

Book Reviews

and two appendices (“Pater, Novalis, Forster,” and “The whole Truth”) that are essentially stand alone essays. The materials for that study are here, but it remains to be written.

Works Cited

Lago, Mary, Hughes, Linda K., and Wells, Elizabeth MacLeod (Eds.) (Foreward by P. N. Furbank). *The BBC Talks of E. M. Forster 1929–1960*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2008.

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Richard Lane. *The Postcolonial Novel: Themes in 20th-Century Literature & Culture*. UK: Polity, 2006. vii + Pp. 146 \$ 24.95

It is through “listening again” that Richard Lane urges the reader to explore the postcolonial novel’s contribution to the development of modern critical theory and literary studies in general. His well-researched project focuses on how different postcolonial texts have enunciated a reforming of theory creating what he describes as “new ways of conceiving the world” (1). Analyzing postcolonial texts from India, South Africa, Canada and the Caribbean, the author juxtaposes the multiple ventures of postcolonial writing to emphasize a new method of decipherment that revitalizes our perception of the postcolonial novel in general. This method of re-examination is achieved through two critical procedures: first, an assessment of how these novels have been read (a “first reading” sub-section that studies the text in relation to recent scholarship); and second, a process of identifying the significance of re-reading the text, taking into consideration the impact these novels have on critical thoughts, postcolonial theory in particular. What the author achieves through this re-reading analogy is a critical perspective on how the text can be explored as a theoretical example of postcolonial creativity.

The “text-with-theory” model the author identifies in his reading of works like *Palace of the Peacock*, *Foe* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* enables him not only to reflect on the oversimplified readings of the postcolonial text, but also how these novels have reformed the nature of critical analysis in postcolonial studies. While the first chapter serves as an introductory commentary to how Lane envisions the future of postcolonial studies, in the second and third chapters, he re-emphasizes how the postcolonial text has already presented a “counter-discursive writing” that challenges the way canonical works are examined.

In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, for example, Lane finds a "powerful entry point into African writing in English" (32) that have clearly stirred other critical insights about African literature. Through "inner resistance" and "multiple endings," African literature proved to present a strong example of postcolonial consciousness that is naturally counter-discursive to English canonical works. What makes Ngugi's work provocative today, Lane asserts, are the decentralized versions of history and cultural identity that he constructs in his writings. Likewise, in his discussion of Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* and Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, Lane describes the structural aspects of autobiographical writing as a site of difference that is both "excessive" and "uncontainable" (59). He argues that in Head's work cultural difference is depicted in various forms to complicate the way colonial and postcolonial contexts can be represented out of the discourses of gender difference and power relations. In Margaret Atwood's postcolonial-feminist novel *Surfacing*, he illustrates how the narrative structure of the novel is an appropriation of the 'linguistic turn' that has informed Western modes of writing.

From the Indian context, Lane includes two influential writers Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy. He finds in Rushdie's work "a labyrinthine world of multiple locations and characters in which radically different modes of writing—'political satire and religious fable; realism and fantasy—are combined'" (85). Rushdie's work, Lane contends, presents a hybridization of forms that challenges our understanding of cultural purity in the postcolonial world. In *The God of Small Things*, however, this hybridization is a new form of magical realism different from what Rushdie employs elsewhere in his works. To understand the complexity of Roy's novel, Lane induces the reader to transcend the meaningless binaries of difference and identity-formation the traditional postcolonial text is expected to present. Towards the end, Lane re-reads two unconventional postcolonial works; Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and Phyllis Greenwood's *An Interrupted Panorama*. In his attempt to extend the boundaries of the postcolonial text, he finds in these creative works of art an aesthetic value reflecting a postcolonial concern. While his analysis of Kogawa's novel illustrates how postcolonial writing can be politically interventionist on different levels of reading, he also illuminates "the more concrete ways in which a powerfully written, high impact novel such as *Obasan* influences and relates to other creative and critical writers, working through and across myriad genres" (111). His analysis of Greenwood's *An Interrupted Panorama*, extends the structure of the postcolonial novel to incorporate other modes of presentation. Although a piece of visual art, Greenwood's work is studied in this book as a creative work of literature crafted with colonial and postcolonial glimpses of the past.

