

Rosalind Jones presents a lively debate on the pleasures and pitfalls on both sides of the French deconstruction/Yankee can-do standoff, although I'm not sure she intended the francophobe pun in her title, "Imaginary Gardens With Real Frogs in Them."

This book is a patchwork-quilt testament to a generation that braved the front lines without guidance. If it is short on suggestions for the next step, it is a reminder of a time when putting one career foot in front of the other was virtually unheard of for intellectual, independent women. It is a look at some who not only learned to walk, but invented a whole choreography.

DOROTHY CHANSKY

Bruce King, ed. *The Commonwealth Novel Since 1960*. Houndmills and London: Macmillan, 1991. pp. xi, 268. £45.00

Bruce King is an experienced hand at putting together collections of informational/critical essays on what is variously called Commonwealth Literature(s), Postcolonial Writing, World Literature in English, and the New Literatures in English. In this recent anthology of essays by various hands, he offers a useful, though uneven, survey of fiction writing since 1960, organized by region, supplemented by a group of comparative essays that cross regions and cultures. In addition to essays on what used to be called the settler colonies—Canada, Australia, New Zealand—and on the traditionally significant areas of South Africa, India, and the West Indies, there are brief essays here on Malaysia and Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Oceania (the Pacific); furthermore, there are separate essays on West and East Africa. The "Movements and Directions" section attends to significant topics such as feminism, indigenous fiction writing, the complication (and competition?) of postmodernism, and the questions of nationalism and regionalism. The volume will surely be useful to anyone needing a preliminary map of the field, and those who no longer need such a map should still find it stimulating, if not consistently so.

The organizational mapping of the major part of the book by country/region is useful but presents problems, given the incredible proliferation of material since 1960. How do you sketch in a context, flesh out a viable synthetic theme, and provide an adequately annotated—and representative, if not complete—list, all within fifteen pages? It's quite a challenge, and one to which not all contributors rise. In (critically) fairly conventional terms, Kofi Owusu covers West Africa, placing recent writers in the context of the "*histoire* of postcolonial societies which felt 'no longer at ease' after 'things [had] fallen apart'" (147) initiated by Achebe; but his essay hardly does justice to contemporary feminist presence in the literature. Kirsten Holst Petersen writing on South Africa—Gordimer, La Guma, Head, Coetzee, Brink, and Ndebele—provides good information in terms of both

background and foreground, and in an interesting way. In his essay on the New Zealand novel, Roger Robinson chooses not to be inclusive, and instead writes four brief pieces on Janet Frame, M. K. Joseph, Maurice Gee, and Patricia Grace, but compensates for this selectivity in a postscript that dispels the illusion that four writers are responsible for contemporary New Zealand fiction; of his writers, some might well feel that M. K. Joseph is the one who doesn't quite belong in the group. Leslie Monkman's essay is more critically ambitious and, ultimately, more arresting in its narrative integrity, interrogating the nationalist thesis and linking postcolonialism with postmodernism as he chooses texts by Margaret Laurence, Rudy Wiebe, Alice Munro, and Michael Ondaatje that resist closure and refuse containment.

I found two of the essays disappointing. Syd Harrex writes about fiction in India in a curiously uncontextualised way. He thematises it generally in terms of Hindu myth and archetype, but declines to provide the informational base that many readers will need. The essay collapses into generalising truism too often, as when it asserts that

as we read the Indian English novel of the past thirty years, and are thereby exposed to the cultural, social, political, religious and aesthetic connections between this writing and the life it embodies, we are presented with an oriental carpet with complex and dialectical patterns woven into and embroidered on it. (82)

And Michael Wilding, on Australia, seems excessively eccentric in his choice of candidates for discussion: Randolph Stow, George Johnston, Thomas Keneally, Don O'Kim, Jeanette Turner Hospital, and Peter Carey. Wilding, far from claiming these as representative figures, did not tell me how these writers or their fictions might be connected at all.

Shirley Geok-lin Lim's account of Malaysia and Singapore is exemplary in its fusing of the "list" element with intelligent contextualizing, as when she suggests that in that region, "English is an ethnic-neutral instrument whose international character counters a national-language/culture dominance to express fragmentation resulting from exclusions and suppressions" (87); her essay both inspires confidence in the accuracy and relevance of its "information" and suggests lines of approach to other (postcolonial) literatures. Frank Birbalsingh, by contrast, provides weak guidance to the West Indian situation, and his essay seems hardly to reflect "some of the main developments in the West Indian novel since 1960" (179), particularly in such suggestions as there has "been no [considerable] emergence of women writers" (175). Olive Senior? Jamaica Kincaid? Erna Brodber? Sistren?

The essays on regions and their writers are uneven, ranging from the careless and unhelpful to the wonderfully informed (and informative). I found arrival at the five concluding comparative essays, then, a liberating experience, even when I could not agree with their posi-

tions. Whether it is Diana Brydon discussing four women writers (Aidoo, Brodber, Garner, Rule) to advocate the scope for choosing, and for *constructing* alternative familial relationships, which their works present; or Aritha van Herk wittily suggesting the complicity between postcolonialism and postmodernism, which Australian and Canadian writers exhibit in their varying deconstructions of the notion of "home"; or Craig Tapping dismissing the business of regionalism—margins and centres—and showing Samuel Selvon, Jack Hodgins, and Rodney Hall at work marvelling in ec/centricity; here we have lively points of view and demonstrations of how to move from place to place tactfully and helpfully. Nan Bowman Albinski's piece on indigenous writers of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand is also sensitive. From this section, only Mark Williams's essay on National Epic disappointed me, partly because he offers to bring Rushdie, Hulme, and Harris into conversation with each other, but in fact sidelines Harris, and partly because I see Keri Hulme as *so* different from Salman Rushdie as to render their linkage in an essay like this simply pointless.

Bruce King provides an introductory essay to the collection that is wide-ranging and provocative, with an occasional suggestion of defensiveness. He resists the current process of the post-colonialisation of Commonwealth critique, suggesting to me the sense of threat that some old Commonwealth hands feel in the face of the newly popular field as defined in the United States. But then, I would like to think that the different inflection to these studies that is coming from Canada's "hegemonic" neighbour is providing a healthy challenge. And there is one curious contradiction in King's articulate survey of the current situation. He underscores the degree to which international trends in communication and market forces have changed what we are dealing with in Commonwealth literature; but he also has a "sinking feeling that feminism, multiculturalism, decolonisation and other forms of self-determination have proved good business in providing an improved source of inexpensive skilled workers and in creating new markets" (14), yet does not think that the Commonwealth novel is addressing this contradiction. In fact, this volume suggests that it is doing just that, at least in several of the postmodern fictions discussed.

PATRICK HOLLAND

Frank Davey. *Post-National Arguments: The Politics of the Anglophone Canadian Novel since 1967*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1993. pp. 277. \$45.00; \$17.95 pb

If I am reading him right, Frank Davey has declared that "Canada," as an internally conflicted, discrete political entity, is under erasure in recent Canadian fiction. The concept of a "Canada" in which citizens