CHAPTER 7

Theories of Anthologizing and Decolonization

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Decolonizing the English literary curriculum is a necessary and yet impossible task. It requires more than overcoming institutional inertia within the university; it requires much more than having a series of difficult conversations at the departmental level regarding the purpose and scope of an English literary education today. Decolonizing the literary curriculum in the United States, the location from which I write, demands nothing short of revolutionizing an entire educational apparatus where the university is only the tip of the iceberg. Add to it Kindergarten–12 schools, the textbook industry, and state legislatures, eight of which as of 2021 have banned the discussion of structural racism, sexism, and White privilege in the classroom (Ray and Gibbons).

I begin with the enormity of the challenge not to be defeatist, but to acknowledge that colonialism suffuses the infrastructure of humanities education. Its tentacular reach is what makes decolonization an unfinishable project (Vadde 21). Parting ways with Jurgen Habermas's characterization of modernity as an unfinished project, proponents of decolonization have learned to question the philosophical optimism implied by a telos of accomplishment. To think in terms of the unfinishable rather than the unfinished is to take into account the persistence of neocolonial institutions and debt structures as well as the continuation of settler colonialism across continents despite the official demise of territorial empires. Within this framework, decolonizing the curriculum functions less as an apogee and more as an ongoing check on the institutional power of educators and educational administrators.

In the field of English literary studies, a primary vector of such institutional power is the canon. Theoretically, the canon and the curriculum should reinforce one another as part of the wider apparatus of academic literary study, but practically speaking, the Canon with a capital "C" has come under fire for its assimilationist and depoliticizing connotations, while smaller canons organized around minoritized or historically

underrepresented identities have proliferated. Even as courses on major authors such as William Shakespeare, John Milton, and James Joyce persist, disciplinary self-definition has responded to the splintering of canonicity by turning away from core texts to core methodologies. If English professors cannot agree on which authors and texts should anchor the curriculum, many still believe that close reading should remain the primary pedagogy of a discipline attentive to the global circulation of English and the plurality of literary Englishes.[1] The turn from adjudicating canonical texts to promoting signature methods might seem like an abdication of aesthetic judgment, but it has shifted the terms of curricular debate away from matters of gatekeeping (i.e. are these texts literary), an obviously polarizing and often racially and ethnically coded question, toward matters of cultural transmission and social reproduction (i.e. how should an English major regard literary tradition).

Gauri Viswanathan's landmark study *Masks of Conquest* precedes the turn to transnationalism within English literary studies, but it is foundational to contextualizing global English literary traditions within the matrices of imperial power. In it, she argues that no serious account of the disciplinary origins of English Literature can ignore the strategic role literary study played in the consolidation of the British Empire. Published through a book series entitled "The Social Foundations of Aesthetic Forms," *Masks* historicized the birth of the English literary curriculum in colonial India as an "instrument of Western hegemony in concert with commercial expansion and military action" (167). Conceptually, she approached curriculum formation "not in the perennialist sense of an objective, essentialized entity but rather as discourse, activity, process, as one of the mechanisms through which knowledge is socially distributed and culturally validated" (3).

When *Masks of Conquest* was first published in 1989, Viswanathan was wary of generalizing her study of disciplinary English beyond nineteenth-century colonial India. However, in her preface to the twenty-fifth-anniversary edition, she is more willing to think in comparatively colonial terms. She finds her understanding of the curriculum as an instrument of social control reflected in Isabel Hofmeyr's work on the circulation of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* in Africa. Viswanathan describes how the text only became part of the English literary canon after it had served as an international tool of conversion for Christian missionaries (vii). Ironically, the canonization of *Pilgrim's Progress* within England itself depended on muting its prior evangelical role in African education campaigns. Hofmeyr's attention to the domestication and racialization of Bunyan

lends insight into the nationalist underpinnings of the discipline of English under formation in England in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (222). Her meticulous study of the international and multilingual itinerary of a single work joins Viswanathan's study of colonial archives in decolonizing the category of Englishness. Both show how the literary curriculums of the colonies provide shadow contexts for decisions made about literary curriculums at the seat of the British Empire.

