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Introduction: Andrea Levy's Dislocating Narratives

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Overview for the Special Issue

This special issue on Andrea Levy, the first of its kind, considers how the politics of place as well as the dislocations associated with empire, migration, and social transformation figure in the author's work and shape her approach to narrative. The articles in this issue discuss Levy's poetics of dislocation, representations of place and space, approaches to genre, inscriptions of trauma, gender politics, and relations to black British, Caribbean, and Black Atlantic writing. Two creative works, a short story and a personal memoir, written as response pieces to Levy's oeuvre, round out the collection.

Andrea Levy's Dislocating Narratives[1]

Wendy Knepper

This special issue on Andrea Levy (1956-), the first of its kind, considers the author's contribution to contemporary literature by exploring how her narratives represent the politics of place[2] as well as the dislocations associated with empire, migration, and social transformation. Since the 1990s, Levy has published five novels, namely *Every Light in the House Burnin'* (1994), *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996), *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999), *Small Island* (2004), and *The Long Song* (2010). Slavery and its legacies, migration, and quests for belonging are recurring motifs in her work. This is not surprising, given that this black British writer's life and writing have been shaped by histories of migration that preceded her birth, notably through her parents' emigration from Jamaica to England during the Windrush era as well as through her genealogical connections to the Middle Passage, slavery, and wider circulations throughout the Black Atlantic. Levy came of age in a Britain marked by racial tensions and the rise of multiculturalism; directly and indirectly, her work reflects the hopes and anxieties associated with this period of transition. Internal exile is a recurring theme, especially in her early novels, which tend to highlight the ways in which migrants and their children have often been marginalised in British society. Many of her novels depict breakdowns in communication or show characters who experience difficulties relating to one another—often as a result of colonialism or its legacies—even when held together in relations of intimacy, whether through sexual partnerships, friendships, or family. Her work as a whole interrogates relations to place/space, notably through depictions of the council estate, London, metropolitan/colonial relations, the sugar plantation, and routes of migration. Throughout her oeuvre, Levy offers an unflinching critique of inequality, especially as evidenced through the intersections of race, class, and gender.

Even as Levy attends to the contested politics of place and identity in material, affective, and imaginative terms, her textual strategies of dislocation work to challenge prevailing ideologies and foster social transformation. For instance, *Small Island* remaps our understanding of the histories, places, and peoples, before and after Windrush migration, in Jamaica and England as well the wider world.[3] Maria Helena Lima observes that "[a]fter reading *Small Island,* […] readers will not be able to see 'home' and 'empire' as two separate spaces, leaving unchallenged the fiction of a pre-existing England, herself constituted outside and without imperialism."[4] The very structure of the narrative, composed of various first-person accounts expressing black and white and male and female perspectives, implies the need for equal representation and thus challenges colonial hierarchies. As this example from *Small Island* indicates, Levy's textual dislocations—such as shifts in time and space and juxtapositions of multiple first-person testimonial accounts—have the capacity to reorient the socio-cultural imaginary because they expose and disrupt the uneven dynamics that underpin hegemonic constructions of space, time, and subjectivity.

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Meena Alexander's account of a poetics of dislocation can help to shed light on Levy's politicised aesthetic. Alexander suggests that the migrant's "painful reckoning" with the vanishing memories of the place from which he or she comes can lead to "the shining strands of a poetry constantly slipping in and out of place, a lyric movement that undoes the teleology of narrative and where 'the explosion of the instant obliterates duration.'"[5] Dislocations through language, space, and time are central to Alexander's vision of migrant writing, but she also suggests that a poetics of dislocation has the power to embody new relations: to offer "a place where the world is born again."[6] Citing Zygmunt Bauman, she notes that the "the very notion of identity is born out of 'a crisis of belonging.'"[7] The experience of what Édouard Glissant describes as "the shock of elsewhere" is potentially transformative, marking an entry into *relation* with others as well as the wider world: to "what is shared and as such can enter into the intricate exchanges of self-identity and the making of poetry."[8] Glissant's definition of a Poetics of Relation, whereby "each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other," suggests a new sense of being in the world order and community as the hierarchies and binary oppositions of empire are displaced by processes of affiliation.[9] A poetics of dislocation has the potential to enable new relational modes of self and communal narration.

