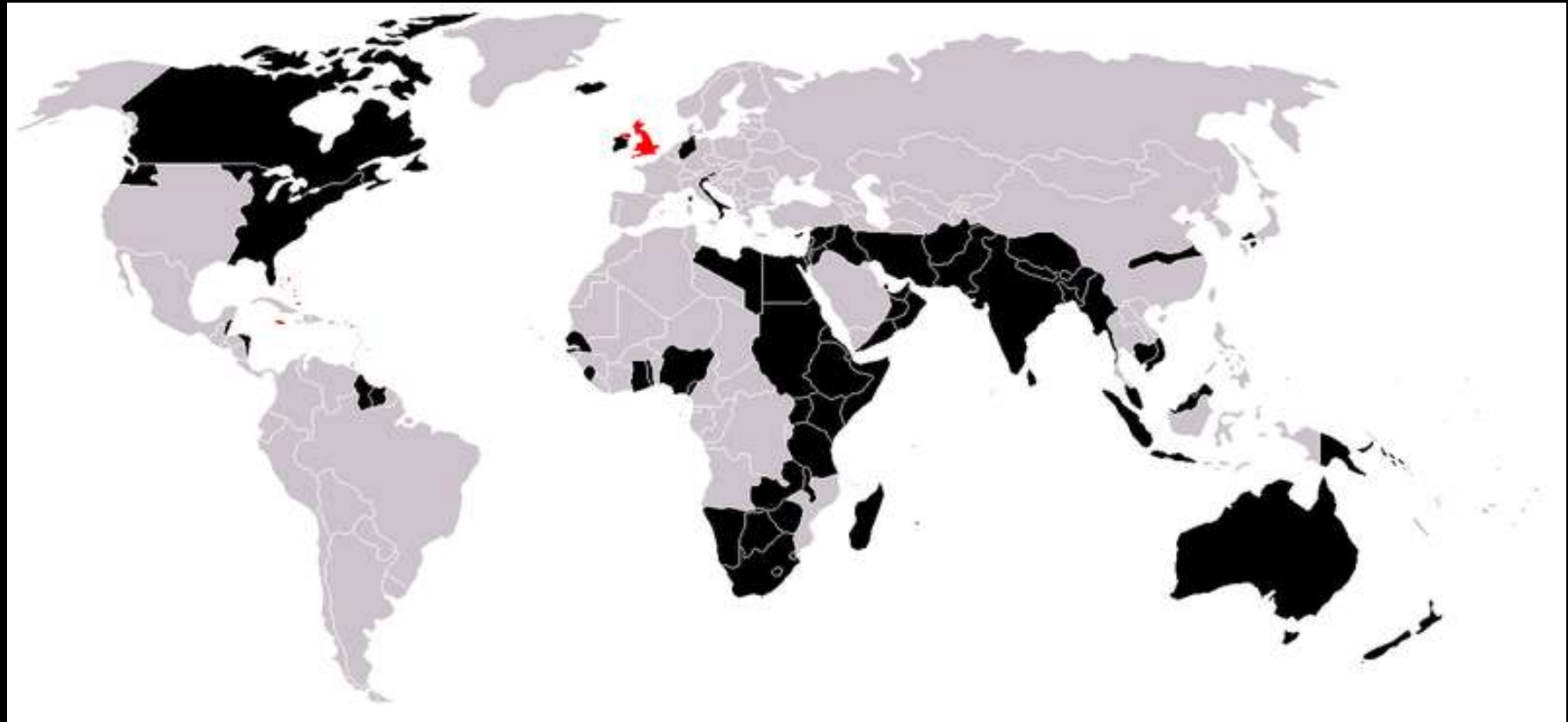


postcolonial literature



the British Empire



postcolonial narratives are

- mapping various kinds of **experience that have resulted from the colonization** and contact with the (British) Empire
- written '**against**' or **in relation to the Empire** on the one hand, but also reflecting the post-colonial period (i.e. after the end of formal colonial rule) on the other hand, particularly post-independence nationalism
- ... providing a **testimony** to crises in representation as well as an alternative to the media representations

