

# Literary London: Post-, Ex-, Trans-, Neo-?

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**T**HE OTHER DAY, ON THE COMMERCIAL ROAD, just past Aldgate where the street suddenly changes from the wealthy private corporate zone of the City of London into one of the main drags of the poorest local borough in England, Tower Hamlets, I witnessed a time-honoured London tradition.<sup>1</sup> One man, insensibly drunk on the pavement, was approached by two Russians, who expertly rolled him first one way then another, fishing wallet from one pocket and cell phone from another. As they stood up, they were stopped by a Bangladeshi man, remonstrating with them over the supine body. The boys had already spirited their loot away: in dumb-show, they held out empty hands and patted their empty front pockets with affronted innocence before walking away. My bus inched on from this tableau towards Stepney and Limehouse, those historic centres of migrations to London. The twentieth century began in the East End with dense populations of Russian and Eastern European Jews. They began to disperse slowly from the ghettos of Whitechapel after the peak of the 1930s,

1 John Clement Ball. *Imagining London: Postcolonial Fiction and the Transnational Metropolis*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004. x, pp. 265. \$45/£28 (cloth); John MacLeod. *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis*. London: Routledge, 2004. pp. 224. £20 (paper).

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to be replaced from the early 1970s by refugees from the Sylheti region of Bangladesh. Now the twenty-first century has seen a burgeoning new population of Russian and Eastern Europeans again, partly escaping poverty, partly religious persecution and the ethnic wars of the 1990s. And East Enders continue to roll drunks, a sport born of economic desperation.

In the large industry of contemporary writings about London, such an incident might be written up in two ways. The first could be called the “Gothic” mode, best represented by Peter Ackroyd’s monumental tome, *London: A Biography*. “The nature of time in London is mysterious,” he asserts (661), pointing out spooky repetitions and strange inheritances across the centuries, and hinting at a magical theory “of that territorial imperative, or *genius loci*, which keeps inhabitants in the same area” (141). London is a haunted city, subject to spectral invasions from an unquiet past. Its present occupants are driven by compulsions they barely understand, conjured by the spirit of the city itself. For the theory of this London, see any number of critical works by Julian Wolfreys; for the avant-garde practice of it, read the novels and urban investigations by Iain Sinclair. Ackroyd has made a popular career out of Gothicizing London. Yet for all this apparent steeping in history, the result is curiously ahistorical—Ackroyd emphasizes a cyclical, mythical London, an “irrational place which can be organized and controlled only by means of private ritual or public superstition” (216). To read the event on Commercial Road in a more materialist way would be to turn to the second contemporary mode: London as the global city, revived from its long-term decline in the last twenty years to become a central economic and cultural node of new transnational flows of capital, information, and people. Global London means high finance and lowly poverty cheek by jowl. The city is, claims the newly created Greater London Authority (established in 2000) in its recently published London Plan, “the world’s most economically internationalised city” and “the most culturally diverse city in the world” (par. 1). In terms of the statistics of migrant populations, the latter claim is untrue (Miami and Toronto top those lists), but aggressive self-promotion is integral to every global city now. So this is also the postcolonial London claimed to have come into being in the post-1945 era by the two books under review. That these books have appeared virtually simultaneously, and just a year behind Sukhdev Sandhu’s history of London’s Black and Asian writers, suggests that a certain critical mass has gathered behind the idea of a postcolonial London.