Twenty-first-century movements to decolonize the university have drawn on the historical work of scholars such as Viswanathan and Hofmeyr, but their leaders have set their sights firmly on the here and now. Simukai Chigudu, a Zimbabwean-born scholar and one of the leaders of the Oxford chapter of the Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) movement, argues that the Foucauldian approach to knowledge for which Viswanathan calls is heralded in the university as long as its insights apply elsewhere to another time and place. The struggle lies in bringing a critical approach to knowledge and self-fashioning to metropolitan centers of power and wealth: "But Oxford, Britain, and the west must be decolonized, too. Essential to this is advancing a richer, more complex view of the imperial past and its bearing on the present. Zimbabwe is not England's troubled colony – it is its mirror." Kehinde Andrews puts the matter more polemically when he writes of the RMF-Oxford movement: "In the heart of whiteness, students mobilized to reject not only their colonial schooling but the hidden curriculum embodied by the statue of racist Cecil Rhodes" (ix). Both assert that a colonial education is not solely a product of geography but also a matter of mentality. The hidden curriculum embodied in the statue of Rhodes reflects the ways in which diversity does not guarantee inclusivity or equity. In predominantly White institutions, Andrews asserts, Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students occupy the edges of the university; their success relies on learning the unspoken rules of assimilation.

Chigudu is a professor of African politics, and Andrews is a cultural sociologist, but both ground their arguments in rhetorical reversals that are distinctly Conradian. Andrews dubs Oxford the "heart of whiteness," while Chigudu calls Zimbabwe (known as Rhodesia until 1980) a "mirror" of Britain. Neither mention *Heart of Darkness* by name, but Chigudu quotes Chinua Achebe's unsparing critique of *Heart of Darkness* when he implores British citizens to do away with a curriculum that reproduces old prejudices, distortions, and mystifications of Africa. Reading Chigudu's and Andrews's essays, I could not help but wonder where *Heart of Darkness*, like *Pilgrim's Progress*, fit into "the hidden

curriculum" embodied in the statue of Cecil Rhodes. Was the hypercanonical novel, like the statue, now an emblem of White supremacy, imperial nostalgia, and the vested interests of an old donor class who remain as committed to the ideology of the Great Books as they do to the ideology of Great Britain? Or did the novel, first published in 1898, remain a powerful if unspoken touchstone for advocates of decolonization as they explained the contemporary institutional configurations of colonial power?

I ask these questions not only as a scholar of English literature but as one of the editors of the upcoming 11th edition of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* (hereafter *NAEL*). First published in 1962 under the general editorship of M. H. Abrams, the *NAEL* was the brainchild of Abrams and George Brockway, president of W.W. Norton and Company from 1958 to 1976. Brockway recruited Abrams to create an anthology of British literature that would parallel the anthology *The American Tradition in Literature*. The *NAEL* sought to compete with two preexisting anthologies, namely *The College Survey of English Literature* (1942) and *Major British Writers* (1959), both published by Harcourt Brace. Within a few years of its publication, the *NAEL* captured 85 to 90 percent of the market for English literature textbooks (Shesgreen 305).

Given its market dominance over the last sixty years, the *NAEL* has been described as "the sine qua non of college textbooks, setting the agenda for the study of English literature in this country [the United States] and beyond" (Donadio). The prominence of the anthology within the North American literary educational system has made it a lightning rod for critique in the intervening decades as feminist, multicultural, and postcolonial critics questioned not only the maleness and Whiteness of the anthology but also the narrative of literary history underpinning its organization. Such conflicts over the diversity of authors represented in the *NAEL* have also yielded more extreme positions among United States-based scholars against anthologizing itself.

