

part of the world. What Hitchens's essays show is not so much that imaginative writing changes the world, but that instead, a crucial poem or work of fiction can crystallize issues at an important moment. He illustrates how protagonists in literary controversies always show their political colours. He traces the process by which arguments used to support or condemn a Wilde or a Wodehouse become the arguments for or against political or legal actions. As Hitchens states more than once in the volume, the activities of "making sentences" and "pronouncing sentences" eventually coincide. In the face of so many appalling sentences pronounced in recent decades, how is it that Hitchens's gloomiest exposés never fail to reassure? Perhaps it is because of their solid liberal faith that Auden's ironic points of light remain visible through the murk, and that the messages they flash out still reach an audience of "the just."

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Works Cited

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Graham Huggan. *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. London: Routledge, 2001. Pp. xvi, 328. \$38.95.

What do we, as politically committed cultural critics, do when the postcolonial critique of the fetishization of cultural difference is in fact what makes the field of postcolonialism a hotly sought-after commodity? What happens when the postcolonial slides, sometimes invisibly, yet inexorably, into a form of colonial nostalgia? How does one talk about cultural difference without reifying it beyond recognition? These are the kinds of questions Graham Huggan is exploring in *The Postcolonial Exotic*. As Huggan points out, postcolonial discourse has long been characterized by soul-searching, yet Huggan provides an additional twist on this process in his analysis and history of the institution of postcolonial studies itself. In so doing, he fills an important gap in current postcolonial theoretical debates.

Huggan's analysis of the paradox at the heart of postcolonial discourse is compelling. The index of this constitutive contradiction is what he terms "the postcolonial exotic." The postcolonial exotic is the repressed contradiction that has haunted postcolonialism from its beginnings; it refers to the in-

commensurable contradiction between the universal and the local; theoretical abstraction and grounded political intervention; sameness and difference; complicity and resistance; commodity fetishism and leftist critique. It “represents the interface between two apparently incompatible systems—the oppositional system of postcolonial resistance and the profit-driven system of the transnational culture industries and global trade” (263). Central to the functioning of the postcolonial exotic is the fetish. In the classic Freudian formulation, one might say that the fetish signals loss through excessive presence; it enables a disavowal of an unpleasant reality through an obsessive overcompensation. As a paradoxical figure, it is an unstable system of containment, holding the place of presence and absence at once. The postcolonial exotic, in Huggan’s formulation, performs a similar function. If exoticism is “an aestheticising process through which the cultural other is translated, relayed back through the familiar,” in a postcolonial context it is repoliticized, “redeployed both to unsettle metropolitan expectations of cultural otherness and to effect a grounded critique of differential relations of power” (ix-x). This, Huggan asserts, is a symptom of the pathology of late twentieth-century Western societies, which commodify the margins as a means of affirming the security of a lost yet longed for authenticity.

Specifically, Huggan is interested in the ways resistance and marginality have come to act as “commodified vehicle[s] of symbolic power” (29). He accomplishes this by focussing on the conflicts inherent in particular commodities of postcolonialism, each of which he subjects to a perspicacious deconstruction. The global appetite for the commodity of an authentic other, for instance, is evident in the international reception of Indo-Anglian writing. Yet Huggan’s analysis of these case studies is perceptive in its account of the ways “native informants” themselves contribute to the commodification of an “Indian” authenticity. Thus, Huggan explores the ways Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy have contributed to their own celebrity status. *Midnight’s Children*, celebrated as a “foundational” text in international postcolonial studies, is central to Huggan’s analysis, for it provides an illustrative case of the ways many ostensibly postcolonial novels (often read for their representation of a localized cultural other) deconstruct their own postcoloniality. In the case of *Midnight’s Children*, the novel offers an ironic critique of the globalized celebration of a consumable India (in part through Saleem’s well-known packaging of India in a series of pickle jars) while also contributing to the dissemination of an exotic India constructed for Western consumption.

Huggan conducts a similar institutional analysis of the Margaret Atwood industry, the British Booker Prize, and Heinemann’s African Writers Series.