The term “postcolonial” is of course extremely contentious, often with its theorists arguing quite entrenched positions, but Ball and MacLeod

eschew obscurity and navigate the reader through their respective understandings of the field with lucidity. Both take the postcolonial not to mark any definitive era *after* colonialism, and both resist eliding the postcolonial with a postmodern aesthetic that levitates above or beyond any meaningful engagement with history. A postcolonial London is therefore understood as a site saturated with the iconography and geography of imperial power, but which has been transformed by the twin effects of the dismantlement of empire and successive waves of migrations from former colonies. The sullen English resentment and the seemingly permanent postwar crisis of national identity (which is sometimes called England's "post-imperial melancholy"), together with the attempts of new ethnic communities to forge identity by hybridizing English with other cultural traditions, is the matrix from which Ball and MacLeod propose that a distinctive postwar literary tradition has emerged. But while MacLeod calls London postcolonial throughout, Ball, from his title on, prefers to emphasize a relation between postcolonial fiction and what he calls the transnational city. This becomes an important difference, particularly when it comes to very contemporary writing.

John MacLeod's introduction sets out his case that the fictions of the Caribbean, African, Asian, and other writers who migrated to London from former British colonies have the positive potential to re-imagine the city. Despite the huge concentration of imperial power in the metropolis and the attendant racial, economic, political, and cultural prejudices that met (and continue to meet) every new community in the city, literature can help imaginatively re-appropriate the city for its migrants. For MacLeod, these writings "daringly imagine an alternative city in which divisive tensions are effectively resisted, and progressive, transformative kinds of social and cultural relationships are imagined" (16). MacLeod hints that the idea of "postcolonial London" might be vaguely transgressive; after all, much postcolonial study has tried to loosen the grip of Anglocentrism, where London is implicitly or explicitly the political or cultural arbiter over a vast sphere of influence across the world. For MacLeod, the phrase "postcolonial London" is a deliberate challenge, "a conceptual stratagem" that "foregrounds the subaltern agency and activities of those who have struggled to settle owing to the architectures of power which creates mappings of the city" (15). His project is therefore to examine "the ways in which the cultural initiatives of postcolonial London confront different schematics of the city's architecture of power, and suggest the possibility of making new spaces in London where the subaltern contingencies of everyday life contest and dismantle authority" (11). Such formulations

about dominant and controlled urban space and potential challenges to that power inevitably invoke Michel de Certeau's frequently cited essay from *The Practice of Everyday Life* on the poetics of city-walking as a mode of subversion, where drifting around, loitering, or re-functioning public space can be temporary acts of defiance. For MacLeod, de Certeau's ideas form the basis of readings that continually want to point to transformative possibilities, however utopian these might be (indeed, in contrast, Ball worries that de Certeau's essay is "limitingly local, sentimentally poetic" [10]). MacLeod at least acknowledges that London has not yet been made a "tolerant, democratic or hybrid" city (15) by these subversive cultural activities, but this opening position statement lets us know that MacLeod will always seek to accentuate the positive.

In each of the five subsequent chapters, which follow a loosely chronological structure from the 1950s to the 1990s, MacLeod takes a cluster of two or three writers on London and explores a particular thematic. In Chapter 1, he examines how Sam Selvon and Colin MacInnes portray the 1950s London explored by the young men of the state-sponsored Caribbean migrations that began in 1948. Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) arguably spawned the "postcolonial London" genre. The pattern of reading is set early: MacLeod notes Selvon's depiction of violent racial prejudice and economic desperation but downplays this element of the novel for those moments when "the boys" are able to re-function little slithers of the city for their own ends in a process he calls "spatial creolisation" (27). He suggests that dance halls and the jazz clubs of Soho were spaces of cultural fusion and hybridity. These were the sites of cross-racial sexual possibility that so obsessed MacInnes; they generate passing visions of a genuinely multicultural society, however violent the streets outside remain. In the second chapter, MacLeod reads the autobiographical narratives of first arrival in London by three disparate authors: V. S. Naipaul from Trinidad in 1950, Doris Lessing from Southern Rhodesia in 1949, and Janet Frame from New Zealand in 1956. All express that sense of disjunction between the symbolic centrality of London in their colonial education and the reality of a war-scarred, ascetic, and collapsing city, "disconcertingly lacking in substance to colonial eyes" (62). The ruin is the figure that unites this chapter: Naipaul clings melancholically to the ruins of English greatness, knowing he has come too late, whilst Lessing and Frame are held to find in the rubble of tradition the chance to rebuild a postcolonial London that is more inclusive and hybridized.