main concerns of postcolonial literature

reclaiming **spaces and places**

e.g. Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* (2000)

revisiting and **re-writing history**

e.g. Doris Pilkington's *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* (1996)

asserting cultural integrity and **difference**

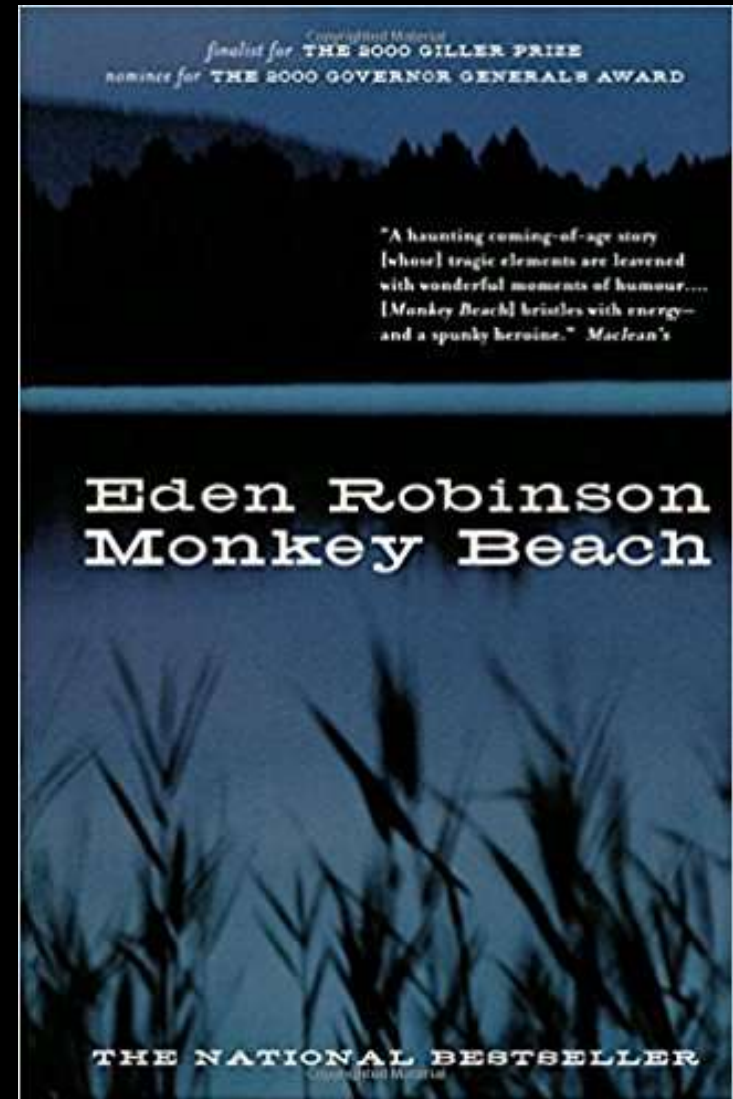
e.g. Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966)

appropriating the **language** of the center

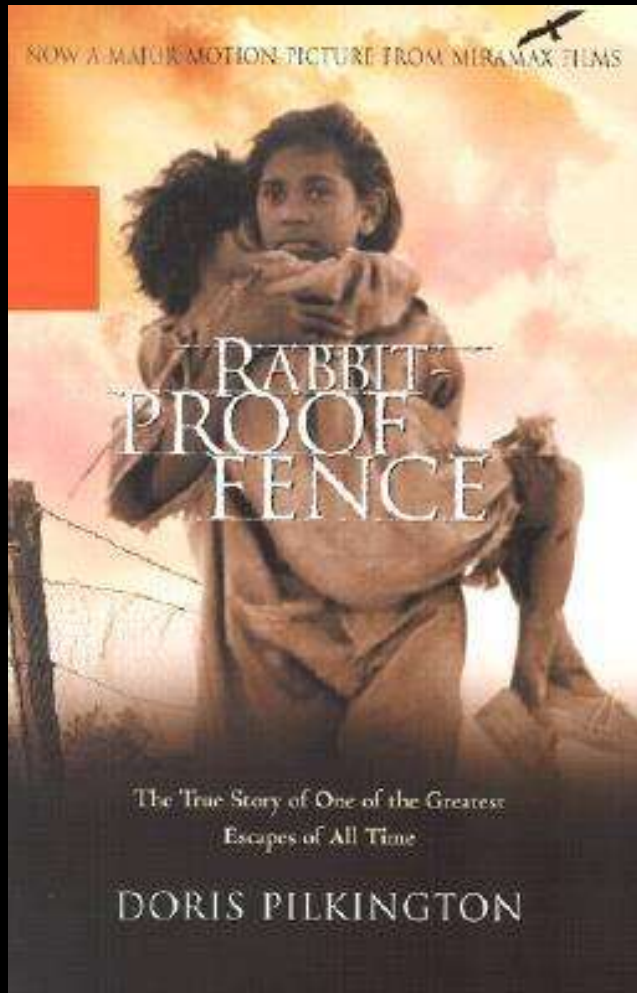
e.g. Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* (1985)

