WRITING ACROSS WORLDS

Literature and migration

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1

GEOGRAPHY, LITERATURE AND MIGRATION

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INTRODUCTION

We live in what has recently been termed 'The Age of Migration'.[2] Geographical movement can be seen as a crucial human experience. Such movement occurs within a striking concatenation of economic, political, social and cultural circumstances which provide both structural forces driving mobility and also the controlling mechanisms that limit and channel the selection of people and places involved. These circumstances lie within the range of traditional social-scientific concerns for the aggregate forces and developments occurring within human populations.

At the same time population movement transforms all the elements involved, not only in the structural circumstances that underpin migration systems, but also within the places and the people bound up in migratory experiences. Places of origin, of passage, and of destination of migrants are altered as a result of the flows of people that affect them. Transformations also occur in the lives of all those involved; not just the migrants themselves but also those who directly come into contact with them and those who, indirectly, are affected by social, political and economic changes induced by migration. The role of human agents is a determining one, but only within the structural context in which those agents are located.

Migration therefore changes people and mentalities. New experiences result from the coming together of multiple influences and peoples, and these new experiences lead to altered or evolving representations of experience and of self-identity. Such representations are then manifest in cultural artefacts of many kinds – new forms of dress, of food cultures and of consumerism, new styles of music and of poetry, new political ideologies, new forms of literary production. All of these can be seen to have their own claims as authentic materials. However this book, and this introductory chapter, explore just one aspect of these representations – that of literary output – without seeking to privilege or prioritise this over other artefacts.

Literary output can be considered at a variety of levels, of which two merit attention here. At one level we can consider individual works, but at another

1

we can consider a full body of literature that arguably hangs together through a relationship with a migratory record or history, often on a societal scale. At the first level, therefore, we may be dealing with individual authors and with the representation of the experience of particular people; at the second we may be concerned with responses in whole societies or nations that have been affected by population movement.[3] The remainder of this chapter will seek to develop a framework and to highlight a series of issues in which the concerns of the social scientist and of the student of literature can be seen to converge fruitfully in the analysis of texts relating to migratory experience.

MIGRATION AND IDENTITY SHIFT

A useful starting-point for the discussion of the representational outcomes of migration experiences lies in setting up a conceptual framework consisting of a series of possible shifts in identity that occur in relation to migration, both at the individual and at larger-group levels.[4] Such realignments of identity may both precede migration (and in a sense, therefore, 'cause' it), and they may also occur as a result of movement to a new location. Migration 'events' therefore occur within personal biographies that neither start nor end at those events, but which provide the context for them.[5] We may, perhaps, conceptualise a number of overlapping multiple identities which are the subject of constant renegotiation in the face of the conflicts and compromises of everyday life. At any point in our lives we can think of ourselves as relating to a number of identities – in gender terms (concerning gender roles and gendered behaviour: sexual identity may perhaps be better considered as a separate element), in terms of a stage in the life-course, in terms of age and family status, in terms of economic identity (related to occupational identity but also to attributes of consumption and savings propensities), in terms of linguistic, religious and other cultural identities and in terms of ethnic identity. In the analysis of identity shift through migration it can be argued that creative literature contains some of the most effective explorations of identity issues.

The act of migration often relates to the calling into question of many of these aspects of identity that make up the individual's personality and psychological self-image. This is not to say that migrants, before migration, have necessarily 'fitted in' to a homogeneous societal structure with no traces of discordance: indeed, sociological and anthropological studies have often suggested that migrants may be effectively 'lost' to their home communities long before they actually pack their bags and leave,[6] and of course not 'fitting in' may be a primary cause of migration. However, the words 'migration' and 'change' can almost be regarded as synonyms in this context – why migrate if such movement does not result in change, or does not accommodate an identity change that has already occurred?

Migrants, whether individually, in groups, or as whole displaced societies, are open to new influences. Many of these provide a challenge to earlier self-perceptions and self-images, and through such challenges the compositional elements of multiple identities may be redefined. This is probably most significant in terms of ethnic identities, where many migrants may not have held a particularly strong view of their own ethnicity prior to movement, but where they may find themselves in situations where they are confronted by an alternative ethnic awareness that labels them and confines them to a stereotyped 'otherness' from which there appears little chance of escape, although a number of differently constrained responses are possible.

Other aspects of individual, group or societal identity are also open to transformation through migration. Much academic writing about migration has tended to ignore the significance of gender issues, but gender roles may be crucially affected by movement.[7] In other spheres, families are often broken up, temporarily or on a more long-term basis. Economic status is altered, with changed employment, changed income and wealth, and with changed patterns of consumption being very common. Secularisation may ensue, or alternatively there may be reassertions of cultural (religious) distinctiveness through a re-energising of attributes of distinction. Habitual language use may slide or be jolted from one tongue to another, with all that such a change implies about the means of representation in words – spoken or written. Projects, dreams and ultimate goals may be revised. All of these changes are discernible in creative writing about migration.

Shifts of identity are highly complex, sometimes unstable, and often have reversible elements built into them. The titles of various works on migration, produced by creative writers or by social-scientific researchers, suggest that migrants may live in a number of worlds, and move between them on a daily, annual or seasonal rhythm.[8] Other changes resulting from migration include attempts to re-create elements of former lives (possibly accentuating significant icons of that existence into quasi-talismans of high symbolic or ritual significance); attempts to integrate or assimilate completely (which may be blocked by a number of mechanisms within the 'host' society); or the creation of a new identity which is characterised by a feeling of independence from both the society of origin and the social structures of the destination. These changes in identity cannot be pinned down to a rigid linear continuum, for they represent the multiple and continually renegotiated outcomes of complex multifaceted phenomena operating both within individual biographies and for societies as a whole.[9]

A common feature of many migrants and migrant cultures is ambivalence. Ambivalence towards the past and the present: as to whether things were better 'then' or 'now'. Ambivalence towards the future: whether to retain a 'myth of return' or to design a new project without further expected movement built in. Ambivalence towards the 'host' society: feelings of respect, dislike or uncertainty. Ambivalence towards standards of behaviour: whether to cling to the old or to discard it, whether to compromise via

symbolic events whilst adhering to the new on an everyday basis. The choices (or the paths taken, since in many cases 'choice' is not actually perceived to exist) depend not just on the individuals involved but also on the constraints of the situations in which migrants find themselves. And since these situations change on a variety of temporal scales, so the identities expressed through attitudes, behaviour and artefacts also change and may be marked by ambiguity.