For some, the core processes of anthology editing – selection, excerption, arrangement, and framing – too closely replicate the decontextualizing and objectifying practices of colonial epistemologies. World literature anthologies, by this definition, are an irredeemable "technology of appropriation" that center themselves by establishing dominion over literatures from elsewhere (Slaughter 54). For others, anthologies are simply incapable of relinquishing colonial categories of value. The consolidation of the category of literariness, for example, has historically excluded and diminished the importance of expressive forms that do not

fit into European genres of poetry, prose, and drama. When anthologies become arbiters of literary merit and discriminating tastes, they do so by obscuring discrimination against peoples and disavowing the "unequal social relations" that remain the "scaffolding" of English as a field of study (Alemán 473). Such antianthology positions show the degree to which pessimism toward the genre has become interchangeable with pessimism toward the discipline of English.

Theories pointing to the colonial underpinnings of the anthology bring up vital truths about the enterprise. Yes, anthologists have historically treated the cultural production of the colonies as raw materials to be turned into property and profit. The practice is memorably enshrined in *Ulysses* when Stephen Dedalus bitterly imagines his best lines ending up in an English visitor's book of Irish folklore: "For Haines' chapbook . . . A jester at the court of his master, indulged and disesteemed, winning a clement master's praise" (Joyce 25). Yes, anthologies inevitably center themselves and their narratives as definitive of a literary tradition. Noting these unsavory elements within the history of genre, however, should not culminate in throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

Critical theories of anthologizing lay the groundwork for decolonizing actually existing anthologies. This is crucial editorial work given the popularity of anthologies for introductory survey courses particularly at large state schools and community colleges, if not in the elite bastions of the Ivy League and private liberal arts colleges. Anthologies are assigned more often in less elite educational spaces, and they are the practical medium through which many teachers first expose students to the premises, objects, and methods of English as a discipline. Without interrogating the organizational principles of anthologies in light of real-world use, we cannot mount a decolonized approach to English literary history that triangulates the canon, the curriculum, and the classroom.

Theorizing the English Literary Anthology

Critiques of anthologies, grounded in postcolonial theory and ethnic studies, treat the genre as representative of and implicated in a power structure much larger than itself. Given their general suspicion and rejection of the anthological project, it is unsurprising that these critiques have little to say about the anthology as an everyday teaching tool. For all their limitations, anthologies remain appealing to instructors and students because they are a relatively affordable one-stop shop for an entire course. To think about the anthology as a classroom text is to contextualize more

abstract questions about the politics of its construction within the concrete demands of its adopters.

In 2001, as part of its inaugural issue, the journal *Pedagogy* did just that. Its editor, Christine Chaney, convened a roundtable of professors who regularly teach with anthologies and asked them to compare the 7th edition of the *NAEL* with the *Longman Anthology of British Literature*. The premise of the discussion was simple: anthologies are widely used in the teaching of college English, yet rarely theorized as such (Chaney 192). This was a problem because, as the comparisons of the Norton and Longman anthologies revealed, ideological convictions shaped not just the construction of anthologies but also instructor preferences for the disciplinary visions on offer. Although the editors of English literature anthologies rarely position themselves as promoting a grand narrative of literary history, anthological paratexts (the preface, introduction, table of contents, headnotes, and illustrations) and scope (six centuries of literary history packed into a hefty tome or tomes) all contribute to one. As one respondent put it, drawing on Nietzsche, anthology editors face a choice between presenting their collated canons as forms of "monumental" history or "critical" history (Drake 199). And college instructors, upon adopting an anthology for a survey course, are essentially deciding whether the literary history they teach will be monumental or critical as well.

Of course, the answer in most classrooms will be somewhere in the middle of these two poles, but how to negotiate that middle is something that anthology editors do *with* classroom instructors and not *for* them. Norton commissions surveys from all its adopters asking them to evaluate the selections they deem essential and to offer feedback on the framework and presentation of selections. In preparation for editing the 11th edition, I reviewed the surveys based on the 10th edition of the *NAEL* and found that many instructors recognized and wanted redress for the racialized and gendered exclusions forged by previous iterations of the canon. In practical terms, such redress called for the inclusion of more women and writers of color, but as a whole these writers were less commonly taught than the traditionally canonical figures who respondents considered essential (Joseph Conrad and T. S. Eliot foremost among them). In thinking about how to meet the needs of college instructors, I found a diversity model of anthologizing insufficient; we needed to rethink our presentation of essential works and canonical authors through a decolonizing frame.

