

Book Reviews

Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo and Gina Wisker, eds. *Rites of Passage in Postcolonial Women's Writing*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2010. 316 pp. \$96.00US.

Adequately addressing any broad field within the necessary constraints of a single book is an unenviable editorial task, the results of which will invariably fall short in the eyes of some readers. Unsurprisingly, then, in attempting to bring together scholarly work which speaks to and about the vast archive of "Postcolonial Women's Writing," without omissions or oversights, Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo and Gina Wisker leave themselves and their collection vulnerable to criticism from those who will note, inevitably, the text's gaps.

Divided into five parts according to region ("Africa," "Americas," "Asia," "Australia," and "Cross-Continental"), *Rites of Passage in Postcolonial Women's Writing* comprises fifteen essays by an impressively "international" group of literary scholars (they come from the United States, England, Germany, the Netherlands, South Africa, Romania, Australia, and Trinidad and Tobago). Not without thematic focus, the essays cohere around questions about, as the title of the book suggests, "rites of passage." Specifically, as Dodgson-Katiyo and Wisker explain in their introduction, the essays included grapple with the "traditional views of rites of passage" derived from Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, in their respective *Les rites de passage* (1909) and *The Ritual Process* (1969). For Dodgson-Katiyo and Wisker—and for most of the contributors to the collection—van Gennep's and Turner's "cross-cultural (even eclectic) range of material" and their "openness" to interdisciplinary models of knowledge reflect a preference for "a cross-fertilization [of ideas] from ethnography and anthropology to literature" (xi).

Essays in this book analyze specific rites of passage, including rituals of female coming-of-age associated with menstruation, marriage, and motherhood. The anthology covers most literary genres. Several contributors examine fiction, both novels and short stories. Katrin Berndt, Helen Cousins, and Alexandra W. Schultheis focus on Zimbabwean writer Yvonne Vera's fiction; Rachel Slater discusses "Australian Women's Fiction"; Alexandra Dumitrescu looks at Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*; and Jessica Gildersleeve, Tanya Dalziel, Anna Gething, and Irene Visser, whose essays make up the "Cross-Continental" portion of the book, all focus on fiction. Other essays engage with memoir, poetry, and drama, including Gay Breyley's "A

Ticket to Nowhere: Coming-of-Age in Two Twentieth-Century Indigenous Australian Memoirs,” Lizzy Attree’s “Women Writing AIDS in South Africa and Zimbabwe,” and Kimberly M. Jew’s “Reclaiming Ritual: Feminist and Postcolonial Perspectives in Two Plays by Victoria Nalani Kneubuhl.”

Depending on their particular research interests and areas of specialization, different readers will find in this book different strengths. Given that three of the fifteen essays focus on Vera, scholars who work on this writer will be interested in the “Africa” portion of the text. Readers whose research centres on Australian literature will likely also find parts of the book valuable—Gay Breyley’s and Rachel Slater’s essays examine Australian women’s writing, and Anna Gething (in “Menstrual Metamorphosis and ‘the foreign country of femaleness’: Kate Grenville and Jamaica Kincaid”) also engages, at least in part, with an Australian writer. Yet many readers, I fear, will be disappointed by the volume. Only one essay in the book considers a New Zealand text (Irene Visser’s “Words Against Death: Rites of Passage in Ana Castillo’s *So Far From God* and Patricia Grace’s *Baby No-Eyes*”). The editors’ decision to represent “Africa” via three essays on one writer, from Zimbabwe, and via a fourth essay, which also engages with southern African women’s writing, is problematic, to say the least: the African continent and its women writers are too vastly complex and heterogeneous to be reduced to four narrowly-focused essays. The same concerns might be expressed about the other regions foregrounded by the book’s structure: how can three essays about Asian writing by women speak authoritatively about this part of the world? Are two essays on Australian writing by women appropriately representative of this nation’s broad spectrum of female, postcolonial voices? Additionally, essays on Canadian women’s writing are absent entirely, as are discussions of Irish women’s writing. Readers—myself included—will acknowledge that one book cannot hope to engage with the enormous body of work that we call “Postcolonial Women’s Writing.” At the same time, and for that very reason, editors of such a project should either rethink their lofty goals or provide, in their introduction, a more detailed rationale for their glaring exclusions and omissions.

Indeed, the overarching rationale for the collection (its interest in revisiting the work of van Gennep and Turner) is never sufficiently explained. Why, given recent postcolonial scholars’ fruitful, compelling, and direct engagements with race studies, queer theory, debates about indigeneity, diaspora, post-humanism and eco-feminism, should readers be interested in the arguably-dated and borderline-apolitical work of these two (white, male, European) thinkers? The collection’s point of departure suggests a regrettably limited perspective on an enormous body of writing that deserves far more

politically-rigorous and theoretically-current attention. Ultimately, scholars of women's writing produced in postcolonial contexts are likely to find in this book less than they would hope for or reasonably expect. For this reason, *Rites of Passage in Postcolonial Women's Writing*—a collection that is more disappointing than inspiring—should be approached with caution and concern.

Lisa Grekul

Paul Jay. *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2010. 248 pp. \$65.00; \$19.95 pb.

The image of the turn as a metaphor for disciplinary transitions has become almost commonplace in recent years, perhaps even ascending to the status of cliché. In Paul Jay's recent study of the "transnational turn," however, the turn is an apt image in both its reference to a figurative intellectual shift and a literal geographic expansion. Taking as his topic the displacement of rigidly national and at times nationalist models of literary studies, Jay historicizes and illuminates the genesis and development of the titular turn in the book's introduction and first four chapters. He makes another turn to model the reading practices he promotes in the five chapters that comprise part two of the text.

A key plank in Jay's analysis of the transnational turn is his adherence to the "long view" of globalization, which argues against the notion that current cultural and economic formations represent a wholly new and unprecedented moment in the development of a transnational or global culture, as Arjun Appadurai, Anthony Giddens, and David Harvey have all notably (though distinctly) asserted. Instead, Jay follows the path of writers such as Roland Robertson, Amartya Sen, and Janet Abu-Lughod, who argue that the shifting nature of global interconnections is best understood as a product of both continuity and change. This expanded view of the history of transnational linkages incorporates European colonialism and imperialism, and has the added analytical strength of acknowledging historical linkages beyond that scope, such as links colonial and otherwise between the contemporary Middle East and South Asia. As Jay notes, "[to] see globalization as a recent eruption is to mistake not only the date but the nature of its emergence, for it leads us to miss the extent to which earlier world systems outside the West produced forms of knowledge and technology integral to later phases of globalization" (39), such as the printing of the world's first book (39).