Editorial

The Empire's New Clothes By Frederick Luis Aldama

I read with great enthusiasm Timothy Brennan's timely, and informative essay, "The Empire's New Clothes" (Critical Inquiry. Vol. 29, no. 2, 2003). First, Brennan's essay on Negri and Hardt's academic best-selling Empire leaves almost no stone unturned. He shows how these two alchemists use their best rhetorical shots to persuade their readers that the fight against capitalism and all its monstrous consequences is no longer necessary because capitalism--as Brennan phrases it--has already provided us with an "inchoate communism."

Crafting against the Grain: an Interview with Zulfikar Ghose

With the publication of eleven beautifully crafted, stylistically varied novels, five collections of poetry, several works of criticism on Shakespeare and writing, and an autobiography, Zulfikar Ghose is one of our late-twentieth century's great and prolific writers.

Why Study Chicano/a Music? By Frederick Luis Aldama

After receiving an interesting, though not very constructive review of my essay, "Frontera Musicscapes: Grinding Up a Bad Edge in Borderland Studies", I take the opportunity to think about the purpose of studying music (borderland or otherwise).

Troubled times: A Conceptual Approach to Understanding Barbarism

ON CONCEPTS. A concept is a mental representation of a class of objects in the world. It is the "glue that holds our mental world together", according to Gregory L. Murphy.

Michael Nava: tooth and nail survival

In 1986 Michael Nava published his first mystery novel, "The Little Death," breathing life into the first gay Chicano lawyer-as-detective, Henry Rios. Michael Nava hasn't stopped to look back since, churning out seven more award-winning novels that fully contour Rios's life as he solves grisly murders and crimes against the disenfranchised, has affairs of the heart, and struggles to survive in a xenophobic, heterosexist world. I met with the gracious, soft spoken, clean-cut Michael Nava at his office in San Franciso. With penal code books lying heavy on the desk, milagros hanging on the wall, and Giants paraphernalia filling up shelves, Nava and I discussed his life and fiction.

Interview with Jose Latour

Known in Cuba for his crime novels and as the vice president of the Latin American division of the International Association of Crime Writers, José Latour makes his English-language, U.S.-published debut with "Outcast."

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CRAFTING AGAINST THE GRAIN: AN INTERVIEW WITH ZULFIKAR GHOSE

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"Crafting against the Grain: an Interview with Zulfikar Ghose"

With the publication of eleven beautifully crafted, stylistically varied novels, five collections of poetry, several works of criticism on Shakespeare and writing, and an autobiography, Zulfikar Ghose is one of our late-twentieth century's great and prolific writers. He is also, one of our most neglected. That Ghose chose not to be restricted by his experiences as a Pakistani-born, Indian- and England-raised writer is part of the story. Since he began publishing poetry and fiction in the early 1960s, he refused to conform to any stereotype and to any political agenda. His diasporic ethnic "identity" is absolutely secondary in his craft as a writer, one highly concerned with the intricacies of the art of creating narrative fiction and poetry. In his dedication to the pursuit of aesthetic goals--and his avoidance of all temptation to become an "ethnic-identified" writer--he has sought to engage his readers on a level that refuses them the formulaic and all-too predictable one-to-one correspondence surmised between the invented worlds of an author and his personal experience. He has shunned the formula--postcolonial thematics of exile, for example--and his novels and poems have constantly challenged formal and stylistic conventions to minutely explore the passions, endeavors, unending toils, soaring hopes, and crucial options that inform the life of his characters and that are such an important component of the human condition.

In his many novels, Ghose breathes new life into conventions of form and content. For example, he collapses time and point of view to foreground elusive nature of memory, generational conflict, impassioned and nearly impossible human connection and communication. He employs self-reflexive, meta-fictional devices to call attention to the inherent tension in novels between *verba* and *res*--between invented worlds and the reality *hors texte*. At times, he rubs together a Dickensean realism with a Kafkaesque fantastic, a Proustian introspection and an Orwellian moralism--all to refigure the quest narrative and to re-form grand mythologies. He unsettles thematic and character expectation, reimagining types such as the estranged scholar/teacher, the Latin American patriarch, and the playful *pícaro* as they experience a kinesis of consciousness in places as different as Brazilian plantations, Indian farms, and British secondary school classrooms.

