Omaar Hena. *Global Anglophone Poetry: Literary Form and Social Critique in Walcott, Muldoon, de Kok, and Nagra*. New York: Palgrave, 2015. Pp. xiv, 200. US$90.

Here are two arguments you have likely encountered if you read postcolonial poetry:

1. Poet P, who uses English or European techniques, shows that we can consider those techniques wholly apart from their origins, because P uses them so well to present her non-English or non-European life. Those techniques are, simply, part of the global literary scene, available for all poets equally.
2. Poet Q, who claims to eschew English or European techniques, demonstrates that poets must eschew them in order to represent non-English or non-European lives. Newly independent nations, especially those of the African diaspora, need a brand-new "nation language" (Kamau Brathwaite); large, optimistic, non-European countries require a new, unrestrained kind of language with "the quality of sprawl" (passim, Les Murray's name for the wide-open, honest Australianness that his poetry also pursues).

Omaar Hena's *Global Anglophone Poetry: Literary Form and Social Critique in Walcott, Muldoon, de Kok, and Nagra* is a largely persuasive study of four

Anglophone postcolonial poets that demonstrates how and where both of these arguments can be wrong. Derek Walcott, Paul Muldoon, Ingrid de Kok, and Daljit Nagra are all, as Hena claims, "receiving and repurposing canonical literary forms" (2), among them epic, pentameter, end rhyme, florilegium, elegiac lyric, and dramatic monologue. Hena does more with modes and genres than with forms in a strict sense, caring more for history than for acoustics—though he can certainly hear the latter. All four of these poets are nationally, if not internationally, honored for their mastery of modes and forms. And yet, despite what the word "mastery" suggests, Hena finds that these poets show what forms, modes, and genres cannot do. Their poems demonstrate "how aesthetic uses of language can sometimes make legible their own limitations before social realities" and how poets can use literary form to show the limits of "structural inequalities" that limit what art and artists can accomplish (162, 43).

Hena accurately argues that Nagra's poems of mimicry and persona—with their foolish-wise Black British and Asian characters—point to the stereotypical expectations integral to the British multiculturalism that has given Nagra his success in the United Kingdom: without the cultural bias that these comic poems mock, there would be no basis for the comedy. De Kok's lyric and elegiac poems—traditional in mode, though written in free verse—show how "a marginal writer *must* link up with the cultural capital of authors recognized as central to the Anglo-American cultural core . . . to become legible in the global North" (159; emphasis in original). Walcott accomplished a similar linkage in *Omeros* (1990), an epic that Hena argues is conscious of what it appears to have lost in making those links, in adopting European symbols and sounds. In *Omeros*, both the system of ocean currents that the sailor Achille must traverse and the world literary system that Walcott has traversed—with its fish and pirogues, its hexameters and its nationalisms—propose "an aesthetic model of globalism" hemmed in "by . . . the inequities of the global literary marketplace" and global inequity more generally (29). The closer Walcott gets to success and power (both aesthetic and institutional) through his command of literary forms, the farther he seems from the relatively powerless, marginal St. Lucia that he wants to represent. Put more baldly: you can write St. Lucia in a way that makes St. Lucia seem important and legible in Manhattan and Islington, or you can write St. Lucia in a way that makes you seem close to the real St. Lucia, but you cannot do both at once. Hena argues that this circle cannot be squared. It can, however, be made into a subject for an epic poem, boosted by puns and dialect spellings, as in the name of Achille's canoe: *In God We Troust*.

While Hena's consideration of Walcott reflects on the limits of representation, de Kok's elegiac lyric reflects on the limits of South African whiteness, "demonstrating how her writing is necessarily enmeshed within the very mechanisms of inequality and suffering that it would seek to forestall" (120). All elegy describes belated helplessness (we cannot bring back the dead), but de Kok's elegies present a political helplessness too: somebody will find a new language for the future South Africa, but it will not be her. De Kok cannot help using the old language. Yet, because of that limitation, her work speaks in complex ways to South Africa's past. For instance, her title "Zonnenbloem" means "sunflowers," but it is also an apartheid-era place name for what used to be Cape Town's multiracial District Six. Once you know that, you can see other kinds of power in de Kok's poem of that name: "They're allies of the sun, / timepieces on the landscape's wrist" (qtd. in Hena 117).

