

by subverting that power in a series of metafictional fissures that remind us of the distinctions between story and discourse. As the "comfort of realism" begins to crack and slide through the narrative awareness of its own meditations, "the ordering gesture [is] quietly brought down . . . and the precisely real begins to lose its firmness" (38). Thus — to mark but one point on the continuum — the stories contained in *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* demonstrate the dislocation of seeing from knowing and are "more exploratory, more skeptical of the hermeneutic code, persistently testing what we know and how we know it" (61).

Quite apart from its careful elaboration of theoretical paradigm and lucid application of theory to practical criticism, this book frequently articulates intriguing tropes which encapsulate its entire argument and, paradoxically, gesture beyond the limits of its own discourse. Nearly always, these tropes illuminate the structural properties of *all* narrative acts: the disruption of linear narrative, for example, results in "configurations of the discontinuous" (109); the layering of discrete times past becomes "a kind of archaeology of temporal zones" (130). Such rhetorical felicities, arising from Blodgett's attention to the grain of Munro's voice, constitute the pleasure of his text; his application of recent narratological investigations to a canon in need of critical reorientation constitutes its ample instruction.

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Stephen Slemon and Helen Tiffin, eds., *After Europe: Critical Theory and Post-Colonial Writing*. Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1989. pp. xxiii, 152. Unpriced.

I have read few books in recent years as important as *After Europe*. Its authors ask gutsy questions about the place in the academy of Anglo-American contemporary critical theory and about the role of the theoretical assumptions emerging from colonized societies. In the 1950s and 1960s Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire were among the first commentators to raise the question of the post-colonial intellectual. In Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, for instance, the post-colonial intellectual is described as part of the "national bourgeoisie" whose responsibility it is to help construct a strong national unity. In the 1970s and 1980s Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Chinweizu, Homi Bhabha, Fernández Retamar, among others, have further developed the idea of the post-colonial intellectual in a Third World context. This collection of essays, called *After Europe*, belongs to this intellectual tradition. What does *post* mean in the term *post-colonial*? Does it mean the death of something? Does it simply mean *after*, which

would suggest a mere chronological arrangement of things? Or does it mean something *beyond*, something *apart from*, say, the colonial order of things?

In the introduction, both Slemmon and Tiffin define post-colonial writing as "a writing grounded in the cultural realities of those societies whose subjectivity has been constituted at least in part by the subordinating power of European colonialism" (ix). For them, as for several of the other contributors, an essentially post-colonial theory of criticism would serve as the most appropriate tool for understanding post-colonial literature. Eurocentric critical theory (which, in their view, includes post-structuralism and Marxist criticism) fulfils European hegemonic interests. There is therefore an underlying ideological assumption in this collection, which suggests that the reading of a post-colonial text is in and of itself a liberating act, and that there is indeed a post-colonial reader who, in the words of Graham Huggan, must be "resistant to the (re) appropriative tactics of European critical practice" (38).

Yet there is a disturbing ambiguity: how does/can an independent post-colonial critical practice come into being when, as Meenaskshi Mukherjee rightly points out, "some of the most crucial terms of the discourse . . . are historically linked with certain phases of literary development in Europe?" (42). At least four of those terms are central to the problematic of this book; they are the theory of the universal, post-structuralism, Marxist/materialist criticism, and the language of critical discourse. The strength of the book, I must add, is that its authors intelligently dialogue among themselves about these issues.

First, the Western "universal impulse," Gareth Griffiths and David Moody eloquently argue, has made it nearly impossible for the Third World to develop its own theoretical models or its own "self-apprehension" (Soyinka). Universalism does not allow cultural difference, relativity, or diversity and is, therefore, an inherently totalitarian notion of the human experience. Post-colonial writing must de-totalize or de-universalize, and make room for the local, even if and when the latter uses a European colonial language.

Second, post-colonial literary practice establishes an ambiguous relationship with post-structuralism. On the one hand, post-structuralism or post-modernism makes available to the "native" voice a centreless universe, thereby creating the opportunity to alter the traditional setting that privileges the centre over the periphery. For Michael Dash, the Caribbean subject has asserted itself in literature largely as a result of this deconstructive element, or this "radical questioning of the need to totalize, systematise and control" (26). On the other hand, because of its support of the principle of indeterminacy or meaninglessness, deconstruction prevents the margins from

interrogating the world about racism, sexism, colonialist and imperialist domination, poverty and indebtedness. For Huggan, deconstruction therefore limits the possibilities for the "Others of Empire" to be radical, subversive, or oppositional. Thus, for some post-colonial readers, Eurocentric post-structuralism runs the risk of being nothing but a neocolonizing agent.

Third, Gareth Griffiths and David Moody consider Marxist ideology to be part of the European hegemonic design. Instead of Marx they propose Fanon "as our principal theorist" (83), for the latter provides "us with an hypothesis with which we can test the case of each post-colonial society's specific and particular struggle for liberation" (84). Similarly, in *Writing Against Neocolonialism*, Ngugi has written that the post-colonial literature from Africa is "really a series of imaginative footnotes to Frantz Fanon." Biodun Jeyifo disagrees with this distancing from Marx, arguing that there need not always be a tension between Eurocentric and post-colonial discourses. In his view, a distinction must be made between "the Eurocentrism which withholds, which excludes, which disdains [and the Eurocentrism] which embraces, invites, gives" (109). Jeyifo's own critical discourse, like that of Chidi Amuta (*The Theory of African Literature*) and other post-colonial readers, draws richly on materialist criticism.

Finally, post-colonial criticism attempts to reassert the language of the margins. The perennial question is how to create an independent literary discourse, a post-colonial *meaning*, in the language of the ex-metropolis. As is well known, Ngugi's solution to this problem was to abandon writing in English and to return to his native Kikuyu as a vehicle of creativity. In this book, W. D. Ashcroft, Craig Tapping, Carolyn Cooper, and Mark Williams and Alan Riach discuss the language problem. For some critics, creolization, especially in the Caribbean context, makes it possible for the "native codes" to replace the "standard codes." Ashcroft claims that a system of supersyncretism in the colonial situation destabilizes any language and therefore problematizes the establishment of an inviolate, standard form. Cooper moves the argument away from abstract discussion to intellectual practice by examining in Jamaican Creole "the testimonies of the women of Sistren" in *Lionheart Gal*. What will the academy make of an intellectual practice in Creole?

There is only one thing that distresses me about this book: the large number of typographical errors which should have been corrected at the proofreading stage. Otherwise it is a must-read book for anyone interested in literary theory as well as colonial, post-colonial, and Third World literatures.

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