

CHAPTER 1

Breaking the Canon? Critical Reflections on “Other” Literary Traditions

Sandra Ponzanesi

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the role of the literary canon as a crucial instrument and reference point in pedagogy and teaching about gender and race. The analysis of the construction, working and transformation of the canon, and the Western canon in particular, forms the ideal arena to teach and discuss how the intersection of race, ethnicity, nationality and language plays a role in processes of inclusion and exclusion, on theoretical, institutional and commercial levels. The main objective of the chapter is to rethink these issues by making an excursion into feminist practices in relation to the canon from its origin through to the feminist postcolonial interventions of the 1990s and onward, while accounting for the vexed relationship with commercial practices such as branding, awards and prizes. The garnering of prestigious literary prizes, such as the Nobel, Booker or Pulitzer prizes, can lend considerable visibility and coverage to previously excluded female and ethnic minority authors. Yet these very “inclusions” also jeopardise or whitewash some of the radical views of the writers involved by “blending” them into the canon or the mainstream. By taking Toni Morrison, the first Afro-American Nobel Prize winner and one of the first authors to depart from the literary canon as a unique example, the scope is to explore the politics of cultural production and to analyse how the mechanism behind publication, reception and canonisation influences teaching practices and the construction of knowledge. The analysis of how gender and race have been included and excluded from the official canon, and the mainstream curriculum, is therefore articulated in its aesthetic, political and commercial implications.

These debates reveal the opportunities and the significant consequences of changing the curriculum in increasingly multicultural classrooms and societies, and also make it possible to readdress the question of power difference in knowledge production even within already established multicultural curriculums. This is because, as Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and You-me Park write,

even though on the one hand most of the field of postcolonial studies acknowledges the need and desirability of curriculums and academic programmes that are more sensitive to minorities' histories and cultures, they are, on the other hand, wary of the liberal humanist tendency in multiculturalism's discourse. "Too often", they write, "Third World women's texts (and by extension Third World women themselves) are objectified and exoticized, or utilized for the convention and quick edification of Western readers."¹ It is obvious that in the context of globalisation, where the flows of culture and capital extend beyond national and linguistic barriers, texts come to fulfil a function that is different from their function in the past. Seen either as representing entire cultures and national histories or as examples of postcolonial experimentalism, the result is that writings from different locations are often conflated into Third World sameness. As Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and You-me Park further write: "Within the limitations of (often, undergraduate) classroom instruction, further, the dangers of an exclusively textualized understanding of the Third World, the suppression of the histories of colonialism and imperialism (complacent enjoyment of Western superiority) and cultural relativism (exemption from any moral discriminations or obligations to act), are real matters of concern."²

Postcolonial feminism and race-critical thinking should strive to form alliances in order to raise and maintain awareness, and to illuminate how these mechanisms are often sabotaged or boycotted by market forces and easily packaged multiculturalism. "If Third World women's texts are not to become simply objects of consumption in the pluralist intellectual marketplace," write Sunder Rajan and You-me Park, "the demands of teaching and studying postcolonial literatures must be made rigorous, the concept of (other) cultures needs to be subjected to critical and theoretical examination, and the positionality of the reader in the Western academy, as well as the multiple and complicated relationships between the West and the rest of the world, should be systematically foregrounded."³

¹ Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and You-me Park, "Postcolonial Feminism/Postcolonialism and Feminism," in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Oxford and Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 56.

² *Ibid.*, 56.

³ *Ibid.*, 56–57.

It is the purpose of this chapter to examine how teaching gender and race can take account of the dilemmas, pitfalls and shortcomings of multicultural curriculums while addressing the promises and perils of globalisation, through the marketing and consumption of diversity.