The act of migration concerns people and places, but it also concerns time. The first movers settle down. More migrants follow the path of the earlier pioneers. The world these latter move to is not the same as for the first arrivals, since the existence of past movement will have in some way altered the conditions of reception, whether directly from people of similar origin, or in terms of the underlying social, economic and political conditions that will influence the experiences of the later arrivals. So, too, circumstances at the places of origin of the migrants change, in part because of earlier departures. Through time the identity of migrant groups and individuals changes, not simply because the people involved age, but because the experiences undergone progressively build up to influence the evolution of identities. What are at first immigrants, singly or in groups, progressively become something else. Here perceptions of what they become may actually be divergent. External labelling may see 'them' as 'communities' (often 'ethnic-minority communities') which may not, in fact, accord with the view from within. Externally driven categorisations can be over-rigid, with a great deal of over-generalisation so that, for example, all people of Afro-Caribbean origin in Britain are thought of as 'West Indians', ignoring the facts of individual island identity that are of great significance to the people concerned,[10] or in France labelling all North Africans as 'Arabs' when some are Jews and others are Berbers rather than of Arabic culture. Internally (and the very word is questionable since it implies a homogeneity of outlook amongst those involved) the ambivalence and ambiguity of identities already referred to often produces a much more circumspect approach to labelling, with divergences between generations, genders, and classes reflecting the different experiences undergone.

These features of migrant identities might be argued to lead towards concepts of pluralism or syncretism at a number of levels, both concerning migrant and non-migrant individuals and groups but also as describing the multiple experiences, reactions and self-identities of migrants themselves and of those of migrant origin. To seek to research pluralism is to seek to elucidate worlds of meaning and belief, of attitude, interpretation and behaviour, and to do so, as argued above, in a context of instability and change within these attributes. Among the representations of these worlds, those that occur through literature present exciting opportunities for analysis as inputs to research. Since the contexts for these worlds expressed in literature are so

diverse, the overall project is one where social scientists and humanities scholars can fruitfully come together.

MIGRATION AS A MOTIF IN LITERATURE

The discussion that follows is confined to representations of migration defined from a geographical viewpoint as 'a change in the place of residence'.[11] No reference will be made to the very extensive genre of travel writing, part of which actually considers certain aspects of human character as discussed here. The equally extensive corpus of writing that has as a theme the relationship of people with place will also be put on one side, again despite the existence within it of certain elements common also to true writing about migration.[12] This is especially so of literature concerning the city – a significant proportion of which takes the viewpoint of the newly arrived migrant as one of its devices for exploring the human condition within the metropolis.[13]

Even leaving this body of literature on one side, the theme of migration *per se* is extremely common in writing produced over the last century – the period during which we have moved into the 'Age of Migration'. The frequency with which the theme appears is not simply a reflection of the realities of human existence, but also has an internal literary justification to it. Put simply, the theme of migration and its outcomes has been an inherently attractive one over recent decades to writers working in a number of different literary movements and traditions.

Accepting for one moment David Harvey's suggestion that the evolution from modernism to postmodernism reflects more elements of continuity than of change,[14] we can see that throughout the literary endeavours represented under these headings a number of themes relating to migration and its outcomes are of significance. Modernism takes the 'bewilderingly problematic' nature of human existence in the contemporary world and, emphasising the fragmentation of human experience, nevertheless still seeks to penetrate what is taken as a general, unifying, underlying reality, albeit through writing which makes use of multiple viewpoints and discontinuities.[15] Postmodernism is suspicious of such metanarratives, abandoning the belief in universals, and stressing the multiplicity and relativity of experiences while also regarding each strand as of potentially equal validity.

The relationships of both modernism and postmodernism to migration are strong. Fragmentation, dislocation and alienation are all very common themes in modernist writing: indeed as Hawthorne has pointed out, 'alienation becomes close to a cliché in modernist literature.'[16] This is often associated with pessimism about the individual condition and the outcome of individual projects, represented, for example, in the following extract from T.S. Eliot's 'Little Gidding', from *Four Quartets*:

And what you thought you came for
Is only a shell, a husk of meaning
From which the purpose breaks only when it is fulfilled
If at all. Either you had no purpose
Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured
And it is altered in fulfilment.[17]

Some of the associations of these negative emotions in modernism are with movement and change, and with the erosion of certainty that this entails.

The motif of alienation is continued in much postmodernist work, but is also accompanied by motifs of indeterminacy and of pluralism, which can be conceptualised as applying to cultures and societies as well as to literary style: indeed, postmodernism is as much a social ideology as a literary movement.[18] Certain of these motifs, however, lead into an assertion of the legitimacy of difference, and towards the celebration of such differences as a vibrant and enhancing aspect of contemporary life.

The act of migration accords closely with these wide issues of cultural evolution. Although for certain groups and societies (for example Western Ireland or some Caribbean islands) 'migrant cultures' exist where migration is accepted as the normal path for life, migration is generally about dislocation and the potential alienation of the individual from both old norms and new contexts. It is about change and, as argued earlier in this chapter, about identity. It is about movement.