In the end, the conclusion falls short in clarifying the new critical reading Lane discovers in the overall structure of postcolonial novel as a literary text. While the concept of “listening again” is mentioned in the concluding chapter to justify why the author has re-examined these different postcolonial texts, this notion briefly touches on the significance of this reading-method as it aims to yield new critical perspectives:

Listening again involves rereading the new and the not-so-new postcolonial canons, and being open to voices that are only just beginning to be heard, locating in the process “other sites of meaning” that have the capacity to trigger dialogue and debate. *Listening again*, however, also generates a problem, one which Jacqueline Rose ponders in her study of Bessie Head: ‘... how to listen to the ... writer from a different culture when any moment of felt recognition may be mere appropriation or projection on the reader’s part....?’ (113)

In these lines the notion of “listening again” appears a new concept, but a close reading of the idea shows that Lane borrows the concept from other critics like Jacqueline Rose, Bart Moore-Gilbert, and David Punter. It’s rather through other critics’ insights Lane reformulates his new readings of the postcolonial novel as such. In many stances in the book, the author’s voice fades away behind other critics’ arguments. The abundant use of quotations makes the author’s views only marginal to the overall argument of the book.

In its ultimate analysis, Lane’s book succeeds in providing a well-researched anthology of the postcolonial novel. This research, however, is conducted to primarily help the introductory reader providing a basic understanding of the postcolonial novel in general. While each section of the book uses contemporary critical deliberations to emphasize the significance of these literary productions, the book does very little to fulfill the promise it states from the beginning; how the postcolonial novel in English had caused “a rethinking of theory” with which the text can be differently re-examined today (1). As an introduction to the study of the postcolonial novel, Lane’s refreshed criticism of the postcolonial text makes his study a significant contribution to the field of postcolonial literary studies. His critical analysis doesn’t only “re-listen again” to the complexity of the postcolonial text, but also re-discovers the correlation between theoretical conceptualization and literary inspiration. The theoretical discourse the author employs in the book will definitely draw the contemporary reader to ponder over these critical readings as they continue to reform our understanding of critical and literary crossings. The novels he highlights in this study constitute not only an endless debate in the field of

literary studies, but also provide a solid entry to the major key texts that have shaped recent discussions of modern literary works and Third World writing.

Ammar Naji

Five Emus to the King of Siam: Environment and Empire. Edited by Helen Tiffin. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007. Pp. 260. \$82.00 hardcover.

The intriguing title of this collection is drawn from the essay “Five Emus to the King of Siam: Acclimatization and Colonialism,” in which Chris Tiffin explains that acclimatization “strictly means the adaptation of individual specimens to a new environment, but the loose meaning of the word in the 1860s was the introduction of plants, animals, birds and insects into areas to which they are not endemic” (165). While this term may be read as metonymic for the broader invasion of settlers, languages, religion, and disease into colonial lands, it also gestures to the ecological focus of *Five Emus to the King of Siam*, an essay collection that foregrounds the environmental impacts of imperialism.

As Helen Tiffin explains in her introduction, the history of European imperialism and colonization “has generally been read and understood in primarily human terms, whether militarily, politically, socially, philosophically or culturally” (xii). Tiffin and her contributors seek to amend this anthropocentric focus by exploring various environmental consequences of colonialism, such as the introduction of non-native species, the introduction of agricultural practices unsuitable for the environments on which they are imposed, and the consequences of a globalized system of trade. In “Transported Landscapes,” for example, Ruth Blair discusses the tendency of colonizers in the South Pacific to prize only endemic or indigenous species that they deemed to have aesthetic or commercial value, and to pride themselves on successfully transplanting species from their homelands, regardless of the effect on native ecosystems. Leigh Dale offers an extensive account of such a species introduction in “Empire’s Proxy,” which details the transformative influence of merino sheep on the Australian landscape. While recounting the devastating effects of sheep farming on the land, the vegetation, and on indigenous land-use practices, Dale also addresses the irony that colonial writers often attributed agency for this damage to the sheep, rather than to the settlers who introduced them.