Ghose's acute attention to style, imagery, and form organize his fictions and poems into aesthetic gestalts that engage powerfully the reader's emotion and imagination, offering insight into the lives of others and their worlds. He asks his readers to respond to the shape and texture of his sentences, the pattern of his narratives and poetic forms, and the sense of life that animates his novels and poems. Finally, Zulfikar Ghose's œuvre challenges and complicates not just the "postcolonial" category today, but, as his many influences suggest--Henry James, Charles Dickens, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, G. V. Desani, Raja Rao, T.S. Eliot, William Faulkner, Gabriel García Márquez, and Pablo Neruda, to name a few--he is an author dedicated to aesthetics. More accurately still, he is an author of world literature.

I interviewed Zulfikar Ghose at his home in Austin, Texas, to learn of his struggle to craft fiction against the grain of marketplace trends and identity categories.

Frederick Luis Aldama: In your book, *The Art of Creating Fiction*, I was struck by your wonderful articulation of the writing process--especially this idea that one must learn to tap into the vast chaos within yourself?

Zulfikar Ghose: The book's title, *The Art of Creating Fiction*, alludes to Henry James's essay, "The Art of Fiction", from which I choose as an epigraph James's only instruction to someone wanting to learn to be a writer, "Ah, well, you must do it as you can!", thus aligning myself, perhaps arrogantly and presumptuously, with the great Master.

I don't believe that one can teach another human being how to write fiction (or poetry or drama) because the best writing comes from within the individual self. Virginia Woolf talks in her Diaries of an "inner loneliness" and "vacancy and silence somewhere in the machine" and finds herself plunging into that deep interior darkness where perhaps resides the mystery of the self. In his *The Art of the Novel*, Milan Kundera talks about "the enigma of the self" that is the object of the novelist's eternal fascination. Roberto Calasso's idea of

"absolute literature" in his *Literature and the Gods* is another expression--very persuasive and brilliantly presented, too--of what I mean by that phrase that some--those who believe hard work to be undemocratic--will consider elitist, "the best writing".

A good many students, whose preconception of acquiring knowledge is that professors spoon feed them from a textbook that contains easily digestible fodder on which any species of cattle will grow fat, are initially baffled by my approach; but some soon begin to hear an echo from inside themselves and realize that literature is not merely material for theoretical speculations to exercise their minds with the sort of problems and difficulties to be encountered in the study of calculus; and a few end by being transformed, which is no more than to say that they begin the process of self-discovery by experimenting with language.

I maintain that a writer's task is to be experimenting with forms and to be putting words together in that sequence that elicits, from the interior world of memory and desire, most precisely the idea one is trying to discover. This is what I have learned from the essays and letters of James, Conrad, Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Woolf…in fact, from the ancients beginning with Longinus all the way to a contemporary younger than myself, Calasso, with now a thought from a Pope or a Dryden preface casting a lightning-bug glow and now that wonderful digression on art in the final volume of Proust's novel throwing its lightning bolt on my interior darkness. And so, to use Eliot's Prufrock's words, how should I presume and how should I begin to teach another human being to write but by revealing something of what has been my experience?

That is what I was trying to do in *The Art of Creating Fiction*. Macmillan, my British publisher, took it without any hesitation but failed to persuade its American associate, St. Martin's Press, to publish it in the U.S. My agent showed it to several American publishers, but the market for creative writing textbooks written with a formula that any unread imbecile could follow that proved profitable meant that the publishers were not interested in my book--a book that dismissed such textbooks as irrelevant.

F.L.A: I imagine, too, the statement you make about the "isms" in the academy that control the publishing marketplace probably didn't bode well with the American publishers either?

