

novels, and contemporary Latin American authors, without providing any sustained reasoning as to why these are noteworthy comparisons. She is also given to rather effusive prose: Zora Neale Hurston's writing is "like a shining hummingbird" (125); Ellese Southerland employs "shimmering, malleable prose" (137); Ernest Gaines writes with the "clarity of crystal, the lucidity of obsidian"; and African American writers have "searched and wandered until they have been surprised by the blooming orchid" of success. The book also provides a glossary, with extensive definitions of terms such as "coherence," "duality," "criticism" (descriptive, prescriptive, and proscriptive), "ironic attitude," even "hero and heroine." It would appear that Jones anticipates a remarkably ill-informed audience for this work—or a very young one.

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Iain Chambers. *Border Dialogues: Journeys in Postmodernity*. New York & London: Routledge, 1990. pp. 146. \$55.00; \$16.95 pb.

The topic of postmodernism continues to draw the attention of writers whose critical definitions often seem to contribute to the genre, so difficult is it to address this highly uncentred and uncentring modality from a distance. But the poststructural critical methodologies that often inform such analyses also diminish the notion of a distanced critique in which the writer's own interests and desires were not implicated. In *Border Dialogues*, Iain Chambers presents a set of five lucid and often lyrical essays that offer some distinctly useful and at times highly stylized commentaries on contemporary Western, and in particular British, culture. Chambers takes a turn on the familiar languages of poststructuralist and postcolonial criticism by intensifying the implicit but usually repressed tones of romantic enchantment that so often lurk in descriptive analyses of contemporary culture. In an inviting though at times syntactically troubled voice, Chambers takes his readers on a series of intellectual tours suggested by the names of his chapters: "An Island Life," a brief but closely detailed analysis of the history of British nationalism and the culture of "Englishness" in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; "Some Metropolitan Tales," a meditation on the textures of modern and postmodern western cities that draws on Walter Benjamin's readings of Paris from the position of the *flâneur*; and "Voices, traces, horizons," in which the open-endedness, *unheimlichkeit*, and wandering of postmodern and postcolonial culture are explained as major symptoms of the complexity and heterogeneity of late twentieth-century global life.

In "A Handful of Sand," Chambers uses the New Mexican desert as a trope for these symptoms and for those of another, antithetical attitude provoked by postmodern thinking. The desert suggests, on the one hand, the endlessly revisionary and hybridizing effects of the Derridean paradigm as applied to the postcolonial West; and, on the other, the zero-degree myths of origin and originality in traditional systems of

Western logic that the postmodern both breaks with and carries along in its unsettling complex of voices and ideas. From this perspective, Chambers argues, "the desert seduces us with the idea that we can start out over again, begin from zero: a myth dear to the hygienic rationality of pure reason and not completely absent from the demonic aestheticism of Nietzschean thought." But the metaphor of the desert is also "a privileged topology for the nomadic sentiments of modern thought . . . [it] can also become the place where we get lost, where our existence is swallowed up and cancelled" (87).

These two directions of thought are the extremes between which Chambers attempts to articulate and conduct "border dialogues" that resist the attractions of either polar position. He describes his own critical practice as something of a non-integrating negotiation of the two tendencies that addresses the margins and interstices found beside and between them:

I propose, given a certain scepticism on my part towards the eventual solutions proposed by both the rationalist and the aesthetic proposals, to circle in the margins and to flip between the respective perspectives, both because I believe that there is no obvious exit and because I think that ultimately they are historically and theoretically dependent upon one another. What their meeting does suggest, however, is the possibility of reshuffling the cards in play in order to find another chance, another prospect, in our lives. That, at least, is the temptation. (86)

This is certainly an appealing proposal, but Chambers has as difficult a time as anyone probably would have in attempting to describe a way of proceeding with such an agenda. His discussions of difference and of otherness, in both the psychoanalytical and cultural senses, go a long way to suggest a critical and political practice that recognizes and respects difference as such. But Chambers's suggestions are supported, in some degree, by reference to what he sees as the breakdown of national parochialism. His analysis of the contemporary disruptions in traditional forms and notions of nationalism, especially in Britain, suggest rather heavily that nationalism is a thing of the recent past, that cultural formations at the political and social level are, like the aesthetic dislocations of postmodernism, in such constant states of inflection and hybridization that no distinct formations of national identity based on mythical sources like "Englishness" can be taken seriously. As admirable as Chambers's idea of the passing of national integrities may be, it is at times difficult to determine whether he is *describing* or advising certain popular attitudes. Citing Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* twice in the course of "An Island Life," Chambers demonstrates the tenuousness and illusory strength of the concept of nationalism and of what Anderson calls "that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations." But Anderson's book not only evaluates the constructedness of nationalism; it attests to the continued popularity and vitality—however constructed—of nationhood. In the era of global "development," members of once colo-

nized territories are not only coming to roost in the metropolis, but they are staying home to bolster and exploit the possibilities for personal and communal profit in neo-nationhood. The phenomenon of eastern Europe and especially the former Soviet bloc during the past two years attests even more dramatically to this continued attractiveness of the nation as an idea among culture groups whose identities have until so recently been tied to first and second world conglomerate states.

