

those of the Western languages in Africa. Secondly, he advocates that the rightful place be accorded to African languages in the discipline of Comparative Literature. Finally and more importantly, he unearths limitless possibilities for the comparatist scholar interested in African vernacular literature and such areas as bibliographical and biographical information, the study of literary intermediaries or "*la mésologie*," archival research, and comparative studies of vernacular and European literatures. These vistas constitute an enrichment of Comparative Literature as an academic discipline as well as a development of literary knowledge through the discovery of unexpected connections.

The author leaves the African scholar with many thought-provoking questions, for example, how and why does an African writer choose a language in which to write? To what extent do literary traditions of the past influence present writing? To discuss African literature effectively, not only must the critic be armed with literary critical tools but he or she must achieve knowledge of African society. In other words, the criticism of African literature implies a contextual approach, "a modicum of anthropological and historical information" (163). However, it is evident that Gerard's knowledge of African contexts (social, cultural, linguistic) is very limited, as he himself confesses his ignorance and his need to rely amply on secondary sources. The result is that discussions in this area are scanty, sketchy, and generalized when compared to information given on European literature.

Another difficulty is the lack of relevance of some of Gerard's assertions on the position of African languages in francophone Africa; events occurring since the time of Gerard's writing have rendered his assertions irrelevant. Such is to be expected when some chapters were published as articles more than 20 years ago. Since then much water has passed under the bridge.

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Timothy Weiss. *On the Margins: The Art of Exile in V. S. Naipaul*. Amherst, MA: U of Massachusetts P, 1992. pp. ix, 276. \$30.00.

Since the early 1970s there have been at least eighteen book-length studies devoted to V. S. Naipaul's writing, published at a pace that exceeds even Naipaul's own prolific output. Recently, as the pile of primary and secondary works has grown higher, the general or introductory reading has given way to several important works with more specific mandates. Selwyn Cudjoe's *V. S. Naipaul: A Materialist Reading* (1988) does an admirable job of articulating ideological and historical contexts, while John Thieme's *The Web of Tradition: Uses of Allusion in V. S. Naipaul's Fiction* (1987) is a thorough and often surprising account of the author's cosmopolitan cultural references, from Hinduism to calypso to Hollywood *film noir*. Dolly Zulakha Hassan provides a valuable source book of West Indian responses to Naipaul's

writings about the region in *V. S. Naipaul and the West Indies* (1989), sifting through and summarizing hard-to-find materials. And *London Calling: V. S. Naipaul, Postcolonial Mandarin* (1992), by Rob Nixon, a former student of Edward Said, uses the strategies of colonial discourse analysis to present the most rigorously scholarly and readable version yet of the familiar argument that Naipaul's non-fiction is Eurocentric, racist, and intellectually dishonest.

At first glance, Timothy Weiss's *On the Margins* looks like another promising specialty account; its jacket copy positions the book as "informed by the theoretical insights of Mikhail Bakhtin and Tzvetan Todorov." But scholars intrigued by the prospect of, say, a Bakhtinian slant on dialogism and heteroglossia in Naipaul's early novels, or of a juxtaposition of Todorov's reading of New World history in *The Conquest of America* with that of Naipaul in *The Loss of El Dorado*, will probably be disappointed. Weiss, an American scholar with a fondness for French thinkers, is almost as likely to cite Kristeva, Camus, or Althusser—but not Derrida or Foucault—as Bakhtin or Todorov. The contributions of the latter two are largely limited to the support their respective concepts of "exotopy" (outsideness) and exile provide to Weiss's sound but unadventurous thesis: that the complexities and contradictions in Naipaul's work are functions of the exile's experience of "double exteriority," of "belonging yet not-belonging completely to either colony or metropolis" (17).

Weiss presents a loosely chronological and almost comprehensive account of Naipaul's fiction and non-fiction—although the omission of *A Flag on the Island* and *A Congo Diary* is never acknowledged, let alone rationalized. He offers competent and sensitive interpretations, but most of what he says is hardly news to Naipaul scholars. His tendency to summarize Naipaul's plots and to paraphrase extensively and quote his non-fictional texts seems more geared to an introductory study than an advanced monograph. This impression is strengthened by Weiss's readings, which cover terrain that has been well trodden by previous studies. The self-evident thesis of the doubleness of exile, not very exciting to begin with, retreats during Weiss's analyses of works, usually reappearing in a final paragraph or two as a biographical correspondence between author and work. Here is a typical example:

In the loss of El Dorado lies a gap between myth and history, idea and action, that is linked with a sense of alienation and loss in Naipaul's own, reversed, New World to Old World encounter with European others. In the loss of El Dorado he finds, in displaced form, his own exile. (85)

