

the approach to be most useful. In its present state, *The Social Dimensions of Fiction: On the Rhetoric and Function of Prefacing Novels in the Nineteenth-Century Canadas* is an awkward and perplexing study, at least to scholars unfamiliar with ETL ideology and methodology. However, even scholars such as myself who are handicapped in this way should be able to recognize the potential value of this study as a starting point for further research.

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John A. McClure. *Late Imperial Romance*. London: Verso, 1994. pp. viii, 187. CAN. \$87.95, hb.; \$25.95 pb.

"Imperialism" is a term used reluctantly by contemporary American cultural critics and historians, except when referring to empires past, such as Britain in the nineteenth century or Spain in the sixteenth, or to geopolitical rivals such as the Soviet Union, or, more recently and for a very brief period, to the ambitions of Saddam Hussein. An emerging field of interest in cultural and literary studies is the critique of Euro-American imperialism and the complex ways that hegemony is negotiated in multiple discourses (see, for instance, Kaplan and Pease). The novel and film, as well as educational and political institutions, are among the cultural forms that extend the more traditional analysis of economic, diplomatic, and military history in tracing world domination and control over markets, both economic and cultural. John McClure's *Late Imperial Romance* is a significant contribution to this emerging field, offering a study of relations between literary form and imperialism, and connecting late imperial Britain to what he posits, somewhat tentatively, as a decline in American world domination.

McClure traces a "crisis in romance" (149) dating from the end of the British Empire. This "crisis" is evident in such fictions as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1898), Kipling's *Kim* (1901), and Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924). It also appears in American fiction of the late twentieth century: McClure discusses several novels by Joan Didion, Robert Stone, Don DeLillo, and Thomas Pynchon. In an intermediary and, to me, the most original and interesting chapter, McClure studies late imperial romance in three contexts of the mid-twentieth century: the liberation writings of Ché Guevara and Frantz Fanon, John F. Kennedy's Cold War calls for new frontiers of American development, and what McClure calls the "dark journey" of Anglo-American modernism. This last context is particularly important in bridging the late-nineteenth- and late-twentieth-century imperial contexts: Conrad, Forster, and Kipling in various ways exemplify the modernist quest for experiential authenticity by an individual lost in a world coming increasingly under the anonymous yoke of imperialist rationalization; the four American

writers, all educated at a time when modernism exercised its own imperial or canonical sway in American literary institutions, develop and extend this quest for spiritual authenticity in new forms of "late imperial romance."

McClure's study expands the scope of his previous monograph, *Kipling and Conrad: The Colonial Fiction* (1981), with more sophisticated methods and materials, a greatly widened geographical and temporal reach, and a trenchant political critique of imperialism. In his study of Kipling and Conrad, published in 1981, McClure adheres almost rigidly to the conventions of traditional literary criticism, concentrating "not only on the colonial dimension of their works but also their own experiences of colonialism and the role these experiences played in shaping their portraits of colonial life" (8). In *Late Imperial Romance*, the thematic and biographical emphasis is extended by a concentration on literary form and narrative strategy and their effects in the shaping of ideology. *Late Imperial Romance* draws extensively upon Fredric Jameson's essay on romance in *The Political Unconscious* (103-50); the "crisis" that McClure traces is mapped, in Jameson's sense, by means of a dialectical opposition between the adventure and enchantment of imperial romance, on the one hand, and the rationalization and bureaucracy of imperial administration, on the other. In discussing each context—late Victorian, mid-century Cold War, and postmodern American—McClure sets out how romance divides the world in terms of imperial geopolitics and how its narrative strategies posit a hero who quests for danger or spiritual fulfilment in a world that cannot accommodate that quest. He demonstrates how these narrative strategies re-inscribe the assumptions of Euro-American superiority and how the possibility for collective political action and critique of empire is displaced continually onto the grounds of an ahistorical spiritualism and/or stories of individual self-realization.

McClure argues that each of his four American novelists simultaneously uses and critiques romance: although they use romance to structure their novels, they critique romance by reconfiguring its traditional elements. However, since each novel is caught up in the contradictions inherent in "late imperial romance," at some point each critique collapses. In the novels of Didion and Stone, this collapse is comparable to that of Conrad: by criticizing contemporary imperialism's rationalizing tendencies, Didion and Stone simultaneously displace the possibilities for any political action onto the quest of an individual domestic subject exposed to the hardships of the American travelling in the "Third World" in search of excitement or spiritual fulfilment. In DeLillo's postmodernist strategies of representation, technology at the centre of empire becomes a possible source of adventure and encounter with the unknown. Nevertheless, despite this concentration on the imperial centre, the division between developed and underdeveloped countries eventually takes on the familiar demarca-

