

although she does not consider any comparable Indian text. Instead of trying to categorize or place it, she notes that "the novel suggests processes, and is filled with signs and significations of change," reflecting "a feminist *new* consciousness" (184). This is her basic premise about the novel and her discussion of the text follows from this. In the last section of her essay, Lal makes some crucial connections between the many questions of national identity that the Atwood novel raises and parallel implications of the Indian colonial/postcolonial identity, among them, "how to assert an individual voice, how to develop enabling institutions, how to overcome lingering self doubts left by the colonial experience" (189). As she sees it, for postcolonial Indian women writers who share some of these anxieties in their works, Atwood's novel can create a nexus, and provide useful grounds for comparison for "readers in the Indian academia" (189). Lal also mentions, pertinently but briefly, the correlation between the environmentalist protagonist in Atwood's novel and some recently emerging ideas of ecofeminism in Indian women's literature.

The third essay on literature is Chandra Mohan's "Native Women's Writing: Legends of My Ancestors." Mohan tries to isolate some thematic patterns that evolve specifically from the writers' cultural history, legends, and spirituality, as well as give a brief history of native writing in Canada. But most of the time the essay is too general, too much like a survey and not really directed at any specific kind of reading. He mentions a number of well-known native writers and their works but curiously enough does not consider any of them, say, Maria Campbell's *Half-breed* or Jeanette Armstrong's *Slash*. Instead, he chooses to confine his study to one anthology only, *Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada*; 18 of his 28 citations refer to this text. Needless to say, there is something top-heavy, or at least lopsided about this selection of material.

But there are several such incongruities or inconsistencies in *Perspectives on Women: Canada and India*, some of which I have already pointed out. All in all, the volume could have done with more thorough editing and even proofreading; names of authors and publishers are frequently misspelt, or inconsistently spelt, and therefore, misleading. A rather obvious error is the omission of P. R. Saradamani's name from the List of Contributors. On a more positive note, though, I should say that some essays in this collection are truly useful, while the rest work mostly as introductions to Canadian studies.

SUMANA SEN-BAGCHEE



Chelva Kanaganayakam. *Dark Antonyms and Paradise: The Poetry of Rienzi Crusz*. Toronto: TSAR, 1997. Pp. vi, 86. \$15.95 pb.

Dark Antonyms and Paradise: The Poetry of Rienzi Crusz is a thorough, accessible, and much-needed new reading of the poetry of a major Sri

Lankan-Canadian writer. Rienzi Cruz, born in Ceylon in 1925, emigrated to Canada in 1965, where he began his career as a poet. His poetry—seven collections published between 1974 and 1995 and, most recently, *Insurgent Rain: Selected Poems, 1974-1995*—inhabits, and continuously renegotiates, the space between his country of origin and adopted country, creating his identity as both “Sun-Man” and “Winter-Man.” In fact, the “elephant and ice” couplet (*Elephant and Ice* is his second volume of poems) presides over his writing like giant twin pillars—like Innocence and Experience in Blake. Cruz is certainly less well known than his compatriot, Michael Ondaatje, perhaps because readers take the “immigrant theme” for granted, ignoring other, more dynamic factors:

Whether Cruz likes it or not, he has often been forced to assume a hyphenated identity, to wear the mantle of a multicultural writer. Formal and aesthetic concerns, notions of a literary tradition and affinity with specific British, American and Spanish writers, for instance, have been deemphasized in order to focus on issues that seem more urgent, more relevant to the literary/cultural and political scene in Canada. The preoccupation with binaries and a concern with problems of alienation and exile have taken centre stage in most discussions. (Kanaganayakam 5)

Kanaganayakam sets out from the work of Judith Miller, Arun Mukherjee, Uma Parameswaran, and others who have identified the dialectical tensions underlying Cruz’s work. While this is organized around a journey motif, for Cruz, as Kanaganayakam shows, “the journey is a complex one, involving, historically, the Portuguese arriving on the shores of Ceylon, politically, the realities of postcolonial Ceylon, and, autobiographically, his migration from Ceylon to Canada” (1). Several journeys converge, then, in Cruz’s text. Moreover, the space he moves through is layered on itself, doubles back on itself. Both metaphorically and literally, the poet voyages forward and back, crossing and recrossing the same frontier. The old country becomes, momentarily, a destination; the new country becomes the place he has lost, or cannot find. So, his writing journey is open-ended, subject to variation, to endless revision.