1. reclaiming spaces and places in postcolonial literature

- Colonialism: claiming and exploiting distant territories, resources and people; Native peoples enslaved, relocated, dispossessed
- Postcolonial narrative: restoring a close link to homeland/environment through narration and dramatization
- e.g. Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach* (2000)



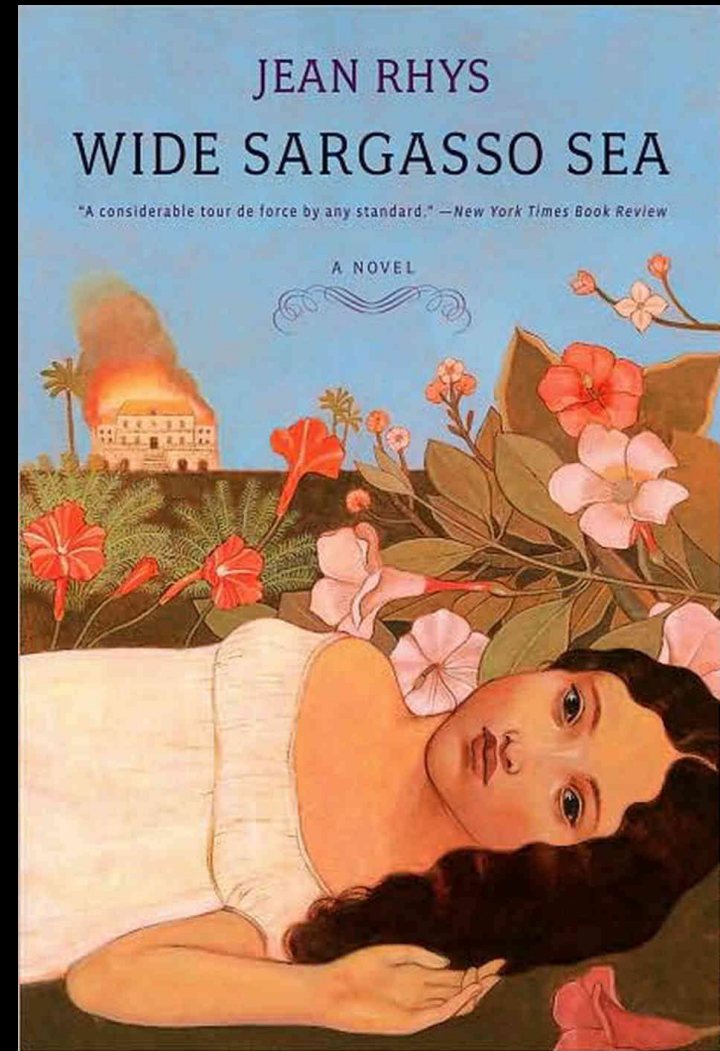
2. revisiting and re-writing history in postcolonial literature