I thought again of Nietzsche's lexicon of monumental and critical histories as it might organize a survey course on English literature. These terms, introduced in his 1874 essay "On the Uses and Disadvantages of

History for Life," formed part of Nietzsche's larger meditation on educational culture at his own historical moment. They reflect his turn away from the disinterested scientific mode of knowledge, enshrined in the Germany university system that employed him, toward a more philosophical engagement with history as a life-enhancing activity. Nietzsche was concerned with the interests different models of history perpetuate in the present. A survey of English literature tilted toward his concept of monumental history would resemble a Great Books course, while one tilted toward critical history would likely be grounded in cultural-studies methodologies. For Nietzsche, monumental histories unify and beautify the past into a series of high points that dull attention to their animating causes in the name of producing "effects in themselves" (70). Such effects are totems of inspiration and are described mystically as "something the brave wear over their hearts like an amulet" (70). Critical histories on the other hand emphasize the power of human beings to resist idealizing the past and instead to "break up and dissolve a part of the past" (75). Critical histories, like monumental histories, serve the living, but in different ways. Whereas monumental histories offer the encapsulation of an immemorial greatness, critical histories in their irreverence offer liberation from the conditioning of our forefathers.

Although unshackling ourselves from the values of the past is at the heart of progressivism, Nietzsche warns against mistaking liberation for exoneration. He posits that the danger of critical history lies in the eagerness of its adherents to distance themselves from those aspects of their inheritance that would seem to merit destruction. For Nietzsche, we are the products of earlier generations, that is, "of their aberrations, passions, mistakes, and indeed of their crimes . . . If we condemn these aberrations and regard ourselves as free of them, this does not alter the fact that we originate in them" (76). Nietzsche does not specify who this "we" is, but it certainly seems like he is talking about the beneficiaries of the past, for whom turning a critical eye upon previous generations seems one way of rectifying complicity with them.

A "we" limited to the beneficiaries is not the "we" conjured by RMF and various other decolonization movements across multiple universities on multiple continents. The "we" of these movements is as internally fissured as the "we" of the university populations to which they belong. While it is tempting to accuse student activists of an us-versus-them mentality, what essays like Chigudu's clarify are attempts to change the conditions under which shared space in the university is forged. The campaign to remove monuments whose primary purpose is to *glorify* figures whose complicated

and often violent legacies should not be obscured is part of a larger call for the recontextualization of monumental histories within their contested legacies across various lines (color, class, and continent being the most visible).

Literary anthologies as taught in the classroom have an important role to play in reappraising the past and reconceptualizing common ground in the university. Today's decolonization movements embrace critique for its associations with structural analysis and revolutionary politics, but they also share Nietzsche's rejection of "critical history" as a form of self-purification from the shameful dimensions of lineage. The English literary anthology, precisely because of its long historical and geographical span, is an essential locus for telling the global story of English lineage anew. Rather than putting its multicentury narrative of literary history to assimilationist ends (for example, framing writers of color as indebted to a tradition defined by William Shakespeare and T. S. Eliot), an anthology such as the *NAEL* can draw on the insights of postcolonial and minority writers to offer a much more complex rendition of how classic forms were put to use in colonial educational contexts to eradicate pride in or connection to local culture. When instructors teach the anthology in the classroom, they can use its selections and paratextual matter to address the canon as a cultural institution buoyed by the economic might of the British Empire but also upended by those subjects who felt both initiated into and alienated by English literary tradition.

To offer but one example, Caribbean poet Kamau Brathwaite coined the term "nation language" to denote the aesthetic and political task of breaking out of the "entire pentametric model" defined by the English poetic tradition from Chaucer onward ("Nation Language" 864). Iambic pentameter represents the sound of English as an "imposed language," whereas its deformation through African folk song and syncopated rhythms enabled Brathwaite to dislocate and indigenize English through the sound and meter of his Caribbean milieu. Brathwaite's deep attention to the components of language led him to focus on the relationship between the sound of poetry and the visual appearance of poems on the page. His later poetry supplemented nation language with what he called "Sycorax video style," that is a style that emphasized typographical experimentation and the use of word-processing tools to retrieve a version of the written word that "could still *hear itself speak*" (*ConVERSations* 167). Brathwaite may have rejected the pentameter of Chaucer, but he uses the affordances of the computer, its selection of fonts and the scroll function of the screen, to return to another, less Christian, account of the Middle Ages

defined by the illuminated manuscript and the historical interactions between Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East.