Much of Hena's argument—though not his examples—grows out of Jahan Ramazani's important studies, *The Hybrid Muse: Postcolonial Poetry in English* (2001) and *A Transnational Poetics* (2009), though the younger Hena gives more credence to materialist views, drawing on critics such as Pascale Casanova (*The World Republic of Letters* [2004]) who examines the economics of literary careers. Sometimes this approach paints poets as improbably mercenary. Does de Kok really write, as Hena suggests, "in order to gain institutional recognition and visibility within global Anglophone writing" (116)? Does even Walcott—a writer obviously conscious of his international readership—"deliberately position . . . his . . . Caribbean poetics for global canonization" (52), as if he were competing with Apple and Taylor Swift? Hena can make poets' choices look alarmingly like those of brand consultants or politicians—what constituency does this position (this adjective, this metre, this comparison) attract? Yet if we understand Hena to ask not why these poets write poetry at all but what makes them intelligible, what parts of their work get rewarded and by whom, then Hena's points stand. The forms, the vocabulary, and the ways of writing that draw in one set of readers for one mode of poetry, in a postcolonial context, also establish distance from another.

Hena's examples invite comparison, not only among poets but also among ethnic groups and nations. Muldoon has sometimes written about Native Americans, not as they were but as they have existed in Irish (and not only Irish) fantasies, as ways to imagine escape—versions of dispossession that are and are not like Ireland under empire. Almost the last, and by far the largest, of Muldoon's self-critiquing Native American fantasies is *Madoc: A Mystery* (1990), a poem that is part science fiction and part alternate history,

in which Robert Southey and Samuel Taylor Coleridge try, and fail, to found a primitive utopia in the wilds of the new American state. The book—the first Muldoon finished writing after settling in the United States—is a giant puzzle, a tangle, a shaggy-dog story of sorts, and a tough sell for an international audience still suspicious of his cerebral, skeptical qualities. No one should start reading Muldoon with that volume. On the other hand, Hena is right about it—it is a mass grave for notions of authenticity and origins, where "even the Indian plays Indian" (80).

With Nagra, Hena's arguments highlight the London-based poet's best and best-known verse. Through his nonstandard South Asian English, his "staged personae and alter egos" (137), Nagra indeed "repeatedly exposes (and capitalizes upon) the 'branding' mechanisms conditioning his staged representations" of "cultural difference" (140). He even demonstrates, while mocking—you might say he mimics—what Homi Bhabha calls "the visibility of mimicry" in earlier postcolonial works (132). You can find similar patterns in stand-up comedy—for example, in Margaret Cho; I wish Hena had asked why and where Nagra's poems are funny. I also wish Hena had asked, in his discussion of all four bodies of work, more questions about tone and feeling. Nagra "represents" Black British life, but he also represents sarcasm and wit, as Muldoon (though not so much in *Madoc*) depicts ambivalence, canniness, pride, and regret. Nevertheless, the questions that Hena does ask are also good.

Tony Harrison has a poem called "On Not Being Milton"; Hena might almost have called his volume *On Not Being Heaney*, so often does the Irish Nobelist come up. Nagra's "Digging," examined at length, is straight-up satire of Seamus Heaney's anthology piece. De Kok's "What Everyone Should Know about Grief," with its "keening" well, "may invoke" Heaney's "Personal Helicon" (100). No one can read Muldoon without noticing the back-and-forth conversation between his poems and those of his former teacher, Heaney. As for Walcott, Hena keeps quoting pieces of *Omeros* that sound like, or answer, Heaney: the "brass scales . . . balanced on horizon but never equal" echo Heaney's "Terminus" (30); Warwick's advice, "[k]eep to the narrow causeway without looking down" (37), reverses the final canto of *Station Island*. Heaney—the author of "Glanmore Sonnets," poems on Irish place names, but also a sonnet sequence about the London Tube—became a kind of impossible model for any poet from a small country or out-of-the-way place who wanted to take from, and give something back to, English-language tradition. Heaney could speak, so it seemed, for a place and a nation to an international audience, authentically (despite detractors), even happily, as well as intelligently and, by the end,

with material success. How did he do it? Will anyone—any postcolonial poet—do it again?

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