For Levy, representations of the crisis of belonging and/or "the shock of elsewhere"—events frequently depicted in her work—foreground the barriers and challenges to *relation* in Britain, but also explore the possibilities for a shared cultural discourse and sense of community through the space of writing. Levy's poetics of dislocation reorients the socio-cultural imaginary. By interrogating empire and its afterlife as well as relaying perspectives that have been marginalised, silenced, lost, or repressed, Levy's work plays a disruptive role in contemporary culture. Through multi-vocal narratives, she creates imagined spaces where new forms of audibility and visibility are made possible. Her emphasis on testimonial accounts, lived histories, everyday relations to place, and spaces of the imaginary forms part of a narrative strategy for interrogating prevailing relations to community and identity. Levy's work considers the relationship between intimacies and empire, challenging dominant accounts of history, culture, and identity in the process. This special issue contributes to mapping the literary, cultural, and other relations that shape Levy's literary production. As will be seen, Levy's contribution to postcolonial women's writing extends in various directions, including Caribbean, migrant, diasporic, black British, African American, and Black Atlantic writing, and embraces multiple hybrid and creolised idioms and genres.

Andrea Levy's Life and Works

A closer look at the contexts for Levy's life and writing helps to situate her concerns with the politics of place and identity as well as narrative strategies of dislocation. While Levy is frequently classified as a black British writer, her family background is more complicated for she is also of Jamaican, Scottish, and Jewish descent. Levy's father sailed from Jamaica to England on MV *Empire Windrush* ship in 1948, followed six months thereafter by her mother. Her family history is thus intimately connected with one

of the defining events of British identity in the twentieth century: the arrival of 492 passengers (in fact, there were more migrants, also from other places, but 492 remains the number that dominates the popular imaginary) from the West Indies whose entry would mark the rise of what Louise Bennett refers to as "colonizin in reverse."[10] Levy explains that her parents, like so many migrants of the Windrush generation, were astonished to discover that the 'Mother Country' was less than welcoming despite the urgent need for additional labourers in the post-war period:

> But they soon found that they were foreigners in England, and this shocked them. The things they thought of as quintessentially English—manners, politeness, rounded vowels from well-spoken people—were not in evidence. They suffered bad housing—by no means the plight of black people alone in those post-war days: the signs in windows read "no niggers, no dogs, no Irish." My dad faced incredible hostility when looking for somewhere to live because of the colour of his skin. He had a job with the post office. My mum, a trained teacher in Jamaica, had to sew to make a living here. She worked in sweat-shops with other foreigners—Czechs, Poles, Greeks—all fall-out from the war. She had one advantage: she spoke English. And one disadvantage: She was black (or coloured, as we were termed then).[11]

Levy's account attests to the various challenges of migration, particularly in terms of xenophobia and the troubled quest for housing and employment.[12]

Born in 1956, growing up in North London, Levy experienced the transitional years when white Britain came to acknowledge its multiracial identity, coinciding with a period of racial unrest. About two years after her birth, in 1958, the Notting Hill riots broke out; she was on the cusp of adolescence when Enoch Powell gave his infamous "Rivers of Blood Speech" in 1968; in Levy's twenties, the 1981 Brixton riots took place. Lisa Allardice notes that Levy only took up writing in 1988 in an effort to represent black British experience:

> It was only a growing political awareness in her 20s that drew her to literature. While working in the wardrobe departments of the BBC and the Royal Opera House, she read voraciously; she was "hungry, hungry, hungry" for books. She looked to Africa-American writers such as Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, but searched in vain for any British equivalents, or a reflection of herself. She enrolled in a writing class [with Alison Fell] and set about writing her own story.[13]

