in and sympathetic understanding of her friend."⁵⁹

For although the defense insists that the prosecution has smuggled Mrs. Moore out of the country because she would "have proved his [Aziz's] innocence . . . she was poor Indians' friend" (249), there is no guarantee here or elsewhere that this determinate type of friendship either existed or exists. The defense calculates that by claiming Mrs. Moore as Indians' friend it could claim her as Aziz's alibi. The friendship testimony invokes does not operate according to calculation, however. It does not provide evidence or help prove Aziz's "innocence." We know why the defense would summon Mrs. Moore, but we never discover why the Indians summon her; it is not even clear that they know why since they are presented as not knowing the meaning or referent of the words they chant. Because the novel never verifies whether this summons occurs with the hopes of exonerating Aziz—whether the Indians rally around Aziz in a show of support of a fellow national—it leaves uncertain whether this summoning serves political ends. The text suggests that this testimony might stage friendship instead as an ethical encounter, a relation between others that is not motivated by calculation.

We might read as an historical index the fact that the trial is what occasions this subversive, perverting, nonidentitarian friendship emerging

through a translation that creates an excess, an “extraneous element,” as the Magistrate refers to the spectral Mrs. Moore. By articulating that colonial legal institutions can facilitate the eruption of alliances they would police but cannot entirely control, the novel registers threats to imperial power in its time. By convoking the strange friendship it does between members of different races, classes, sexes, castes, and nations, insurgent testimony indicates that the novel also imagines a future in which social structures imposed under imperialism have eroded. The trial scene intimates that colonial rule will eventually end, therefore; however, it does not do so by acknowledging that an anticolonial nationalist movement exists in the colony at the time. Said argued that Forster’s text is restricted by the imagination of the England of his time because it cannot take seriously the coherence of such a movement in India, except, the critic maintains, for a brief moment. That moment is the eruption of the chant during the trial in which “the Indians [are] roused momentarily to a sort of nationalist coherence.”⁶⁰ The “sort of” is significant. Only by ignoring a host of details in the choreography of this insurgent testimony—the aberrant sexuality and errant witnessing; the structural suturing of Mrs. Moore to the subaltern, who, as such, is necessarily *not* captured by a popular nationalist movement;⁶¹ and the translation that generates a “community” whose members are not shown to be consciously resisting imperial power or even conscious of the meaning of their speech—can this chant be termed nationalist or coherent. Instead, this insurgent testimony and the alliance it convokes operate below the level of the national *and* cross national (and cultural-linguistic) borders.

The trial scene configures a mode of anticolonial subversion distinct from, and both less and more threatening than, the organized nationalist movement coincident with the novel’s composition and publication. The disordered, spontaneous subversion, queer and unconscious, is less threatening than the nationalist movement that consciously and systematically resists because the latter proved strong enough to articulate a program that made explicit the implicit suspension of democratic principles of British law during the Amritsar Massacre and successfully prevented the implementation of a permanent state of exception in the form of the Rowlatt Acts. By contrast, the novel’s alliance suspends the trial only briefly. The proceedings continue until Adela withdraws her charge. Insurgent testimony also does not recover the “truth” of the occluded event at the trial’s center and does

not resolve questions about culpability and innocence. The novel will not verify that justice has been served with the acquittal of Aziz. However, this mode of witnessing is more threatening than the extant nationalist movement because it discloses what cannot be represented in any direct way: the threat of a state of exception to the colonial government that will norm it as a governmental tactic. Insurgent testimony lays bare law's capacity to produce subversions that reveal law's internal interruptions. Moreover, the agents of subversion are no longer immediately recognizable by race, gender, class, or caste or identifiable by the logic of presence and the present or by the conditions of status quo the novel's conclusion countersigns. As we have seen, the courtroom draws together subjects the law hopes to separate and unintentionally creates the possibility of uncontrolled desire and collectivities that cross borders. Finally, because the alliance is disorganized and spontaneous, it is more difficult to anticipate or control, and it carries the possibility that the exposure of English law's suspension of liberal principles and claims to provide universal justice can occur at any time.