The third chapter clusters the black women writers Buchi Emecheta, Joan Riley, and Grace Nichols, concentrating on their work from the 1970s

and 1980s. Again, MacLeod moves from the most despairing portrayals of the immigrant experience in Emecheta and Riley towards “hopeful models of a transformed city” (95) in Nichols’s *The Fat Black Woman’s Poems*. Although Nichols’s work is possibly the least interesting, it is used almost as a hex to ward off the “mercilessly bleak experience” depicted by Riley (111). Chapter 4 also has a big challenge to think positively, since it concentrates on the images of fire and riot in the work of Linton Kwesi Johnson, Hanif Kureishi, and Salman Rushdie. These works reflect a hardening rhetoric on race in English political discourse in the emergence of the New Right in the mid-1970s. Thatcher’s Conservative government passed the Nationality Act in 1981, which redefined British identity as fully divorced from the Commonwealth, severely limiting rights of residence. In the same year, an arson attack killed thirteen black teenagers in South London and Brixton, London’s principal Caribbean district, erupted in riot. Johnson’s dub poetry is here respected as an angry, apocalyptic political discourse and record of dark times. MacLeod uses Kureishi’s film *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, however, to find a space in the midst of the riots it depicts for hope. It “keeps faith with the insurgent possibilities of urban youth,” he claims (146), not in the rioters but in the carnivalesque troupe of travelers and refuseniks who up camp and move on at the end of the film. With mild perversity, since Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* is often regarded, as MacLeod says, as “the quintessential celebration of the city’s migrant foundations and cosmopolitan mélange” (147), Rushdie is taken to task for the limits of the novel’s postcolonial imaginings, particularly when it comes to the depiction of the riots in Brickhall (Rushdie’s fantasmatic elision of Brick Lane and Southall). Finally, the book counters images of fire with images of water in David Dabydeen, Fred D’Aguiar, and Bernadine Evaristo. Water dominates the island imagination of the Caribbean and presents endless possibilities for communication, communion, and intermingling. This is an image that Ball also uses extensively in his book, and for MacLeod it pushes towards a conclusion that celebrates “millennial optimism” (160).

I admire MacLeod’s lucid and engaged prose in a field not noted for its accessibility. This is a book that undergraduate students ought to seize on—it provides sound and intelligent commentary on key works and is easily navigable. My principal reservation is with the remorselessly upbeat tone of the book. The same interpretive imperative is launched at every text under investigation, and this can risk flattening out both historical and regional differences. The urge to find the positive picture in every book can sometimes lead to difficulties. Joan Riley is actually dressed down at

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one point for being negative: “Riley perhaps too quickly writes out the realities of female ageing, survival, innovation, creativity and community formation” amongst black women in London (118). That “perhaps” is wonderfully disingenuous: it signals exactly the opposite of the hesitancy it supposedly indicates. MacLeod seems to have no empathy with the idea that negative descriptions of marginal and brutalized lives can nevertheless have an important function for readerships under constant threat: the role of recognition. And I was left blinking in disbelief at the idea of “millennial optimism” in London at a time of large increases in racial attacks and differential poverty between ethnic communities, and when paranoia about “foreign” terrorists and a virulent language of anti-immigration is a constant presence in the media. I spent some time trying to locate the reason for my annoyance with MacLeod’s tone, and eventually realized what it was. When MacLeod writes about postcolonial London, his vision of a multicultural city is in some senses a political promise not as yet fully realized: “[M]uch has been achieved,” he says, “yet there remains more to be done” (21). This is the exact cadence of any political speech made by a British New Labour minister on “social inclusion” or of any number of documents produced by the Greater London Authority on cultural diversity. Of course these are admirable goals, but they are empty phrases when the celebration of “multiculturalism” acts as a fig-leaf for failing to address the fundamental and rapidly growing structural inequalities evident in every “globalized” city, not just London. Racial inequalities are becoming increasingly entrenched as internationalized cities divide between a small privileged core and the vast reserve of poor, dispossessed, and migrant peoples that service them. There are any number of texts that address this cultural situation in London, but MacLeod’s chirpy postcolonialism blanks them out. Robert Young has recently reasserted that “the overall political project of postcolonial critique remains coherent and urgent” (69). MacLeod’s readings are deliberately designed to promote a political stance of agency and enablement. But optimism of the will always needs to be accompanied by pessimism of the intellect—particularly when your topic is contemporary London.

