

Overall, Jyotsna Singh's *Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues: "Discoveries" of India in the Language of Colonialism* is marked by clear writing and strong research that make a difficult topic accessible to both students and teachers. The numbered subsections into which each chapter is divided facilitate easy reading. The book also offers rare and insightful quotations from British and Indian texts ranging over four centuries. By sustaining the trope of "discovery," Singh gives the book unity and meaning; the intersection between the "real" and an "imagined" India as well as between formal and informal voices is well introduced and fully developed.

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Patricia Ingham. *The Language of Gender and Class: Transformation in the Victorian Novel*. London & New York: Routledge, 1996. Pp. 197. US \$65.00, \$22.99 pb.

My difficulties with this book began with its title. Like many recent works of academic criticism, this book attempts to stake out as large a territory for itself as possible. Certainly Ingham's book is about "the language of gender and class," but only insofar as that language is used in a particular way, at a particular time, and as it affects one gender — women. Although the subtitle identifies the locus of these investigations — "the Victorian novel" — it compounds the problem by introducing yet another sweeping concept, "transformation." While it may seem unfair to criticize a text for its packaging, titles, epigraphs, and prefaces, conclusions and other paratextes are crucial in transforming isolated readings into a coherent, autonomous, and purposeful work: as Gérard Genette remarks in *Seuils*, the literally marginal paratexte can be defined as "ce par quoi un texte se fait livre". (7) Ironically, given that the purported focus of this text is "transformation," its own transformation from a series of academic exercises into a substantive work of scholarship has not been particularly successful.

Ingham's text conforms slavishly to the now-standard format for the academic thesis. In each half of the book a generalizing theoretical chapter precedes a group of three readings of individual novels. The whole is introduced by a chapter obviously intended as an introduction although not labelled as such. Indeed, this first chapter follows the self-aggrandizing pattern evinced in the book's title: Chapter One claims to discuss "the representation of society in the early nineteenth century." Representation in what medium? By whom? Of what society? The reader eventually learns that Ingham will be discussing "the fictional treatment of the two (central) signs relating to middle-class femininity and to fallen women" (27), but this is a far cry from "the representation of society." Isn't it? And while the title and intro-

ductory chapters of this book arrogate a presumptuous importance to its project, the book's "example" chapters — those devoted to readings of individual novels — are identified only by the novels' titles. Thus, chapters 3, 4, and 5 are entitled "Shirley," "North and South," and "Hard Times." As I regularly remind undergraduates, "those titles are already taken." I am not merely quibbling here: the imprecision of this book's presentation and organization weakens the force of its argument. As most academic writers learn sooner or later, diagramming a project by devising coherent, well-focused titles that sketch out the development of the argument is a valuable exercise in foregrounding the purpose and focus of the project: in deciding, for the writer as much as for the reader, the project's *raison d'être*. While Ingham's book contains many interesting observations about the texts under scrutiny, it lacks a fundamental coherence, that sense of graceful and assured inevitability that characterizes the best thinking and writing.

Indeed, the only area in which this book departs from the conventions of the academic thesis is in its lack of a conclusion. In three paragraphs at the end of the final chapter — on *Jude the Obscure* — Ingham attempts to summarize her argument and her examples. After a brief discussion of the way authors "shift the meaning of [linguistic] signs as speakers shift the meaning of words by the sentences or contexts into which they insert them" (177), Ingham begins a new paragraph:

Looked at in the light of this, it is possible to describe a dominant or "core" meaning for a "womanly" or conventionally feminine Victorian woman as including middle-class status, sexual purity and selflessness. Secondary features are moral and emotional refinement, maternal and domestic skills, submissiveness. . . . What this account defines is stereotypes. But each instance is a particular exponent of the sign and a variation on it (or particular accenting of it). The women already discussed illustrate this and also illustrate the slow process of change in the meaning of the signs. Margaret Hale in *North and South* is a fairly typical example of the first sign. . . . (177)

After a further paragraph reviewing the main female characters in the novels discussed, Ingham's conclusion returns to a discussion of *The Unclassed* and *Jude the Obscure*. Here are the book's concluding two sentences:

The Unclassed, like other novels, reverts finally to a narrative syntax which underwrites the social status quo. *Jude* overwrites this structure by another which to the end asserts that the story of working-class individuals signifies brutal inequality. (182)

Please, Ms. Ingham, could we have some more? Or, to bring Oliver's lament into our moment of Generation X-ers: "you mean this is it?"

The book's basic premise is not uninteresting. Ingham uses Bakhtin's notion of dialogism and the structuralist view of linguistic signs as arbitrary and fluid to argue that novelists were able to change social

perceptions of women by changing their fictional representation: life, that is, imitates art. "I wish to show," writes Ingham, "how the attempts to reaccent the signs of both the *womanly* woman and the *fallen* woman succeeded in rewriting their significance and what this meant for the treatment of class and gender as a whole" (20). Yet the focus of Ingham's investigation seems to dissipate as the book progresses. At various moments Ingham alludes to the Brontës' use of pseudonyms, narrative syntax, "the more expansive language of women" (47), "women's language" (48), and Victorian conventions of motherhood, in addition to returning regularly to a discussion of working-class unrest and generalized social instability. Yet, with the possible exception of the last topic, these concepts are invoked rather than discussed. Ingham's discussion of "arrative syntax" and her claims about the narratorial voices in the novels she discusses would have benefitted from some reading in standard and feminist narrative theory: her Bibliography omits reference to any of Booth, Chatman, Felman, Genette, Lanser, Prince, Rimmon-Kenan, Winnett. And the same goes for "women's language," motherhood, and representations of the fallen woman. These subjects have been widely discussed by feminists, sociologists, historians and philosophers in addition to literary critics: much recent work could be helpful to Ingham's study.

This book is frustrating to read; its prose is mechanical and unmelodic. Yet Ingham is working in a fascinating area. The novels she discusses are indeed fertile ground for any discussion of class and gender representation, the gendered and subversive uses of language, the strategic use of narrative voice and narrative structure — to name a few. But Ingham's book kept reminding me of the plate-spinner from the Ed Sullivan show: darting frantically back and forth, he kept a frenzy of china plates madly spinning on poles. In the same way, this book darts back and forth: language, gender, class, transformation, narrators, syntax are each poised on the top of a slender, unstable pole. Unhappily, such acrobatics do not make for a very satisfying intellectual experience.

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Commonwealth and American Nobel Laureates in Literature: Essays in Criticism is a collection of sixteen essays, with a preface and introduction