In terms of the outcomes of migration there are also strong relationships between the establishment of migrant or ethnic communities and the legitimisation of 'otherness' in postmodernist discourse, with the search for an individual and group identity as a prime objective. In the Age of Migration these are themes that affect everyone, directly or indirectly, and put migration at the forefront of everyday influences in a role that is often disruptive. Social scientists have for some time seen migration as relating to marginality, both causing movement and resulting from it. A number of literary commentators are now beginning to argue that migration, dislocation and ensuing marginality are some of the most important influences subverting long-standing beliefs in the linearity of progress and the stability of cultural identity, and that these have been determining influences on the inner conditions of contemporary humanity.[19]

It is not, therefore, surprising that migration has been used as a topic through which writers have explored the human condition. We might also note that the ambiguities of language, including the use of metalanguages, metaphor and metonymy, can be constructively exploited in discussing what have been characterised earlier as the ambivalences and ambiguities inherent in many personal reactions to migration experiences.[20] One of the commonest uses of migration as a literary theme has actually been as a metaphor of death. Thus Stratis Haviaras, a Greek novelist who left his native country in 1967

and who now works as curator of the poetry collection in the Harvard University Library, uses emigration and death effectively as synonyms throughout his novel *When the Tree Sings*, about life in a small coastal town in southern Greece. At the end of the book the grandfather contrasts the habitual belief in the future, 'They'll make a fortune in exile, and they'll come back one day,' with the reality, 'No one ever returned. The ship came back empty, came back for more.'[21] This is a theme that recurs in other southern European literature.[22] The equation of migration with death is not, however, simply a literary device: around the turn of the century it was a common practice to provide an 'American Wake' for Irish emigrants about to set off across the Atlantic – not only a reflection of impending individual loss but also an indication of a whole community's attitude to migration and exile.[23] An alternative metaphor for migration, less often found but present nevertheless, is that of awakening or rebirth, relating to the migrant's transition to adulthood, to modernity, or to real self-discovery.[24]

It is useful to consider as examples two books that make full use of migration as a theme, but within a project that lies at a much deeper level of exploration: John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Cesare Pavese's *The Moon and the Bonfires*. *The Grapes of Wrath*, which has sold more copies than any other of Steinbeck's novels, won the Pulitzer Prize for its author in 1940, and the award of the Nobel Prize for literature followed in 1962. The book tells the story of the uprooting of a poor family from the dust-bowl of Oklahoma during the Great Depression, and their migration westwards in search of a land flowing with milk and honey in California.[25] Steinbeck's motivations for writing the novel lay partly in a (successful) neo-realist endeavour to draw attention to a social problem, but in a pre-publication interview he also claimed that he had written a novel about 'desire', saying that 'this migration is the outward sign of want', and relating this to a wider human yearning: 'I have set down what a large section of our people are doing and wanting, and symbolically what all people of all time are doing and wanting.'[26]

But *The Grapes of Wrath* is about many other things too – the choice between home and the road, about loss, about matriarchy, about human roles in the natural environment (the novel both starts and ends with episodes of meteorological extreme events), about the need for an existential re-examination of the rules of living. These themes are all explored via the Joad family's journey, which consists of both a geographical relocation that calls into question the cosy significance of any concept of 'home', and of an inward journey into their own personality that each member of the family makes.[27]

Cesare Pavese's *The Moon and the Bonfires* makes equally complex use of a migration theme to produce one of the classics of postwar Italian fiction.[28] The protagonist is a man who returns to his native district (clearly identifiable in the novel as the area around Santo Stefano Belbo in the hill-country of southern Piedmont, south of Turin). The hero, Anguilla, returns from twenty

years in America, seeking something to hold on to, and for an act of return that will be reassuring – the expected welcome, the glory of the returnee.[29]

> Once upon a time I'd had a longing within me (one morning in a bar in San Diego I nearly went mad with it) to come out on to the main road, to push open the iron gate between the pine and the lime trees at the corner, to hear the voices and the laughter and the hens and say 'Here I am, I've come back'.[30]

However, on his return Anguilla finds that his expectation that things will have remained the same as when he left is thrown back in his face: the war and the progress of time have transformed his old village and hardly anyone knows him or is interested in him.

> It was a longing I'd never get rid of now. I had come back. I had come out on to the road, I had made my fortune – I slept at the Albergo dell'Angelo and talked with the Cavaliere – but the faces, the voices, the hands which should have touched me and recognised me, were gone. They had been gone for a while. What was left was like a piazza the day after the fair, or a vineyard after the grape harvest, or going back to eat alone after someone has let you down.[31]

On leaving, the migrant so often expects to change and to run away from stability and an order which is felt to be unchanging. Yet, as Pavese realises, that world of the origin community may also be dynamic, so that the act of return cannot produce quite what the migrant expected. Pavese's Anguilla is searching not just for his geographical origins, but also for his own past and for an understanding of his own roots (he is, in fact, an orphan): he is partially disappointed in all these projects.[32] Thus once again, as in the case of *The Grapes of Wrath*, the author uses migration as a process occurring on two levels, both outward and inward. The re-exploration of place as well as personality through a return migration event is a common theme in much twentieth-century literature,[33] and it is a recurrent theme in some of the chapters that follow.