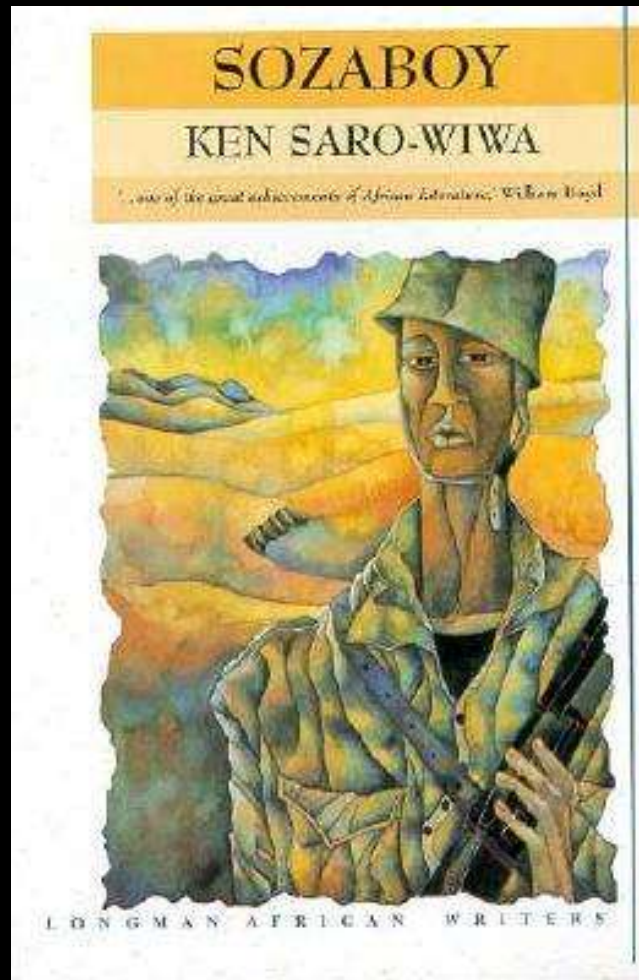
- Colonialism: the colonized people's cultures seen as backward, unchanging, inferior, existing 'outside of history'
- Postcolonial narrative: revisiting local histories and re-writing dominant narratives of nation-building
- e.g. Doris Pilkington's *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* (1996)

3. asserting cultural integrity and difference in postcolonial literature

- Colonialism: forcing colonized peoples to accept and internalize dominant cultural and social norms, suppressing local cultures
- Postcolonial narrative: restoring richness and validity of native cultures and languages
- e.g. Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966)



4. appropriating the language of the center in postcolonial literature



- Colonialism: denial of native languages, forced to accept the colonizer's language through re-education and assimilation
- Postcolonial narrative: complex relationships between the language of the centre and periphery
- e.g. Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* (1985)

appropriating English in pocolo narratives

"Although, everybody in Dukana was happy at first.

All the nine villages were dancing and we were eating plenty maize with pear and knacking tory under the moon. Because the work on the farm have finished and the yams were growing well well. And because the old, bad government have dead, and the new government of soza and police have come."

(Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English*, 1985)

Salman Rushdie on appropriating English

("Imaginary Homelands" 17)

One of the changes has to do with attitudes towards the use of English. Many have referred to the argument about the appropriateness of this language to Indian themes. And I hope all of us share the view that we can't simply use the language in the way the British did; that it needs remaking for our own purposes. Those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we can find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles between the cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies. To conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free.

main contributions of postcolonial literature

emphasis on the politics of **opposition and resistance**
(as well as complicity)

dismantling the relationship between the **centre and periphery**

questioning the **privileges of 'Britishness' / 'Englishness'**

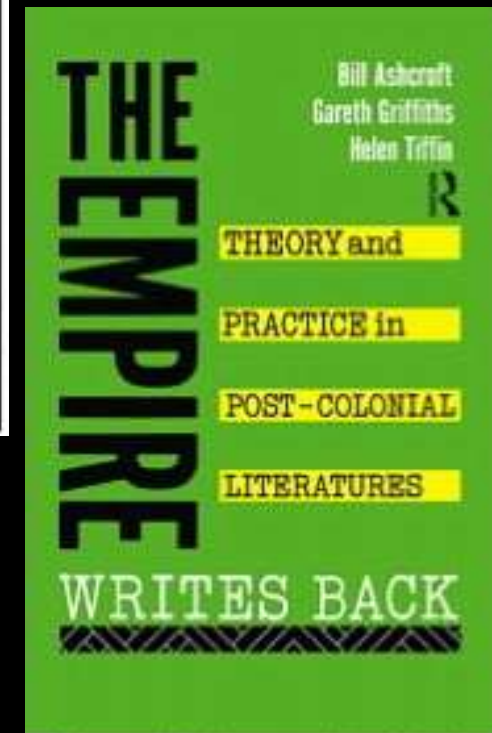
canon transformation: crucial in opening up the Anglo-American literary canon -> world literature in English