Chambers's text elaborates a scene that would warm the heart of many in our own fields of professional and social interest, but it does not describe one that we read about in the newspapers every day. At the risk of privileging the newspapers as sources of "truth" where theoretical description fails, I would like to suggest that in fact many people in the United States, Europe, Africa, and Asia continue to see themselves as members of a national body politic and that this is precisely the source of much violence, racism, and traditional hatred across the contemporary globe.

One of the most interesting aspects of *Border Dialogues* is the position from which it establishes its discourse. Chambers has been living and working in Italy for several years, and, as he indicates in his introductory chapter, "The 'double solution'," it is the double view that this bi-cultural perspective gives him which allows him to see the dialogues between the metaphorical borders of his title:

Italy has provided me with an important critical counterpoint to a British experience. It has allowed me to look back on where I came from with different eyes and ears and to unpick and reassemble some of the bits and pieces of a particular history and formation. In particular, it has offered and opened up an intellectual itinerary that, after more than a decade of 'crises'—of Marxism, of reason, of modernism—now finds me on the beach, facing that 'open sea' of critical endeavour once invoked by Nietzsche. Caught between mimicry, alterity and ultimately silence, I write from two shores and between two cultures. (12-13)

Italy, it seems, is for him a different place from Britain, a place that lets him see home from a distance and from another set of values, traditions, histories. In the global scope of much of the book's attention, I would think that Italy would be considered to occupy a cultural position close to Britain's rather than so amply "other" as to allow this removed and somewhat regenerated view. It is tempting to understand Chambers's Italy as a postmodern version of Keats's "beaker full of the warm south," a place of removal and fair vision. Indeed, Chambers's sources are often Italian intellectuals with whom I, at least, had not been familiar, and he makes a great contribution by introducing their work into contemporary English language cultural discourse. But the "dialogue" is aimed mostly at analysis of British culture, with little if any attention to Italian intellectual or social life, even given the many quotations from Italian intellectual sources. This position recalls the American habit of going into the western wilderness for regeneration and re-vision of the civilized life of the east. But Italy is not substantially different from Britain in the global scheme that Chambers addresses.

Implicated in colonial exercises itself during the twentieth century, and sharing the values of individualism, capitalism, and industrialism on which Britain and the rest of Europe have rested their major narratives for many generations, Italy gives no substantial place of difference from the clamour of life in England—not unless Chambers is attempting to understand it once again as a sunny place to use and appropriate for the representation of one's own, British self.

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Richard A. Grusin. *Transcendental Hermeneutics: Institutional Authority and the Higher Criticism of the Bible*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1991. pp. xii, 196. \$32.50.

Richard Grusin has written a scholarly book of great importance for the understanding of the American literary movement of Transcendentalism that flourished between the 1830s and the end of the Civil War. As a volume of the "Post-Contemporary Interventions Series," edited by Stanley Fish and Fredric Jameson, *Transcendental Hermeneutics* re-examines the canon as a problem of reading texts.

Grusin examines Emerson's resignation from the Unitarian pulpit in September 1832, to begin his literary career. True, his resignation—as noted in his resignation sermon, "The Lord's Supper"—is clearly the result of his being unable to administer the Lord's Supper as an institution permanently authorized by Jesus. As a result, literary historians (for example, Richard Poirier and Ursula Brumm) have viewed the resignation as an act of rebellion to make the individual autonomous of a religious institutionalism, leading to a literary career as a path for such individualism. Emerson the literary artist is canonized as such because his rebellion led him to a language founded upon aesthetics, distinct from ordinary discourse; through this language, he set up significant oppositions between individual intuition ("genius") and institutions, the literary and the political, the self and society, the head and the heart.

However, literary historians do not examine what Grusin terms the "complication" of the sermon. The proper "complication" involves a study of hermeneutical practices deriving from specific issues of 1830 post-Puritan America. The central focus of the sermon is on how to interpret Christ's words about bread and wine becoming His body and blood at the Last Supper, and how that hermeneutical interpretation served Emerson as a theoretical model for interpreting other texts.

Emerson resigned not for reasons of secular individualism but to find a "true doctrine respecting forms" in which the rhetoric of a text could make individuals conscious of their "moral sense." The "moral self" was, in Emerson's view, a disposition for action which made individuals conscious of their virtues in the eyes of God, and this consciousness was Emerson's formulation of what individuals experienced in the moment of grace. Grace was an immediate experience that could give individ-