

find much rich and thought-provoking work here, numerous starting points and points of connection for further investigation. The work is commendable not only in terms of the quality of its research and the information it provides but also for the unsettling of disciplinary boundaries it productively enacts, and, perhaps most important, for the critical questions it raises, even if inadvertently.

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NOTE

¹ The other pieces are Steven Feierman's "Africa in History: The End of Universal Narratives"; Joan Dayan's "Haiti, History, and the Gods"; Anthony Pagden's "The Effacement of Difference: Colonialism and the Origins of Nationalism in Diderot and Herder"; J. Jorge Klor de Alva's "The Postcolonization of the (Latin) American Experience: A Reconsideration of 'Colonialism,' 'Postcolonialism,' and 'Mestizaje'"; Irene Silverblatt's "Becoming Indian in the Central Andes of Seventeenth-Century Peru"; and Emily Apter's "Ethnographic Travesties: Colonial Realism, French Feminism, and the Case of Elissa Rhais."

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Frank Birbalsingh, ed. *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996. Pp. xxiii, 206. \$18.95 pb.

Chelva Kanaganayakam. *Configurations of Exile: South Asian Writers and Their World*. Toronto: TSAR, 1995. Pp. xvi, 157. \$16.95 pb.

If the test of a theory is the predictability of results then it was absolutely certain that proclamations of the death of the author would be followed by the current fashion for biographies of living authors, autobiographies, barely disguised fictionalized autobiographies, and books of interviews. In Paris, so many famous, notorious, and wannabee poststructural death-of-the-author theorists have published autobiographies that there is now a very strictly enforced law mandating banishment to American universities.

There are other reasons for the flourishing of authors than Reality's taste for custard pies. With the rapid development of new literatures around the globe in various societies, and the constant movement of arts, artists, and styles across boundaries, how else would it be possible to understand what is happening without writers telling us? How would it ever be possible to see Rajiva Wijesinha's place in Sri Lankan literature, especially as Wijesinha became a novelist in direct response to rapidly deteriorating postcolonial politics. The anti-Tamil

riots of 1983 also made Jean Arasanayagam into a political writer who would identify with her husband's culture although his family persecuted her as a Burger outside their high caste. Although Chelva Kanaganayakam's Introduction to *Configurations of Exile: South Asian Writers and Their World* recycles nationalism, race, and language, the actual interviews are marvellously suggestive revelations covering a wide range of topics.

Where else would a non-specialist have learned that Wijesinha's novel *Acts of Faith* had to be published in India, or that because it was in English the government could ignore it although read by those with influence? Bapsi Sidhwa says that writing in English was allowed in Pakistan at a time when her novels would otherwise have been banned. There is now the problem that while her ironies translate into European languages, they do not into the main languages of Pakistan. Kirpal Singh comments that his use of "Singlish" (Singapore English) is disapproved of by those in authority and that the government permits allegory whereas more direct criticism would bring him trouble. Kanaganayakam's South Asians are Indians, Pakistanis, and Sri Lankans, often diasporic, and many are reminders that races, nations, ethnicities, and cultures are never pure. Just as "Singlish" mixes English with Tamil, Chinese, Malay, and Punjabi, so Singh is part Sikh, part Scottish-Jew; his wife is Singaporean Chinese, and he lived for many years in Australia.

The points of view are refreshing. Wijesinha respects Mrs. Gandhi for holding a fair election after she had proclaimed the Emergency and for sticking to the rules by suing Rushdie over his depiction of a specific falsity rather than having him bumped off—which happens to writers in Sri Lanka. Satendra Nandan says it was his discovery of Commonwealth literature at Leeds University that made him aware of the political dimensions of literature and led him out of the English Department into Fijian politics. Having survived two Fijian nativistic revolutions at the cost of being exiled to Australia, Nandan rightly complains of those who remain obsessed with imperial injustices while ignoring continuing postcolonial evils including local racism. The Indians of Fiji had settled there for 100 years and thought of it as home, yet the world did nothing when a group of the military ousted parliament and forced through a new constitution making Indians second-class citizens. Nandan's writing is necessarily autobiographical; he has not recovered from the shock of what happened. I wonder if those who speak glibly about the death of the author understand that many authors risk death and that some are murdered?