A Passage to India gestures toward a more just future through the insurgent conjuring of spectral witnesses, but without detaching itself entirely from the limits of its own present. The future testimony imagines is certainly not one defined by normative selves who transcend differences and historicities, the "utopia" articulated by R. Radhakrishnan in his examination of Forster's novel. Considering the depiction of flames that approach in the Marabar Caves, Radhakrishnan regrets that the novel forecloses the "ideal world"⁶² it provokes, one structured by reciprocity rather than asymmetry: "Why can't each flame perform both as mirror and as window to the other so that transcendence into the utopian Real may be effected in radical transgression of the colonialist mode of recognition?"⁶³ The rearrangement of community testimony conjures does not resemble this "ideal world" in which unevenness and alterity have disappeared. Both more realistic and less teleological and problematically humanist than Radhakrishnan's formulation of the future, the collectivity insurgent testimony enacts through linguistic and cultural translation is not as divided as that of 1924, but it remains shaped by the unevenness of that time. For the trial's *mise-en-scène* reveals what must be given up in order for Forster to imagine a new community. After all, the alliance emerges through a disappropriation of its subjects, the divestment of selfhood and volition, as well as the erasure of markers of historicity and

embodiment. Each “friend” is not a “normative Self . . . willing to be rendered vulnerable by the gaze of the ‘Other’ within the coordinates of a level playing field.”⁶⁴ Testimony ensures that to become “poor Indians’ friend,” Mrs. Moore must die and be translated into an Indian deity, prosopoetically detached from a face, voice, and body produced by the contingencies of history. The Indians cannot even be rendered conscious that they might be engaging in an act of friendship. The novel cannot create a situation in which English women and Indian men and women become friends “in themselves” or as selves during the colonial era.

Thus, while the friendship that emerges during the trial inclines toward the ethical because it is not subject centered and is discontinuous with calculation, this friendship remains parabolic to the ethical that such theorists as Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, and Jean-Luc Nancy articulate because it demands the effacement of all historical differences and perhaps even demands the transcendence of finitude, the transformation of friends into “gods” or “goddesses.”⁶⁵ We thus cannot verify whether an “ethics” of witnessing has occurred. The alliance testimony conjures is already a perjury of the ethical because it is constituted out of the political-historical situations of modernity that structure the novel.

Radhakrishnan’s reading of *A Passage to India* prompts Laura Winkiel to raise significant questions about modernism, utopia, and historicity as she reflects on how comparative methodologies might access global modernisms’ varied relationships to modernity. “Modernism is rife with failed utopias,” she reports, “but,” she asks,

is there a possibility for comparative modernisms that might allow us a glimpse of that utopian and potentially transformative space? I’m concerned most with keeping in play both colonial historicity and the utopian realm of transcendent temporality. . . . How does the novel as a global form signify modernity and enact that modernity by negotiating with other forms at the state and local levels? How does the novel negotiate those disparate spaces and temporalities, cultural otherness and sameness, especially at the level of literary genre?⁶⁶

Insurgent Testimonies endeavors to respond to some of these questions. The book understands modernity as “by definition uneven, divided as it is between capital and labor, overdevelopment and underdevelopment,”⁶⁷ yet at the same time, as testimony to these particular historical traumas insist, as rife with the imaginative potential to disrupt unevenness.

The events the writings collected here address entailed enormous suffering and loss, but also, as the example of *A Passage to India* conveys, they conditioned possibilities for imagining new social, political, and economic arrangements. These works' testimonies to trauma therefore challenge any definition of modernity as the ready acquiescence to the singular and decisive triumph of capitalism and imperialism. To explore such imaginations, I rely on close reading, an increasingly anachronistic method in an era of "distanced reading" and "surface reading." Close reading, at its best, allows one to draw connections in a way that prevents universalizing ahistoricism, on the one hand, and, on the other, impedes the tendency to reduce literacy on the basis of preprogrammed historical knowledge. Jane Gallop asserts, "It is precisely my opposition to timeless universals that make me value close reading," and she makes a compelling case for the necessity of it in the midst of literary studies' return to historicism and the archive.⁶⁸ Here, close reading attempts to follow the shifting hyphens between the ethical and political, the literary and historical that testimony enacts. At this contemporary moment in which techniques of power these works elaborate and scrutinize are being restaged in new as well as old ways—from indefinite detention, to capital punishment, to racial profiling, to arguments for imminent threat and deterrence as bases for policy decisions in the ongoing war on terror—these writings might become, themselves, dialectical images. They might enable us "to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger" so as to reexamine oppressive pasts that form a constellation with the present.