Towards an alternative canon: Multiculturalism and diversity

From its inception, the canon has not only been a form for preserving a culture's best work, to be treasured and disseminated in the classroom as part of national excellence, with iconic status, but also a form for preserving the beliefs and ideological values of a culture. However, the ideological implications of the canons have always been downplayed in favour of a rigorous account of the "best that has been thought and said in the world"⁴ or "the existing monuments of [art] form and ideal order among themselves".⁵

The new critical movement that developed in the 1940s and 1950s followed this path and promoted a canon that preserved culture by elevating certain works of art on aesthetic and formal grounds. As Paul Lauter pointed out, this, in theory, did not mean that the canon had to be narrow but, in truth, works by women and ethnic minorities were considered lacking in terms of the New Critics' ideal of complexity, ambiguity, tension and irony.⁶ In the various anthologies edited by the New Critics, authors who failed to create "masterpieces" were not included, and these authors gradually became less known and slowly dropped out of circulation altogether.

Feminists and critics in the 1970s observed that although the canon was supposed to represent masterpieces with *universal* aesthetic value, these works were almost exclusively written by white, middle-class males. Paul Lauter, Annette Kolodny⁷ and many other critics began broadening the canon by including more works by women and by writers of diverse ethnic, racial, and class backgrounds.

⁴ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (Oxford: Project Gutenberg, 1869), 6.

⁵ T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1917), in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1920).

⁶ Paul Lauter, *Canons and Contexts* (New York: Oxford, 1991).

⁷ Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630–1860*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

These arguments led to an opening up of the canon in the 1980s. The feminist contestation and contribution to the opening up of the canon has gone through a number of stages. From Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* on gynocritics, which looked at the nature of female creativity and the history, themes, genres of literature by women to Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* whose purpose was to reveal that power and domination are the real issues at stake in the process of recognition and canonisation, to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's influential *The Madwoman in the Attic*, which endeavoured to define a new genealogy by exploring the anxiety of female authorship, much of the canon-bending dealt, however, only with white middle-class Western women, and suddenly the canon was again stifling and exclusive.

In the 1990s, a considerable amount of work appeared on gender and difference, and on the importance of the simultaneity of identity formation based on gender, race and class along with sexual preferences, nationalities, religious beliefs, physical disability and so on. The first impact came from the black feminist movements in the United States, with the works of Hortense Spiller, Barbara Smith, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins, Angela Davies and many others following the famous slogan, "Ain't I a Woman?," launched by Sojourner Truth in 1851.

This Bridge Called My Back, edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, is a showing-and-telling, a volume of reflections and poetic power. First published in 1983, this collection was an important addition to the steadily growing voice of the world's silenced people, especially women of colour. Opening up the canon of feminist criticism also meant opening up to voices of the Third World. Accounting for women outside the Western bulwark meant a total readjustment of the practice of feminist criticism.

As Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and You-me Park ask in the opening of this chapter: how should we deal with difference? Where, from a literary point of view, were the famous women writers from Africa, India or the Caribbean? How should they be evaluated again? And as Spivak wrote: what is emancipatory in one arena can be oppressive in another.⁸ The translation of women's

⁸ Gayatri Spivak, "The Politics of Translation," in *Outside the Teaching Machine* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 179–200.

works from vernacular languages into English (the vehicle for accessing a global readership) is rife with inconsistencies and misinterpretations.

The canon and the cultural industry

The following step in this analysis is to ascertain how the relationship between canon formation and the cultural industry has changed in recent decades, and to explore the impact this has had on teaching practices on gender and race. New global forces and, more specifically, the financial interests of powerful publishing houses and the accompanying carnival of international literary prizes are having a serious impact on the development of canon formation and all its variations.

My aim here is to show to what extent the awarding of prestigious literary prizes influences the entry of women writers, or women writers from racialised minorities, to the canon, and through the canon, to the classroom. It should be noted, however, that the garnering of prestigious prizes, such as the Nobel Prize, does not necessarily always secure literary canonisation and long-term influence (consider, for example, forgotten women laureates such as Sigrid Undset, 1928 or Selma Lagerlöf, 1906). Furthermore, many literary titans have never managed to enter the Nobel pantheon (James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust, Franz Kafka, Simone de Beauvoir, Henry James, Silvia Plath and others). This subscribes to the whimsical and ambivalent nature and role of literary prizes and canonisation as such.