Despite the presence of Caribbean writing in Britain at that time, including authors such as Sam Selvon, George Lamming, V.S. Naipaul, Caryl Phillips, Joan Riley, and performance poets, such as Linton Kwesi Johnson, Jean "Binta" Breeze, and Benjamin Zephaniah, Levy turned to feminist writing. Levy herself has said that reading *The Women's Room* by Marilyn French was a key moment, which led to a wider reading of feminist authors such as Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, and Zoë Fairbairns.[14] If we consider the writers to whom she turned, it seems that she was looking for a tradition of women's writing for inspiration. Certainly, her early novels, written in the genre of the female *Bildungsroman*, show the influence of black women's writing with its emphasis on what

Barbara Smith refers to as a "woman-identified art."[15] Yet, like Toni Morrison, Levy is also interested in representing black masculinities. Indeed, she has said that her father's death in 1987 was the inciting incident that led to the writing of her first novel, observing: "[...] I think that I just wanted to make him, record something of his life, and also the experience that we'd gone through with it."[16] Levy has stated that Selvon's accounts of the migrant experience correspond to those of her father,[17] suggesting a wider oral tradition of storytelling in Caribbean diasporic families that supplements the well known fictions by male Windrush writers, such as Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1954) and Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956).

Levy's early fictions from the 1990s overlap with the kinds of critiques of race and culture offered by Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy as well as by creative writers, such as Hanif Kureishi, Caryl Phillips, Joan Riley, Beryl Gilroy, and Salman Rushdie, among others.[18] Yet, Levy has said that she experienced difficulty when searching for an agent and publisher for her early work,[19] and we might consider why this was the case. Levy suggests that "publishers didn't quite know what to do with a North London working-class girl talking about an ordinary family."[20] Her early works—*Every Light in the House Burnin'*, *Never Far from Nowhere*, *and Fruit of the Lemon*—offer bleak, yet humorous, accounts from a black British female perspective. In *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature*, Alison Donnell argues that "'double colonisation' [...] has arguably served to figure women's writing before the 1970s and the 1980s as voiceless and invisible."[21] For Levy, it seems that the legacies of earlier marginalisation persisted still in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Literary styles and the marketing of literature might also be considered. In an era when magic realism and metafiction often figured in postcolonial writing, Levy's work seemed perhaps less marketable. Levy's works are often unremittingly bleak, offering the reader little hope of a better horizon. So even though her work would fit well in the kind of literary history John McLeod presents in *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis*, a closer look at the narratives he discusses shows that Levy's early work does not tend to celebrate the carnivalesque or lead to "the articulation of utopian visions of London," but highlights instead the ways in which imperialism's enduring influence complicates and frequently blocks communication.[22] Finally, perhaps Levy lacked sufficiently developed literary connections: for both Phillips and Jamaica Kincaid write in ambivalent, realistic fictions, which are comparable to Levy in style and themes, but were able to find their way into publication with relative ease.

Nevertheless, by 1998, Levy was already gaining wider recognition for her work as evidenced by the Arts Council Writers' Award for *Fruit of the Lemon*. However, it was not until 2004, with the publication of *Small Island*, which won the "Whitbread Book of the Year Award" and the "Orange Prize for Fiction," that her reputation soared. The subsequent adaptation of *Small Island* to the small screen by the BBC and a mass reading project across Britain brought her a wider readership throughout the region. Recently, literary scholars have been particularly attentive to Levy's place in British writing. For instance, Chris Weedon locates Levy's work alongside works by British Black and South Asian women authors, including Joan Riley, Vernella Fuller, Lucinda Roy,

Charlotte Williams, Leonora Brito, Jackie Kay, Ravinder Randhawa, and Farhana Sheikh.[23] Looking beyond Britain, Levy's work belongs to the domain of transnational and diasporic fictions, which are inscribed across borders through multiple literary affiliations.