Cruz’s earliest writing is linked to a painful set of personal circumstances: the break-up of his first marriage and the political upheaval in Sri Lanka. Ironically, a scattering, a closure, is in place at the start. Kanaganayakam shows that these violences mark him as “an elegiac poet” (15). “Elephant and ice” reappear as: heat/cold; dark/light; body/mind; feeling/thought, as if to indicate by this slippage not only connection but failed connection. But here is where Cruz’s poetry resonates. Cruz’s “less-educated mother” is the source of his “artistic impulse” (Kanaganayakam 19). His “scientific” father is “the cold arches of the brain” (Cruz; qtd. in Kanaganayakam 19). Cruz’s poetics of the particular, the moving, bursting, undulating image associated at first glance with his place of birth is set against his earliest, conven-

tional British education: Shakespeare, Milton, and the Bible. Fire and ice meet as well in Crusz's recollections of his first wife: Paramaswaran talks about the wife's "refusal to be held in the persona's arms, her secret trysts elsewhere, and the intense hold on him even long after she disappeared into the night" (qtd. in Kanaganayakam 23). We are reminded of how sensory imagery, sounds, and voices resolve continually into clear, sometimes harsh lines and shapes, motions and shadows. Time is suspended, opens to being infinitely recalled, retraced. In "Little Brown Boy," a poem in *Flesh and Thorn* (misquoted partially by Kanaganayakam), Crusz recalls

when cats wailed
on the parapet wall,
and the wind called,
called through the na trees,
and she rose like a zombie
and walked into her beloved night.
(Qtd. in Kanaganayakam 23)

Details are thrown into sharper relief by the woman's disappearance. What is captured is the memory of an absence: she is a present absence. Locating such paradoxes allows Kanaganayakam to defend Crusz against charges of mere exoticism, charges that position the poet too conveniently, and absolutely, on one or the other edges of his work. The real danger is that he might be neither here nor there, but in the middle. In "O Canada" (in *The Rain Doesn't Know Me Any More*), Canada is a stopover, not a destination, a curious conjunction of warm and cold, dark and light, real and fake, lovely and scary:

The land may freeze
even as we admire her blonde hair,
buttock lines, but Union Gas
will safely toast the chilling air
for our brown skins.
Expect some darkness from this woman. (14)

Canada and Sri Lanka mix, dissolve, appear inside each other. Crusz's topoi become a palimpsest; they become lenses through which each regards the other. So, as Kanaganayakam tells us, "imagination transforms the real into constructs; and despite the referentiality of his work, at some level he lives in a textual universe and works within its parameters" (53). It is, moreover, an interior world, built of domestic details, remnants, subject to routine. It is, too, a world of surfaces. Now we see the fate of the personal: all subjectivity, all memory, spills over into self-reflexivity.

The poem mirrors the poet, mirrors itself, as if having no other subject than itself to speak. We see "surfaces" in the consciousness of writing itself, where everything becomes a mirror to everything else. The world flattens onto the page. All things wear masks. In "reincarnation," the poet as "metempsychosis man" finds "all his enemies flat as paper"

(*The Rain* 30). For Kanaganayakam, it is "The Elephant Who Would Be a Poet" that serves as an apologia for his poetry and as an illustration of the thematic and formal preoccupations that run through his work":

Without command
 he eases his huge body to the ground
 rolls over,
 makes new architecture
 from his thick legs,
 four columns vertical
 to the sun. (Qtd. in Kanaganayakam 54)

Yet Cruzs has recourse also to metaphors of form: "architecture," "columns," "this crazy theatre of my mind" (qtd. in Kanaganayakam 54). Perhaps poetry is an excess that overflows into the coldness of self-referentiality, creating a rhetorized world of empty gestures, banalities. The exactness with which Cruzs collects his world seems to diminish it. In "Suitcase," (in *Beatitudes of Ice*) the poet's valuables, what he carries from there to here, are "Fruit-of-the-Loom underwear," "Listerine in Mint, toiletries / that exude 'Eternity'" (58).

But for Kanaganayakam, Cruzs's self-conscious "aesthetics" does not mean "retreating from the experiential. . . . Artifice enables the coexistence of contraries" (55). Not rhetoric, then, but progression, though a progression that faces inward, backward—which accounts possibly for Cruzs's narrative interest in the nineteenth-century Ceylonese outlaw, Sardiel (with his links to Ondaatje's Billy the Kid). In the end, Kanaganayakam's treatment of Cruzs creates the possibility of new departures *outward/into* the field of his text. To affirm Cruzs's "faith in the redemptive power of passion" (72), Kanaganayakam turns (back) to one of Cruzs's earliest mentors, Irving Layton—fellow dialectician of feeling and vision: "I couldn't think of a single poet who, groin tickled and happy, could achieve such delirium on paper" (qtd. in Kanaganayakam 72).

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