Nonetheless, the growing significance attached to literary awards and honours in recent decades (especially the Nobel, Booker, and Pulitzer prizes) has allowed serious literary fiction titles to become the subject of academic discussion.⁹ The Man Booker Prize is a very prestigious, commercial and influential prize that is received every year with much publicity and that always manages to stir a controversy. As the wordle included here shows (see Figure 1.1) several winners have entered the literary pantheon, as the references to Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992) or Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) demonstrate, while

⁹ See for example Brian Feldman, *The Nobel Prize: A History of Genius, Controversy, and Prestige* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2000) and Laura Carlson, Sean Creighton and Sheila Cunningham, eds., *Literary Laurels: A Reader's Guide to Award-Winning Fiction* (New York: Hillyard Industries, 1995).

academic discourses in the past decade, and which focuses on the ideological implications of literary production and reception to shift the significance of “newness” away from Western norms. Yet the question of Third World women’s text consumption in the global multicultural marketplace, as Sunder Rajan and You-me Park warn us, should be analysed rigorously and critically.

Race, gender and diversity in the canon: Toni Morrison

I will now clarify the two discourses discussed earlier in this chapter: the role of gender and race for canon formation, and the connection to the cultural industry in recognising but also exploiting these categories as tokens of diversity and exoticism. The case of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* raises many important political and literary issues concerning the place of women in the canon, the inclusion of minorities such as the Afro-American and the acquisition of this institutionalisation through the garnering of prestigious literary prizes, such as the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1988 and the Nobel Prize in 1993. Toni Morrison is not just a canonical author but also a literary critic who continually challenges the values of such awards, saying that black writers and their books should not just receive recognition but a recognition that does them justice.¹¹ As is often the case with the Nobel Prize, the winners are nominated and awarded the prize because they interpret or represent universal aspects of the human condition. In a press release from the Swedish Academy, Toni Morrison was labelled someone: “who, in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import, gives life to an essential aspect of American reality. ... Toni Morrison is a literary artist of the first rank. She delves into the language itself, a language she wants to liberate from the fetters of race. And she addresses us with the lustre of poetry.”¹²

Morrison is the first black American and the eighth woman to be nominated for the prestigious award since its inception in 1901 (as of 2012, a total of 12 women have been nominated).¹³ Morrison is the eleventh American

¹¹ Toni Morrison, “Nobel Lecture 2003,” in *Toni Morrison, Critical and Theoretical Approaches*, ed. Nancy J. Peterson (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

¹² Swedish Academy press release. Retrieved on July 2, 2011 from http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1993/press.html.

¹³ There have been 12 women laureates in literature since 1901: Herta Müller, 2009; Doris Lessing, 2007; Elfriede Jelinek, 2004; Wislawa Szymborska, 1996; Toni Morrison, 1993; Nadine Gordimer,

writer to win the prize. She said that winning as an American is very special but winning as a black American is a knockout. The glowing reception she received confirmed her role as a leading voice in African-American literature, and it was also a significant occasion for black women writers. At that stage she had already written six novels: *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992) and after her Nobel Prize, *Paradise* (1999), *Love* (2003) and *A Merci* (2008) along with a book on literary criticism, *Playing in the Dark* (1992). She was already an internationally renowned and well-established writer and critic, but somehow the Nobel Prize conferred a measure of universality, of expressing local, deeply-rooted historical events, such as slavery, through the experience and consciousness of dispossessed women in a resonant language that transforms myth and memory. Her magic vocabulary and haunting bodily inscriptions and absences fuse the tradition of oral storytelling with the more advanced technique of postmodernism based on erasure, ambivalence, repetition, pastiche, linguistic wordplay, the iteration and reiteration of words, phrases and passages, metanarratives, and open endings. While this linguistic and narrative variation is evocative of an oral literature that shapes and retraces various tellings of the same story, it also demonstrates a concern for the production and meaning of language.