Levy's first three novels, from the 1990s, deal primarily with the coming-of-age experience for children born of Windrush migrants, offering black British and Caribbean diasporic perspectives concerning society and identity formation. These works are sometimes read as a trilogy,[24] reflecting Levy's experience from the 1960s through to the 1980s, but they also belong to a wider tradition of fictions by the children of migrants who "are constantly reminded they are 'not of here' even though they believe and feel that they are."[25] Levy's first novel, *Every Light in the House Burnin'* (1994), presents a semi-autographical, fictionalised account of a Jamaican family living in London in the 1960s. Told from the perspective of Angela Jacob, this story explores the family's experiences on council estates and encounters with the National Health Service (NHS), highlighting the ways in which institutionalised and everyday racism as well as class distinctions have shaped life in Britain. Set during the 1970s, *Never Far from Nowhere* (1996) shows how racial hierarchies inflect the life horizons and aspirations of two sisters, Olive and Vivien, growing up in Britain. Like Vernella Fuller in *Going Back Home* (1992), Levy depicts racism on the council estate, offering a comparative depiction of the two sisters' efforts to negotiate their Jamaican-British heritage and sense of place and displacement in British society. In *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999), Faith Jackson, a young black British woman, travels to Jamaica after suffering a nervous breakdown, following an incident of racial violence in Britain. In Jamaica, Faith gains a new sense of self and experiences an awakening of transnational consciousness by listening to stories about her family's participation in the long history of the global Caribbean. While it is tempting to read the first three works as a kind of trilogy, *Fruit of the Lemon* stands as a novel of transition because of its emphasis on the relations between historiography and vernacular storytelling traditions, concerns that are central to the novels that follow.

In an essay entitled "This is my England," published in *The Guardian* in 2000, Levy reflected on the question of identity politics and writing, observing: "Identity! Sometimes it makes my head hurt–sometimes my heart. So what am I? Where do I fit into Britain, 2000 and beyond?"[26] Interestingly, her answer to this question demands a backward-looking response, examining the longer histories that impinge upon the present. Like Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, this has meant coming to terms with empire and the Black Atlantic experience. *Small Island* and *The Long Song* retain the focus on personal life stories, but they disrupt and complicate a sense of history. James Procter notes that "Empire brought Britain and its black communities together long before the Nationality Act of 1948 prompted mass migration to Britain from its colonies and former colonies,"[27] and Levy's narratives are attentive to this earlier sense of community. While histories of black British identity often focus on the Windrush era, Levy calls attention to the longer historical processes of contact and formation. While *Small Island* examines the British Empire Exhibition of 1924 and the role of colonial volunteers in World War II, *The Long Song* considers the role of slavery and trans-Atlantic migration.

Multiple dislocating narrative techniques come together in *Small Island*. The novel subverts the centre-periphery paradigm of empire by bringing the history of one small island, Britain, into dialogue with another, Jamaica. Furthermore, Levy complicates a sense of history by retelling it through the converging and often incommensurate vantage points of white English (Queenie and her husband Bernard Bligh) and Afro-Caribbean migrant characters (Hortense Roberts and Gilbert Joseph). Britain, especially London, emerges as an uneasy contact zone of exchange, segregation, and intermixture. Levy calls attention to World War II as an event that transformed race relations for a short time, but also initiated longer term changes. African American authors, such as Walter Mosley, have already shown the ways in which World War II led to altered race relations at home following demobilisation. Levy follows in this path, but she also explores interrelated histories of violence, enabled by various imperialisms, especially through Britain's post-WWII military interventions in India. Her novel draws on testimonial accounts, including her own family narratives and those of the wider community. The experiences of Michael Roberts and Gilbert take inspiration from her uncle's experiences in the RAF and her father's experiences as a Windrush migrant respectively. Moreover, she incorporates insights gained from important oral histories, such as those collated in Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips's *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (1998). Thus, the novel reconfigures an understanding of history from many different angles.