In fairness, MacLeod has written an undergraduate guide, presumably in accordance with a strict brief from Routledge. The book expertly covers the emerging canon of postcolonial London writing, with the added coherence of a single thesis pursued throughout. John Clement Ball’s book, from a smaller university press, has the luxury of greater length and therefore greater detail: it feels more nuanced and personal throughout. Where MacLeod’s writers are familiar, Ball’s broader range produces some

fascinating finds. Ball also shifts to a study of a relation between postcolonial writing and what he calls the transnational city. This is a different conceptual framework. Taking his cue in part from Michael Peter Smith's *Transnational Urbanism*, Ball understands imperial and postimperial London in a shuttle between near and far, centre and periphery: "London has always contained and been linked to worlds of difference: through its immigrants, its economy, its imperial history, and through the global scale of its patterns of cultural absorption and projection" (26). Empire means contact with the world; it also means that the imperial centre becomes itself enworlded in unforeseeable ways. As migrants travel back along routes to the old imperial centre (particularly as those tentacles withdraw with formal decolonisation after 1945), the spatial divisions of near and far begin to collapse. This has further accelerated in recent years with globalization. "The world city's 'local,'" Ball argues, "is interfused with a 'global' that is actually a network of loosely connected, far-flung other locales, nations, and regions" (28). Hence Ball suggests that "London as a setting for postcolonial fiction is 'transnational' because of the unique way it confounds global-local binaries and accommodates new forms and narratives of relational identity" (31). This theorization allows for diverse forms of relation; the transnational can be experienced as enabling, disabling, or even just plain boring as cities look more and more alike; it can result in celebratory multicultural discourses or, on the contrary, be the reason for panicked narratives of alien invasion and demands for racial purity. At times, Ball's transnational metropolis looks a little like MacLeod's postcolonial London. Migrants can "reappropriate it and reterritorialize it" so that the city "becomes subsumed into their postcolonial consciousnesses" (9, 11). Yet Ball is also hesitant about the kinds of re-appropriation and hopeful subversions always sought by the postcolonial theory of the kind propounded by MacLeod. He mounts a cogent critique of how this risks idealizing and homogenizing texts under a single model and wants to argue for more "ambivalent, multilateral resistances" (11).

After this extensive introduction, Ball divides his treatment over four long chapters, dealing separately with Canadian, Caribbean, Indian, and recent Black British writing. The advantage of proceeding regionally rather than cross-cutting thematically is that the specific cultural differences that result from historically very different experiences of colonialism can be observed and enriched. Canadian fiction, for instance, seems to repeat a similar narrative trajectory, sending an adolescent woman from Canada to London as a symbolic space for transition to adulthood. In Robertson Davies's 1958 novel, *A Mixture of Frailties*, this seems an unproblematic

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Jewish identity.