As the name implies, Sycorax video style also sent Brathwaite back to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. In his poem "Letter to Sycorax," he reimagined Sycorax, mother to Caliban, as a ghost living inside his computer and inspiring his reclamation of the tools of literacy from a colonial print culture. Writing in light, as Brathwaite would call the practice of composing on a computer, countered the symbolic weight of Prospero's book and guided his poetic return to various points of origination: the birth of English literary tradition, the slave trade, the genocide of Indigenous peoples in the Caribbean, and the spoils that resulted from those conquests.

Brathwaite made his *NAEL* debut in the 8th edition in a section entitled "Nation and Language." This section, which appeared in "Volume 2: The Twentieth Century and After" under the editorships of Jahan Ramazani and Jon Stallworthy and the general editorship of Stephen Greenblatt, was the first to address directly territorial decolonization and the migration of Brown and Black peoples from the former colonies to Britain. "Nation and Language" arrayed writers of color alongside White working-class, Scottish, and Irish writers. In addition to Brathwaite, it featured Claude McKay, Hugh MacDiarmid, Brian Friel, Louise Bennett, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Salman Rushdie, Wole Soyinka, Tony Harrison, and John Agard. In the 9th edition, the section would be revised as "Nation, Race, and Language," and Hanif Kureishi, Grace Nichols, and M. NourbeSe Philip would replace MacDiarmid, Friel, Harrison, and Agard. In the 10th edition, the section continued to diversify the writers represented in the anthology by broaching historical and political conditions through the linguistic question of "which English?" (853). The choice of whether to abandon English for Indigenous languages, to write in a vernacular or creole, or to adopt Standard English carried within it the need to balance the marks left by the British Empire with the marks its former subjects could leave on the English language.

As the *NAEL* editorial team prepared the 11th edition, matters of nation, race, and language suffused every period of literary history. The editorial team thought comprehensively about how the perspectives of postcolonial and immigrant writers might alter the selections and normative framework of the anthology as a whole. Period editors, while respectful of one another's specialist knowledge, also engaged in conversations across period boundaries to determine how older literary works signify differently across centuries and political geographies. We debated whether the profoundly

complicated legacy of *The Tempest* in the Caribbean should exert retrospective pressure on which Shakespeare plays were included in "Volume B: The Sixteenth Century and Early Seventeenth Century" and how those plays should be paratextually framed through headnotes, footnotes, and bibliographies. As we finalized our selections for the 11th edition, period editors decolonized our principles of selection by recognizing how the global diffusion of English literature was grounded in the power dynamics of territorial, educational, and cultural imperialism. The colonial legacy of English in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries alters our choice of representative and significant texts from previous centuries.

And yet to say that a shared interest in decolonization guides changes to our organizing principles is not to suggest that *NAEL* editors are simply plucking concepts of racial or linguistic difference from the present and applying them to the past. In their revisions to "Volume A: The Middle Ages," editors Julie Orlemanski and James Simpson find that a period-specific engagement with race demands following notions of racial identity into older discourses of bodily, religious, and cultural difference. Following the lead of premodern critical race studies, they aim to pluralize the genealogies of race as a literary and cultural lens by including texts that stage European fantasies of Islam and Judaism and explore geographic alterity. For instance, the 11th edition features a romance known as *The King of Tars* in which religious difference is written on the body when the conversion of a character from Islam to Christianity results in the apparent whitening of his skin. Selections from the *Book of John Mandeville*, a popular travel narrative, survey the wonders supposedly witnessed on a journey as far east as India and thus give a sense of how cultural distance and foreignness were figured by writers of the time. The editors also include texts in translation such as a poem originally written in Hebrew by Meir ben Elijah of Norwich, ruminating on the painful experiences of Jewish persecution leading up to the expulsion of Jews from England in 1290.[2]