Levy's keen interests in women's language and hybrid voicing surface in *The Long Song*, a neo-slave novel, a genre which has played an especially important role in African American women's writing. We might also situate this text in the wider Caribbean and Black Atlantic tradition of neo-slave novels, which includes works by Caryl Phillips, David Dabydeen, Fred D'Aguiar, Dionne Brand, Nalo Hopkinson, Marlon James, and Bernardine Evaristo. The language and voicing of *The Long Song* are particularly noteworthy, marking a turn towards a more stylised use of dialect. This metafictional work is presented as a highly self-conscious act of orature: even as the novel brings the voice of July to the reader, it also highlights the editorial interventions and mediating efforts of her son, Thomas. Levy's attentiveness to various forms of literacy and language and metafictional techniques are in many ways comparable to the narrative strategies of Patrick Chamoiseau, an author who frequently combines techniques of metalepsis, vocal distancing, and testimonial narration when writing about the slave past. Furthermore, Levy's novel is written in a tragicomic mode: as Ulla Rahbek notes, Levy "has managed to tell the gruesome story of slavery and racism in an amusing way."[28] *The Long Song* contributes to the wider Black Atlantic effort to confront the traumatic past of slavery and its legacies through an intimate history, which offers a fragmented, partial, and subversive view of the oppressions of empire.

Towards a Poetics of Dislocation: Levy's Dislocating Narratives

Despite the importance and growing influence of her oeuvre, Levy's work has only recently begun to receive the kind of critical attention it deserves. Current scholarship tends to reflect on Levy's efforts to represent identity politics and issues of belonging in British, postcolonial, and global contexts. Mark Stein's *Novels of Transformation*, situates

the black British novel in the tradition of the *Bildungsroman*, arguing that fictions about identity formation, such as Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon*, are also "about the *transformation* of British society and cultural institutions."[29] Stein shows that Faith's "location of belonging turns out to be location of 'unbelonging'" and rejection.[30] However, when Faith journeys from London to Jamaica, she collects stories that enable her to put into perspective her relationship to Britain and "conceive of alternate histories—and alternate futures as well."[31] Weihsin Gui's comparative reading of Andrea Levy and V.S. Naipaul situates the authors' work as "*post-heritage* novels that combine thematic and formal characteristics identified by Rebecca Walkowitz in her analysis of the 'post-consensual novel,"[32] namely the microgenres of "the novel of minority culture; the novel of multiculturalism, and the novel of transnational comparison."[33] Where Gui is primarily interested in migrancy and racism as represented in *Fruit of the Lemon*, it is easy to see how this account of microgenres might more generally be applied to Levy's oeuvre as a whole. Gui's analysis of contesting representations and imbricated histories places emphasis on the related inscriptions of Jamaica and Britain, and suggests a new emphasis on travelling narratives as a means of locating new ways of dwelling in the world. More widely, issues of belonging and unbelonging have been explored through Levy's inscriptions of Windrush history,[34] the culinary,[35] the motif of adoption,[36] contrapuntal voicing and tensions between creolised and standard English,[37] the hybrid relationship between homeland and motherland and the hybridisation of Britain,[38] vernacular cosmopolitanisms,[39] and multiple negotiations of multiculturalism and globalization.[40] Finally, the wider impact of fiction on reading publics has recently been considered by Anouk Lang in her discussion of the mass-reading project on *Small Island*, which saw the distribution of fifty thousand copies of the novel across the UK.[41]

This special issue on Andrea Levy extends the dialogue about un/belonging and citizenship, but it also considers her approach to a poetics of dislocation. Levy's fictions examine the life histories of Caribbean peoples and their descendants, showing that their sense of place and identity is often deeply contested as a result of the dislocating effects of empire and migration. While many of her stories focus on life in Britain and the transformation of society through the rise of multiculturalism, Levy also shows how routes to, through, and beyond the Caribbean have contributed to the transnational experience and expanded social imaginary. At a discursive level, her narratives move to-and-fro through time and space, shift among various voices, explore various and often differing points of view, mix genres and idioms, and incorporate other techniques of textual dislocation. Thus, stories of dislocation and dislocating narrative techniques are central to her work, enabling a strategic representation of the past from a postcolonial vantage point.