Z.G.: That's correct. Of course, publishers should pursue profits, and if some fad will help them to do so, then good luck to them. An "ism" is only a provisional point of view, a hypothesis that persuades minds eager for a compartmentalization of reality that they are the privileged ones who have a handle on reality when in fact all they see is another chimera. I can't think of any writer, except Emile Zola perhaps, who cared for an "ism". Interestingly, Zola himself is a good writer only because he doesn't quite follow his own "ism"; when he's trying to be a naturalistic writer, he's awful, but when he just lets his objective senses guide him, he's terrific. I think *Nana* is a beautiful work, whereas *Germinal*, which contains some glorious writing, has some tedious parts when Zola is following his naturalistic program; and *Thérèse Raquin* remains mired in the muck of Zola's "ism" from beginning to end. Well, actually, there are other writers and other "isms"--André Breton and surrealism come to mind--but aren't such schools and their adherents proclaiming their manifestoes as a sort of political act to draw public attention to themselves? Of course, each new writer develops his or her own perspective that in some singular case--a Goethe, say--becomes a mode of expression for a whole group of writers who follow, and that is how forms are renewed and the language recharged with a fresh vigor until repetitive imitation reduces what was original to a hackneyed formula. In America, such groupings have been not ideological but regional--Black Mountain poets, San Francisco poets, Chicano writers, Southern writers, etc.--that has facilitated the elevation to the status of genius a good many writers who would otherwise be indistinguishable from the dust in the Mojave Desert.

F.L.A: You're critical of writers such as Doris Lessing and Ernest Hemingway?

Z.G.: I think some writers are praised for reasons to do with their subject matter and their appeal is to a certain group of people who look at literature for an affirmation of their own entrenched ideas. The reader identified by Nabokov as the "lowly" kind of reader, one whose firmly held convictions may not be challenged, whose passions, though base and corrupt, being common and easily manipulated by such forces as nationalism, may not be questioned, this reader who belongs to the majority, which flaunts its ignorance as some new and democratic kind of superior education, has been responsible for the inflation so puffed up of certain reputations that they float above us lesser mortals like those balloons that remain up in the sky only as long as they are held there by hot air.

F.L.A: In your own career as a craftsman of fiction, you have written employed great variety of different genres and styles--but not necessarily in the direction that gestures toward the post-colonial. You focus on the creative act and wherever that takes you and not on the trendy themes of postcolonialism. Can you talk a little bit about this?

Z.G.: I don't know what "postcolonialism" means or what are the trendy themes that are related to it. At any given moment, my focus is on the sentence being composed less than it is on the idea that is the impetus for the composition; this is because I do not know, and cannot know, the idea in advance of the sentence being completed. Flaubert said in a letter to George Sand, "I constantly do all I

can to broaden my mind, and I write according to the dictates of my heart. The rest is beyond my control." That has always been my approach, even before I read Flaubert, to read as much as I can, to read slowly, staring at the sentences, asking questions, going back, re-reading, and then when writing, to let it happen, let it come naturally, concentrate on giving that "ring and shape" to the sentences that Conrad talks about, and as for the ideas, their complexity and interest is inevitably going to depend upon the quality of the created language and not upon any great philosophy that the good Lord meant me to impart to humanity. I will write a page on the computer, print it out, leave it on my desk for days, fool around with the sentences until the moment comes when I say, The rest is beyond my control.

F.L.A: In our publishing world with identity categories you could be identified as a South Asian author. But you write stories that aren't necessarily about the South Asian experience. Has this choice proved a harder, riskier path to take?

Z.G.: I have never thought of myself as belonging to any region except that large region of literature that is more global than anything dreamed of by the International Monetary Fund. Only writers with very little confidence in their art can wish to be identified with a region, an umbrella always offers one a sense of security. I published an essay called "Orwell and I" in *The Toronto Review* not too long ago, which begins with the statement, "George Orwell and I were born in the same country", India, and then describes how, though my life followed a pattern similar to Orwell's (going to England, being educated there, starting life as a writer with journalism in the London weeklies and talks on the B. B. C.), he came to be known as an *English* writer and I some sort of an alien.

My more successful earlier work consisted of poems that drew on the experience of deracination, poems filled with images of the India that no longer existed for me (the book in which these poems were collected was called *The Loss of India*) and a novel, my second, *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, the latter drawing upon some images experienced in Pakistan when I went as a journalist with the English cricket team on its tour of the Subcontinent. In writing those works, I was not making a choice to restrict myself to the South Asian experience, merely responding to a particular body of experience which at that time was the unique possession of my consciousness; and as a writer one responds not exclusively to the physical phenomena that create a riot of sensations within that individual consciousness but one's response is also a selective one and chooses to exploit that corpus of sensations that can best be accommodated by a formal preoccupation that one's mind has become interested in as a result of what one has written before and what one has been reading. What I had written before *The Murder of Aziz Khan* (the novel *The Contradictions* and my half of the short stories in the book shared with B. S. Johnson, *Statement Against Corpses*) had been awful, filled with the pretensions of style though what the poor reader saw was the equivalent of a man attempting to dive into a swimming pool and falling flat on his belly. Therefore, I was determined to make a fresh start and show that I could do things correctly. The literary influence behind this determination was the solid, old-fashioned work of John Steinbeck, Patrick White and the Thomas Mann of *Buddenbrooks*. And that was what went into the making of *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, not any choice to be a representative of South Asia. After that, my reading and my travels pursued a different direction, and naturally my writing followed where they went.