AUTHOR AND AUTHENTICITY

A striking fact about both Steinbeck and Pavese is that the powerful novels they wrote on a theme of migration were both written on the basis of research rather than drawing from autobiographical experience. Certainly Pavese had been born in the Langhe district in which he set *The Moon and the Bonfires* (and many other of his fictional writings), but he lived in Italy throughout his life. Steinbeck was a native of Salinas, in California, so that much of *The Grapes of Wrath* could, in fact, be seen as a polemic against his own community; but the basis for the story lay in research Steinbeck carried out for a series of articles commissioned by the *San Francisco News* in 1936,

followed by more investigations both in California and along Route 66 back to Oklahoma in the following year.[34]

A very high proportion of creative writing relating to migration and its impacts is, however, strongly autobiographical. Motives for the production of such writing may be many and varied. Artistic or commercial considerations play a part, but there are also, in many cases, strongly personal motivations drawn from a possible need for catharsis, or to allow the act of writing to contribute to the re-definitions of identity alluded to earlier in the chapter.[35] In certain cases migrants have been deliberately encouraged to write by outside organisations, again for a number of reasons which often have a political objective of demonstrating cultural legitimacy.[36] Much of such group writing, as well as a proportion of the more individually motivated materials, can be seen as having a neo-realist purpose – of uncovering a less than optimal situation as a means of creating a policy climate for improvement. The material is directly based on lived experience, and although the styles and forms of language may be less complex than in the works discussed earlier, experiments are sometimes made with the blending of literary styles from different cultural origins.

Here, however, different readers need to ask different questions of the author. Whilst for the student of literature certain readings of literary criticism seek interpretation and understanding entirely through the text, for the social scientist interested in migration and the representation of migration experiences and outcomes there is more of a need to validate the credentials of the author. This relates strongly to the accepted need, within the more qualitative and interpretative strands of social-scientific research, to examine the positionality of sources in relation to social structures, power relationships and other influences: most often this concerns the researcher himor herself in methodologies where the researcher is acting as a participant observer or as the motivator for in-depth interviews or group discussions that involve the double hermeneutic of exploration by both the researcher and the researched. This social-scientific need for more knowledge of the author should not, however, be taken as negating the use of certain texts: instead it produces the possibility of embedding the reading of texts by reference to the social, political and economic context in which they were written. These are not major differences between the approaches to literature adopted by the social scientist and the humanities specialist; they are instead differences of emphasis between text and author.

EMERGENT THEMES

Social scientists have traditionally tended to use literary sources as adjuncts to other materials – as commentaries, critiques, or as illustrations. In the words of Gerry Kearns, they have often been seen as 'tangential sources'.[37]

More recently, with the development of humanistic philosophies and approaches, particularly in geography, has come a wider engagement with literature for its own sake, but with the project still being generally aimed at uncovering empirical worlds of experience interpreted through literature taken as a secondary source.[38] The focus has generally been on 'worlds' as places,[39] but attempts have also been made to engage with the uses of literature in studies of situations defined by social context, and in broader work on societal structures themselves.[40] This is work where geographers and other social scientists come to have research objectives that are similar to those of scholars of cultural studies: thus Edward Said's work has proved a very fertile basis for exchange and discourse within a variety of disciplines.[41]

Research on migration from social-scientific perspectives has tended to focus on a certain range of issues concerning the characteristics of the migrants, the nature of the places of origin and of destination, and the underlying (political, social and above all economic) forces and structures that engender and condition movement. Much of this research has been operated at an 'objective' level with a concentration on statistical data sources: it is no coincidence that in the modern bureaucratic world data are generally more readily available on demographic events such as birth, death or (particularly international) migration than on many other aspects of human activities.[42] The corpus of established work has tended to operate on a limited set of scales: except in social anthropology and some social history, the role of the individual within migration has been poorly articulated, and at the same time the role of migration within a culture or society is often under-conceptualised and lacking in detailed study.[43] These are important gaps which can be constructively filled via the use of creative literature. The approach of the remainder of this chapter is to examine, albeit briefly, a number of texts to elucidate what such literature can contribute to the study of migration and its relations and effects at all levels. Throughout, however, the theoretical context of identity shift, outlined at the start of the chapter, is retained as a framework. Although the examples used here tend to highlight gender issues, this is not to say that the other elements of identity shift cannot be similarly considered through literature.

We might start with a recent English novel dealing with migration experiences that are as yet very poorly documented in academic studies – the experience of high-skilled 'transient migrants' from developed-world backgrounds, here seen through the eyes of women.[44] The author writes from a partly autobiographical perspective, having lived the life used as a background to her fiction. Hilary Mantel's *Eight Months on Ghazza Street*[45] concerns a woman who follows her civil engineer husband from Botswana to Jeddah where she confronts the compromises involved in seeking to retain her identity as an independent Western woman, with her attendant ideas on the morality of behaviour, in a context where all of these seeming fixities are daily challenged. In Jeddah it is policy, laid down by the company and by all the leaders of the British expatriate community, that the only viable response is to retreat into a state of mind in which the irritations and ambiguities of Saudi life are simply not thought about. Frances, the protagonist, finally manages to achieve this state but only after a series of traumatic and unexplained events which she observes and about which she asks too many questions. *Eight Months on Ghazza Street* brings out a number of themes relating to migration: the role of gender in migration decision-making and in adjustment (the steward on the flight from Heathrow to Jeddah points out that gender is crucial in Saudi Arabia – 'You're a woman, aren't you? You're not a person any more'); the roles of images and preconceptions (not so much for Frances but for those she meets); and the existence of defensively clustered social networks operating amongst Western expatriates, just as such networks evolve amongst ethnic-minority communities in Western cities.

Mantel's book is particularly interesting because it comments on the accepted Western view in which women from less-developed backgrounds follow their men to developed-world destinations and remain culturally and socially encapsulated in their new locations. Mantel shows Frances as more intelligent and aware than her husband, who is more willing to 'accept' the (albeit much more limited, since he is a man) restrictions on his thoughts and behaviour in Saudi Arabia. The writing of women migrants often challenges the hegemony of views of gender roles in migration, derived largely from male-dominated research. This is becoming increasingly the case in writing by migrant women from ethnic-minority backgrounds.