The latter, committed to marketing a particular version of a “postcolonial” African literature, canonized a body of work which was thought to embody a kind of “anthropological exotic” (37). However, like Rushdie, many of these authors participate in what Huggan calls a form of “strategic exoticism” (xi). While at once celebrated for their ethnographic purchase on an unmediated “Africa,” many of these texts, including Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, in fact offer a self-conscious counter-ethnographic critique of the quest for anthropological authenticity.

What is perhaps most valuable in Huggan’s exploration of the commodification of the “exoticized” margins is his destabilization of the opposition between East and West in the dynamic of postcolonial cultural production. The commodification of otherness is thus seen to operate on both sides, even if it is Western audiences that are ultimately positioned as the consumers of postcolonial products. Huggan’s analysis of the ways writers such as Rushdie and Kureishi have engaged in a form of “strategic exoticism” or “staged marginality” (77, 87) offers a brilliant example of the ways exoticization has become “integral, rather than peripheral, to the postcolonial field of cultural production” (121).

This contradiction within the field of postcolonialism is nowhere more obvious than in the overlaps between commercial and academic responses to the postcolonial exotic, highlighted, most overtly, in the phenomenon of the Booker Prize. Huggan explores the compromised history of the Booker company, which has its origins in the Booker-McConnell company’s colonial operations in Guyana in the nineteenth century, and concludes by noting the contradiction inherent in the functioning of the award: on the one hand, the Prize opens the field of literature in English to include writings from the so-called peripheries; on the other, it succeeds in containing any possibility of radical cultural critique in these texts “by endorsing the commodification of a glamorised cultural difference” (110). It thus participates in the dual character of exoticism, celebrating cultural difference for the ways it can be rendered familiar and assimilable. The identification of a particular Booker content has been highlighted by Rushdie and others, yet Huggan is astute to point out the ways the Booker’s glamorization of “Raj nostalgia” is itself internally divided. While such nostalgic texts offer a revisioning and critique of past colonial histories, they also recuperate the ambiance of an exotic place/time of imperial splendour.

Huggan’s account of the “other” side of postcolonial studies, the commodification of postcoloniality, owes much to the theoretical precedent of such cultural analysts as Pierre Bourdieu, Terry Goldie, Sara Suleri, Deborah Root, and Aijaz Ahmad. Applying Bourdieu’s analysis of the “agents of legitima-

tion” in the consecration of literary texts and authors (212), Huggan extends these precepts to the field of postcolonial studies as a whole. In the process, he makes an important distinction between postcolonialism and postcoloniality: “The first of these concerns largely localised agencies of resistance, the second refers to a global condition of cross-cultural symbolic exchange” (ix). However, while indebted to Ahmad’s materialist critique of the global commodification of postcolonialism, Huggan’s approach seeks to evade a wholesale rejection of the postcolonial field by assessing the constitutive (yet nevertheless enabling) split at the very core of postcolonial discourse: that is, the ways postcolonialism launches an anti-imperial critique which can in turn be marketed for neo-colonial ends (ix).

For those of us engaged as writers and/or critics in the field of literary postcolonialism, this is a sobering book. It is particularly important at this historical moment, when postcolonialism’s success internationally, and academically, risks becoming its own liability. Huggan’s analysis might help those of us who remain committed to an oppositional postcolonial politics to recognize our blind-spots. It provides an insightful view of how postcolonial writers and theorists are at once empowered and constrained by the very success of the discourse they embrace. If the postcolonial exotic is complicit with the forces of globalized capital and academic professionalism, it is also “an agent of productive destabilisation” (262). In other words, Huggan’s assessment needn’t reduce us to a condition of listless apathy, but rather should alert us to the pitfalls as well as the possibilities of a demystified postcolonialism: “The language of resistance is entangled, like it or not, in the language of commerce; the anti-colonial in the neocolonial; postcolonialism in post-coloniality” (264). This book calls for us to confront our internalized uncertainties, to attend to the repressed voice of a self-critical postcolonial scepticism as embodied in the African Tintin figure with which Huggan concludes his study: “so, you find me exotic; and what does that say, my friend, about *you*?” (264).

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