I've said this many times: the question before an English-language writer in the second half of the 20th century and later is what can the imagination accomplish in prose after James Joyce and in verse after T. S. Eliot? To be writing like Thomas Hardy after Joyce, Woolf and Beckett is ridiculous. People still do that. Actually, even Hardy writing like Thomas Hardy is ridiculous after the great genius of the late Dickens of *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit*, and a *Our Mutual Friend*. And as for English verse, God save not the Queen, which would be a waste of his time even if all eternity is his, but let him save us from the blithering inanities of the likes of Philip Larkin.

F.L.A: In your first two novels *The Contradictions* and *The Murder of Aziz Khan* you use a more straightforward realist storytelling mode. Then after, with *Crump's Terms*, you shift your style. There's also a notable delay in its publication. You mentioned earlier that there was this difficulty of being published because you were perceived as a foreign-born writer. Did this play a role at all in *Crump's Terms* and your other less realist novels?

Z.G.: After *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, Macmillan anticipated that I was going to write more of the same. But my imagination had gone into a new direction. This was the mid 1960s in London. The *nouvelle vague* cinema from France had us fascinated--Truffaut, Resnais, Luc-Godard; and then there were the Italian magicians--Fellini, Visconti, Antonioni. The publishing scene, which had been slow in recovering from the Second World War and had remained somewhat inhibited and parochial, was taking off--John Calder launched Jupiter Books with two early Beckett novels and published several avant-garde Europeans, other publishers started new lines: Penguin began a series called Penguin Modern Poets, Cape Editions launched a series of beautiful little books and introduced strange new voices--Ponge, Trakl, etc. Plays by Ionesco, Genet and Beckett drew full houses at the Royal Court Theatre. Conceptual Art at the Hayward, Pop Art at the Tate. It was not a cultural environment in which one did a small water color of roses and expected to be taken seriously as an artist.

It was in that environment that I wrote my next novel, *Crump's Terms*. Macmillan were shocked when they received it. They turned it down.

In 1966-67 I went on my first visit to Brazil--a trip that led to my writing *The*

Incredible Brazilian. I don't believe I would have written *The Incredible Brazilian* had Macmillan taken *Crump's Terms*. They saw *Crump's Terms* as a self-indulgent exercise by a young person who thought he was being very avant garde and clever. Had they published it--or had another publisher done so, for my agent showed it unsuccessfully to all the major houses in London--I would surely have gone on to produce some other new work. Instead, the rejection of *Crump's Terms*, which must have gone on for two years, prompted me to revert to the traditional mold when the imagery of the Brazilian experience began to shape itself into a novel. When I finished it and submitted it to Macmillan, they sent me a cable (I was in Texas by now) expressing their delight with it. When they offered a generous contract for the proposed trilogy, I demanded that they publish *Crump's Terms* as well. They agreed. Then I stipulated one more condition: publish a volume of my new poems as well. They agreed to that too.

Macmillan published *Crump's Terms* seven years after they had rejected its original version, but printed it on awful paper--probably because they didn't expect it to have much of a life. Ironically, it had some of the best reviews I've ever had in London.

F.L.A: What about the experimental novel *Hulme's Investigations into the Bogart Script*?

Z.G.: *Hulme's Investigations* came out of the American experience. It began itself. The novel's first sentence, "Finally we arrived in the desert," wrote itself. I'd just finished the second volume of *The Incredible Brazilian*, the one called *The Beautiful Empire*. I'd gone to the post office, and I'd just mailed the parcel of that novel to my agent. I got back into the car, returned home, walked into my study, sat down at my desk, put a piece of paper into the typewriter. And without thinking at all and in a trance, I typed, "Finally we arrived in the desert." I scratched my head and said, "What next, Ghose?" And then the images began to come out, and I put them down. And that is when I had the idea, what if you have a novel in which there are succeeding sentences, each one appearing to be logically succeeding the previous one, but soon the sentences, though still maintaining the appearance of logic, become disconnected from the first one. What happens then? And what happens to reality? It became a philosophical conception. Of course, it went back to Wittgenstein's ideas that I had been reading about since taking philosophy as an undergraduate. So I re-read some of his work, and then I read a lot of texts like Lewis and Clark and various other texts to do with the discovery of the West.