tion of imperial space. In *Running Dog* (1978), for instance, DeLillo, in McClure's view, "reduces a complex history of competition across cultures to a simple romance pitting aliens devoid of feeling and individuality against Westerners richly endowed with both" (133). For McClure, Pynchon offers the best hope for a way out of the deadlock of the binary between possibilities of otherness and the deadening and soul-destroying rationalization of imperial power, a binary that determines the "crisis in romance." By rejecting the traditional oppositions of political action *versus* spiritual quest and of individual fulfillment *versus* collective responsibility, Pynchon, in *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, offers the possibilities of a breakdown of barriers dividing "First" and "Third Worlds" and of collective action on the basis of a world view grounded in environmentalism and spirituality.

There are four ways in which McClure's study is almost necessarily limited by, or caught up within, the "crisis" in romance, as well as the current geopolitical and cultural "crisis" of the USA, in which "imperialism" is a bad word. First, and most importantly, McClure's treatment of romance as a literary form is limited on the theoretical level to Jameson and Northrop Frye, and, on the historical level, from late Victorian Britain to the present. A more extensive theoretical discussion (especially of genre) and a broader historical treatment might have provided strategic options more powerful than the deadlock that McClure's tentative conclusion reaches about the possibilities for Leftist politics, a bridge between the religious and political as a new *via media*. Second, in surveying so large a number of novels, McClure sometimes lapses into what appears to be a series of plot summaries, thereby blunting his argument relating literary form to contemporary geopolitics and to possibilities for opposing the imperialist agendas. Third, McClure's argument follows a narrative of unbroken development originating in the late nineteenth century and (he hopes) terminating in the late twentieth. This narrative trajectory introduces aspects of evolutionary development, a historical grid that at times risks falling into explanations that all too easily reduce the complex dynamics of imperial power to a process of natural development. Fourth, although he introduces briefly various postcolonial perspectives in the liberation narratives of Ché Guevara and Frantz Fanon (and, in a more limited way, of Régis Debray, Gustavo Gutierrez, and Rigoberta Menchu), McClure's material is located entirely within the imperial order. Hence his critique of that order and his perspectives on imperial romance necessarily are limited by this perspective. Edward Said has recently argued in his *Culture and Imperialism* that a coherent anti-imperial vision was not available until the period of decolonization following the Second World War, when intellectuals from the former colonies were able to formulate theories, strategies, and political programs from outside the domination of imperial hegemony. One cannot fault McClure for writing from within the heart of the

New World Order—indeed, for this political action he deserves praise; rather, his analysis points to the limitations of self-critique for domestic subjects of empire.

These limitations, however, should be qualified. They are not the faults of the author, but the necessary conditions in which he writes. *Late Imperial Romance* maps important connections between imperial contexts and literary form in ways that will provide theoretical paradigms and strategies of political critique for subsequent scholars to explore in more detail.

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Earl G. Ingersoll, ed. *Doris Lessing: Conversations*. Princeton: Ontario Review Press, 1994. pp. xv, 248. \$17.95 pb.

Margaret Moan Rowe. *Doris Lessing*. New York: St. Martin's, 1994. pp. xii, 137. \$37.50.

Ruth Saxton and Jean Tobin, eds. *Woolf and Lessing: Breaking the Mold*. New York: St. Martin's, 1994. pp. xvi, 208. \$58.00.

Interest in Doris Lessing's work was renewed with the publication in 1994 of *Under My Skin: Volume One of My Autobiography, to 1949*. The three critical works under review also appeared in 1994.

Saxton's and Tobin's volume, *Woolf and Lessing: Breaking the Mold*, is a well-organized, theoretically informed collection of essays that compare the fiction of Lessing and Virginia Woolf. Part One is titled "Constitution of a Female Subject." Claire Sprague muses over a perception many readers of Woolf and Lessing share: "I have always imagined a deep and visible connection between Lessing and Woolf. But that connection was elusive. . . . Woolf's name never appears in Lessing's criticism, and verifiable allusions to Woolf in Lessing's work are almost nonexistent" (3). Sprague, a prolific contributor to Lessing scholarship, demonstrates her Auerbachian and Bakhtinian approach to the multipersonal and dialogic modes in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Golden Notebook*. Roberta Rubenstein considers yearning and nostalgia in Lessing's and Woolf's production; her exposition focuses on the "recurrent . . . emotionally saturated meanings . . . of place (*home*) and of person (*mother*)" (15). In "Woolf's *Between the Acts* and Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*: from Modern to Postmodern Subjectivity," Magali Cornier