

Book Reviews

Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby, eds. *Modernism and Empire*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000. Pp. xiii, 338. \$69.95, \$29.95 pb.

Modernism and Empire is a collection of essays that address the relations between colonialism and modernist literature. The topic is significant and timely. As the editors stress, there has been considerable work on colonialism and Victorian literature, and on the putative relations between post-modernism and post-colonialism. However, modernism has been little discussed in connection with the structures and ideologies of the British empire. This volume is a valuable attempt to fill that gap.

In fact, there are not many essays in this collection that I found greatly illuminating. Even the best are flawed, primarily as a result of their conformity to currently standardized ways of thinking about colonialism. This occurs most obviously through hyperbolic rhetoric. Today, a writer who makes a joke about colonialism is not merely rejecting colonial ideology. He/she is "subverting" colonialism itself — an exaggerated claim that trivializes real, practical challenges to colonialism. Along with this, there is a self-righteousness in discussions of literature and colonialism, an attempt to show one's moral superiority by uncovering perfidy in seemingly innocuous acts. For example, a number of these essays consider the issue of whether a European writer's use of non-European literary ideas is an act of colonialist plunder. Whatever they conclude, the entire discussion is misdirected. First, literary principles are not an exhaustible resource, like gold. If I take gold out of a country, then there is less gold there for the inhabitants. But if I write a poem that draws on the ghazal tradition, that does not leave *less* of the ghazal tradition available to Iranians. Second, it is not clear to me that anyone can properly be said to own a literary tradition. Do Irish and Indians have no business teaching or writing on Shakespeare because the English own him? Do Hindus own the *Ramayana*, so that Muslims can be persecuted for drawing on that tradition in their art?

There are also more banal intellectual problems with much work in this area. For example, there is a great deal of fuzziness even in technical

terminology. An obvious instance in this volume is the word "modernism" itself. Its meaning is never quite clear. The definitions offered by some writers are either vague or excessively broad. Thus a number of essays explain modernism by reference to the incorporation of non-European culture. But the incorporation of non-European culture was equally crucial to Romanticism. Indeed, non-western ideas have played a consequential role in Europe stretching back through Scholasticism even to Platonism.

Fortunately the collection is greater than the sum of its parts. A reader cannot finish this volume without recognizing that colonial concerns are deeply important to many modernist writers and that one's interpretations and evaluations of many modernist works will suffer if one ignores their relation to colonialism. Moreover, if there were few essays that I found particularly insightful, there was not one essay which I did not find valuable in some way.

Patrick Williams presents a theoretical treatment of the general topic. In well considered arguments, he shows the problems with some influential beliefs, incisively examining work by Said, Jameson, and others. However, Williams's positive treatment of the relation between colonialism and modernism is less compelling. The next essay, by Rod Edmond, considers ideas about degeneration, first in colonialist writings, then in Conrad and Eliot. The historical material is very interesting, and it does seem to fit Eliot in particular. It is not clear that linking Eliot with this particular current of thought adds much to our interpretive understanding of him, although it does highlight the colonialist connection. Next, Helen Carr treats imagism. She presents informative material on the genealogy of the movement, but her discussion of Eastern influences contains few surprises. However, she argues convincingly for the less commonly recognized influence of Irish culture. Moreover, in both cases, she usefully stresses colonial connections.

Four of the next five essays treat Ireland. Elleke Boehmer discusses Yeats and Leonard Woolf. The discussion of Woolf is more valuable, as his work is less widely known. Nonetheless, the discussion of Yeats, especially in his relation to Tagore, does bring out some complexities in Yeats's attitudes toward colonialism. C. L. Innes also treats Yeats, along with Joyce. The essay includes a thoughtful criticism of Jameson. However, it is difficult to accept Innes's positive view that Yeats's and Joyce's use of "personal autobiography" is, as such, anti-colonial. Following this, John Nash perceptively disputes readings of *Ulysses* by Cheng and Nolan, going on to discuss Joyce's use of the London *Times* in "Cyclops." The information on the *Times* is interesting, although it does not significantly affect our interpretation of *Ulysses*. Finally, Maire ni Fhlathuin discusses Patrick Pearse as an anti-colonial modernist. The discussion is very informative, but Fhlathuin's characterization of Pearse as a modernist is unconvincing. The characteristics he shares with modernists are equally shared by Romantics.