Holt, Rinehart, Winston in New York had made quite a large sum with the sale of the paperback rights to *The Incredible Brazilian*. When they received *Hulme's Investigations*, their response was as much to say, "What the hell is this?" They didn't want it. And nobody else wanted it. As it happened, one of my former students, a man called Ron Taylor, who had become so interested in being a writer and so impatient to publish his own work, that he began a publishing house, Curbstone Press. He said, "Well, I'll do it." And I said, "Fine, go ahead." But, of course, the only value of this sort of small press publishing is that one has copies to present to one's friends

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F.L.A: In the novels, *A New History of Torments* and *Don Bueno* you make yet another shift in your crafting of fiction?

Z.G.: Yes, I became interested in mythology. I will tell you how *A New History of Torments* came into being. On the last day of classes in the beginning of May, 1980, I came back home to my study here, and I said, "Right, I will now spend two or three months writing a novel." I had no idea in my brain. I never do. And, sitting at my desk, I said what I shall do is I shall turn around and from the shelf in the back I will pull out Bullfinch's Mythology. And I shall open it at random, and the story that I chance upon will be my story. I did so. The story that came was the golden fleece, Jason and the golden fleece. I said, "All right. Jason and the golden fleece. What do we do with it?" Next, I decided to not set the novel in Texas because my imagination was taking me elsewhere with its suggestive images. A couple of years before I had been to a farm in Quito, Ecuador. The arbitrary line of the equator happened to run through the farm. Along the terrace on the roof of the house was drawn a blue line to indicate the equator. I walked along that line with a foot in each hemisphere. I started with this image in my mind with the idea that it would somehow or the other end in the Amazon, where I had been a few years earlier; images of the river and the jungle were still present in my mind, and I wanted to use them. Then I asked, what about this golden fleece? I was mowing the front yard and parked in my neighbor's driveway was a golden colored Lincoln Continental. So that's what gave me the idea of the golden bars in the back seat of the Lincoln Continental. The mythological context helped to create the skeleton for the novel and once the imagination had come into play, the story wrote itself. Within two months the novel was done.

F.L.A: In *Figures of Enchantment* you use Shakespeare's *The Tempest* also as a template of sorts. In *Don Bueno* the story loosely follows the Oedipus myth?

Z.G.: In *Don Bueno*, each of the succeeding sons kills the father without knowing it. I was simply following the Oedipus story and creating a succession of sons who are brought by the circumstances of their existence to be at the very place where the father has to meet his death. There's a story by Borges called "The South", in which the character who finds himself seriously ill in Buenos Aires takes a train to go south. The train stops at some strange place. He gets off, goes into a bar, and two young men accost him there, and he is obliged to fight . Borges presents this either as a fantasy of a heroic death in

the mind of the person dying in Buenos Aires or as actually happening. I was drawn to the idea of the heroic death initially in *Don Bueno*. By some quirk of fate, the sons in my book have the names of Latin American heroes--Simón Bolívar, José de San Martín; to this Borgesian echo is added some resonance from *Hamlet* while my succession of fathers is ensnared in the Oedipal plot. But the mythology and the literary associations are only the framework, the real story is elsewhere, in the imagistic details, and therefore to read *Don Bueno* only as a modern re-working of the Oedipus story is not to have read it at all.

The same is true of the next novel, *Figures of Enchantment*, which uses Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, as you noted, as well as images drawn from a visit to the Gallapagos Islands, but as in the previous two books, the imagistic content, if examined closely, will take you elsewhere.

And then came my most ambitious novel, the one that filled me for a short time with the happy illusion of having produced something significant: *The Triple Mirror of the Self*.