The issue begins with contributions concerning Levy's narrative strategies for representing dislocation through space and time. In "The Familiar Made Strange: The Relationship between the Home and Identity in Andrea Levy's Fiction," Jo Pready examines the interplay between place, space, and feelings of displacement. Building on the work of John Procter and John McLeod about dwelling places in black British writing, Pready demonstrates that a sense of interiority is negotiated through the contested space

of the home in *Every Light in the House Burnin'* and *Never Far from Nowhere*. Claudia Marquis's "Crossing Over: Postmemory and the Postcolonial Imaginary in Andrea Levy's *Small Island* and *Fruit of the Lemon*" bridges space and time by considering how Black Atlantic crossings, imagined and actual, shape literary production. Drawing on trauma theory, she takes George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), a work that looks back to the colony from Britain, as a point-of-entry for reading Levy's narratives of crossings as acts of memory and imaginative encounter that complicate and enrich our understanding of history.

Levy's approach to temporality, particularly belatedness, and writing as a process of continuous negotiation plays an important role in her oeuvre. Ole Laursen's "'Telling Her a Story': Remembering Trauma in Levy's Writing" addresses the dislocating effects of slavery and migration as traumatic events. He argues that Levy resituates British and Black Atlantic histories through writing itself as a performative act of postmemorialisation, which reclaims "the experience of those who grew up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth."[42] Levy's narratives highlight the ruptures and transformations that occur through the repression and recovery of personal and cultural memories. An emphasis on the open, ongoing process of cultural transformation also informs Alicia E. Ellis's "Identity as Cultural Production in Andrea Levy's *Small Island*." Through a close reading of the "Prologue," she highlights the ways in which Levy complicates the representation of black British presence, Windrush migration, and interracial encounters in Britain. The back-and-forth movements of memory and the instabilities of language come together in a dislocating poetics.

Intertextual readings of Levy's work highlight the ways in which Levy's fiction intervenes in the cultural imaginary in order to highlight forms of marginalisation, particularly in terms of race and gender, as well as consider the ways in which writing may disrupt and challenge the prevailing cultural imaginary. Sandra Courtman's "Women Writers and the Windrush Generation: A Contextual Reading of Beryl Gilroy's *In Praise of Love and Children* and Andrea Levy's *Small Island*" addresses the marginalisation of female authors in the black British literary canon. Re-reading the work of Gilroy in dialogue with Levy, she critiques the suppression of women's writing and offers a nuanced reclamation of feminist literary genealogies. In so doing, Courtman sheds light on the poetics of dislocation, reflecting on the ways in which the author's location in a particular time and place may have shaped her writing strategies. Charlotte Beyer's "Representations of Ageing and Black British Identity in Andrea Levy's *Every Light in the House Burnin'* and Joan Riley's *Waiting in the Twilight*" takes an intersectional approach, examining representations of ageing and the body, race, and gender. Beyer skilfully weaves together an analysis of identity politics and the poetics of dislocation, showing how Levy and Riley's uses of realist memory writing, representations of ageing, and narrative that resist closure serve to foreground and celebrate intergenerational histories.