allegory of colonial dependency, regarding Canada as periphery and London as the cultural centre. As the post-war era advances, however, this colonial relation undergoes profound shifts and therefore the symbolic significance of London changes. Mordecai Richler's *St. Urbain's Horseman* (1971) allows Ball to explore the sense of Canadian rootlessness or in-betweenness, as British imperialism retracts and American neo-imperialism expands. London begins as the idealized, heroic location for the novel's hero; it ends as a diminished place, understood in dynamic relation with Canadian, English, American, and Jewish identity. By the time Kate Pullinger publishes her first novel in 1989, London is a visibly multicultural city, Ball suggests, "a hub in a web-like network of spatial and temporal relations" (68). *When the Monster Dies* coincides with a revival of the contemporary London Gothic and is an explicit reflection on a postimperial centre. Six characters from Canada, Australia, and other former dependencies gather in a squat in Vauxhall to observe the empire die at close quarters, to "crowd around and watch its grotesque death-convulsions" (95). Various empires overlap and echo here in the most histrionic years of Margaret Thatcher's reign as Conservative Prime Minister: the British, the American, and even the Roman, with a mosaic uncovered in the garden of the squat. Although perhaps over-schematic, the novel argues that "a fully engaged form of postimperial dwelling ... involves recognizing and responding to London's past and present imperial relations" (99). Pullinger's later novel, *The Last Time I Saw Jane* (1996), and Catherine Bush's *The Rules of Engagement* (2000) seem to exemplify the accelerations of transnational dislocations in the 1990s. London is fully decentred for the Canadians who inhabit it: both texts shuttle spatially and temporally between English and Canadian and the much wider world, reflecting explicitly on changing relationality inside, but also outside, a long colonial history.

In the second chapter on Caribbean fiction, Ball begins by questioning the truism that London was the displaced literary capital of the Caribbean in the 1950s, the view long propounded by works like George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960). Derek Walcott and V.S. Reid ignored the path to London; BBC radio's *Caribbean Voices* (1946–58) can be read "transnationally" rather than as a set of paternalistic broadcasts that reeled in far-flung writers to the colonial metropolis. The important theoretician here is Paul Gilroy, whose *Black Atlantic* complicates the dyadic centre/periphery model by seeing the Atlantic ocean as inherently "transnational and intercultural" in the way it brings into communication Europe, Africa, and the Americas with the Caribbean islands (108). The writers that do

migrate to London are read through this prism, and because Ball proceeds historically and has the space to include minor works by the likes of Edgar Mittelholzer and Andrew Salkey alongside the canonical Selvon and Naipaul, there is a convincing sense of changing West Indian relationships to the city. Lamming's enclosed spaces and barely recorded London in *The Emigrants* (1954) is succeeded by the more "expansively relational" work of Selvon only a year later. There is a nuanced reading of Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* (1967) that does not dismiss the book as a pro-imperialist tract but tries to situate his conservatism in an intertextual relation with Conrad's vision of London as a thoroughly complicit place of twilight and darkness. He reads a succession of 1970s texts by writers that try to deal with the rise of Black Power movements and looks at works from the 1980s, when political reaction against migrants was becoming enshrined in law.

The third chapter performs a similar, interculturally specific exploration of Indian fiction about London. Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988) is put into an historical trajectory that leads from Kamala Markandaya's *Possession* (1963), Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1971), and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988). Although illuminating, there is a slightly less convincing sense of historical density at work (fewer texts, lengthier passages of close reading, for instance), and Ball rather forces a unity on the works around a thematic of theatricality in Indian literary London—that the city is "a place of unreality and artifice, a world characterised by the ephemeral, the metamorphic and the immaterial" (176). Obviously this prepares the stage for a sustained reading of *The Satanic Verses*, which is praised for its magical realist erasure of boundaries, its playful vision of the city as "the locus classicus of incompatible realities" (205). There are none of MacLeod's reservations: Ball sees the novel as positing a "London-to-be" where "personal fancy or conventional theatrics give way to the participatory tradition of carnival. He envisions an inclusive, hybridised, and revolutionary urban space in which old rigid realities can be played with and changed" (208). I was struck by the silencing of certain aspects of Rushdie's vision of exclusionary Englishness (the book is full of paranoid, violent police and immigration officers) and also the lack of irony about this textual vision of inclusivity compared to the actual reception of the text by Muslim and other communities in London and elsewhere. MacLeod also steers clear of the context that made this book so globally famous. For me, this began to crystallize some of the limits both critics had in dealing with London in the era since *The Satanic Verses* was published. This sense of occlusion grew further with Ball's final chapter on recent Black British writing. In the last stages of the book, Ball registers mild