Brathwaite's rejection of one powerful strand of English poetic tradition, the iambic pentameter, led him back to other strands of English literary tradition and textual culture, namely scrolls and illuminated manuscripts. It also led him to a version of the Middle Ages that privileged points of intercultural contact rather than autochthonous culture. We see this version of the Middle Ages emerging from revised editions of the *NAEL* as Orlemanski and Simpson draw attention to the imagining of cultural difference within the period. They also explain the salience of medieval literature to recognizing the religious and iconographic dimensions of modern racisms. Such an editorial strategy builds on the specific

interventions of contemporary scholars of color who have worked tirelessly to render race a legible category within earlier periods of literary history. These same scholars have also had to fight against their own persistent marginalization within the profession of English literature and were among the first to denounce misinformed appropriations of medieval symbols by alt-right and White nationalist groups.

Kimberly Anne Coles, Kim F. Hall, and Ayanna Thompson have argued that remaining studiously neutral in the face of White supremacist mythologizing results in cultural histories of early literatures that unwittingly "assist far-right fictions." They call upon fellow scholars in the early periods (where scholars of color are less likely to be represented) to confront how the colonial project is woven into canonical texts, and they advocate for editorial and teaching approaches that transmit the political complexities of early literatures. For medievalist Mary Rambaran-Olm, disabling racist fantasies of a glorified Anglo-Saxon past also demands decentering Eurocentric narratives of ancient literary history and doing the work of historical recovery. She foregrounds figures such as Hadrian and Theodore – late seventh- and early eighth-century monks and "refugees from Asia Minor" who brought Greek Christian traditions to England by way of Syria and Palestine. The Bigger 6 Collective, started by a group of scholars dedicated to fighting structural racism in the field of Romantic literature, takes its name from the shared mission to promote scholarly and creative work by historically marginalized people and to give a wider view of the Romantic period than the one on offer through figures such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake, Byron, Shelley, and Keats (the Big Six).

The periodic revision processes of anthologies like the *NAEL* respond to the latest developments in scholarship and to the work of antiracist academic collectives such as Bigger 6, Medievalists of Color, and Shakerace. These groups have been at the vanguard of decolonizing work in the North American academy, and they have explicitly tied research innovation (or the lack thereof) to hiring and recruitment practices within the profession. Their interrogation of the English literary tradition yields not a convenient revisionism but a compelling need for renewal in ways that connect literary research to the bodies doing and teaching the research. The suspension of a literary dominant, for example a canonical meter or set of writers, engenders a return to the historical and cultural milieu from which it emerged. I have come to think of the suspension that is also a reinvigoration as central to a decolonized theory of anthologizing. Such a theory uses the exigencies of the contemporary moment to exact new forms of recognition and amplification from the narratives we develop about literature in the English language.

Reimagining Literariness

Certainly, critics of English as a discipline might respond that the *NAEL*, by virtue of its scope and mission, can never go far enough in dismantling a Eurocentric canon or displacing traditional curricular categories built on the paradigms of major authors and genres (poetry, drama, fiction). Anthologies organized around parallel traditions (for example, Caribbean literature or postcolonial poetry) or a more capacious category of textuality (for example, Black British writing) play a vital role in the formation of distinct collective identities.[3] In turn, the publication of identity-based anthologies creates the strategic groundwork for the recognition and consolidation of fields and can serve as a prerequisite to the curricular accommodation of in-depth courses on minority or diasporic literatures.

While I welcome anthologies dedicated to raising the visibility and accessibility of less-taught literary cultures, I do not want to underestimate the power of changing the story a dominant literary culture tells about itself. Rethinking the contours of the *NAEL* leverages the influence of a historically powerful publishing enterprise in universities and classrooms where decolonizing methodologies are not always incompatible with notions of canonicity. The most faithful adopters of the *NAEL* teach at large state institutions in the southern United States, in particular Texas and Alabama, where introductory survey courses are changing but the category of "Great Books" has not fallen out of fashion. Working with these instructors demands meeting them where they are and introducing changes to the anthology that recognize progress made on the ground.