the role of English in the colonial dominance

“At its very inception the study of English literature was conceived as **civilizing process**, a process that diminished Australian literature just as effectively as it marginalized Indian, African or Caribbean literatures”

(Bill Ashcroft, “Is Australian Literature Post-Colonial?” 3)

“The Empire writes back with a vengeance”



Also available as a printed book
see title verso for ISBN details

the writing-back paradigm

a strategy “in which a post-colonial writer takes up a character or characters, or the basic assumption of a British canonical text, and unveils those assumptions, subverting the text for post-colonial purposes” (Helen Tiffin)

texts that “take a classic English text as a departure point, supposedly as a strategy for contesting the authority of the canon of English authority” (John Thieme)

Shakespeare's *The Tempest*:

George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960)

Aimé Césaire, *A Tempest – Adaptation for the Black Theatre* (1969)

Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*:

Derek Walcott, *Pantomime* (1978), St. Lucia, Caribbean

J. M. Coetzee, *Foe* (1996)

Dickens' *The Great Expectations*

Peter Carey, *Jack Maggs* (1997)

Bronte's *Jane Eyre*

Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966)

Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*

Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (1958)

Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* (1969)

V. S. Naipaul, *A Bend in the River* (1979)

Christopher Hope, *Darkest England* (1996)

Kipling's *Kim*

Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient* (1992)

re-reading canonical master narratives

- **Gayatri Spivak**, "Three Womens Texts and a Critique of Imperialism": re-reading Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, analyzing the depiction of Berta Mason as well as the source of Jane's miraculous fortune
- **Edward Said**, *Culture and Imperialism*: examines Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, especially the source of economic troubles in the Bertram family



deconstructing stereotypes in pocoland narratives

- especially racial stereotypes - through irony, satire, parody
- e.g. Sherman Alexie, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993)
- *Smoke Signals* (1998), dir. Chris Eyre
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwcJaUaVfR0>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xPnV2392Tck>



postcolonial nostalgia and melancholia

- notion of nostalgia: displacement, sense of (non)belonging, spatial anxiety, migrancy, diaspora -> impossibility to ever depict accurately the pre-colonial homeland
- e.g. Salman Rushdie: position of a migrant writer, in *Midnight's Children* he re-imagines his homeland:

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge—which gives rise to profound uncertainties—that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind.

(Rushdie, "Imaginary Homelands" 10)

Australia as a settler colony



E. Phillips Fox, *Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay, 1770 (1902)*

Australia as a settler colony

- 1770 “discovered” by Captain James Cook and claimed by the British crown
- 1788 first British settlement in New South Wales, starts as a penal colony
- 1901 Australian Federation, six states entered the Commonwealth of Australia
- as a British dominion, Australia was dependent on the mother country -> marginalized, culturally as well as politically

settler colonies in comparison (Can, Au, NZ, US)

- struggle for their own independence – break away from the mother country, ambivalent relationship to it
- history of colonialism (dispossession of Indigenous peoples, ways of settling the territory)
- multicultural policies

resistance and complicity

- resistance to colonial rule on the part of European powers

X

- complicity in the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and later other ethnic minorities

=> a site that is **both colonized and colonizing**

Terra nullius (or not?)