An example of such writing can be seen in the works of Buchi Emecheta. Emecheta was born in Nigeria and in 1962 joined her husband in England: however she was driven to leave him and to bring up her family alone, as well as making a living. Her breakthrough came through her stories for the *New Statesman* about life on a London council estate reserved for 'problem families' and from these came her output of novels and an autobiography.[46] Emecheta's works describe both the consciousness of migration and of an 'other' place in her childhood in village Nigeria, but also document the resultant struggles of migrant women, triply marginalised through their gender, their race and their poverty. There is a growing self-confidence among her women (reflecting her own rebellion at her husband's burning of her first writings), and the depiction of the growth of a community consciousness amongst black people in which women play a leading role. Many of these are themes common to much other migrant fiction.[47]

From a different literary tradition we may take *The Veil of Silence* written by the Algerian singer Djura.[48] Here again is an autobiographical story dealing in a complex fashion with a woman's identity between Algerian (more specifically Kabyle) and French cultural and social pressures, but ultimately celebrating the strength of an individual woman to survive. As the daughter of a migrant family in France, Djura was expected to conform to the traditional values of her parents' homeland and managed to complete an

education only against the opposition of her male relatives. To escape these restraints she eventually fled to Algeria, paradoxically leaving France during the feminist revolution of the 1960s to seek freedom in Algiers, where her family instead arranged her imprisonment. On release by her French boy-friend (a major cause of family strife), Djura returned to France and became a film-maker and then a singer in an Algerian band, singing about the oppression of Algerian women and of their humiliation and the violence against them. But despite the fact that she had become the financial support of her family, it was her brother who attempted to murder her (and succeeded in killing her French husband) because of the stain she had brought on the family by marrying a Frenchman. *The Veil of Silence* depicts the complexities of a generation who move between identities, experiencing the exile's desire to retain cultural roots, whilst at the same time being drawn to assimilation and the abandonment of 'otherness'.

A common feature of many of these writings is therefore ambivalence. The migration event may seem clear-cut in the cold tables of statistical informa-tion, yet the event itself lies at the centre of a long-drawn-out (indeed, perhaps never completed) web of personal reflections, adjustments, reactions and repercussions that start in the individual's biography well before the move and which are played out for many years afterwards. The insights of literature provide a commentary on these processes.

Ambivalence and adjustment are themes treated elsewhere in migrant literature. In Prafulla Mohanti's book *Through Brown Eyes*, again an autobiographical account of the author's experiences, we see his early socialisation into the idea that Britain is a 'good' place and a natural desired destination for an Indian youth.[49] Following the path thus set before him, Mohanti moves to England and progressively finds himself becoming more English – a trait that is most apparent whenever he revisits India where he now sees the filth, malnutrition, petty officialdom and lack of efficiency to which he was previously oblivious. When in England he longs for India, and vice versa – a reflection of the arguments over movement between two identities made earlier in this chapter. Even where adjustment seems to be going well, as in some of the Sri Lankan poet Romesh Gunesekera's short stories, there are still cravings for the flavours of the life that has been left behind, and which draw ex-migrants together.[50]

These are all readings of literature which act to flesh out, often in great detail, many of the concerns of established work on migration, but which also raise a whole series of new questions which can not be approached through more aggregative approaches. Other types of literature may, however, not simply complement existing work but may stand alone. The example used here is that of writing about clandestine migration. Rey Ventura's auto-biographically-based book *Underground in Japan* has as its theme the experiences of illegal migrants, most of them from the Pacific-Asia region and especially from the Philippines, in a country that has officially set itself against

any large-scale immigration, but which has a growing need for workers to take the jobs at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy. Ventura describes the labour-hiring arrangements in the informal economy:

> What everyone called the Centre was nothing more than an intersection on Kotobuki-cho where, at five in the morning, about a hundred workers were milling around, buying food from the noodle shops and stores, and eating their breakfast on the street. These were the *tachimbo*, the Standing Men, day-labourers dependent on the casual system of hire ... the Filipinos scattered around the four corners of the intersection. I discovered later that this technique of spreading out was part of a strategy in case of raids.[51]

As the French-Algerian *beur* writer, Mehdi Charef, has pointed out about dawn: 'It is the time of day possessed by the immigrant worker, after the milk delivery man and before the dustmen.'[52] Ventura has described, at one level, a relatively unknown situation in Japan,[53] but his book also reflects and comments on familiar migrant experiences in the Age of Migration in many other societies throughout the world.

A further theme approached only with difficulty through other research methods concerns the experience of flight, of exile as a refugee, of dislocation and of abandonment. Stories depicting such experiences are of value, drawn both from autobiography and from involvement as an outside observer. A recent example comes from Marion Molteno's *A Shield of Coolest Air*, in which two experiences of exile are simultaneously examined – that of a South African woman who finds herself alone in London after her husband has been deported from South Africa for radical journalism – and that of the Somali refugees whose cause she takes up.[54] Diverging interpretations of the flight of the oppressed are evoked through the terror and humiliations of those seeking sanctuary in Europe and the contrasting bureaucratic views of immigration officers: a pressing flood of emotional upheaval confronted with the decision that takes a moment to make but which has immeasurable consequences. Postwar population flows in Eastern Europe have also given rise to distinctive literature, and to a certain significance of a migrant culture, as when, in Ingeborg Drewitz's novel *Das Hochhaus* (The High-Rise), set in postwar Berlin, one of the commonest topics of conversation with relative strangers is not the weather but the ascertaining of common experiences as part of the 'refugee' movements out of Pomerania or Silesia to the east.[55]

