

Susheila Nasta. *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain*. London: Palgrave, 2002. Pp. xii, 305. \$90.61 CDN hc.

One of Nasta's central aims in *Home Truths* is to place the "fictions of the South Asian diaspora in Britain" within the framework of the narrative of modernity. She insists that the postcolonial writers under consideration—ranging from the 1940s to the present—are not simply writing about and against colonialism, but are also significant shapers of modernism, a literary movement from which they have been excluded. Nasta presents a striking example of the deliberate exclusion of South Asian diaspora writing from the history of modernity: a photograph from 1942, reproduced in a recent *TLS* essay, depicts black, white, and Asian writers present at the BBC Radio programme *Voice*, but with a caption that reads "among others—T. S. Eliot, George Orwell, and William Empson" (25–27). Nasta argues that South Asian writers in Britain, far from being absent from the modernist narrative, were engaged with presenting a new face of modernity that must be acknowledged in what is still seen as "exclusively European and American phenomenon" (25).

After first considering some pre-twentieth-century representations of Britain by im/migrant writers such as J. M. Malabari and Sake Dean Mahomet, Nasta discusses the origins of modernity in South Asian diaspora writing. Writers who were concerned with "shifting the angle of the gaze" include Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao (1930s), G. V. Desani (1940s), Aubrey Menen (1950s), and Artia Hosain (1960s). Nasta persuasively argues that while these writers were not conventionally seen as part of modernist writing in Europe, in fact, they were actually writing in that very tradition. According to Menen, the aim of this "lifelong project" was to "widen the angle of the lens and to open up the essentially dualistic perspective of a Western modernity" (50). Exhibiting characteristically modernist features such as silences and fragmentary narration, these diaspora writers were stylistic and linguistic innovators in the manner of James Joyce and T. S. Eliot. Nasta's devoting an entire chapter to Sam Selvon's work is especially notable: she situates his novels with Anand's and Rao's (the "fathers" of the Indian novel in English), claiming that his mythic, creolized reinventions of London must be considered alternative modernist narratives.

These early fictions anticipate the diverse range of diasporic writing that followed in the second half of the century. Nasta argues that post-World War II novelists V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie reveal a common concern with questions of "home" and "abroad" that lead to the creation of "imaginary

homelands,” or mythical mental constructs based on reconstituted fragments of memory firmly rooted in the past. Naipaul’s work in particular, with its emphasis on migrancy and double exile, reconfigured the trends that became the basis of postcolonial theory and cultural studies in the 1980s (95). Novels such as *The Mimic Men*, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, and *The Enigma of Arrival* are important in their “ambivalent and equivocal positioning in relation both to a decaying imperial past and the ambivalent realities of a diasporic and postcolonial present” (124). Nasta also situates Rushdie’s work at an apex or liminal point within the tradition of South Asian writing: he brought the South Asian diaspora “centre stage, a subject previously ignored by the modernist avant-garde” (157). Just as the ground for his writing was cleared by earlier black and Asian literary figures, by raising migrant issues in *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie also charts new territory and sets the stage for the “second-generation” (British-born) South Asian writers who follow him.

This new, young Britain of the 1980s and 90s is the subject of the penultimate chapter of *Home Truths*. Nasta argues that rather than speak of past loss and exile, novelists such as Hanif Kureishi and Ravinder Randhawa express a desire to reconfigure homes according to the realities of their present lives. By charting subjective visions of the present, they engage with new and complex issues such as gender, sexuality and feminism, along with race and nationalism. Nasta’s indispensable discussion of Randhawa’s work reveals her importance as the first woman novelist of South Asian diaspora in Britain. Randhawa’s first novel is characterized as “arguably the first *explicitly* Asian British novel” (182), which influenced her diasporic contemporaries Meera Syal, Suniti Namjoshi, and Leena Dhingra. Nasta is at her best in comparing *A Wicked Old Woman* with Kureishi’s *Buddha of Suburbia*: she usefully argues that like Gibreel and Saladin of *The Satanic Verses*, protagonists Karim and Kulwant use “the performative” (disguise and acting) as a means of survival (159). Both writers center on modernist conceptions of fluid identities and multiple selves. For both protagonists, transformations in ways of seeing lead to transformations in ways of thinking: while Karim wishes he had lived more deeply at the end of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the ending of *A Wicked Old Woman* celebrates the generation of “more subtly nuanced modes of representation” (210).

In the final chapter, Nasta insists that another side to new Britain has emerged, consisting of postmodern experimental writers such as Aamer Hussein, Romesh Gunsekera, and Sunetra Gupta. As the boundaries of “home” shift once again, new diasporic texts “open up new cycles of resistance, alternative ways of writing, reading, and *living* in the world” (212). Nasta makes the compelling argument that these writers are no longer con-

cerned with lost homelands of the past, but instead use memory and language to re-angle old stories and create “fictional homes within the text itself” (10). As Hussein’s short stories demonstrate, rather than having at their centre issues of “place” or “location” (Hussein recognizes that the lost homeland can never be regained), their subject is the mode of telling itself, or the fictional strategies involved in the process of “making” memory. By creating “deliberately invented constructs of home” (244), both Gupta and Gunesekra expound the belief that writing is “an act of political and personal independence” that fundamentally depends on the ability of writers to “map the interiority of an imaginative territory of desire” (227).

A major strength of *Home Truths* is that alongside well-known literary giants Naipaul, Rushdie, and Kureishi, Nasta discusses lesser-known diaspora writers, recognizing them for their contributions to South Asian literature in Britain. The important definitional and historical work that accompanies her close textual analyses is also to be commended—most notable is her charting of the terms “Black-British writing” and “hybridity,” as well as historical research on the East Asian presence in the Caribbean. Literary scholars, however, will find *Home Truths* most valuable for situating British South Asian fictions as a significant part of the long-established tradition of Western modernism. In the end, Nasta holds the varied literary strategies that make up the diasporic imagination responsible for both “extending our readings of the narrative of modernity” and “making visible the *home truths* of history” (245).

Summer Pervez

Sarah Cole. *Modernism, Male Friendship, and the First World War*.
 Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003. Pp. vii, 297. \$60.00 U.S.

The three stated concerns in the title of Sarah Cole’s engaging study immediately made me think of Wyndham Lewis’s discussion of the “men of 1914” (252) in *Blasting and Bombardiering*, his 1937 memoir. He too connected reshaping the world of—and through—art with male bonds (himself, Pound, Joyce, and Eliot being the principal figures), and he too linked the war to the enterprise’s outcome. Thankfully, however, Cole presents her argument with all of his commitment but none of his posturing. One could perhaps quibble with the apparent equivalence of her title’s three terms. Although Cole certainly offers perceptive comments about modernism and war in service of her declared goals of opening up still further current discussions of both, the ar-