

Ralph Pordzik. *The Quest for Postcolonial Utopia: A Comparative Introduction to the Utopian Novel in the New English Literatures*. New York: Peter Lang, 2001. Pp. 199. US\$53.95.

Ralph Pordzik outlines the generic changes that result when the open-ended postmodern writing practices of many postcolonial futurists meld with the classic utopia, opening up its closed narratives, challenging its reliance on realism, and dissolving its boundaries. At the same time, this study extends the examination of postcolonial literature, by discussing many texts overlooked by critics. Yet, as Pordzik claims, the sheer number of utopian texts published demonstrates that “[w]ithin the ambitious project of postcolonial writers to inscribe into the established canon their own distinctive experience, the revision of utopian discourse has been one of the primary points of issue on the agenda” (20). As evidenced by the comprehensive works cited list, Pordzik is familiar not only with a geographical and historical range of utopian texts, but also with much postcolonial and utopian theory, drawing on the work of theorists such as Jameson and Suvin.

The study examines how authors from regions such as Canada, South Africa, India, Australia, and New Zealand have reconfigured the utopian form to suit their own purposes and audiences since the 1970s. Oddly, it does not examine any Caribbean texts, although the author often relies on the theories of Wilson Harris. The main reconfiguration has been to move away from the narrative realism and progressivist history of classic utopia. These postmodern, postcolonial utopias instead depict heterotopias, or “the view of a world in which fragmentation, discontinuity, and ambiguity determine the course of action and the striving of the protagonist/reader to make sense of what he or she is given to understand is constantly undermined by the introduction of new perspectives and points of reference that cannot be integrated into a meaningful whole” (3). Heterotopias undermine the possibility of progress towards a static utopian future and blur the boundaries between utopia, dystopia and anti-utopia, in an effort to depict the future as dynamic and multiple, opening up space for the voices of the silenced.

Pordzik divides the estranging techniques of the speculative text into two types: representational and narrational discontinuity. While representational discontinuities depict the utopian locus, narrational discontinuities, with their diverse codes and perspectives that demonstrate hybridity, imply the open-ended, postcolonial, utopian horizon. To emphasize what these dis-

parate texts have in common, he privileges ontological over narrational estrangement because “the latter encompasses [...] techniques concerning plot, structure, and textual coherence which may force the reader to look at the narrated world from the estranged perspective of a diversity of mutually incompatible discourses, world views, usages, and modes of writing” (13). Unfortunately, the focus on representational discontinuity leaves the examination of these texts at an abstract, less materialist, level, postulating that what the fictions have in common is the representation of a transcendent, cross-cultural, international imaginary. While Pordzik recognizes that the texts have “culture-specific details,” these details must always be read from the perspective of the text’s overall strategy and its preoccupation with “cultural emancipation” (27). He views utopia as primarily an English form, and although writing back to the colonizer adds a thread of continuity between the texts, the focus on cultural emancipation leads Pordzik to almost always read these utopias in relation to the colonial centre rather than from within their own context. He spends very little time outlining socio-political and textual differences.

The study postulates a “gradual transition” from the classic utopia of the “‘colonial’ phase,” to the “‘post-colonial’ phase” where postcolonial writers began to create more regional, yet still realist, utopian visions, to the “‘post-modern’ phase” that presents radical alternatives to both literary conventions and socio-political systems (169). Pordzik begins his outline of the “quest” with an examination of texts from the early 70s that challenge utopia’s closed narrative structure. He then moves on to texts from the late 70s and 80s that display cross-cultural perspectives and recuperate elements of colonized cultures. Chapter five looks at feminist utopias from the late 80s that “exemplify the abiding interest of women to find a place for their concerns in the ongoing debate about utopian change” (90). The study then follows this trend into the 90s, examining women’s use of magic realism to evade the constraints of realism and patriarchal discourse. Pordzik sees this use of magic realism as paralleled by postcolonial writers who are exploring cultural diversity; however, the separate discussion of feminist utopias implies that they are concerned only with feminist, and not broadly cultural, issues. These magic realist utopias—feminist or otherwise—refuse to assimilate the supernatural into the mimetic and “the approved logic of cause and effect” becomes “a ceaseless flow of marvelous incidents and memories between past, present, and future” offering the most radical understanding of futurity (130). Pordzik ends his discussion with an examination of utopias that emphasize the linguistic construction of the world and where the utopian is seen to be in “the capacity of words and images to indicate cultural difference” (164).

Although he acknowledges “the inevitable distortions that such a progressivist view of genre history produces,” this evolutionary mapping of the genre seems ironic considering that he privileges utopian texts that openly challenge progressivism (169). Yet Pordzik’s discussion is carefully researched, and the structure allows him to emphasize the cross-cultural links within and between texts of similar historical periods.

Finally, both a strength and a weakness is the examination of more than thirty main texts, as well as numerous others, in relatively few pages. Covering such a large number of obscure texts forces Pordzik to devote considerable space to plot summaries rather than analysis, at times leaving the reader feeling bombarded by examples. But, at the same time, it supports his assertion that a discussion of postmodern, postcolonial utopia necessarily means more than examining Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Nadine Gordimer’s *July’s People*, and Buchi Emecheta’s *The Rape of Shavi*—that we are talking about a large web of revisionist future fictions (2). The study never manages a very close reading of any particular texts, but, as Pordzik indicates in his title, he intends his book to be an introduction. With its broad comparative analysis and comprehensive works cited list, this study makes an important contribution to both its main fields, and will, perhaps, inspire others to examine more closely the role of individual utopias in postcolonialism.

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Robert Fraser. *Lifting the Sentence: A Poetics of Postcolonial Fiction*. Manchester, New York: Manchester UP, 2000. Pp. x, 252. US \$74.95; \$29.95 pb.

Robert Fraser sets out to discuss postcolonial fiction the old-fashioned way: by returning to an analysis of language, style and form. This book seems to have been conceived during the “theory versus literature” wars within English departments several years ago. What confounded me is why the author seems to think that an analysis of the poetics of postcolonial fiction should be considered as separate from the theories of postcoloniality. For three quarters of the book, I struggled to keep interested in the use of tense, first, second and third person singular and plural voice, parody, symbolism—some of which were interesting and some ground already covered by others—over an analysis of postcolonial novels from the Caribbean and Africa, India, Ireland as well as Australia, New Zealand and Canada. In his sampling of fiction, he makes the