But the problem with *The Triple Mirror*, *Don Bueno*, and my other novels set in South America, is that people immediately put them into the category of magical realism, and therefore to be ignored as some sort of a parasitic growth of a tree flourishing in someone else's garden. Now, really I have nothing to do with magical realism. No more than has Shakespeare in *The Winter's Tale* or *The Tempest* have anything to do with magical realism. I think a certain imaginative rearrangement of experience in which something enchanting, something extraordinary happens has always been part of literature. But people--educated critics at that!--bring facile preconceptions to their reading. You've only got to mention the Amazon and everyone begins to yell, *Magical realism!* Well, the Amazon is a real river, I am a real person, I have been on the Amazon and had real experience about which I have something to say, the truth I advance is in the images, just as a real person called Jerome K. Jerome experienced a real river called the Thames and had something to say through the adventures of his characters.

F.L.A.: From mid-1960s to 1991 when *Triple Mirror of the Self* appeared you published eleven novels. Then silence. What happened after *Triple Mirror of the Self*? How was it received?

Z.G.: It was not received at all. Its publication was a disaster that more or less finished my literary career. I've not published a novel since because *The Triple Mirror of the Self*, published in London, went almost completely unnoticed. There were only two reviews in London, in the *TLS* and the *New Statesman*. It died. The publisher's attempt a year later to reincarnate it in paperback was no more successful in creating an interest, and the publisher's enormous financial loss rendered unwelcome any of my future work. When that happens, other publishers hear of it and one is consigned to the class of the untouchables. Even my literary agent abandoned me. When I approached another agent, his answer was, "If you were a beautiful 27-year-old woman I could sell your first novel but someone in his 60s with his umpteenth novel…", forget it, and besides publishers were not interested in what was termed "literary" novels. Eleven years have passed since then, I have written two more novels and have begun a third, though I continue to remain an untouchable. The situation is worse in the U.S. where *The Triple Mirror* was rejected by every publisher, one editor making the remarkable statement that it was too good to be published. It's hard to understand why the very people who've been educated to appreciate literary allusion in Nabokov, the layer of philosophical ideas beneath the apparent surface of the absurd in Beckett, the exquisite prose rhythms in Faulkner, and so on, are incapable of bringing the same intelligence to the reading of a new work but instead stare stupidly at it as if they were again in kindergarten and had yet to master the alphabet.

F.L.A: To move to another genre, your poetry. When did you begin to write poetry?

Z.G.: I had been writing poems since the age of 13 or 14 as a school boy in Bombay when I was attracted by the lyrics of the Romantic poets, especially Byron and Shelley. When I went to London at the age of 17, I discovered Browning, Dryden, and then T. S. Eliot. The imitative poems I wrote were seen favorably by the headmaster and the teachers who encouraged me. Then when I went to Keele University, I took a fairly prominent role in the student literary politics, acquiring notice as a poet and becoming the editor of the university's literary magazine. By the time I moved back to London in 1959, I was writing a lot of poems and had already begun to be published nationally.

F.L.A: You saw yourself as a poet during this period?

Z.G.: I worked on writing poems every day and spent much of the night reading poetry--Yeats again and again, Hopkins, Dylan Thomas. As a reviewer, I read dozens of new volumes--all the major publishers both in London and in New York had poets on their list (no more, alas, even Oxford University Press has abandoned the new poets). I was part of a group of poets that met in Edward Lucie-Smith's house on Fridays and later came to be known as The Group that has since acquired a niche in English literary history. I was also one of the Dulwich Group that held monthly readings in a pub. I met Theodore Roethke when he came to London in 1960 and he introduced me to the work of many of his American contemporaries. Yes, poetry was my main preoccupation in that period.

F.L.A: After *The Loss of India* you published, *Jets from Orange*, then *The Violent West*?

Z.G.: The first poem in *Jets from Orange*, "The Incurable Illness", begins with images about a cricket reporter friend of mine who'd died at the age of 38 of an incurable illness; it then becomes a poem about what I then perceived was an incurable illness in the culture of Europe. At that time in England, a new vulgarity had set in; there was a sense of decay in the culture. What we now call dumbing down began at that time. There were other poems in the book, too, of course, but I was unhappy with this book. Too many of the poems in it were merely competent, at best rather elegant copies of the simplistic forms then current in London.

F.L.A: This was before you began your more experimental poetry phase?