Much of this body of literature serves to illuminate general aspects of human conditions through analysis of individual situations. Such an en-deavour, accepted in certain academic disciplines, has traditionally made social scientists uneasy at attempting generalisations based on a sample of one. Yet even the sceptical may find consolation in the possibility of 'triangulation' – of comparing depictions and understandings between different sources and of bringing out a discourse between them, testing the plausibility of overall

interpretations. Many bodies of literature are suffused with similar evocations of the experiences of migration, and can be taken as representing a certain 'mentality' within the societies depicted. The large body of Portuguese fiction from the 1950s to the 1970s depicting aspects of migration is a reflection of the omnipresence of this theme in Portuguese society during the same period.[56] At a more comparative level there are great similarities throughout Southern Europe in analyses of the rural worlds of out-migration during the twentieth century, and of the consequences for the communities left behind.[57]

Although couched in individual terms, such novels nevertheless add up to a very considerable body of evidence concerning the relationships of people and place, of the significance of territory, of the retention of multiple identities, and of the discordances that migration experiences bring to the lives of both individuals and societies at large. These were, indeed, the themes explored earlier in connection with Pavese's work, but they suffuse much other writing – sometimes fully articulated as the overall project of a piece, sometimes hidden but ever-present as the underlying structure that holds up the narrative.

But finally, it must be noted that amongst all the literature of migration the highest proportion deals in some way with ideas of return, whether actualised or remaining imaginary. To return may be to go back but it may equally be to start again: to seek but also to lose. Return has both a temporal and a spatial dimension. For the individual returning to their 'own' past and place it is rarely fully satisfying: circumstances change, borders in all senses are altered, and identities change too. But for many in the Age of Migration the time and place to be returned to are ill-defined. For those brought up in families with a background of migration, conceptualisations of 'here' and 'there', of 'home' and 'away' are confused. One of the novels by the Caribbean writer Joan Riley amply demonstrates this confusion. In *A Kindness to the Children* one of the two main characters is a British-born woman of Jamaican family origin who 'returns' to her cultural origins but finds herself alienated and unable to relate to Jamaican reality. The second main role is played by her cousin who has fled an oppressive childhood in Jamaica to survive in England in a form of self-exile from her past. Return to the Caribbean triggers a breakdown brought on by memories of the past.[58] 'In my beginning is my end.'[59]

CONCLUSION

Social-scientific study of migration has traditionally tended to emphasise the event and the aggregate: in dealing with the outcomes the focus has again been on groups. Recently there have been arguments calling for more biographical approaches, with an emphasis placed on individuals and their understanding of the 'realities' of their situation.[60] The world of creative literature opens up a whole new series of questions and issues that must rightly share prominence with more aggregate concerns, whilst also yielding new evidence on some

well-researched topics, as well as according with the new interest in individual experiences. Taken together, the contributions to this book consider, through their particular localised studies, all the aspects of multiple-identity renegotiation suggested at the start of this chapter. All illustrate the utility of literature as a representation of the migration experience, and of the embedding of movement within societal structures.

Creative or imaginative literature has a power to reflect complex and ambiguous realities that make it a far more plausible representation of human feelings and understandings than many of the artefacts used by academic researchers. In migration, above all topics, the levels of ambivalence, of plurality, of shifting identities and interpretations are perhaps greater than in many other aspects of life. The relationships between people and their contextual societies and places are intimate ones which are transformed by movement. Adjustment processes may never be fully completed: indeed, since we all continually refine our self-identities throughout our life-course it may be more truthful to say that migration intervenes in that process of renegotiation as a lasting force, rather than as a single event.

Migration has often been conceptualised as being an outcome of tensions between the individual's desires and opportunities – as a reflection of past circumstances and of expectations for the future. Others place it more firmly in a longer biographical context. Creative writing on migration often illuminates the processes of socialisation that occur to awaken an acceptance that migration is a viable, even sometimes the expected, means to achieve a goal (poorly articulated though it may often be). Migration also produces its own outcomes, for those directly and indirectly involved. Fictional and auto-biographical writing illuminates many of those outcomes in terms of both superficial happenings and deeper-seated attitudinal and behavioural changes. The study of such writings, alongside other sources, extends the range of understanding of the longer-term impacts of migration and thus our understanding of the forces at work in modern society.

Finally, literature does not just reflect the circumstances that lead to its creation: a given corpus of writing also becomes a cultural force with the power to influence (and not just to reflect) societal mentalities. Questions of readership as well as of authorship certainly arise: multiple readings and interpretations may be possible, in which the author's 'meaning' is filtered through the experiences and conceptions of the audience. Meaning may thus be contested, but in many cases bodies of literature using similar metaphors and metanarratives reflect general societal norms and values. The myths set up or reflected by such writing may play powerful political roles. The writing of an individual may reflect the identity of that individual: the writing produced from within a particular society may become part of the mark of the identity of that society.

The postmodern world of greater diversity of experience is reflected in the growing variety of literary outputs, with migration and its outcomes as one

of the dominant contemporary themes. 'Writers are citizens of many countries: the finite and frontiered country of observable reality and everyday life, the boundless kingdom of the imagination, the half-lost land of memory...'[61] In the field of migration studies, collaboration between social scientists and literary scholars studying such writers has the potential for increasing the understanding of an agenda that is wider than can be tackled by either group of scholars alone.