Beloved

In *Beloved* Morrison spins an incredible story, woven around myths which create a sophisticated linguistic interplay: the crossing of genres and styles is parallel to the crossing of borders, the interplay between presence and absence, life and death. This is a story that rewrites American history and, at the same time, “it is not a story to pass on”. This is the constant refrain throughout the book. The historically and geographically situated opening of the book: Cincinnati, Ohio, 1873, 124 Bluestone Road, ends up on the last page with: “It was not a story to pass on. ... This is not a story to pass on. ... By and by all trace is gone, and what is forgotten is not only the footprints but the water

1991; Nelly Sachs, 1966; Gabriela Mistral, 1945; Pearl Buck, 1938; Sigrid Undset, 1928; Grazia Deledda, 1926; Selma Lagerlöf, 1906. The Nobel Prize is therefore catching up for the lost time by rebalancing the percentage of women winners.



Figure 1.2: Film adaptation starring Oprah Winfrey as Sethe and Kimberly Elise as Denver (Source: still *Beloved*, directed by Jonathan Demme, USA, 1998, 172 min. Disney Enterprises, Inc.)

too and what is down there. The rest is weather. Not the breath of the disremembered and unaccounted for, but wind in the eaves, or spring ice thawing too quickly. Just weather. Certainly no clamor for a kiss. *Beloved*.”¹⁴

Toni Morrison’s novel, *Beloved*, received international acclaim and entered the cultural industry not only by being conferred many prestigious international prizes but also by being adapted into a mainstream motion picture, produced by none other than Oprah Winfrey, who also stars in the film as Sethe (see Figure 1.2). Though the film was not a critical success it entered the Hollywood pantheon, and this guaranteed a further circulation and reprints of the novel. The film was partly unsuccessful given the tortuous nature of the novel, which can be considered a major challenge to any screenwriter, in this case Akosua Busia.

The novel is, in fact, one of the most complex, disturbing and beautiful works of postmodern literature, yet it is ideal for the classroom to teach about shifting ideas of gender, race and responsibility. The novel relies heavily on

¹⁴ Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (London: Picador, 1988), 275.

flashbacks (Sethe's and Paul D's "rememories") to explain a dark story of slavery, love, death and retribution. The book is deeply emotional and raises weighty moral issues. Morrison's writing remaps American history but is not historical in the usual sense; it is not linear but circular, and it has mesmerising refrains and repetitions, like lullabies and myths which come to life. Beloved is not just the baby ghost that comes back to reclaim her mother who killed her to protect her from the inhumanity of slavery; it is also the metaphor for all the "sixty million and more" people who were enslaved and suffered (as mentioned in the epigraph to her book). She symbolises the individual and the collective, the deep unconscious and yet the political figure. Morrison wrote for the first time about slavery not in sociological terms but expressed the inner life of slaves, exploring their psyches, bringing to word the experience and consciousness of black women, mothers and daughters, real and magical. It is, therefore, not without reason that literary critic Barbara Christian compared Toni Morrison to Virginia Woolf in her article.¹⁵ She compared them because they are both crucial to the question of canon formation: Woolf for the entry of women into the Western literary canon, and Morrison for opening up the canon to black Americans. Though their class background is completely different, they struggled to achieve expressive freedom, fighting the influence of their forefathers. Both experimented with language and invented unorthodox, novelistic characteristics, fighting literary conventions that had silenced the voice of women. For both, memory is a central aspect of inner life. They both solved the tension between inner and outer life, Woolf by using soliloquies (not exactly the stream of consciousness deployed by Joyce, which was too centred in a self that never embraced that which is outside self and beyond), and Morrison by using inner monologues, along with choruses, inner voices and ghosts becoming flesh, and flesh becoming absence. Both writers have a strong imagination, but Woolf attempted to capture the meaning of life in the moment, and Morrison through the rhythm of life.

Such a comparison is not only totally plausible but also highly insightful. Barbara Christian is a black woman, and so she is entitled to extend her critical horizon beyond any racist bias. Nonetheless, at the beginning of her career, Morrison was compared by Joan Bischoff to a "great" canonical author, Henry

¹⁵ Barbara Christian, "Layered Rhythms: Virginia Woolf and Toni Morrison," *MFS, Modern Fiction Studies* 39, 3&4 (1993): 483–500.

