

John C. Hawley. *Postcolonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections*. New York: State University of New York P, 2001. Pp. x, 334.

There is a reference to me in the opening lines of John Hawley's introduction to *Postcolonial, Queer*. I mention this "in the interests of full disclosure" as they say, but also to situate the field. There have been a number of us trying to begin an exploration of possible relationships between imperialism and same-sex desire. The article of mine to which Hawley refers was published in a special issue of *ARIEL* on "Gay and Lesbian Issues in Postcolonial Literatures" (30:2 April 1999), edited by myself and Robert Gray. Now comes the present book, of which the cover blurb by Judith Butler states, "Finally, the staging of an encounter between queer and postcolonial studies..."

Butler's adverb seems to indicate a certain triumphalism: at long last IT is here. It would be easy for me to claim the status of pre-originary, declaring that our predating volume was the truly establishing moment. I am all too aware, however, of what is missing in our *ARIEL* collection. We did not come close to examining the various postcolonial regions, much less achieve an overview. Our volume was far too literary in focus. Finally, far too many of the contributors were from Canada, presumably reflecting the nationality of the editors, for various reasons. Regardless of the obvious quality of the individual articles, this was not the collection I had envisaged when I began the project some years before.

I suspect John Hawley would have a similar reaction to the limitations of *Postcolonial, Queer*. While a number of the contributors originate elsewhere, their academic addresses are almost all American. The exceptions are two Australian and one Welsh. Two pieces on individual "postcolonial" nations, by Jilanna Enteen on Thailand and Chong Kee Tan on Taiwan, do an excellent job of exploring the nexus between international homosexualities and indigenous traditions and adaptations. Jarrod Hayes on Algeria is more theoretical and literary but also less specific, as is Gaurav Desai on "Africa." As a literary person myself, perhaps I am the pot calling the kettle, but I mistrust the generalizations Desai makes based on one novel by Wole Soyinka and one by Bessie Head. I have a similar reaction to Hema Chari's spin-off from Salman Rushdie.

The position of Australia in this volume is particularly strange. Australia as a postcolonial nation is never mentioned, but it is important as an institutional base. The collection begins with a piece by Dennis Altman on "the internationalization of gay identities." Altman's importance to gay

studies cannot be overstated. While maintaining attention on his home in Australia, Altman has written many seminal pieces on the international gay movement and on that in the United States, which, like it or not, remains the key to what happens in queer studies everywhere. Altman is an almost always reasonable voice of the queer left, a card-carrying devil's advocate who never met an opinion he didn't question, and one of that all-too-small group of academics who can maintain rigour and community involvement and write texts that are generally accessible.

Perhaps because of Altman, a key source of energy in this volume is a replay of an exchange in the *Australian Humanities Review*. Thus Altman sets the tone with his discussion of the global vs the local and Donald Morton replies, with a degree of vitriol, that while Altman is often hailed as an avatar of the queer left, he is far from a Marxist. As in his other works, most notably *The Material Queer*, Morton calls for a doctrinaire scientific historicism. In "By Way of an Afterword," Samir Dayal attempts to reconcile the two through calls for pluralism. Given Morton's views this is rather ridiculous. It is like suggesting to the Pope that he cease prioritizing Christianity.

The problem isn't Altman or Morton. They are taking the same positions they have before and they both argue well, although no doubt some will believe that any Marxist as devout as Morton can be dismissed on the grounds of religious fundamentalism. I would much rather have Morton than the selection here by J. K. Gibson-Graham. Apparently this name is a conflation of two academics – Katherine Gibson in Australia and Julie Graham in the United States – who suggest that changing the rhetorical response to globalization could change the facts, as they claim might be done by feminists by moving away from the term "rape." Gibson-Graham seem to believe that capitalism can be fought productively through "alternative scriptings" (264). I can only guess at Morton's response to that one.

Regardless of Gibson-Graham (how can an article by two authors, an article that lays claim to materialism, refer to "my mind"?), the overall problem with the book is that the introduction and blurbs, and very much Dayal's afterword, assume a range and coherence that the volume doesn't have. The Morton and Gibson-Graham articles seem little concerned with either 'postcolonial' or 'queer,' except as grist for other debates. Then there are other misdirections. Dayal states that "queering" "is certainly a live issue in the public sphere – witness the recent debates on the question of the legal status of same-sex couples in Vermont or, further afield, the debates in France..." (306). Pardon? How can a book with a title that refers to "post-colonial" see Vermont as inevitably local in contrast to France as "further

afield"? I can see that my rhetorical questions are beginning to betray a certain frustration.

This is a useful book in two rather contrasting ways. It first reprints some theoretical pieces that provide a lot of energy: the Altman and Morton but also Joseph Boone's *PMLA* article, "Vacation Cruises," which has become a ubiquitous citation since it was first published in 1995. On the other hand, there are the regional and national articles mentioned above. Still, it is not the book it might have been, I suspect because the disparate voices just would not come together in the way Hawley wished. Dayal writes, "Reading same-sex desire back into the colonial calculus certainly adds a dimension to the understanding of the traveling discourse of empire. The promise of this approach, probably not fully realized even in this collection, is that it could radically restructure the understanding of desire and its ambivalences in the colonial primal scene, where the structure of affiliation, we are told, led to the shuttling of affiliation" (311).

Dayal resorts to theory-speak but the substance is valid. The "colonial calculus" needs this "dimension" but it is "probably not fully realized even in this collection." While Butler's "Finally" is no doubt unjustified, it looks like pocco-queer is a field that is going to need many founding moments. This is one more worthy attempt.

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Mohammad A. Quayum and Peter C. Wicks, eds. *Malaysian Literature in English: A Critical Reader*. Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: Pearson Education Malaysia, 2001. Pp. xiv, 338.

This book professes to be "the first serious collection of literary criticism on the subject of Malaysian Literature in English ever to be put together in published form." Regardless of whether the collection as a whole or its parts live up to the ambitious scope of the project, such a claim does point to the salutary nature of the undertaking involved. Given that a body of writing identifiable as a Malaysian literature in English goes back fifty years, the belatedness of an endeavour of this sort is itself a sign of the fraught dynamics arising from the adoption of English into, and its adaptation by, a postcolonial, diasporic context.

The editors' introduction is particularly helpful given the complex entanglements between English and the Malaysian nation-state. Although the