

“place” from “space,” and she concludes that Burns can be described as neither as merely local nor as narrowly national.

The last three chapters consider the reception, transmission, and performance of song and ballad. Leith Davis writes about the translation of orality into textuality in the transmission of songs, considering the music as well as the verse and arguing that Burns printed his early songs with the names of traditional tunes as a deliberate challenge to English readers with conventional textual expectations. Adriana Craciun examines the reception of the Gothic ballads of Ann Bannerman, which she compares with poems by Matthew Gregory Lewis and by Coleridge: her discussion of women’s exclusion from the literary Edinburgh of the Romantic period is particularly useful. Finally, in a fascinating chapter on child murder in Scottish ballads, Ann Wierda Rowland demonstrates the extent to which the ballad revival was a formalist movement. To discuss the *content* of such a ballad as “Lamkin,” in which a nurse participates in the murder of a child, would mean addressing the tension between an idealization of childhood (and of formalism, which ballad revivalists connected with a childlike, pre-cognitive state) and the possibility of terrible violence at the very source of the ballad’s transmission from nurse to child.

This book is strong both in its individual chapters and in its coherence and comprehensiveness as a whole. It will certainly be of interest to scholars of the Romantic period and of Scottish studies; but its importance goes beyond the borders of national and disciplinary categories. Anyone with an interest in nineteenth-century literary history and its post-colonial revisions should find this a useful resource, both for the quality and insight of its individual chapters and for its wide-ranging notes and references.

Anne McWhir

Victor Li. *The Neo-Primitivist Turn: Critical Reflections on Alterity, Culture, and Modernity*. Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 2006. Pp. x, 292. \$50.00.

The primitive “Other” continues to have currency in postcolonial discourse, according to Victor Li in his book, *The Neo-Primitivist Turn: Critical Reflections on Alterity, Culture, and Modernity*. Li argues that the obstructions contributed to the field of postcolonial studies by hegemonic practice continue to perpetuate the use of imperialist language; thus postcolonial studies still assert hegemonic rule over the Other in order to achieve “the rehabilitation and

renewal of the Western subject” (19). Citing examples from Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard, Marianna Torgovnick, Marshall Sahlins, and Jurgen Habermas, Li divides his text into chapters on alterity, culture, and modernity: three grand, abstract narratives that he positions contiguously to demonstrate a metonymical progression in uses of his term, “neo-primitivism.”

Neo-primitivism, as defined by Li, is a primitivism that “question[s primitivism] for its adherence to a Eurocentric universalism that fetishistically recognizes and disavows primitive difference” (18). Relying heavily on anthropological research, neo-primitivism shifts in meaning from initially serving as another Western term to describe the Other, to one that is used to deconstruct modernist perspectives of the Other. Li demonstrates that neo-primitivism does not attempt to renew Western authority through a self-reflexive redeployment of past imperial practices, but he asserts that the Other must criticize these imperial practices, which are still regulated and renewed in the present.

Li begins his book by setting out the modernist model of evaluating the primitive, that is the “telos of progress” whereby the primitive’s “temporal or historical past has evolved” (6). This first section is consistently marked by references to the colonized Other as being without autonomy. Building on arguments from both Baudrillard and Lyotard, Li proposes the beginnings of the relationship between alterity and the primitive. “Baudrillard’s appropriation of the primitive Other as radical critique of an alternative to Western theory becomes for Lyotard merely the reintroduction of the Western primitivist fantasy of escaping to a ‘non-alienated’ region,” (49) which grounds neo-primitivism as a non-self-serving Western practice. In the hopes of establishing a new discourse on how we view the Other, Li uses Baudrillard’s theory of simulation as the backdrop for a schema to illustrate a “pure” primitive by deconstructing the primitive as a simulated object, as seen through the eyes of the West. But this deconstruction of the primitive is virtually impossible, because of the dominance of Western hegemony, hence the loss of the primitive’s agency.

Finding the “pure” primitive is unattainable for the West, as only the primitive knows him/herself in an untainted form. To his credit, Li realizes that his argument for alterity, to view the Other in its own time, is his own idealistic, paradoxical mode of thinking; for as he illustrates, only the primitive Other can view him/herself without Western conflict, yet one must have this conflict to see oneself as a “pure” contrast to hegemonic discourse. Delving into Sahlins’ anthropological research on the events of January 17, 1779 when Captain James Cook sailed into Kealakekua Bay, Li examines how integrated cultural systems—such as the Hawaiians’—used alternative perspectives

to change their former understanding of cultural events: an important understanding of the affects that the West, consciously or not, inflicted on the primitive Other. Sahlins' work illustrates how Captain Cook created a cultural shift in a particular Hawaiian celebration of their god Lonos when his ship arrived in Hawaii. Li's analysis of this research "demonstrates in particular the existence of a profound ontological difference between Hawaiian and European world views" (141). The difference is that every culture is distinct but only when viewed through a "cosmopolitan perspective that allows [each Westernized culture] to subsume the many [different primitives Other]" (152).

Li concludes his text with a brief analysis of Habermas's "modernity." At this point, however, Li has yet to demonstrate a clear-cut understanding of how to avoid the mishaps that each anthropologist/theorist/philosopher has encountered by through a neo-primitivism that continues to universalize the primitive Other. Instead, Li falls into the same trap that his caveat for reading Habermas discloses, namely, that "in arguing for the achievements of modern rationality, Habermas hopes to show us how far we have progressed, while warning us . . . that to abandon achieved levels of rationality is to court the danger of a regression to mythic thought" (172). Neo-primitivism regresses to the mythic thought of the primitive; its use of alterity as a mode of respectfully "purifying" the primitive comes at the expense of making assumptions about the "unknown" cultural views of the Other, and tells the Westerner and the Other how to employ them to find "distinctions." Although Li touches briefly upon this conflict in his research, he shies away from it, only mentioning it near his conclusion.

Alterity, culture, and modernity are engagingly deployed by Li to convey Western hegemonic discourse as a prevailing way of evaluating the Other. But at the same time, these terms continue to confound the Other, as Li is merely adding another metonym to displace the primitive—that is, all "other" cultures—through the (same) kaleidoscope of neo-primitivism: for there are always distinctions that separate one primitive Other from another, but this does not mean that they can be filtered through a single encapsulating mode of analysis or discourse.

Howard Fruitman