James.¹⁶ As Nancy Peterson writes, this move was calculated because by comparing Morrison to James, Bischoff justifies her object of study as someone who, though unfamiliar to the academics of the period, is deserving of their attention.¹⁷ It also implied that Morrison's book spoke to more than just a black audience. Indeed, Bischoff goes on to invoke the problematic language of universalism to promote Morrison: "Though her characters' problems are conditioned by the black milieu of which she writes, her concerns are broader, universal ones."¹⁸ Concerned that analogies between herself and various (white, male) canonical authors were tantamount to imposing the wrong tradition on her novels, Morrison would remark in an interview in 1983: "I am not like James Joyce, I am not like Thomas Hardy, I am not like Faulkner." Morrison asks for the development of a criticism rooted in black culture to make profoundly intricate readings of her novels and those of black women writers possible. This is the same claim made by women writers in general on the male canon. In short, she condemns praise or negative criticism based on criteria and paradigms that are not connected to Afro-American culture. One of the most heated discussions in the field deals with questions of authenticity and authority. It examines who practises black feminism (only black female feminists?) and the kind of analysis it entails (the study of black women's writing only? The study of race, gender and class in any text?). To argue that black feminist critics are the only ones attuned to the issues to be found in black women's writings is to risk lapsing into a problematic biologism or essentialism. But to argue that the identity of the critic is totally irrelevant would be to deny the particular insights that can come from the experience of living as a black woman. By comparing Woolf and Morrison, and by examining the contextual and material circumstances that distinguish them from one another along with the similar obstacles and goals shared along the axis of gender, leads to a reading in which gender, race and class are mutually illuminating.

The novel *Beloved* shows exactly how to overcome this critical dilemma: although it focuses on the internal consciousness of black women from a black

¹⁶ Joan Bischoff, "The Novels of Toni Morrison: Studies in Thwarted Sensitivity," *Studies in Black Literature* 6, 3 (1975): 21–23.

¹⁷ Nancy J. Peterson, *Toni Morrison: Critical and Theoretical Approaches* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 3.

¹⁸ Joan Bischoff quoted in Peterson, *Toni Morrison*, 3.

female perspective and at a certain time and place in history, it nevertheless expresses something larger than the text itself, an indefinability, a reach, an anxiety, a suffering, a form of pain that is common to other women and men in another time and another place. Identity is never fixed, but always dislocated, more present than absent. It is the hard task of the reader to make sense, or many senses, of what is read but also experienced through the rhythm of language. It is an experience, a sensation, that goes beyond the critical reflection and speaks right to the heart. Therefore *Beloved* eludes explanation, and the gap between response and interpretation persists. Morrison's techniques, themes and iteration induce a compelling confusion.

That magical confusion led to the novel's huge success and impact. The novel has the power to puzzle and destabilise, yet also to console and provide guidelines for understanding what has been and should never be again: "This is not a story to pass on." And yet it had to be passed on in order to reach that level of identity and identification that would allow the black community both to immortalise their history of pain and suffering and to celebrate memory as the most precious tool against forgetfulness and erasure.

Conclusion: Beyond the colour-line of the canon?

Since its inception, the canon has significantly changed in meaning, format and function. It has adapted to societal changes, and to new aesthetic dimensions that require a broadening of the paradigms of evaluation, appreciation and interpretation. Feminist theories, black studies, post-colonialism, queer studies and multiculturalism have had a marked impact on changing the flexibility of the canon, also by contesting its inherent mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Nowadays we can no longer speak of a single canon but of a multiple array of possible canons that do still attempt to guarantee a kind of visibility, coherence and also accessibility for both dominant and minority writers, either inside or outside the Western canon. The cultural industry has also become more imbricated with the appeal of literary products, which, in tandem with the role of literary prizes and their international appeal, has increased its imprint on the canon; it is no longer an ivory tower but more an intricate crossroads of genres, generations, genealogies and geographies. So, rather than having become obsolete and unwanted, the canon has reinvented itself to serve different purposes.