The final articles bring Levy's work into dialogue with African American and Black Atlantic fictions. Ann Murphy's "Stranger in the Empire: Language and Identity in the 'Mother Country,'" offers a comparative analysis of interracial encounters in Levy's *Small Island* and James Baldwin's "Stranger in the Village" (1953). Murphy is particularly

attentive to the ways in which language often impedes rather than enables communication, bound up as it is with discourses of race. At the same time, she shows how Levy's acts of voicing and Baldwin's account of dislocation and loss serve to rework the crisis of belonging and contest conditions of estrangement. Maria Helena Lima's "A Written Song: Andrea Levy's Neo-Slave Narrative" examines the ways in which *The Long Song* responds to and reworks the conventions of the genre. She shows that Levy's use of metafictional techniques places emphasis on the narrative as an ongoing, incomplete process of gathering together and narrating various discourses and stories of slavery and empire. Once again, Levy's resistance to closure serves as a strategy of dislocation and relation, reworking relations to the wider world. Storytelling becomes part of an ongoing process for contesting power relations and reframing ideological horizons in the direction of equality and non-violence.

Finally, two creative writing submissions represent responses to Levy's fiction from other locations related to the history of empire. Mohanalakshmi Rajakumar's "Coloured" tells the story of a British Indian man who finds himself misidentified in the South during an era of Jim Crow laws. She says that her story was inspired by reading *Small Island* as part of a book club, attesting to the ways in which communities of readers are also potentially communities of writers, affiliated with Levy through literary and cultural relations. Racialised encounters also figure in Rhona Hammond's "Letter to Motherwell," a testimonial narrative based on her ten-month stay in South Africa. Hammond describes the text as "a personal memoir, a diary of impressions, and also an attempt to make sense of a wonderful but very challenging experience." Like Levy, she examines the way in which migration and relocation are linked to textual dislocations of identity and culture.

Reading Levy: Future Directions

As this issue aims to open the way for a wider investigation of Levy's dislocating narrative techniques and literary affiliations, I would like to close by considering possible lines of inquiry for the future, particularly in connection with Caribbean diasporic and Black Atlantic writing. The following is a list of possible directions, and is far from exhaustive:

- **Voicing and Language:** Levy's uses of colloquial, vernacular, standard, and creolised English suggest a rich and varied engagement with the language of empire and global English. How does her use of language relate to the mapping of identities, communities, and imaginaries in global contexts?
- **(Post)Colonial Encounters:** Levy's emphasis on gazing and moments of encounter could be said to rework the colonial narrative of transcultural contact, particularly the colonial gaze. What role do vision, gazing, and eye witnessing play in her work?
- **Affect & Intimacies:** Drawing on theories of affect, including trauma theory, critics often open up new ways of understanding how emotional and psychic states can provide alternative forms of knowledge and insight. How does Levy

rework discourses of identity and relation through representations of affect and affective narrative strategies?

- **Feminisms:** Levy's relation to African American women's writing, particularly through black feminism with its emphasis on intersectionalism, warrants close attention. More generally, how does Levy's work contribute to black British and Caribbean writing from a feminist literary perspective?
- **Remapping Genres:** Levy frequently tweaks and remaps genres, most notably the *Bildungsroman* and the neo-slave narrative. How might Levy's transnational reworking of genre serve to reframe an understanding of Caribbean, diasporic, Black Atlantic, and minority identities?
- **Dislocating Realisms:** The tension between realism and metafiction represents one of the most fascinating aspects of Levy's works. Where Zadie Smith opts for what she describes as "lyrical Realism,"[43] Levy's fictions seem closer to the ambivalent realisms of Jamaica Kincaid or Caryl Phillips. How might her approach to the quest for new forms of mimesis and uses of realism be described?
- **Plots:** Caryl Phillips often takes converging, diverging, or parallel lines of migration as the basis for plotting. Similarly, Levy's poetics rely heavily on multiple plot lines and overlapping narrative perspectives, which rarely cohere, but tend to offer an oscillating, unresolved representation of historical realities. How might such approaches to plot serve to reconstruct, and perhaps enrich, an understanding of history?
- **Spatio-Temporalities:** The contributors in this collection have paid close attention to the politics of place and spatio-temporal movements, especially through discussions of textual circulations and alternative ways of narrating history, such as through trauma narratives or acts of genealogical reclamation. In what other ways, does Levy reframe our understanding of local, national, or global imaginaries and experiences?
- **Humour:** Comic modes have been touched on in several of the papers. How might Levy's humour be related to the uses of comedy in contemporary postcolonial writing, notably in the work of Zadie Smith, Hari Kunzru, and Hanif Kureishi?