This approach allows Weiss to stress what goes into Naipaul's writing at the expense of what that writing may do—to privilege affect over effect. The causal psychologizing implied in the above quote is explicit in the following comment on Naipaul's travel writing:

This vision of cycles of unmaking depends on actualities and observations, but it is equally a product of the recursive voyage of his exile: it derives, in

part, from the experience of a life without a society, of a home left behind, of a need to reaffirm self and the self's relationship with others. (164)

Valid as these insights may be, they do not add much to Naipaul's own comments about the relations between his life and art. And they provide a blanket excuse; if Naipaul's controversial representations of Third-World societies can be accounted for by his divided self and dualistic world view, their consequent status as personal explorations exempts them from other, more worldly accountabilities. Naipaul is indulged, given the same licence to misrepresent and simplify in journalistic prose as in his most satiric fictions.

Weiss is good at interpreting Naipaul's books through the author's other writings. He makes valuable connections among disparate works, most notably in an inspired reading of *The Enigma of Arrival* as a conciliatory culmination of previous themes and stances. But he is too prone to take Naipaul at his word and to write the kind of criticism that Cudjoe derogates in his own "idealist" predecessors, who "reproduce and re-emphasize the self-evident truths of Naipaul's judgements" (4). Weiss's critical product has too little value added, too much re-arranging and reprocessing of raw materials.

When Weiss does detach himself from Naipaul's own perspectives and constructs, it is typically to support Naipaul's portrayals with socio-economic statistics and quotes from like-minded thinkers or to refashion the insights of Weiss's own critical forebears. When these insights border on critique (*à la* Nixon and numerous West Indians ideologically hostile to Naipaul), he seems to be raising them reluctantly, out of duty more than conviction. "Power?", a "bellwether essay," he acknowledges as "racist," but implies that this is unimportant since "its focus is not on race, ultimately, but on the wounding legacy of empire" (138-39). He acknowledges that the term "Fourth World" as moniker for a purportedly regressive Third World is a construct of "European colonial discourse," but he uses it anyway—not merely because it suits Naipaul's vision but because it suits his own:

postcolonial Africa . . . can appear, at least to Western eyes, to be the epitome of oppression and chaos—not a *Third World* (whatever that term might now mean), but a partly real, partly fantastic *Fourth World* toward which many countries are regressing. (167)

The publication in the same year of new books by the American scholars Weiss and Nixon demonstrates that Naipaul criticism continues to be polarized between fans and foes. Nixon's is the more compelling book; his prose engages while Weiss's is workmanlike, and he contributes a broad range of creative scholarly approaches. Theories of tourism, travel writing, ethnography, autobiography, history, dependency, neoimperialism, and reception are convincingly summoned in support of Nixon's hermeneutic of suspicion. He argues strongly and passionately, although he sometimes makes exaggerated claims: his ar-

gument that Naipaul lets the West almost completely off the hook in critiquing former colonies (37) ignores his frequent condemnations of colonialism. Scholars looking for a more balanced approach to Naipaul can either read Weiss and Nixon together, or, preferably, look up Cudjoe's *Materialist Reading*. Of all the recent studies, Cudjoe's offers the best combination of original readings informed by respect for Naipaul's achievement and a historicized accounting for his limitations.

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Morag Shiach. *Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing*. London and New York: Routledge, 1991. pp. 161. \$49.95; \$13.95 pb.

A quick glance at the bibliography to Morag Shiach's *Hélène Cixous: A Politics of Writing* reveals the disparity in both number and genre of Cixous's French texts versus those that have been translated into English. By far the majority of her texts in English translation are the critical and theoretical articles; most of her fiction and drama has yet to be translated into or performed in English. As a result, there are, in effect, two dominant constructions of Hélène Cixous: the French Cixous is an experimental feminist writer and poststructuralist critic and theorist; as interpreted primarily by British and American scholars, the English Cixous is widely held to be a feminist theorist whose work betrays poststructuralist thought by lapsing into a backward-looking and dangerous essentialism. Her fiction and drama and the "creative" aspects of her theoretical articles are often overlooked or bracketed. Though the flow has abated, articles tarring the so-called French feminists (Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray are the main targets, though neither Cixous nor Kristeva was born in France) with the brush of essentialism are still appearing, despite the convincing arguments of, among others, Naomi Schor, Barbara Freeman, Rosi Braidotti, and Diana Fuss.¹ However, the discovery that poststructuralist analyses of subjectivity could be applied not only to issues of gender construction but also to such home-grown national issues of racism and classism and therefore that "theory" was not, as it was feared, the exclusive