

Although he acknowledges “the inevitable distortions that such a progressivist view of genre history produces,” this evolutionary mapping of the genre seems ironic considering that he privileges utopian texts that openly challenge progressivism (169). Yet Pordzik’s discussion is carefully researched, and the structure allows him to emphasize the cross-cultural links within and between texts of similar historical periods.

Finally, both a strength and a weakness is the examination of more than thirty main texts, as well as numerous others, in relatively few pages. Covering such a large number of obscure texts forces Pordzik to devote considerable space to plot summaries rather than analysis, at times leaving the reader feeling bombarded by examples. But, at the same time, it supports his assertion that a discussion of postmodern, postcolonial utopia necessarily means more than examining Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Nadine Gordimer’s *July’s People*, and Buchi Emecheta’s *The Rape of Shavi*—that we are talking about a large web of revisionist future fictions (2). The study never manages a very close reading of any particular texts, but, as Pordzik indicates in his title, he intends his book to be an introduction. With its broad comparative analysis and comprehensive works cited list, this study makes an important contribution to both its main fields, and will, perhaps, inspire others to examine more closely the role of individual utopias in postcolonialism.

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Robert Fraser. *Lifting the Sentence: A Poetics of Postcolonial Fiction*. Manchester, New York: Manchester UP, 2000. Pp. x, 252. US \$74.95; \$29.95 pb.

Robert Fraser sets out to discuss postcolonial fiction the old-fashioned way: by returning to an analysis of language, style and form. This book seems to have been conceived during the “theory versus literature” wars within English departments several years ago. What confounded me is why the author seems to think that an analysis of the poetics of postcolonial fiction should be considered as separate from the theories of postcoloniality. For three quarters of the book, I struggled to keep interested in the use of tense, first, second and third person singular and plural voice, parody, symbolism—some of which were interesting and some ground already covered by others—over an analysis of postcolonial novels from the Caribbean and Africa, India, Ireland as well as Australia, New Zealand and Canada. In his sampling of fiction, he makes the

same mistake that the writers of *The Empire Writes Back* made eleven years ago: he neglects to distinguish between the literature (and race) from white settler colonies and that from the racialized former colonies.¹ While I appreciated discovering some early canonical postcolonial writers with whom I was not familiar, Fraser's structuring according to style and form (rather than text) is difficult to follow, as he moves back and forth between texts, combining them to illustrate his literary points.

The first chapter, where he discusses general theories about the politics of language, aesthetics and nation, is disappointingly superficial. Moreover, when raising the issue of novel and nation, he neglects to mention key theoretical texts such as Homi Bhabha's *Nation and Narration* and the debate over Jameson's point about Third World literature as national allegories. Fraser's decision to "concentrate on the nitty gritty" by performing in-depth analysis of a smaller range of books than previous postcolonial literary critics (7), but without demarcating which writers at the outset, and within which generation and location, unsettles the reader. The absence of indigenous writers' works becomes noticeable in light of his choices of works by white writers from settler colonies: Miles Franklin (author of *My Brilliant Career*), Elizabeth Smart, Patrick White, Margaret Laurence, etc. In his discussion of time, for example, he could have at least noted Patricia Grace's novel *Potiki* which deals with the Maori notion of spiral temporality, or Mudrooroo's aboriginal dream time in *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*. A more radical strategy is to challenge the westernized framework of nations and national literatures by focusing instead on particular writers and the concatenated identities they bring with them (as well as their own alternative imagined communities). Although Fraser to some degree articulates this idea (47), he does not go far enough. The dilemma of the book is that the whole is sacrificed for bits of in-depth and comparative textual analyses bound by eurocentric poetic values and assumptions—assumptions made clear only in the final chapter. While there is nothing wrong with, for example, discussing Rushdie and Soyinka in a section on "voicing the nation," one wonders, with the breadth of texts Fraser has undertaken to cover, what justifies his choice of focusing on particular writers and not others?