- from lat. ('no-man's land'), the concept of empty, unoccupied land -> doctrine giving legal force to the settlement of lands occupied by "backward" people, where no system of laws or ownership of property was held to exist
- used to legitimize the colonization of Australia by the British
- 1992 *Mabo case*, legal principle of *terra nullius* was overturned by the Australian High Court
- 1993 *Native Title Act*: protection of Native Title (interests in land held by indigenous inhabitants by virtue of their prior occupation)

1997 *Bringing Them Home* Report

- between 1910-1970, c. 100,000 children of mixed parentage were removed from their families -> the term '**Stolen Generations**'
- -> mission schools, orphanages, foster care, later into domestic labor or farm work
- goal: to disrupt Aboriginal children's ties and assimilate them
- commissioned by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, the report collected over 500 oral testimonies from the victims of forced assimilation (-> impact of human rights campaigns)

land ownership, settler belonging

- settlers' desire to master the land and the indigenous elements but the land is linked inevitably with the Indigenous dispossession -> desire to simultaneously erase indigeneity and become indigenous
- history of violent colonization -> "return of the repressed"
- the haunting element -> the "unsettling" nature of the settlement, settlers' spatial anxiety

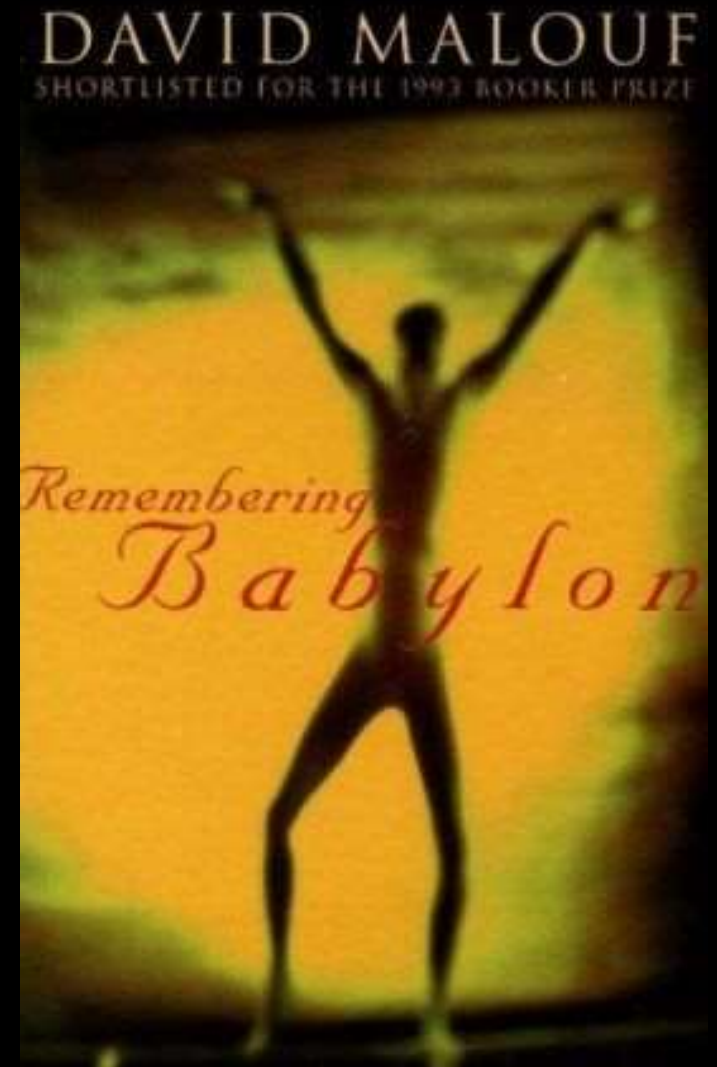
land & belonging in Australia

“How can we non-indigenous Australians justify our continued presence and our love for this country while the Indigenous people remain to express an attachment to places that were wrested from the Indigenous people who loved them, lost them and grieve for them still?”

(Peter Read, *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership*, 2001)

David Malouf, *Remembering Babylon* (1993)

- character of Gemmy: in-betweenness, hybridity -> postcolonial sense of place and belonging
- Gemmy's influence on various characters in the community – who is transformed by his presence/absence and who is not?
- depiction of the early settlement -> turning unfamiliar landscape into a "home"
- a sense of settlers' anxiety/desire to belong



E. Phillips Fox, *Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay, 1770*
(1902)



Daniel Boyd, *We Call Them Pirates Out Here* (2006)
Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