The institutionalisation of literary prizes (Nobel, Booker, Neustadt, and Pulitzer prizes, to name but a few) has favoured the inclusion of women writers in the canon, in particular women of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. However, this often relates to a tokenification and fetishisation of difference more than a real interest in different aesthetics and politics. Often marketed as exotic others, as in the case of Arundhati Roy (*The God of Small Things*, Booker Prize 1997), or selected as representing the voice of her own people through a universal language, such as Toni Morrison (*Beloved*, 1987, Pulitzer Prize, 1988, Nobel Prize 1993), literary prizes can lend considerable visibility and coverage while also jeopardising or whitewashing some of the radical views of the writers involved, by “blending” them into the canon or mainstream. The scope of this chapter has, therefore, been to explore the politics of cultural production and to analyse how the mechanisms behind publication, reception and canonisation function, and to examine the role of gender, race, ethnicity and nationalism therein. The debate on “objective judgment” versus the challenge of diversity has been addressed, in particular, with respect to how race can make or break the canon.

Implications for teaching

The chapter questions the process of canon formation with respect to issues of gender and race and explores how to make the link with the role of the global marketplace, which is increasingly influencing, though not yet dictating, the process of canon formation. It is obvious that the categories of gender and race figure prominently in all processes of inclusion and exclusion, of which the canon is an exemplary model. Though the definition of canon is slippery and over time is subject to shifts in perspectives, it is still one of the most useful reference tools for teaching. The canon not only constitutes the bases on which many school and university curriculums are structured, but it also organises the modalities through which knowledge and evaluation is incorporated by students, teachers and policymakers. As this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, the canon does not function in isolation, away from the rules of the marketplace. On the contrary, in recent decades it has come increasingly under the influence of commercial institutions, even in the form of prestige through awards, prizes and reviews. This means that the relevance of the canon for pedagogy has shifted from a pure reflection of

aesthetic value to become a more interlinked reflection on global practices and power differentials.

This chapter has attempted to show how gender and race have featured in these transitions, from the traditional canon to a more detailed analysis of how operations of inclusion and exclusion based on gender and race have entered the global market. Though gender and race were initially positioned as marginalising women and authors of colour, questions of otherness have now become an item of exchange in themselves. Being a female or black author is often marketed as an item of distinction and therefore difference is essentialised in order to be competitively promoted.

It is important to reflect on these issues in teachers' practices, not only to discuss issues of gender and race by reflecting on individual authors, but as a general discourse on practices of inclusion and exclusion which operate for individual authors and also at national and international levels. The undoing of mechanisms of power and politics must start in the classroom, by making students aware of patterns of dissymmetry not only at the level of representations (by analysing stereotypes on women, ethnic or marginalised people), but also by unravelling discursive practices that work towards the institutionalisation, canonisation and commercialisation of certain regimes of values and beliefs. These have deep roots in colonial relations, where notions of self and otherness were constructed by championing Europe as the cradle of civilisation and the colonies as laboratories for development, and where education, schooling and learning were pretty much based on this dissymmetrical operation: who was teaching "what" to whom. The chapter has shown that teaching and learning are interactive sites of knowledge that work both bottom up and top down. In order to understand the mechanisms of this exchange, gender and race have been analysed as exemplary categories that operate against processes of inclusion and exclusion.

Questions

1. This chapter highlights how the canon has worked through history as an apparatus of inclusion and exclusion where relations of power, based on gender and racial dissymmetries, are played out. After reading this chapter, what factors do you think make you as a reader critically aware of the ideological implications of the patriarchal and racialised apparatus of cultural production?

aesthetic value to become a more interlinked reflection on global practices and power differentials.

This chapter has attempted to show how gender and race have featured in these transitions, from the traditional canon to a more detailed analysis of how operations of inclusion and exclusion based on gender and race have entered the global market. Though gender and race were initially positioned as marginalising women and authors of colour, questions of otherness have now become an item of exchange in themselves. Being a female or black author is often marketed as an item of distinction and therefore difference is essentialised in order to be competitively promoted.