When Martin Puchner, the general editor of the *Norton Anthology of World Literature* (*NAWL*), met with instructors in Alabama, he found that their curricular understanding of "greatness" had evolved from an emphasis on Western civilization to a more comparatively religious and civilizational approach. These anthology users strove to give their students access to "the foundational texts of foreign cultures" and to address an increasingly large cohort of students from China, India, Saudi Arabia, and South Korea (the four largest groups reflected in the internationalization of United States higher education). Learning more about the changing constituencies and continuing values of Southern universities spurred Puchner to revise the operative definition of literature at work in the *NAWL*. No longer grounded in modern categories like the novel or even ancient ones like poetry, the anthological category of world

literature now encompasses religious scripture, orature, and philosophical writing.

The move to deprovincialize Great Books courses and world literature anthologies overlaps with the aims of decolonizing the English departments that house such courses. For Caroline Levine, a member of the *NAWL* editorial team and a scholar originally trained in nineteenth-century British literature, the political potential of anthologizing world literature lies in foregrounding "literature's role in a large-scale story of global inequality" (218). As Levine argues, literature presupposes literacy in the written word, with the consequence that world literature anthologies reproduce a European progress narrative in which mass literacy becomes an index of civilizational superiority and orality becomes an index of civilizational simplicity. Given that 90 percent of the world "could not read as recently as 1850," Levine pleads for the category of world literature to make room for orature (226). By recognizing and granting prestige to complex oral works and to the oral performances of written works, the world literature anthology decolonizes its own standards of cultural achievement. It makes room for the complex verbal artistry of modern African and Asian cultures while also granting pride of place to the songs, folktales, and legends of Indigenous and enslaved peoples in colonial and nineteenth-century American literature – groups historically given short shrift by the yardstick of literacy.

The *NAWL* approach mitigates the historically exclusionary and misleading effects of the category of "literariness" without dispensing with the commitment to honor aesthetic achievement in the verbal arts. Its reckoning with literacy as an instrument of power, discipline, and indoctrination recalls Brathwaite's stance in his essays on nation language and Sycorax video style. It also raises the question of whether a Norton anthology can meaningfully evolve beyond the format of the printed book to make use of digital platforms in a decolonizing fashion. Can we connect transcriptions of oral poetry with recordings or performances of it? The 10th edition of the *NAEL* includes poetry by Black British poets Linton Kwesi Johnson and Patience Agbabi in addition to Bennett and Brathwaite. While the linguistic ingenuity of each of these poets is amply available on the page, sound and performance are indelible elements of their work and are not reproducible within the limits set by the printed book.

Yet if we can marshal the resources of the e-book format, we can create a literary anthology across print and digital formats that allows teachers and students to access literature – that is, read, hear, and

experience it – as the multimedia category that it is. Reimagining the anthology across book formats means thinking of it as a transmedia genre. This is essential for multiple reasons, not least that electronic literature is unable to be anthologized satisfactorily in the codex form. The kinetic poetry of bpNichol, the Flash animations of Young-Hae Change Heavy Industries, and the Twitter fiction of Teju Cole show that twenty-first-century literature is evolving in ways that demand anthologizers think with and beyond the printed book. These forward-looking examples provide opportunities to reappraise how past entries have been anthologized and whether they could be anthologized differently.

Take Agbabi for example. Although she identifies primarily as a poet, as opposed to a spoken-word poet, she has talked about the centrality of the "voice with its cadences" (Novak and Fischer 361) to her body of work: "For me it is about trying to get to the emotional truth of a poem through the sound of it" (358). While the poet laureate of Canterbury, she began composing *Telling Tales*, a rewriting of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in the voices of diverse members of British society who would mirror the nation's twenty-first-century demographics. The Wife of Bath becomes a Nigerian immigrant, the wife of Bafa, who speaks in rhyming couplets and in the cadences of a Nigerian English that irregularly follows iambic pentameter. Agbabi describes the project as "retelling the stories that Chaucer himself retold from those circulating around medieval Europe." *Telling Tales* draws on a variety of poetic forms from Chaucer's rime royale to the sonnet corona. Into these forms, Agbabi blends the sounds of regional accents garnered from audio recordings and transcriptions available through the *Sounds Familiar?* website of the British Library. Her collection hails Chaucer's by emphasizing the conjunctures of oral and written cultures in ways that represent ordinary speakers from across all levels of society.