Part Four entitled "Theocolonialism" unravels and explains my discomfort with the first three parts of the book. Here, Fraser displays a virulence towards deconstructionist theory and postcolonial criticism, labelling the dominance of theory in English departments "theocolonialism": "theory as an instrument of power" (221). This attitude is reflected in the excessive imagery he uses to construct a picture of Barthian literary critics "who had seemingly acted as murderers, sucking the victims' veins and replenishing themselves with their

lifeblood. Undaunted like the vampire, the critics arose and licked their lips" (224). Fraser's generalized and unreferenced statements—voiced in the same authoritative manner he finds in fiction by colonial writers whose "imperial-cum-anthropological gaze" (100) is expressed in the voice and style of the "past historic" (102)—give the impression that they are solely his opinions, and may even be oblique personal snipes. It is Fraser's arrogance that grates, for with substantiated evidence, one might be inclined to agree with some of his statements or at least be able to debate them. Yet, he does not even realize how his position and perhaps, personal investment, are embroiled in the text. What escapes his awareness is that his approach to postcolonial fiction also derives from literary theory, specifically New Criticism. His jibe at the postcolonial academic star system is irrational: "Ever larger salaries were awarded to stars, thus depriving those less stellar, and robbing society of precious resources which, had they been released into the wider community, might have helped to alleviate the kinds of deprivation upon which the academics theorized" (223). Note how Fraser places the moral responsibility for equitable economic redistribution on the third-world metropolitan intellectual, while the first-world white male tenure-track professor generally does not have to think twice about accepting a salary twice that of an adjunct professor in his department doing the same kind of work. In this section Fraser gets so personal that he no longer perceives the structures at large that account for such disparities.

Frankly, Fraser is uncomfortable with the use of the category "postcolonial." Ideally, he seeks to do away with it altogether, displaying his western universal humanist proclivity while working under the misconception that a study of style and form is not itself an ideological act. In his concluding paragraph, he asks whether postcolonial fiction has a distinct poetics or whether its qualities define "human imagination": "Having lifted the sentence of colonialism, and wrestled with its neocolonial doppelganger, it may be that we will eventually feel the need to lay the category of postcoloniality itself aside" (230). As if to further undermine his entire thesis after showing how numerous postcolonial fiction writers seek poetic and formalistic ways to articulate their identities independently of colonialism and neocolonialism, Fraser ends thus: "Thenceforth, the proper release of postcolonial writing may well be into form. Only then, possibly, will it become a literature, become in fact itself. Lo! The text steps forward, and raises up its hands" (230). The antiquated English harkens back to colonial English with a capital "E," back to the mother(land) of all English-language postcolonial fiction: British literature. Ironically also, the biblical gesture and language undermine Fraser's own analogy of theory as "the Logos of Christian theology" (229). It is a shame

that Fraser's counter-argument to theory, which he holds as putatively "ineffable and pure," is to suggest another equally purist and polar view—that form is all there is, essentially, to literature.

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Notes

- 1 Which is why I think the book is written much earlier than its publication date of 2000. Either that or the author has not bothered to read the criticisms of EWB together with many other postcolonial theoretical essays for which he shows such contempt. Unfortunately, ignorance has not deterred him from savage criticism either.

Works Cited

- Grace, Patricia. *Potiki*. New York: Penguin, 1986.
- Narogin, Mudrooroo. *Master of the Ghost Dreaming*. Sydney, Australia: Angus & Robertson, 1993.

Robert J.C. Young *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*.
Oxford: Blackwell, 2001. pp. xi, 498. \$24.95 pb.

Over the past ten years, critical scholarship in literary and cultural theory has tendentially moved to question and complicate the radical claims that have been made on behalf of postcolonial studies. Critics ranging from Aijaz Ahmad and Arif Dirlik to Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri and Peter Hallward have emphasised how postcolonial studies has focused too much on the politics of culture, the experience of migrancy and the hybridization of identities. As a consequence of this focus (so the argument runs), little attention is paid to the relationship between the critical vocabulary of postcolonial criticism and the rhetoric of global economic restructuring. This lack of critical self-consciousness has led to a situation where the vocabulary of postcolonial theory is seen as symptomatic rather than critical of the transition from the political and cultural liberation of former European colonies to contemporary global economic dependency. As Hardt and Negri put it in *Empire*: "[m]any of the concepts dear to postmodernists and postcolonialists find a perfect correspondence in the current ideology of corporate capital and the world market. The ideology of the world market has always been the anti-foundational and anti-essentialist discourse par excellence" (150).

In response to such attempts to contain and delimit the intellectual achievements of postcolonial studies, Robert Young offers an ambitious and