Janet Montefiore discusses Kipling, arguing that he is not as simplistically colonialist as is often assumed. Although she overstates her case regarding the political complexity of Kipling's work, her discussion of war images, particularly chlorine gas, is convincing and indicates Kipling's ambivalence toward at least some aspects of imperial ideology. Howard Booth takes up Lawrence's theory that English culture could be revived by a transfusion from the colonies. He shows that Lawrence changed his ideas on this as he came into contact with other societies, toward which his attitude was frequently colonialist. Nigel Rigby finds a more open-minded attitude in the work of Sylvia Townsend Warner. It is good that he treats this less known author. However, his analysis is too narrowly constrained by current theoretical preferences. For example, Warner presents a European who cannot learn Polynesian music, while a Polynesian character, Lueli, learns Polynesian and European music easily. One obvious interpretation is that Lueli recognizes universal principles of music and makes use of that recognition. But Rigby infers almost the precise opposite. He insists that the problem with imperialism is the suppression of difference, not the failure to recognize similarity. Thus he interprets Polynesian music as "atonal" and "following a completely different system" (234). If this were the case, it would be difficult to see how Lueli could learn Western music so easily. But, in fact, it is not the case (see McLean 109).

Mark Williams's essay is particularly valuable as the one piece in the collection that treats non-white writers in any detail, a major flaw in this collection being the almost complete absence of non-European authors. Specifically, Williams discusses Patricia Grace and Witi Ihimaera, even though his focus is on Katherine Mansfield.

Up to this point, the essays are remarkably accessible, but the final essays are more in keeping with common writing practices in the field. Abdulrazak Gurnah argues that "The central yearning of *Out of Africa* is to find the true self in the other, and then to expel the other by representing its otherness" (286). I don't know what this means. However, Gurnah does usefully isolate distinct ideological senses of "the settler," which bear not only on Dinesen, but on other writers also.

The final essay, by Bill Ashcroft and John Salter, presents an informative overview of Australian modernism. However, it too is marred by uncertainty. For example, they maintain that the problem of aboriginal land rights "is not simply a problem of racial and cultural exclusion; it is a failure of inherited discourses of spatiality" (293). Certainly, land rights are complex. They involve issues of law, economic structure, and various sorts of force, such as policing. But I have no idea what "a failure of inherited discourses of spatiality" might be.

In sum, the individual essays in the collection have a number of faults characteristic of studies in literature and colonialism. There is clearly a great deal of work to be done on the topics treated in these essays.

However, whatever its flaws, this collection does make very clear that the relationship between colonialism and literary modernism is deep and consequential — and thus deserving of further study. It is a good beginning.

WORKS CITED

McLean, Mervyn. "The Structure of Tikopia Music." In Raymond Firth, with Mervyn McLean. *Tikopia Songs: Poetic and Musical Art of a Polynesian People of the Solomon Islands*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990. 107-24

PATRICK COLM HOGAN

Gregory Elliott. *Perry Anderson: The Merciless Laboratory of History*. Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota P, 1998. Pp. 340. \$39.95.

There can be no doubt that Perry Anderson is one of the most important Marxist critics in the Anglo-American world today. The author of more than ten books, the editor for many years of the influential London journal *New Left Review*, Anderson has produced a body of writings reflecting on history, national cultures, Marxist theories, poststructuralism and postmodernism. Under Anderson's leadership, New Left Books (now Verso) embarked on an ambitious project to translate both classical studies and contemporary interventions within Western Marxism into English; the series made the writings of Berthold Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Jean-Paul Sartre, Louis Althusser, Nicos Poulantzas and others available to a wider English and North American readership, influencing developments in literary, cultural and social theories across a range of disciplines. In *Perry Anderson: The Merciless Laboratory of History* Gregory Elliott provides a useful assessment of this important contemporary thinker, whose work is not as well known as it deserves to be in literary and cultural studies.

In the auspicious summer of 1968 Anderson published "Components of the National Culture," an article in which he undertook to analyze, drawing on an Althusserian-inspired methodology, the contradictions and overdeterminations in British academic culture and their implications for the development of leftist strategies. He locates a dual absence in the intellectual traditions of his national culture: first, there has been no important Marxist thinker in Britain, and, second, there is no sociological theorist to compare with European theorists such as Emil Durkheim or Max Weber. What this points towards in Anderson's suggestive argument is the ideological domination of British empiricism over any theoretical traditions which lay claim to investigating totalities. In Elliott's phrasing, "Components of the National Culture" is "a remarkable essay in cultural mapping" (52-53), one whose audacious scope gestures towards a beginning of the kind of intellectual tradition missing in British culture. While poststructuralist and postmodernist thinkers have attuned readers at the end of the century to suspect Anderson's stress on