

ologies of feminist postcolonial theorists and Subaltern Studies historians, which generally attempt to trace the agency and struggles of disempowered, “non-hegemonic” groups, Young tends to privilege the hegemonic strategies of various political leaders. In this respect, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* arguably repeats the founding exclusions of dominant historiography in many postcolonial nation states. What is more, Young’s concluding chapters on the theoretical work of Edward Said, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida are marked by an unacknowledged shift in emphasis and register. Young’s arguments that Said’s account of colonial discourse is based on a misreading of Michel Foucault’s notion of discourse, and that a more faithful Foucauldian approach to colonialism would adopt a historico-empirical analysis of colonialism as a discursive formation are certainly thought-provoking. Yet the rather conversational chapter on/with the Algerian biographical subtext of Jacques Derrida’s thought seems somewhat incommensurate with the historical weight of Young’s earlier arguments.

Nevertheless, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* is a groundbreaking and exhaustive historical resource with an excellent works cited list, which will be indispensable for future generations of students and scholars working in postcolonial studies. Furthermore, Young’s historical mapping of a tricontinental transculturation of proletarian internationalism offers an important historical re-assessment of anti-colonial resistance struggles that will be instructive to contemporary post-Marxist thinkers who are committed to finding a new “common language of singularities” (Hardt 57).

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### Works Cited

Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 2000.

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Margaret Atwood. *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002. Pp. xxvii, 219. \$29.95.

Drawing from Margaret Atwood’s presentations for the Empson Lecture series in the spring of 2000 at Cambridge, *Negotiating with the Dead* engages with the unique relationships writers maintain with themselves, their readership, and the world-at-large. Despite Atwood’s claim that she necessarily had to “[remove] some of the cornier jokes” (xxv) from her lecture copy, perhaps the most engaging aspect of this text is that her prose retains much of the spontaneity and humour that are so characteristic of her quality as a speaker.

While she deftly manages a wealth of literary and popular culture allusions, inventive metaphors and personal anecdotes, *Negotiating with the Dead* is free of any stilted prose or stodginess and is accessible to a variety of audiences. The entire text reads easily and each of the six chapters, based on the six lectures delivered at Cambridge, seamlessly weave into one another while simultaneously covering very diverse ground.

Atwood's meditations on the role and nature of the writer cover the basic questions continually asked of writers by their audiences, and—as it would seem from Atwood's own and other authors' anecdotal evidence—those questions writers continually dwell upon when considering the self and their own position within literary life. In the second chapter, aptly titled "Duplicity," she posits that "the mere act of writing splits the self into two" (32). In fact, according to Atwood, there is a definitive boundary between the public conception of what it means to be a literary celebrity and the quotidian, and far less glamorous, self that is "the one who walks the dog, eats bran for regularity [and ... ] takes the car in to be washed" (35). Drawing her epigraphs from Matthew 6: 3-4 and a portion of Gwendolyn MacEwen's poem, "The Left Hand and Hiroshima," she extends the metaphor of the duplicitous nature of hands in order to represent what she sees as the essential double-nature of the writer.

*Negotiating with the Dead*, however, does not remain fixed within the sphere of the writer; Atwood turns her attention to the tripartite relationship between the self-contained duplicity of the writer and the relative singularity of his/her reader. She considers the importance of the reader in the construction of meaning in a highly self-conscious manner, which is mindful of her assertion that the "fictional writer who writes to no one is rare" (127). Atwood attempts to debunk the mythology of the writer who produces for a universal audience; she continually reiterates that writers produce for a "singular" (134) vision of their own ideal reader. Considering the implications of such thought, given the realities of modern publishing, Atwood comments that:

the writer-while-writing and the Dear Reader assumed as the eventual recipient of this writing have a relationship that is quite different from that between the mass-produced edition and "the reading public." Dear Reader is singular—second-person singular. Dear Reader is a You. But once both book and Dear Reader become multiplied by thousands, the book becomes a publishing statistic, and Nobody can be quantified, and thus becomes a market, and turns into the great plural third-person Them, and Them is another thing altogether. (134)

Atwood's recognition that her triangular model exists in theory only and is compromised by the reality of dissemination is additionally complicated by her claim that, although a singular reader "must be postulated by a writer," readership in its plural form can create the "hazards" (133) not only of misrecognition, but also of the "risk" of having "too much [Keatsian] negative capability" resulting in readers' conflation of their own "desires and fears" (139) with their reception of the text. Although she does focus on the problematics of the writer-reader relationship, Atwood makes clear that ownership of meaning necessarily remains in the hands of the readership. If readers are indeed a "hazard," *Negotiating with the Dead* positions them as a purely occupational one.

The final chapter, titled "Descent," and sharing its subtitle with the entire collection, places the work of the writer firmly within the frame of the classical quest narrative. Citing the mythological origins of the quest narrative in its various permutations, Atwood compares the backbone of literary work to that of the hero or heroine's descent into the underworld. Her alignment of the author with the hero or heroine serves largely to represent her sense of the writer's necessary engagement with the past. She argues that:

All writers learn from the dead. As long as you continue to write, you continue to explore the work of writers who have preceded you; you also feel judged and held to account by them. But you don't learn only from writers—you can learn from ancestors in all their forms. Because the dead control the past, they control the stories, and also certain kinds of truth [ ... ] so if you are going to indulge in narration, you'll have to deal sooner or later, with those from previous layers of time. Even if that time is yesterday, it isn't now. (178)

Certainly, Atwood's link between the mythical hero and the writer may serve to widen the gap within the split subjectivity of writer and non-writer, but her parallel speaks more to a sense of the requirement of the writer to be attuned to history, rather than to forward any grandiose suggestion of the cultural value of authorship. The allusions to the underworld as a kind of shared subconscious among writers is a fitting one, and opens up the discussion of the writer's personal and social responsibility towards the past.

In all, *Negotiating with the Dead* provides a solid view of the tenuous territory of the writer's life, conception of self, and relationships with audiences. Ideal not only as a companion to Atwood's own work, *Negotiating with the Dead* provides a framework from which the function and value of writers in general might also be considered.

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