It is important to reflect on these issues in teachers' practices, not only to discuss issues of gender and race by reflecting on individual authors, but as a general discourse on practices of inclusion and exclusion which operate for individual authors and also at national and international levels. The undoing of mechanisms of power and politics must start in the classroom, by making students aware of patterns of dissymmetry not only at the level of representations (by analysing stereotypes on women, ethnic or marginalised people), but also by unravelling discursive practices that work towards the institutionalisation, canonisation and commercialisation of certain regimes of values and beliefs. These have deep roots in colonial relations, where notions of self and otherness were constructed by championing Europe as the cradle of civilisation and the colonies as laboratories for development, and where education, schooling and learning were pretty much based on this dissymmetrical operation: who was teaching "what" to whom. The chapter has shown that teaching and learning are interactive sites of knowledge that work both bottom up and top down. In order to understand the mechanisms of this exchange, gender and race have been analysed as exemplary categories that operate against processes of inclusion and exclusion.

Questions

1. This chapter highlights how the canon has worked through history as an apparatus of inclusion and exclusion where relations of power, based on gender and racial dissymmetries, are played out. After reading this chapter, what factors do you think make you as a reader critically aware of the ideological implications of the patriarchal and racialised apparatus of cultural production?

2. Do you think that there is an objective and impartial way of judging and assessing literary works on their literary merit or do you think that social and cultural contexts also play a role? In the latter case, what is the role that gender and race have to play?
3. After reading the case of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, highlight the reasons for this novel's successful breakthrough at theoretical, institutional and commercial levels. Analyse why this novel is theoretically and aesthetically innovative, why it has attracted the interest of prize-giving committees and why it has become so widely distributed and well received.
4. Think about how gender and race, also in intersection with other categories, play a role in the process of canonisation of an author and how this is integrated in the multicultural curriculum. Is the multiculturalisation of the curriculum always positive and desirable? If not, why not?

Assignments

1. Elaborate on the function of the literary canon, both mainstream and alternative, and argue about the advantages and drawbacks of being part of the mainstream canon for writers of different gender and racial background.
2. The chapter focuses on the case of Toni Morrison, as an exemplary icon who bent the canon to open it up and include gender and racial diversity. Can you give other examples that have also fulfilled this function? Analyse and discuss how they managed to bend the canon in interaction with the cultural industry.
3. Can you think of any recent hype surrounding an author? Analyse the marketing campaign behind it, paying attention to how gender and race were used and addressed.

References

- Arnold, Matthew. *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism*. Oxford: Project Gutenberg, 1869.
- Bischoff, Joan. "The Novels of Toni Morrison: Studies in Thwarted Sensitivity." *Studies in Black Literature* 6, 3 (1975): 21–23.
- Carlson, Laura, Sean Creighton and Sheila Cunningham, eds. *Literary Laurels: A Reader's Guide to Award-Winning Fiction*. New York: Hillyard Industries, 1995.
- Christian, Barbara. "Layered Rhythms: Virginia Woolf and Toni Morrison." *MFS, Modern Fiction Studies* 39, 3&4 (1993): 483–500.
- Eliot, Thomas S. "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1917). In *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. London: Methuen, 1920.
- Feldman, Brian. *The Nobel Prize: A History of Genius, Controversy, and Prestige*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 2000.
- Gates, Jr., Henry Louis. *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Gilbert, Sandra, and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.
- Kolodny, Annette. *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630–1860*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984.
- Lauter, Paul. *Canons and Contexts*. New York: Oxford, 1991.
- Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. New York: Doubleday, 1970.
- Moraga, Cherríe, and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981. Reprint New York: Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, 1983.
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. London: Picador, 1988.
- . "Nobel Lecture 2003." In *Toni Morrison, Critical and Theoretical Approaches*, edited by Nancy J. Peterson, 267–273. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.
- . *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Peterson, Nancy J. *Toni Morrison: Critical and Theoretical Approaches*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.
- Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists From Brontë to Lessing*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977.

Spivak, Gayatri. "The Politics of Translation." In *Outside the Teaching Machine*, 179–200. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.

Sunder Rajan, Rajeswari, and You-me Park. "Postcolonial Feminism/Postcolonialism and Feminism." In *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, edited by Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray, 53–71. Oxford and Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004.

Todd, Richard. *Consuming Fictions: The Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today*. London: Bloomsbury, 1996.