Z.G.: There was at that time in England a very stultifying insularity, and the kind of complacency that made people applaud Larkin's rejection of European sources and to acclaim his mediocrity as something to be prized--for had he not restored poetry to where ordinary people could understand it while those wretched Americans had locked it up in some secret language that was hopelessly obscure? It wasn't until I came to Texas that I discovered people like Paul Valéry, for example, and Francis Ponge and a number of other very important French and Italian influences, and of course the Americans without whom poetry in the English language in the twentieth century would be a pretty sorry affair, with the exception of two Englishmen, Basil Bunting, who learned at the feet of Pound, and Christopher Middleton who so far is the unacknowledged genius of contemporary English poetry. Coming to Texas, then, I began to re-educate myself, and the poems in *The Violent West* are the result. A bit hesitant and tentative a good many of them, the work of someone in search of form, a new style.

F.L.A: There's yet another shift in tone and style in , *A Memory of Asia*?

Z.G.: *A Memory of Asia* was more discursive and more philosophical. By that time I had read a lot more literature--especially Proust. Some of the descriptive poetry in *A Memory of Asia* is almost a Proustian kind of a language. After that there was a collection called *The Selected Poems* that came out in Karachi in which the newer poems are also philosophical and abstract in their ideas while remaining imagistically pictorial in their language.

F.L.A: You've worked in other genres as well: journalism, the scholarly essay, and autobiography, for instance. In 1965 you published your autobiography, *Confessions of a Native-Alien*?

Z.G.: The autobiography came about because Routledge & Kegan Paul published my first book of poems, which was also my very first book. The editor asked me if I wrote any prose. I'd written some personal essays about my earlier years in India, and so coolly announced to the editor that I was writing my autobiography. He thought it a splendid idea. And a year later I had an autobiography, beautifully bound in blue cloth that my friend B. S. Johnson said already made it look like a textbook, and could consider myself a Grand Old Man of Letters, only I'd just turned thirty.

F.L.A: You then wrote a book on literature, *The Fiction of Reality*?

Z.G.: *The Fiction of Reality* begins with somebody sitting besides ligustrum bushes thick with their white springtime flowers, intoxicated by their perfume; images and scenes from the fictions he has read float into the mind of this meditating figure, the reality of his being dissolves and is replaced by the reality of Alain Robbe-Grillet, Patrick White, Beckett, Machado de Assis, etc. These fictions are drawn to his mind just as the butterflies are to the ligustrum flowers, and his mind slips into longer observations and analyses of the novels. I, the critic, am only a consciousness receiving awareness of fictions emanating from the consciousness of others as well as a character in the fiction of my self and my appreciation of literature is the interplay of those two sets of fiction. And just as one dreaming suddenly awakens, this meditating self comes out of his trance and makes observations--thoughts expressed by the rational self that unfold for some twenty pages and that are distinguished from the preceding and the succeeding text by being printed in bold. My model for these observations was Valéry's *Analects*. After these bold paragraphs, the self again slips into a dream of fictions, and finally finds himself repeating a line remembered from Beckett--*my whole life a gibberish garbled six-fold*. I wanted this line to be repeated for several pages, each time more and more blank space between the repetitions, with the phrase being reduced first to *my whole life a gibberish* and then to *my whole life* and finally to *my* all by itself in the middle of the final page. But that was too much to expect from the publisher and I contented myself with two blank pages, which, unfortunately, no reader is going to notice as belonging to my text.

F.L.A.: How have your critical books been received in the academy

and mainstream?

Z.G.: Not at all seriously. In fact, hardly noticed at all. The very few reviews that appeared were condescending or dismissive and in the case of *Shakespeare's Mortal Knowledge* vituperative. It is as if some mongrel dog had wandered into the territory of the chained German shepherds and French poodles guarding the academic mansion, they made sure there was no trespassing.

F.L.A: Can you tell me about the novels you've written since *Triple Mirror of the Self*?

Z.G.: The one I wrote after *The Triple Mirror of the Self* is called *Rajistan,*

Texas. It's a double narrative set in Houston and an area in the Subcontinent that I call the Frontier Province. The second novel, finished over a year ago now, is called *Sailing to Mont Serrat*. It is set in the future, 200 years from now in a world become mostly water and desert in which two of the countries that have survived in some primitive form are Brazil and India. It would be futile to try and describe what these novels are *about*. As you know, the ideas in my work cannot be separated from the language in which they are expressed nor any meaning divulged that is not apprehended by the reader contemplating the images to be discovered in that language. At the heart of the creative act is this process of discovery that surfaces at last from the chaos within the self.