Suniti Namjoshi's charming, off-beat replies perhaps show that only by living in exile can one imagine a perfectly static "home" against which to rebel. She left and remained away from India to avoid the family being scandalized by her lesbianism. While for her, like some other self-exiles, there are two contrasting mental structures sup-

posedly expressive of opposing languages and cultures, her India seems a product of an Introduction to India 101, in which V. S. Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness* is the only text. How else can one explain such canards as Indians lack a sense of individuality, or the more charming idea that even if you are not a Hindu, it is sufficient to be raised around notions of transmigration for talking animals to be unexceptional. Just today I was told about the oral traditions of African-American women and talking animals. Although her thought is shaped by Western intellectual fashions of a few decades ago—a world rigidly compartmentalized into political categories, with men and women thinking, imagining, and writing differently—Namjoshi apparently lives in a private world of by now self-generating obsessions and many of her tales are criticisms of their politics. Kanaganayakam usefully reminds us of the formalism of her writing; and she remarks that she could not have survived teaching English at the University of Toronto without becoming a formalist. Arnold Itwaru's comments about multiculturalism seem appropriate: "The desire to retain what you had becomes even stronger when you come to an alien place. It becomes an emotional need. And that is an illusion here." Itwaru sees multiculturalism as the state "creating a dependency on its mechanisms of containment and its consortiums of power" (401).

Vikram Seth claims a lack of any fixed judgements beyond a writer's desire to give full expression to the feelings and ambitions of his characters and to avoid being bored or boring. It is, however, difficult to take seriously that books such as *The Golden Gate* and *A Suitable Boy*, requiring years of sustained work, were just passing whims. Shashi Tharoor observes that Seth, unlike himself, carefully plans and plots his chapters. The Seth interview is mostly surface, a charming public face, revealing little beyond the curious fact that Nandan was once Seth's English teacher in India.

The difficulties that result from placing writers within national, regional, or ethnic boundaries is indicated by David Dabydeen being included in both Kanaganayakam's and Frank Birbalsingh's books, whereas to me he is British. Kanaganayakam brings out Dabydeen's relationship to Walcott and V. S. Naipaul, especially the way the Naipaul of *The Enigma of Arrival* has become a father-figure that the next generation needs to slay; enter Oedipus Dabydeen with *Disappearance*. Those creole *Slave Songs* were really medieval alliterative poetry, sort of. In Birbalsingh's interview with Dabydeen, we are told of their being minimalist poetry and, in keeping with deconstructionist fashions and the death of the author, the poems are footnoted after the example of—take your choice—Alexander Pope and T. S. Eliot. What comes through is Dabydeen's reading and playfulness.

Birbalsingh's interviews are aggressive and interestingly biographically detailed—Dabydeen can remember his family fleeing the anti-Indian violence on the coast of Guyana when he was seven years old

—but I found the book disappointing. There is not enough that is new. Derek Walcott is represented by a meandering lecture. The interviews with Andrew Salkey and Jan Carew are only of interest for their historical details. Birbalsingh believes literature should serve political interests: the conversations show that some West Indian writers, notably George Lamming, remain committed to Castro, think the changes in Eastern Europe a mistake, regard democracy as a capitalist plot to divide workers, hope for a revival of Communism; others, such as Dionne Brand and Caryl Phillips, live in the First World while imagining themselves to be part of a Third World united in opposition to the West. As with Parisian intellectuals the discourse takes well-trodden paths and follows its own conventions without reference to reality. A. K. Heath has now lived for over 40 years in England without writing about or liking the country. Few of the authors have tried to return permanently to the West Indies. With the Caribbean enjoying a high standard of living, most of its dictators departed, and its African survivors increasingly regarded as a small part of the cultural brew, the past 150 years of writing Caribbean history needs to be re-thought. Significantly, the younger writers, such as Jamaica Kincaid, David Dabydeen, and Caryl Phillips interview best.

BRUCE KING



Bruce King, ed. *New National and Post-Colonial Literatures: An Introduction*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996. Pp. 311. \$108.00.

Bruce King's collection of essays has a strange title. Nowhere does it indicate that the literatures referred to are all written in English. Moreover, it is not clear whether the pairing of "new national" and "post-colonial" literatures indicates a distinction between two things or alternative names for the same thing. There can, of course, be post-colonial literatures that are not national literatures—this book includes essays by Vinay Dharwadker on "The Internationalization of Literatures," Chelva Kanaganayakam on "Exiles and Expatriates," Victor J. Ramraj on "Diasporas and Multiculturalism," and Adam Shoemaker on "Indigenous Literatures in Canada, Australia and New Zealand"—but can there be new national literatures in English that are not postcolonial? The title is best read as an affirmative answer to a question that it itself poses: whether the new national literatures of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand are fully as postcolonial as, say, the literatures of the Caribbean and Africa.

The title of King's introductory essay, "New Centres of Consciousness," is also mystifying (he cannot mean that people in Africa and India only came into consciousness when they started writing in English) until the reader realizes that the collection is primarily concerned with the "new nations" of Canada and Australia. More than half of the four-