

Book Reviews

Patrick Colm Hogan. *Colonialism and Cultural Identity: Crises of Tradition in the Anglophone Literatures of India, Africa, and the Caribbean*. Albany, NY: State U of New York P. 2000. Pp. xix, 353. \$20.95.

With *Colonialism and Cultural Identity*, Patrick Colm Hogan offers readers of postcolonial writing a broad-based if eventually predictable analytic typology of identity constructions formed in response to the colonial experience.

Proceeding from the contention that concepts like mimicry and hybridity have been both unsystematically theorized and decontextualized by contemporary postcolonial theory, Hogan maps out his own spectrum of the colonized's different graduated responses to indigenous and metropolitan cultures. This spectrum extends from tradition-based orthodoxy at the one end, to alienating hybridity at the other. Such postcolonialist categories are then related to their matching gender configurations (the term "postcolonialist" for Hogan signifies "postcolonization," to distinguish what is being discussed from the postcolonial as it is more commonly, and he believes a-historically, understood). According to Hogan, then, gender is "a special case of standard [postcolonialist] relations to cultures" (320). Thus, not unsurprisingly, patriarchal conservatism becomes a function of orthodoxy, and a confusion of gender identity relates to the anomie of hybridity.

The book ends with a glossary-appendix, offered, the author says, in response to his first readers' request for more immediate access to his terms of analysis. General definitions for his main identity categories are thus set out in summary form, and indeed provide a useful index to his thought, especially given the tendency of his sometimes overly fine or verbally loaded definitions to lose their distinctiveness and blur into each other. A sample, which, though relatively crisp, is still representative: "neocolonial nativism is related to both mimetic collaborationism and opportunistic nativism" (72).

Across the body of book, its eight main chapters, Hogan presents analysis and substantiation of a different kind, in exhaustively

close readings of seven “native” and postcolonial (or, collectively, postcolonialist) novels, which are intended as exemplifications of his categories. These novels range from Tagore’s *Gora* (a chapter richly informed by Hogan’s obvious specialism in Indian literatures) and Attia Hosain’s *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, to Derek Walcott’s *Dream on Monkey Mountain* and, almost inevitably, Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*.

While it is apparent that Hogan has little patience with what he somewhat crudely and tendentiously represents as the “conceptually imprecise” hegemonies of postcolonial discourse, especially the work of Homi Bhabha (25), it is equally apparent that he even so owes his understanding of colonial contact, and the ambivalences and diversities of response generated by that contact, to certain of the prominent postcolonial theorists, not least Bhabha. As he demonstrates, however, he is concerned at the same time to accommodate other theoretical approaches, feminist theory most obviously, which have intersected with or supplied methodologies for postcolonial studies. He also pays some lip-service to Marxism, for its recognition of the materiality of colonial oppression, but his analysis is not otherwise much concerned with class and cultural practice as such, or the economies of colonial or neo-colonial rule.

Essentially, as his dedication to Noam Chomsky suggests, Hogan wishes to speak on behalf of what he repeatedly promotes as universalism (empathic rather than absolutist), on the basis of which his transcultural categories, “common to all relevant regions” (xii), are constructed. For him it is this universalism that justifies the critical importance of his typology, which we might otherwise dismiss as yet another analytic system, as opposed to one with universal applicability.

Throughout, his primary objective is to systematize what we might call the post-colonialist equivalent of Chomsky’s deep-structure theory in linguistics, which, like Chomsky’s, is built on the belief in and the assumption of a common humanity, that “all human societies share fundamental cognitive, emotive, ethical, and other properties and principles” (xv), including a feeling of compassion towards others generated by literature. The book indeed becomes a kind of credo for this belief, and this feeling. With regard to the contemporary animus against universalism, Hogan claims that universalism has unfortunately been misrepresented as a chauvinistic projection. Tagore, Ngugi, Ashis Nandy, and Kwame Appiah are all cited in support of his more accepting, humane approach: “Respect for different cultures is not the antithesis of universalism, but a *consequence* of universalism,” Hogan writes (xviii; his emphasis).

Given the centrality of identity formation to postcolonial struggles and writing, an academic study that is concerned to clarify while at the same time also helpfully interrelating different but connected colonized “types,” cannot be anything but welcome. Yet a fundamental

drawback of Hogan's universalist paradigms is their tendency, almost unavoidably perhaps, to homogenize texts, and readings of different texts. In each case, whether we are looking at Jean Rhys or at Earl Lovelace, at Emecheta or at Hosain, the same underlying categories of response are extracted, to the extent that a reader can begin to predict the patterns and the development of individual chapters, depending on the novel under scrutiny. Each text is in effect processed through a grid or template, like sentences in Chomskyan analysis, whereby commonalities are highlighted, and idiosyncrasies and ambiguities signalled but finally flattened out. Literature becomes grist to an analytic mill. One is left with a dizzying and indeed alarming sense of infinite extension — or is it infinite regression? — whereby, according to this approach, any given post-colonialist text will generate its recognizable patterns according to the basic underlying typology. It is as though these are to be seen as natural character types, which mirror certain fixed and hard-wired qualities in us all.

Despite Hogan's heartfelt and even at times persuasive case for universalism, such conflation and eventual overgeneralizations have to be recognized as a major drawback of his approach. Indeed, viewed from a reverse angle, his tendency to overgeneralize becomes the strongest recommendation for the spectre which is so tiresomely dismissed in the book as postcolonial theory. In our reading of postcolonial literatures, after all, what should remain key is the degree of attention which we can give to the particular ambivalences, nuances, and fluidity, the *thisness*, for want of a better word, of individual postcolonial texts. To this finally Hogan's analytic typologies do not, indeed cannot, give adequate scope.

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Rod Edmond. *Representing the South Pacific: Colonial Discourse from Cook to Gauguin*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997. 307 pp. \$59.95.

Representing the South Pacific: Colonial Discourse from Cook to Gauguin provides a detailed examination of representations of the South Pacific islands and islanders in European literature from the time of first contact through the early twentieth century. Edmond's thesis is that these representations, although one-sided and governed by period and socio-political constructs, are nonetheless critical in their depiction of the Europeans. The author regards this one-sided perspective as regrettable though inevitable, given that there is a plethora of cultural material for analyzing the European perspectives, but a scarcity of native-authored sources. I disagree with Edmond's insistence on "the relative absence of historical indigenous viewpoints" (21): the Pacific in fact is rich in terms of oral histories and indigenous literatures. If he had given greater attention to Islander writers instead of the