
Alexandra W. Schultheis. *Regenerative Fictions: Postcolonialism, Psychoanalysis and the Nation as Family*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. Pp. ix, 203. \$75.00 cloth.

For a short book, *Regenerative Fictions* is ambitious in scope, aiming not only to “complicate the center-periphery model of postcolonialism” (4) but also to liberate “subjectivity and nationhood” (7) from their patriarchal moorings. Given the persistent metaphorization of the nation with the paternal family in Western imperialism, and given the centrality of paternal law to subject formation in Western psychoanalysis, Schultheis’s project cannot help but rehearse important questions concerning agency. In particular, how do “postcolonials” (20) gain the critical distance necessary to re-imagine the imbricated fictions of imperialism and psychoanalysis, to bypass the “injurious identifications” (171) through which their subjectivities have been seemingly constituted or interpellated?

In exploring this problem, Schultheis relies mainly on the work of Kaja Silverman and Judith Butler, each of whom distinctively revises the Lacanian paradigm by locating the possibilities for a “self-reflexive agency” at the subject’s core lack (28). Of course, as Schultheis herself acknowledges, defining postcolonial identity in terms of Western psychoanalysis—especially in terms of *lack*—risks reinscribing the marginality of colonized peoples, “forever relegat[ing them] to devalued subject positions” (158). Here, Schultheis’s aim is certain: “to explore and stretch the limits of psychoanalytic theory” for postcolonial studies (172).

But while I admire Schultheis’s analytic sophistication and ethical stance, her introductory chapters are needlessly dense with theoretical allusions. Too many tangential considerations, which could have placed in endnotes or footnotes, detract from her key points. At the same time, some of her more compelling theoretical bases—such as Katherine Pratt Ewing’s link between Gramscian hegemony and Lacanian subjectivity—remain tenuous, if only because they are under-explained. Still, this apparent lack of focus may be inevitable given the complexity of her subject matter: Schultheis notes, the “possibilities of re-imagining subjectivity and nationhood exceed the bounds of the very theoretical approaches that enable [her] readings” (7).

More satisfying are her literary analyses, featuring four prominent postcolonial writers—Bharati Mukherjee, Darryl Pinckney, Salman Rushdie, and Jamaica Kincaid—each of whom reveals an alternative possibility for subjectivity in response to the elaborate psychological and material consequences of imperialism. Schultheis’s chapter on Kincaid’s *The Autobiography of My*

Mother insightfully explores how Xuela defies a “lack” that is circumscribed not only by the (post)colonial paternal family but also by the absence of the actual mother as a source of psychological identification: “Without a maternal image to internalize ... Xuela remains just outside the Oedipal identifications that ‘should’ inculcate her subordinate role in this structure” (158). Rather than become a subject who lacks agency—one who fulfills the colonial stereotype of either the black mammy or the mulatto temptress (155)—Xuela continues to long for an impossible maternal source of identification while rejecting motherhood for herself. In so doing, she refuses “any position of romantic subjugation” (163), affirms her sexual autonomy, and appropriates the language of the paternal colonizer to “contest the web of oppressions she finds at home and at school” (160). Here, Schultheis suggests that the Western psychoanalytic model, although aptly focused on lack, has underestimated the extent to which the unique subject may decline to model the “single, totalizing subjectivity” of liberal humanism and “[refuse] to become trapped in loss” (162).

This rift between Western psychoanalysis and postcolonial agency is further mined in Schultheis’s discussion of Pinckney’s *High Cotton*. Here, the narrator’s “yearning for coherence and recognition” (73), coupled with his simultaneous refusal to reconcile competing forms of racial identities, signals not only a foundational lack but also “the possibility of alternative identifications” (84) from within that very lack. Schultheis further challenges Western psychoanalysis—in particular, Lacan’s concept of mimicry as mere war-like “camouflage” (56)—in her chapter on Mukerjee’s *The Holder of the World*, which exemplifies a “subversive” (61) form of mimicry. A revision of Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Holder of the World* features a desirous female subject who complicates Puritan authority: “whereas desire figures initially as a masculinized preserve inseparable from colonization, through Hannah it becomes a realm of love and procreation that fuses ethnicity with what it means to be American” (70). Finally, Schultheis shows how Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and *The Moor’s last Sigh* use “the family to capture the ‘soul’ of the modern nation” only to prompt us “to rethink our easy acceptance of its terms” (107). In total, these literary analyses are rich, original contributions to the postcolonial canon of criticism.

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