NOTES

1 The author wishes to acknowledge the help of comments received from Juliet Carpenter, Daniel Gutting, Elizabeth White and his two co-editors on an earlier draft of this chapter.
2 S. Castles and M.J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, London, Macmillan, 1993.
3 Both of these levels can themselves be analysed from both objectivist and subjectivist perspectives, as discussed by A. Giddens, 'Action, subjectivity and the constitution of meaning', *Social Research*, 1986, vol. 53, pp. 529–45.
4 The discussion which follows in this section owes much to the work of D. Gutting, 'Residential histories of the population of Turkish origin in Munich', Ph.D thesis in preparation, University of Sheffield.
5 K.H. Halfacree and P.J. Boyle, 'The challenge facing migration research: the case for a biographical approach', *Progress in Human Geography*, 1993, vol. 17, pp. 333–48.
6 See, for example, J. Galtung, *Members of Two Worlds: A Development Study of Three Villages in Western Sicily*, Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, 1971, ch. 4.
7 See A. Phizacklea (ed.), *One Way Ticket: Migration and Female Labour*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983; E. Gordon and M. Jones, *Portable Roots: Voices of Expatriate Wives*, Maastricht, Presses Interuniversitaires Européennes, 1991.
8 For academic examples of this argument see J.L. Watson (ed.), *Between Two Cultures: Migrants and Minorities in Britain*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1977; E. Lichtenberger, *Gastarbeiter: Leben in zwei Gesellschaften*, Vienna, Böhlau, 1984. An example from creative literature is Förderzentrum Jugend Schreibt (ed.), *Täglich eine Reise von der Türkei nach Deutschland*, Fischerhude, Atelier im Bauernhaus, 1980.
9 N. Hutnik, *Ethnic Minority Identity: A Social Psychological Perspective*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991; K. Ljios (ed.), *Die psychosoziale Situation von Ausländern in der Bundesrepublik*, Opladen, Leske und Budrich, 1993.
10 C. Peach, 'The force of West Indian island identity in Britain', in C. Clarke, D. Ley and C. Peach (eds), *Geography and Ethnic Pluralism*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1984, pp. 23–42.
11 P. White and R. Woods, *The Geographical Impact of Migration*, London, Longman, 1980, p. 3.
12 This is a theme that has been extensively surveyed elsewhere: see G. Tindall, *Countries of the Mind: The Meaning of Place to Writers*, London, Hogarth Press, 1991; D.C.D. Pocock, *Humanistic Geography and Literature*, London, Croom Helm, 1981; W.E. Mallory and P. Simpson-Housley, *Geography and Literature: A Meeting of the Disciplines*, Syracuse, NY, Syracuse University Press, 1987. Geographers have also produced a large number of studies of individual authors and their sense of place or region: for some examples see B. Boulard, 'Paysages

normands dans l'espace de Flaubert et Maupasssant', *Etudes Normandes*, 1988, vol. 3, pp. 71–84; I.M. Matley, 'Literary geography and the writer's country (Britain)', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 1987, vol. 103, pp. 122–31; D.C.D. Pocock, 'Catherine Cookson country: tourist expectation and experience', *Geography*, 1992, vol. 77, pp. 236–43.
13 P. Keating, 'The metropolis in literature', in A. Sutcliffe (ed.), *Metropolis 1890–1940*, London, Mansell, 1984, pp. 66–80; M.A. Caws (ed.), *City Images: Perspectives from Literature, Philosophy and Film*, New York, Gordon and Breach, 1991; K.R. Scherpe (ed.), *Die Unwirklichkeit der Städte: Großstadtdarstellungen zwischen Moderne und Postmoderne*, Rowohlt, Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1988; E. Timms and D. Kelley (eds), *Unreal City: Urban Experience in Modern European Literature and Art*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1985.
14 D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1989, p. 116.
15 P. Faulkner, *Modernism*, London, Routledge, 1977, p. 75; Harvey, op. cit., p. 30.
16 J. Hawthorne, *A Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*, London, Edward Arnold, 2nd edn, 1994, p. 122. Albert Camus is a paradigmatic modernist writer in this respect: see Chapter 8 of this book for discussion of his work.
17 T.S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding', from *Four Quartets*, London, Faber and Faber, 1944. Edition used here is that of 1959, p. 50.
18 I. Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture*, Ohio, Ohio State University Press, 1987; J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
19 See, for example, I. Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, London, Routledge, 1993; N. Papastergiadis, *Modernity as Exile: The Stranger in John Berger's Writing*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1993.
20 W. Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, Harmondsworth, Peregrine, 3rd edn, 1961 (originally published 1930).
21 S. Haviaras, *When the Tree Sings*, London, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1979.
22 For example, A. Ribeiro, *When the Wolves Howl*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1963. Originally published as *Quando os Lobos Uivam*, Lisbon, 1958. The theme of migration as, or versus, death is further exemplified by Arnold Cassola in Chapter 11 of this book.
23 K.A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986. See also the next chapter.
24 G. Lewis, *Day of Shining Red*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980.
25 J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, New York, Viking, 1939.
26 Quoted in D. Wyatt, 'Introduction', in D. Wyatt (ed.), *New Essays on the Grapes of Wrath*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 6.
27 We might also note, relating to an earlier point, that Grandpa Joad dies on the day he leaves the old farmstead.
28 C. Pavese, *The Moon and the Bonfires*, London, Quartet, 1978. Originally published as *La Luna e i Falò*, Turin, 1950.
29 D. Thompson, *Cesare Pavese: A Study of the Major Novels and Poems*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 226.
30 Pavese, op. cit., pp. 80–1.
31 ibid.
32 The passage from T.S. Eliot's Little Gidding, quoted above, is in fact used at the start of Thompson's discussion of *La Luna e i Falò*, see Thompson, op. cit., p. 223. See also A. Musumeci, *L'Impossibile Ritorno: La Fisiologia del Mito in Cesare Pavese*, Ravenna, Longo, 1980.
33 See, for example, many of Margaret Atwood's novels of return to Canadian settings: *Surfacing*, London, André Deutsch, 1973; *Cat's Eye*, London,

Bloomsbury, 1989. The contemporary French novelist Patrick Modiano explores similar themes with regard to return to Paris, for example in *Quartier Perdu*, Paris, Gallimard, 1984.

34 Wyatt, op. cit., pp. 13–14.

35 An interesting case here is that of Salman Rushdie: see J.P. Sharp, 'A topology of "post" nationality: (re)mapping identity in the *Satanic Verses*', *Ecumene*, 1994, vol. 1, pp. 65–76.

