Igor Maver, ed., *Critics and Writers Speak: Revisioning Post-Colonial Studies*

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REFERENCES


1 Igor Maver's edited collection of essays and interviews makes an important contribution to the current debate on the future of postcolonial studies. Given the proliferation and overgeneralized use of the term “post-colonial,” Maver's collection addresses the need to review the history of the terminology and to sort out the conceptually useful from the inappropriate, contradictory, and/or obfuscating; in that task, Maver strikes an admirable balance, acknowledging the accomplishments of post-colonial studies as well as pointing out its exhausted current status. The collection contains both new critical essays and interviews with authors of fiction, poetry, and film, providing a “forum for discussion, revision, and interrogation of the current and future usage of the category of the postcolonial and the critical practice of post-colonial studies.”

2 In his Introduction and in the lead essay of the collection, “Post-Colonial Literatures in English *ab origine ad futurum*,” Maver gives an historical account of the evolution of these literatures and the theories associated with them, discussing Said, Young, Spivak, Bhabha, Dirlik, et al., and of course, *The Empire Writes Back* of Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin. Maver catalogues the various problems that the theories face, such as overuse and loose use of the term “post-colonial,” the ambiguity of “post,” the commodification of theory and the pushing of literary texts that the theory purports to serve to the margins. “Perhaps it is only right to say that the term post-colonial shall one day be dismissed along with the generalizing concept of Commonwealth literature,” Maver
He then considers some directions that post-colonial literary studies might take in the future, citing, for example, Dennis Walder, who sees that future in the expression of multiple and unstable identities (literary, national, cultural, ethnic). A greater interdisciplinary within the cultural studies and cultural translation paradigm would likewise bring new perspectives, as would transnational cultural studies combined with area and diasporic/migrant studies. In conclusion, Maver recommends that we rethink the content as well as the concept of the post-colonial, remembering the importance of openmindedness, non-exclusion, and tolerance—recommendations that ring of Edward Said.

Other critical essays follow Maver’s. In “Proteus, Gertrude, and the Post Colonial Rag,” Janice Kulyk Keefer examines Bill Ashcroft (and others’) “transformed” post-colonialism, in On Post-Colonial Futures: Transformations of Colonial Culture and Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies, arguing that the paradigm can no longer be salvaged; we need a new one, and not another word game. In “Reading Literatures in English without Theory,” Robert Ross observes that, in terms of the concepts spawned by post-colonial theory, we long ago entered into the realm of the overused, the stale, and the parodic. Ross advocates returning to the literary works, rather than the theorists, for a new sense of direction. Graham Huggan considers transmutation in Wilson Harris’s Palace of the Peacock, where postcolonial discourse is shown as an ongoing process of change and renewal. In “Archaic Ambivalence: The Case of South Africa,” John C. Hawley looks at post-apartheid literature in relation to the work of that country’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, arguing that South African writers are indeed moving beyond the black-white bifurcations of innocence and guilt and “opening doors through trauma into unexpected vistas.”

Two essays about Australia, Anne Brewster’s “Remembering Whiteness” and Peter Pierce’s “Recolonisation and Disinheritance,” consider, in the first instance, indigenous autobiographies, and in the latter, autobiography and fiction about nineteenth-century Tasmania. J.A. Wainwright considers Native “writing-back” against colonialism in recent Canadian fiction such as Eden Robinson’s Monkey Beach. William Peterson writes about Maori theatre, arguing for an appreciation and analysis of it on its own terms and pointing out the inadequacy of post-colonial theory to comprehend it. Silvia Albertazzi considers childhood memories, children’s stories, and autobiographical sketches by postcolonial writers, arguing that they show a certain tension and struggle to de-territorialize the past.

Three interviews follow the critical essays: in the first, Maver talks with the Booker Prize winning Australian author Peter Carey about how people in other countries understand his work and how he views his own identity as writer. Fukuko Kohayashi speaks with Trinh T. Minh-ha, feminist-postcolonial critic and author of film and film criticism; this is a particularly perspective interview that touches on a number of topics including categorization, clichés, silence, autobiography, feminism, and film. Finally, Maver interviews Jamaican writer Opal Palmer Adisa, who gives her views on her own identity as a writer, Jamaican/Caribbean writing, and women in Caribbean literature. Colonialism is still very much a reality for the Caribbean region, Opal Palmer Adisa remarks, and she has little use for the term “post-colonial”: “As a writer I give almost no thought or credence to the term post-colonial as I think this is true of most writers.”

This is not the last word, of course; the debate continues, and both scholars and students of literatures in English will sharpen their sense of the history of the
terminology and the issues facing post-colonial studies today by reading Marver’s collection of essays and interviews.

AUTHORS

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Timothy Weiss is a Professor at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. His books include *On the Margins: The Art of Exile in V.S. Naipaul* (U of Massachusetts P, 1992), *Translating Orient: Between Ideology and Utopia* (U of Toronto P, 2004), and *English and Globalization: Perspectives from Hong Kong and Mainland China* (co-ed. with Kwok-kan Tam; Chinese University of Hong Kong P, 2004). He is currently writing the chapter on the “Windrush Generation” for *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth-Century English Novel* and the entry on “Postcolonial Fiction of the West Indian / Caribbean Diaspora” for Blackwell’s *Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Fiction.*