disapproval about fictions for the first time. Diran Adebayo and Courtia Newland are apparently uninterested in the “transnational,” exploring only the internal worlds of the Black subcultures of London, “enamoured of the contemporary, mostly empty of the parents and worldly contexts that can sociohistorically situate fin-de-millennium London lives” (238). Approval instead is given to Hanif Kureishi’s *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* for its proper transnational and transgressive drives, in terms that exactly echo MacLeod, even down to the return of Michel de Certeau as a theorist of urban resistance. Ball then ends with a celebration of Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000). Smith’s work divides opinion—I tend to share the view that this was a hugely overrated, flashy, locally brilliant, but poorly structured novel that spoke to the empty multicultural optimism that abounded in the first couple of years of New Labour’s term in office after the British elections in 1997. The book of course fits Ball’s demands for the transhistorical and transnational perfectly because it contains every move the proper multiculturalist could want, but I was disappointed that Ball had fallen for its superficial charms. *White Teeth* works like a fetish: its knockabout multicultural farce conceals far more than it reveals about millennial London.

I have learnt an immense amount from both critics about the imaginative reinvention of London by migrant writers in the post-war years. If I felt they faltered when it came to cultural representations of London in the last fifteen years, that may be because it is genuinely possible that the postcolonial paradigm is in crucial ways unable to process recent transformations. The contemporary revival of London as a world city has been the result of economic globalization (in part the product of the so-called “Big Bang” that deregulated London markets in 1986). The vast migrations around the world—ones that will expand the population of London from 7.1 million to an estimated 8.3 million over the next ten years—are intimately connected to this shift in world systems. The historical routes and connections of the old British Empire will of course continue to have an effect on pathways of migration into London. But in many ways this legacy has been superseded by other forces directing the movement of people: the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc, American neo-imperialism, the inexorable rise of the Pacific rim in economic and cultural importance, and the consolidation of “fortress Europe,” with relatively free movement inside the walls but increasing control of passage across its external borders. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have polemically argued that since 1989 the idea of the nation state has been displaced by an abstract thing they call Empire, the decentred and deterritorialized flow

of capital around the world that escapes any national controls. Transnationalism now implies globally extended corporations and the growing importance of supranational regulatory bodies such as the World Bank and the United Nations. It also means charities and other non-governmental organisations dealing with millions of displaced people from the wars and conflicts that have exploded as the cohesive force of the secular or non-ethnically-based nation-state is eroded. The postcolonial undeniably marks a phase of postwar global relations between empires and former colonies, but this can no longer be the only way of reading contemporary London. Migrant populations in the 1990s—Somalian, Algerian, Kurdish, Afghan, Iraqi, Chechen, and peoples from the former Yugoslavia—don't fit into the "postcolonial" as it is conceived within the academic discipline. Ball's idea of the "transnational" clearly has more ability to deal with these new migrations than one tied to solely the British imperial legacy—but that only makes his decision to focus on what used to be called "Commonwealth Literature" look a little narrow.