36 There is now a considerable outpouring of writings fostered by migrant or ethnic-minority writers' co-operatives, workshops and other organisations. A recent example is R. Ahmad and R. Gupta (eds), *Flaming Spirit*, London, Virago, 1994, produced by the Asian Women Writer's Collective in the United Kingdom. See also Chapter 3 of this book.

37 G. Kearns, 'Progress reports: historical geography', *Progress in Human Geography*, 1992, vol. 16, p. 407.

38 R.J. Johnston, *Geography and Geographers: Anglo-American Human Geography Since 1945*, London, Edward Arnold, 4th edn, 1991, p. 183.

39 J.D. Porteous, 'Literature and humanist geography', *Area*, 1985, vol. 17, pp. 117–22.

40 J. Silk, 'Beyond geography and literature', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 1984, vol. 2, pp. 151–78; P. White, 'On the use of creative literature in migration study', *Area*, 1985, vol. 17, pp. 277–83.

41 See especially Said's short article 'Narrative, geography and interpretation', *New Left Review*, 1990, no. 180, pp. 81–97.

42 This is not to say that the data are perfect, and it is arguable that the lacunae in migration data are currently increasing, necessitating new approaches to migration research: see P. White, 'Migration research', in P. Hooimeijer *et al.* (eds), *Population Dynamics in Europe: Current Issues in Population Geography*, Utrecht, Royal Netherlands Geographical Society, 1994, pp. 53–67.

43 A partial exception is the literature dealing with exile: a recent example is provided by H. Bernstein, *The Rift: The Exile Experience of South Africans*, London, Cape, 1994. Other exceptions include Stephen Fender's examination of the role of migration from Britain in creating America's literary culture and identity: S. Fender, *Sea Changes: British Emigration and American Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992. There are also several studies of the role of a 'myth' of America as a migration destination for Italians: see M. Chu, 'The popular myth of America in southern literature', *Journal, Association of Teachers of Italian*, 1983, no. 39, pp. 3–19; D. Heiney, *America in Modern Italian Literature*, New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 1964.

44 See Gordon and Jones, op. cit., for one of the few academic studies of expatriate wives; skilled transient migration in general is rapidly gaining interest, see A. Findlay and W. Gould, 'Skilled international migration: a research agenda', *Area*, 1989, vol. 21, pp. 3–11.

45 H. Mantel, *Eight Months on Ghazza Street*, London, Viking, 1988.

46 B. Emecheta, *In the Ditch*, London, Barrie and Jenkins, 1972; *Second-Class Citizen*, London, Allison and Busby, 1974: the autobiography is *Head Above Water*, London, Fontana, 1987. See also Emecheta's recent novel about return migration from London to Nigeria, *Kehinde*, Oxford, Heinemann, 1994.

47 An interesting collection of short stories reflecting this is K. Pullinger (ed.), *Border Lines: Stories of Exile and Home*, London, Serpent's Tail, 1993.

48 Djura, *The Veil of Silence*, London, Quartet, 1993.

49 P. Mohanti, *Through Brown Eyes*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985.

50 R. Gunesekera, *Monkfish Moon*, Cambridge, Granta, 1992.

51 R. Ventura, *Underground in Japan*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1992, pp. 25–6.

52 M. Charef, *Le Thé au Harem d'Archi Ahmed*, Paris, Mercure de France, 1983, p. 44.

53 One of the few academic studies is J. Connell, *Kitanai, Kitsui and Kiken: The Slow Rise of Labour Migration in Japan*, University of Sydney, ERRRU Working Paper no. 11, 1993.

54 M. Molteno, *A Shield of Coolest Air*, London, Shola Books, 1992.

55 I. Drewitz, *Das Hochhaus*, Stuttgart, Werner Gebühr, 1975, p. 151. For a more recent period see also H. Müller, *Reisende auf einem Bein*, Berlin, Rotbuch, 1989, concerning the plight of those fleeing from Eastern Europe during the 1980s; and M. von der Grün, *Springflucht*, Darmstadt, Luchterhand, 1992, on the arrival of the *Aussiedler* in the Ruhr. See also the short stories of P. Huelle, *Moving House and other Stories*, London, Bloomsbury, 1994, on the interpretation of mass population movement in postwar Poland.

56 Ribeiro, op. cit.; O. Gonçalves, *A Floresta em Bremerhaven*, Lisbon, Seara Nova, 1975 (about migrant experience in Germany); L. Jorge, *O Cais das Merendas*, Lisbon, Europa-América, 1982 (a postmodernist novel bringing together emigration, tourism and the breakdown of community); F. Namora, *O Rio Triste*, Amadora, Bertrand, 1982 (on the Portuguese condition generally).

57 From Italian literature, C. Levi, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1982 (originally published as *Cristo si è Fermato a Eboli*, 1945); A. Giovene, *The Dilemma of Love*, London, Collins, 1973 (originally published as *L'Autobiografia di Giuliano Sansevero*, 1967); C. Levi, *Words are Stones*, London, Victor Gollancz, 1959 (originally published as *Le Parole sono Pietre*, 1955); from Spanish literature J. Goytisolo, *Campos de Nijar*, Barcelona, Seix Barral, 1959; I. Aldecoa, *Cuentos Completos*, Madrid, Alianza, 2 vols, 1973.

58 J. Riley, *A Kindness to the Children*, London, Women's Press, 1993. Another novel exploring similar themes of 'return' to an unexperienced ancestral homeland is that of Peter Handke, *Die Wiederholung*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1986, concerning a young Austrian of Yugoslav extraction.

59 T.S. Eliot, 'East Coker' from *Four Quartets*, London, Faber and Faber, 1944 (1959 edn, p. 23).

60 Halfacree and Boyle, op. cit.

61 Text by Salman Rushdie delivered to the 'International Parliament of Writers', Strasbourg, November 1993, reported in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 February 1994, p. 14.