

and critique the dominant ideologies. Her valorization of the U.S. as a locus for positive change in novels like *Jasmine* problematizes her position as a postcolonial intellectual, for she fails to see the threat of American neocolonialism.

There are several other articles in this collection that are worth mentioning. Samir Dayal examines the pervasiveness of violence in Mukherjee's work, arguing that the ambivalent functionality of violence in *Jasmine* reveals "the contradictions of postcolonial subject-formation" (65). Janet M. Powers offers an interesting deconstructive reading of Mukherjee's fiction. Using Roland Barthes's system of structural analysis of narrative, Powers highlights the sociopolitical commentary generated in Mukherjee's novels of the Indian immigrant experience in the United States. Pushpa N. Parekh looks at the narrative voice and gender roles in *Jasmine*, focussing on how these techniques are used in delineating the "selving" process of the immigrant women. Gurleen Grewal investigates the many inconsistencies that plague *Jasmine*. She makes a convincing case of the utter improbability of Jasmine's adventures and changes of identities in the United States, showing Mukherjee's insensitivity to the real struggles of immigrant women. Mitali R. Pati examines the culture conflict that Mukherjee's Indian immigrants experience in her short stories. Carole Stone makes a comparative analysis of the short fiction of Bernard Malamud and Mukherjee. Maya Manju Sharma traces the development of Mukherjee as an artist, with focus on her early work. Pramila Venkateswaran examines Mukherjee as an autobiographer, arguing that *Days and Nights in Calcutta* marks the turning point in her artistic development.

Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives is a useful collection of essays with plenty of material that the reader will find interesting and challenging or, at the very least, controversial.

SHAMSUL ISLAM

Bruce Greenfield. *Narrating Discovery: The Romantic Explorer in American Literature, 1790-1855*. New York: Columbia UP, 1992. pp. x, 249.

Discovery narratives, so Bruce Greenfield in *Narrating Discovery*, are part of colonial discourse, for "reporting on an exploratory journey . . . meant casting individual activity in terms that would be recognized and valued in European and colonial power centres" (10). These introductory remarks are apropos; they are also somewhat alarming, because a reader versed in recent travel criticism may fear that this is yet another predictable and jargon-ridden tract without due attention to the texts. Such a reader will be pleasantly surprised: *Narrating Discovery* is one of the most intelligent and thought-provoking books in the field to have come along in recent years; in its unassuming way, it is equally respectful towards its material and its reader without ever relinquishing its own intellectual integrity.

The cover illustration captures the spirit of the book better than its title: what first appears to be a black-and-white reproduction of a Romantic painting turns out to be a contemporary photograph, and the figure reclining against a backdrop of fog-shrouded mountains is not a languorous worshipper of nature but a wary-looking modern-day hiker: indeed, the book is much concerned with the conflicts that many "discoverers" have had to negotiate between preconception and reality. Nor were the conflicts necessarily motivated by romanticism; Greenfield spends much space on discussing narratives in which romanticism was patently not an issue. Among these is Samuel Hearne's *Journey to the Northern Ocean*, and here, too, the subtitle is somewhat confusing: Greenfield begins with narrators who are traditionally considered part of Canadian exploration literature (Hearne, MacKenzie, Henry). He may, of course, argue that these, too, are part of the (North) American picture, but since he sets out to trace a development beginning with Hearne *et al.*, continuing with Lewis and Clark, Zebulon Pike and John Charles Frémont, and culminating in Irving, Poe, and Thoreau, he is clearly after a (U.S.) American literary ancestry. Given the efforts in Canadian-American comparative studies to insist on differences as well as similarities in the two lineages, it would have been worthwhile to learn of Greenfield's views on the matter.

Narrating Discovery outlines a development that begins with a dominantly "collective errand as embodied in commercial and governmental institutions" (21), as difficult as it often was to sustain the impersonal voice of such narratives, and moves towards romantic individualism by "radically shifting the authority for the traveler's undertaking for sponsoring institutions to the traveler's personal experiences" (174). Greenfield is careful to insist that such individualism may be a form of colonialism even more pernicious than the original, for in order to inscribe that "particular destiny" (182), romanticists found it necessary to postulate a virgin land devoid of aboriginal inhabitants and traditions. The thesis of the book may be simple enough, but it still provides unusual historical and generic perspectives for Irving, Thoreau, and Poe, placing them in the middle of a development rather than at its beginning.

The approach of the book—by author rather than theme—makes for some redundancy. At the same time, it makes for a persuasive cumulative argument that leaves the specificity of each text intact. Like his colleagues in travel criticism, Ian MacLaren and Mary Louise Pratt, Greenfield is particularly strong in rhetorical analysis. Researchers interested in this approach will find excellent work on classic tropes such as the explorer as Adamic man or the half-breed guide as liminal figure. Greenfield might have made more of the special resonance that his comments on Irving's *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* acquired in 1992, the book's year of publication: Columbus's depiction as Christian martyr and the narratological complications of a text de-

voted to propagandising his mission make interesting footnotes to the many assessments, that year, of Columbus's arrival in America. In a quotation from Irving's *The Adventure of Captain Bonneville*, Greenfield also offers a poignant extension of Pratt's analysis of the bird's-eye view as imperialist perspective; here, the spectator usurps Native traditions to legitimize his undertaking:

For a time the Indian fable seemed realized: he had attained that height from which the Blackfoot warrior, after death, first catches a view of the land of souls, and beholds the happy hunting grounds spread out below him, brightening with the abodes of the free and generous spirits. The captain stood for a long while gazing upon this scene, lost in a crowd of vague and indefinite ideas and sensations. (159)

Narrating Discovery is a fine book, reminding one that much groundwork for the analysis of imperialist discourse has been accomplished in American Studies, a perhaps paradoxical situation not always sufficiently acknowledged in postcolonial criticism.

EVA-MARIE KRÖLLER

Brian McHale. *Constructing Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge, 1992. pp. xii, 342. \$49.95; \$16.95 pb.

As Brian McHale points out in his introduction, *Constructing Postmodernism* seeks to overcome the substantialist reading of postmodernist fiction that (some have thought) he advances in his first book, *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987). In that work, although claiming constructivist biases, McHale outlines a rather formed view of modernist and postmodernist fiction. Modernist fiction is preoccupied with questions related to knowing: "What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?; . . . What are the limits of the knowable? And so on" (*Postmodernist Fiction* 9). Whereas modernist fiction is marked by this *epistemological dominant*, postmodernist fiction is concerned with *ontological* issues related both to the nature of fiction itself—as seen in the proliferation of parodic meta-fictional texts—and to the nature of the worlds constituted by narrators and characters.

In *Constructing Postmodernism*, McHale is sufficiently circumspect to realize that he has fallen into a self-"constructed" trap of sorts, though certainly he is not alone in this among students of postmodern literature and philosophy. This particular problem was captured long ago in a Greek paradox, the one involving a Cretan who claims that all Cretans are liars. Though explicitly endorsing the relativism and contingency that is at the heart of postmodernity—see, for example, McHale's admission of constructivist biases in both of his books—postmodern scholars ultimately betray themselves by speaking authoritatively, definitively, uncontingently, about matters postmodern.