Perhaps the most startling thing missing from either of these books is any mention of religion, and specifically Islam. This again can I think be ascribed to the limits of the postcolonial paradigm. What Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* revealed was the emergence of a "differend" between different constituencies of readers (Jean-Francois Lyotard coined the term "differend" to name instances where parties in a disagreement cannot even agree a common ground on which to argue). Islamic offence at the portrait of the Prophet Mohammed in the novel can't be ignored—the celebratory visions of hybridity and cultural elision really did meet a limit around this element of the book. And this could have been used to say important things about the changing nature of London (and literary representations of London) in the 1990s. Both authors, for instance, use Hanif Kureishi's work from the 1980s, particularly the brash cross-cultural mélange of *Sammy and Rosie*. Neither mentions how Kureishi begins to address the effects of Islam and Islamic fundamentalism in his work in the 1990s, in the novel *The Black Album* (1992) and the film *My Son the Fanatic* (1997). Neither chooses to mention a book like Hanan al-Shaykh's *Only in London* (2001), a novel that is far more articulate about London at the millennium than the shiny world of Zadie Smith. Al-Shaykh's novel opens with a sly reference to the beginning of *The Satanic Verses*—turbulence on a flight from Dubai to London—but offers a very different sense of London and its Arabic and Islamic spaces. The book is full of moments of skewed translation or parallel cultural sayings that won't quite convert ("It was raining, as the English say, cats and dogs, and as the Arabs say, hard enough to split

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the sky in two" [239]). It recounts how fraught and *difficult* cross-cultural liaisons are—at the heart of it is a relationship between an English man who fetishizes the feminine Orient and a divorced Arab woman doubly displaced from Najaf in Iraq and then Beirut in Lebanon. Lamis tries to break out of the closed circuits of Arabic London: there is a symbolic visit to the Telecom Tower, “to see London like an outstretched palm, like something lying in front of me without a past or a present” (266). Yet the novel is too intelligent to imagine boundaries away. The novel’s title retains its ambivalence to the end: “only in London” might carry approval or be delivered with a despairing shake of the head.

London is not dissolving into a hybrid *mélange* of racial harmony manifested within the all-singing, all-dancing markets and carnivals that MacLeod idealistically invokes. A lot of migration to the city over the last thirty years has been related to the fate of various Muslim populations—from the civil war in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), North Africa, the Balkans, Russia, and Afghanistan (the settlement of Afghans in tribal patterns across London has been documented in James Ferguson’s *Kandahar Cockney*). These groups are subject to the typical contradictory fears over a foreign body in the city that will not assimilate—or, possibly even worse, *will* assimilate. The panic has only increased since 2001, when the British government extended the definition of terrorism to include even suspicion of passive sympathy for “terrorist” groups; consequently, the police now make many more stops and searches of Middle Eastern and Asian peoples. As John Upton remarks, the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act (2001) works in an unusual way: “Instead of using the criminal law as its basis, it has arrived at the solution of grafting anti-terrorist provisions onto immigration law” (6). Liz Fekete, looking at Britain in the context of wider European policy, also sees a fundamental shift in policy: “[T]he state is seeking to steer ‘race relations’ policy away from multiculturalism towards monoculturalism and cultural homogenisation” (18). One can see this in education policies that encourage and fund “faith schools” in the inner cities, and particularly in London. The effect of faith schools, where entry is determined by religious denomination, is to produce racial polarization. There are many mixed schools but also growing numbers where a vast percentage is Muslim, Church of England, or Catholic only. Whilst the Labour government endorses these developments, opposition parties and the right-wing popular press ratchet up the rhetoric about bogus asylum seekers, “mad mullahs,” and dastardly Arabs. This is a further indication that it is the Gothic and not the carnivalesque

that has become a dominant mode in representations of contemporary London—something I've argued elsewhere.

Syncretism has a habit of winning out in the historical long term. Populations disperse from their initial ghettos and diffuse through the city. It is difficult not to walk through the East End without falling over walking tours that are busy piecing together the last traces of a Jewish population now largely absent from the area. There seems to be no awareness that they chase these chimeras by passing through streets of privation for the latest migrants, stepping over the drunks in the gutter. Ball and MacLeod have produced strong guides to a specific era of postcolonial London. I can recommend them both as books that will enrich an understanding of postwar English literature. But simply offering a narrative of progressively advancing interculturalism and hybridity can't quite work for contemporary London. These are very grim days, and they need to be properly addressed.

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