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euphoric tone of his last paragraph is the appropriate note on which the Proceedings close.

Gerhard Stilz's handsome volume is rich, wide-ranging and, above all, thought-provoking. It will, surely, serve his ultimate aim of preparing "the ground for further integrative research into the borderline areas of Literature, Language, Culture and Society."

Notes

- 1 In D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke, ed., *Perspectives on Post-Colonial Literature* (London: Skoob Books, 2001).
- 2 Tennyson, "Locksley Hall" *The Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson* (New York: Macmillan, 1891) 101.

D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke

Michael Keevak. *The Pretended Asian: George Psalmanazar's Eighteenth-Century Formosan Hoax*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2004. Pp. x, 182, and 17 illustrations. \$29.95 cloth.

Michael Keevak's *The Pretended Asian* is one of only three book-length studies of George Psalmanazar that I am aware of, the other two being Frederic J. Foley's *The Great Formosan Imposter* (1968) and Richard M. Swiderski's *The False Formosan: George Psalmanazar and the Eighteenth-Century Experiment of Identity* (1991). Keevak builds upon and surpasses the work of these earlier scholars, placing greater emphasis on the historical context in which Psalmanazar's seemingly outrageous imposture was able to succeed. Keevak examines Psalmanazar's fraud in the light of eighteenth-century ideas of racial difference and their development from a focus on the cultural to a focus on the biological, with particular emphasis on the role of language as a marker of cultural difference and the foundation of Psalmanazar's success.

Those unfamiliar with George Psalmanazar may be surprised to learn that, in 1703, the young man appeared in London claiming to be a native of the island of Formosa (modern Taiwan), who had converted to Anglicanism. Psalmanazar's racial claim went largely uncontested, despite his being white-skinned and (according to at least one account) blonde, his insistence that Formosa was ruled by the Japanese (it was commonly considered part of China), his command of Latin with an accent that appeared French, and the tremendous differences between his wild accounts of Formosa and what was generally known about Formosa. Psalmanazar went on to author a popular

account of cultural life in Formosa and the story of his own religious conversion, entitled *An Historical and Geographical Description of Formosa, an Island Subject to the Emperor of Japan* (1704). The work went on to be reprinted in a second edition and translated into French, Dutch, and German—its popularity bolstered, no doubt, by the author’s absurd claims that the natives of Formosa yearly sacrificed thousands of young children and practiced ritual cannibalism. Psalmanazar’s own presence on the London scene, and his affinity for eating raw meat in public, must also have contributed to its popular success.

Psalmanazar is a fascinating figure, but because of the absurdity of his life and hoax, scholarship concerning Psalmanazar “hardly seems to have gotten beyond the let’s-tell-the-story-one-more-time stage” (11). Aside from the boldness and complexity of his Formosan hoax, which included the creation of a false alphabet and a serviceable language, he later became a Hebrew scholar of some renown, a hack writer on Grub Street, a close friend of Samuel Johnson, and is alluded to in Swift’s *Modest Proposal*. His autobiographical writings, particularly the *Description* and the posthumously published *Memoirs of****. Commonly known by the Name of George Psalmanazar; a Reputed Native of Formosa* (1764), deserve a critical attention they have not been given, as does almost every aspect of his most unusual and singular life. Keevak argues that when scholars bother to address Psalmanazar’s Formosan fraud, “there is a certain way in which critics’ constant reiteration of its sensational details has ended up only obscuring the contexts in which the disguise was in fact able to succeed” (11). Keevak then sets out to right this critical wrong, offering a lengthy, coherent, and convincing series of arguments concerning the many aspects of Psalmanazar’s fraudulent assumption of an Asian identity.

Keevak’s primary argument is that Psalmanazar appeared at a time in European history before race had begun to be defined according to biological traits, such as skin colour, and was instead referenced in terms of cultural stereotypes, to the extent that “a Chinese or Japanese or Formosan identity had to be created in such as [sic] way as to incorporate stereotypes already present in the European imagination—and even if these biases might directly contradict the evidence of actual experience” (14). Psalmanazar’s fraud was therefore successful because he exemplified stereotypical notions concerning the Asian “stranger” even if the Europeans he encountered should have “known better” based on available evidence or prior contact with actual Formosans. Psalmanazar’s success is thus explained by his status as a cultural chameleon, intelligent enough to position himself in such a way that he “balanced what was currently known about the Far East with what remained mysterious, leg-

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endary, and stereotypical” (61). Moreover, Psalmanazar was incredibly consistent in his fraud. Although he made many outrageous claims, he never once attempted to rescind or amend them, insisting upon their truth by reference to even more outrageous yet unverifiable (and therefore, in a sense, unquestionable) claims.

Keevak emphasizes the importance of Psalmanazar’s fictitious Formosan language, and indeed of language itself, in the creation and maintenance of the Formosan fraud. The chapter “Psalmanazar’s Language” is the longest and most interesting of the book. In it, Keevak offers a thorough description and analysis of the qualities of Psalmanazar’s invented language and alphabet, to illustrate the role of language and historiography in the formation, transformation, and development of cultural identity. This includes a history of Psalmanazar’s “Formosan,” which leads a remarkable life extending beyond the fraud itself, as the language and alphabet invented by Psalmanazar are adopted in various instances as examples of the “authentic” Formosan tongue—sometimes while Psalmanazar is being denounced as a reprehensible fraud in the same breath.

The Pretended Asian is undoubtedly the best existing work concerning Psalmanazar’s life and fraud. Keevak considers the various elements contributing to the success of Psalmanazar’s hoax to illustrate the preeminence of cultural performance in eighteenth-century Europe, providing important insight into the early blossoming of stereotypical ideas concerning racial identity, from which colonial attitudes were forged.

Jonathan Ball

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