Graham Huggan, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*

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REFERENCES

Graham Huggan, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 734 p. ISBN (hb): 9780199588251. £100

- 1 Over the course of more than 700 pages, produced by an international team of 43 leading contributors, *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies* expands and multiplies venues and fields of enquiry, in a way that can only healthily contribute to renewing postcolonial studies. It stands as an indispensable tool for reflection on the status and implications of postcolonial studies, examining the progress, direction and new perspectives of current research (without providing the quick answers that the misleading “handbook” in the title might imply).
- 2 The general introduction by Graham Huggan raises three important and problematic points, dealing with “Postcolonialism and Revolution,” in which the notion of liberation is central; “Postcolonialism as Critical Revisionism,” focusing on the colonial past, its present legacies, and new forms of colonialism; and “Postcolonialism and Reconciliation,” in connection with the “ethical turn” in the humanities. If postcolonial studies result from the encounter of Marxism and post-structuralism, as has often been said, the perspective adopted here is not discourse-oriented, but definitely with a materialist bent.
- 3 The Handbook is divided into five sections, each of six chapters. Each section opens with an introduction by the editor problematizing the theme and presenting the chapters, and closes with a response that opens up the discussion. The perspective is multidisciplinary, with contributors in English and Comparative Literature, History, Political Science, Philosophy, Sociology and Cultural Studies. Overall, the book retains the strong literary anchorage of postcolonial studies, and literature is envisioned in its

political dimension. I will review each section and illustrate its discussion by focusing on one chapter, for lack of space to cover them all.

- 4 The first section, “The Imperial Past,” stresses the need to “address the symbiotic relationship between imperialism, modernity, and global capitalism” (30). Timothy Brennan, in “Hegel, Empire and anti-Colonial Thought,” examines some of the links between philosophy and postcolonial theory by arguing, against the grain of Hegel’s image as a conservative, that his “strategy of conceptualizing the human was [...] comprehensive” (158), so that his philosophical legacy is one that offers valuable resources to the anti-colonial project.
- 5 “The Colonial Present” (II) establishes a dialogue between postcolonial studies and the contemporary globalized world; in the introduction, Huggan points to the need to examine paradigms such as “neo-colonialism” or “new imperialism,” and the geopolitical or biopolitical dimensions of the “war on terror.” In dealing with vulnerability and exposure to power, several contributors discuss ideas from Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* and Judith Butler’s *Frames of War and Precarious Life*. For instance, Jo Smith and Stephen Turner, in “Indigenous Inhabitations and the Colonial Present,” a chapter devoted to the reluctance to accord sovereignty to Maori in New Zealand, deliver a critique of Agamben’s description of political relation, which is incompatible with the Indigenous ontology of land, water and peoples that they advocate as an alternative to the standard Western perspective.
- 6 “Theory and Practice” (III) addresses postcolonial studies’ much debated claim to activism and to achieving “practical effects” (Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*) by exploring the relation between theory and practice. The notion of liberation is a key term, as well as a test of postcolonialism’s efficiency. In “‘Third-Worldism’ and the Political Imaginary of Postcolonial Studies,” Neil Lazarus, “one of postcolonial studies’ most combative Marxists” (301), argues that postcolonial studies emerged after the period of decolonisation (1945-1975) and Third-Worldist, Bandung-era discourse of emancipation and national liberation. The term “Third-Worldism” appeared in postcolonial studies, replacing “Third-Worldist” discourse, indicating that the West had turned against anti-colonial revolutions, and claiming at the same time a form of “anti-anti-liberationism” for postcolonial studies. By contrast with this compromised critical position that continues to claim certain ties with Marxism while considering it obsolete, Lazarus argues that the task of postcolonial critics is to position themselves as part of the counter-history of resistance to capitalist imperialism.
- 7 “Across the Disciplines” (IV) deals with the multi-disciplinarity of postcolonial studies, whose “methodological eclecticism” (419), to Huggan, is more often than not “additive” rather than “integrative.” Yet disciplines make specific contributions to the field, and simultaneously challenge the validity of postcolonial studies. Along those lines, Diana Brydon, in “Modes and Models of Postcolonial Cross-Disciplinarity,” considers that, in the context of the “global financial and environmental crises of the early twenty-first century,” the time has come for binary models of opposition to be replaced by “interactive models of relations that can still embrace an agonist or contestatory politics when necessary” (428).
- 8 “Across the World” (V) examines the links between postcolonial studies and globalization. Huggan sees the relation between the two as a dialectical one “in which the complementary terminologies of each are understood as being equally inadequate” (548). The two complement each other fruitfully in “Postcolonizing the Americas.” In

this chapter, Charles Forsdick envisions the United States and its “wider transnational, hemispheric, and Atlantic frames” (650) in a global context, as opposed to a localized and exceptional one, thus submitting the United States to a “postcolonial prism of interpretation” (Quayson, *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice or Process?*) and underlining its historical role as empire.

- 9 The volume as a whole very much constitutes an overview and a discussion of postcolonial studies at a given moment in time, as demonstrated by its focus on reconciliation, Muslim societies and the Arab Springs show. Even though its emphasis on the political tends to leave the discursive approach aside, the book is bound to inspire postcolonial scholars to address in creative ways some of the important questions that face us now.

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