I would like to anthologize Agbabi's poems from *Telling Tales* on the printed page and through recordings of their oral performance. The same goes for Bennett's "dialect" poetry, which she performed for mass audiences in the Caribbean under the stage name of Miss Lou. Bennett's "Jamaica Language," which currently appears in the *NAEL*, is a radio monologue that begins "Listen, na!" (856); yet the anthology does not yet give readers the ability to do so. Norton publishers and users have understandably prioritized the printed book since the inception of the anthology in 1962, but it is high time to make theoretically informed use of the e-book

format for texts that were written for stage and page, ear and eye.[4] The e-book presents an opportunity for decolonizing the operative notion of literariness in the *NAEL* so that it encompasses more than the written word and speaks to constituents who have experienced print culture as a tool of cultural alienation and subordination. If we as editors of the 11th edition can rise to the challenge of creating a multimedia anthology, the next step will be convincing anthology adopters that recordings of performances are not supplements to the written poem but essential versions of the literary work.

An Anthology Is Not a Monument

The decolonizing of the *NAEL* will proceed in tandem with the decolonizing of college English pedagogy. As survey courses become more diverse, comparative, and ideally multimediated, the histories professors offer about literatures in the English language should also become more inclusive of the varied and entangled literacies of the anglophone world. When discussing the *NAEL*, Abrams insisted that the anthology not become "a monument" (Donadio). The refusal of the analogy between anthologies and monuments seems especially prescient in the wake of the global RMF movements. Monuments in these movements have become symbols of institutional ossification and recalcitrance in the face of social progress.

Anthologies collect great, some might say monumental, works of literature, but how editors frame and revisit these works over updated editions cannot remain the same. The continued value of anthologies of English literature and for that matter world literature is not a foregone conclusion; indeed, the historical association of anthologies with the cultural arm of imperialism cannot be ignored. For the anthology to be a genre with a bright future, its publishers and editors will have to acknowledge and redress its dark past. An anthology is not a monument, but it is a balancing act. The task is to balance the project of literary and cultural custodianship with a responsiveness to historical change writ large and to demographic change within universities. Anthology makers serve teachers and students who likely do not share the same cultural and social norms even if they are sharing classroom space. The more we can ground our theories of anthologizing in an awareness of that diversity, the more capable we will be of thinking concretely about the revision, transmission, and decolonization of literary tradition.

Notes

1. For literary histories that both model and defend close reading within the expanded framework of global English, see Wai Chee Dimock's *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time*; Jahan Ramazani's *Transnational Poetics*, and Rebecca Walkowitz's *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature.*
2. My thanks to Julie Orlemanski for discussing specific texts as well as the broader editorial strategy for Volume A with me.
3. Yet these identities can come at a cost. Barbara Christian has written about the double bind facing editors of anthologies dedicated to more particular identity groups, for example Caribbean women's writing. While strategically essential to rendering these groups legible within literary curriculums, such anthologies participate in a consolidation of identity that is fundamentally at odds with the irreducibility of literary expression and authorial freedom. Hence, anthologists of ethnic literature must contend with the limitations of the category of ethnicity on the reception of the writers and works they aggregate (Christian 258). For accounts of experimental anthologies of Black writing that attempt to assert identity while also eluding it, see Edwards.
4. Janet Neigh argues that staging poetry is an important avenue by which to decolonize collective memory (170). Performing in pubs, clubs, and music halls allows poets to reshape the internalized scripts of their colonial education and to reach audiences who would not access their works through the traditionally literary means of the chapbook or the anthology.

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