It is perhaps fitting that this introduction to a special issue on Andrea Levy should end with a series of questions and topics for further investigation, given that Levy is resistant to closure with the aim of perpetuating debate, dialogue, critique, and relational tendencies. This issue aims to open up new directions for research on this important contemporary author whose work persistently explores the meaning of empire and community, renews realist modes of writing, gives voice to (post)colonial subjects, and challenges prevailing relations to time and space through her expression of the transnational imaginary.

Endnotes

1 I would like to thank Charlotte Beyer, Maria Helena Lima, Jago Morrison, and Anshuman Mondal for reading the introduction and providing feedback. I would also like to thank Gloria Maestripieri for her assistance with copy-editing. The flaws that remain are my own.

2 Here I am using the term a "politics of place" to refer to the ways in which hegemonic and other, often competing, constructions of place (including locales, regions, and nations) work to (re)define groups of people or imagined communities, construct boundaries, and negotiate who and what is inside/outside a given place.

3 For a discussion of spatial remapping and the reconstruction of identity, see Irene Pérez Fernández, "(Re)Mapping London: Gender and Racial Relations in Andrea Levy's *Small Island*, *Interactions* "The Role of Female Voices in Constructing Fictional Maps of Contemporary Britain" 19.1-2 (2010): 25-40.

4 Maria Helena Lima, "'Pivoting the Centre': The Fiction of Andrea Levy," *Write Black, Write British: From Postcolonial to Black British Literature*, Kadija Sesay, ed., Hertford: Hansib, 2005, 56-57.

5 Meena Alexander, *Poetics of Dislocation.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2009, 5.

6 Ibid., 38.

7 Ibid., 5.

8 Ibid., 4.

9 Édouard Glissant, "Errantry, Exile," *Poetics of Relation.* trans. Betsy Wing, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997, 11.

10 Louise Bennett, "Colonisation in Reverse," *Writing Black Britain: 1948-1998.* James Procter, ed., Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000, 17.

11 Andrea Levy, "This is my England," *The Guardian* 19 February 2000: http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2000/feb/19/society1 [accessed 10 January 2012].

12 For more on this topic, see James Procter, *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003.

13 Lisa Allardice, "The Guardian Profile: Andrea Levy," *The Guardian*, Friday 21 January 2005: http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2005/jan/21/books.generalfiction [accessed 21 April 2012].

14 Andrea Levy and Susan Alice Fisher, "Andrea Levy in Conversation with Susan Alice Fisher," *Changing English: Studies in Culture and Education* 12.3 (2005): 361-362.

15 Barbara Smith, "Towards a Black Feminist Criticism," *The Truth that Never Hurts: Writings on Race, Gender, and Freedom* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000, 5.

16 "Andrea Levy in Conversation," 362.

17 Levy, "This is My England."

18 Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*. London: Routledge, 1987. See also Ashley Dawson, *Mongrel Nation: Diasporic Culture and the Making of Postcolonial Britain*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007. Dawson does not discuss Levy's work, but his cultural history offers important contexts for her fiction.

19 Andrea Levy and Blake Morrison, "Andrea Levy Interviewed by Blake Morrison," *Women: A Cultural Review* 20.3 (2009): 328.

20 Ibid.

21 Alison Donnell, *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature: Critical Moments in Anglophone Literary History*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006, 8.

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