Book Reviews

414 Mooneeram, Roshni. *From Creole to Standard: Shakespeare, Language, and Literature in a Postcolonial Context*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009. 240 pp. 50 €.

George Lang, University of Ottawa

One way of thinking about comparative literature in relation to national literary disciplines is as a kind of antivirus to the normative narratives the former generate though, like any vaccination, it carries dangers of its own, being only a weakened form of the original virus. The founders of the discipline—we often speak in the first instance of Madame de Staël or of Goethe—intended their arguments to counter, perhaps even to eradicate, the nationally exclusive versions of literary history of their times. To be sure, the concept of *Weltliteratur* incorporates *Literatur*, and literature in Goethe's vaulted sense was also understood as consisting of a canon, though one which should be universal, *une littérature (vraiment) générale*, to allude to Étiemble's telling title from 1974. That the evolving canon of world literature as we now teach it is international does not fundamentally change the rules of the canonic game, though for a long time now comparative literature has included a panoply of transliterary specializations: literature and the arts, the sociology of literature and, in recent decades, poetics, literary theory, discourse analysis, semiotics and post-structuralism.

The cultural convulsions brought about in the twentieth century by two world wars, various revolutions and the decolonization of European empires and hegemonies inevitably disrupted not only the national literary narratives, but comparative literature itself, which has had to come to terms with globalization and the de-centering of the eurocentric focus of world literature, though the discipline has had little

Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée
CRCL SEPTEMBER 2011 SEPTEMBRE RCLC
0319–051x/11/38.3/414 © Canadian Comparative Literature Association

impact on the parochialism of the various national literary systems, monolingual and encouraged to remain so by the forces that be.

One vector of change in this regard has been the concept of postcolonialism, though it too is tinged with eurocentrism (an expression we should understand to include *americo-centrism*). There are, however, two differing approaches to postcolonial studies. The first is closely associated with post-structuralism and questions the "stable identities" of postcolonial subjects and their writing, tries to deconstruct them, exploding, sometimes softly but with subversive intent, the certitudes (national) literary histories usually deal in. This is well and good but it doesn't take much reading around in postcolonial theory to see that this subversion is largely confined to the English language and practiced within the cosseted and narrowly-influential realm of academic discourse within North American universities.

The second approach is predicated on the observation that literature in the functioning world of publishers, readers and writers has not, with only a few exceptions, surmounted the injunction to foster stable identities. The literary systems decolonization engendered several decades ago actually replicate, albeit in new ways, the phases which marked the rise of the canonical European literatures, first and foremost the development or extension of literacy and the growth of a readership, itself followed by imitation of models and innovation spun off them, and then subsequent creation of gatekeeping criteria and instruments of criticism, these based on the premise that a national culture needs it own literature, must nourish and protect it, and this for a host of reasons both political and artistic.

The book at hand is an excellent example of how the "postcolonial context" can be read according to the second approach—not that Roshni Mooneeram is unaware that the cultural location of postcolonial subjects, to borrow the operative jargon, is fraught with conflict and contradiction, or can at least so be seen. To be a creolophone and to write about literature in creoles is inherently metaliterary, self-conscious, and to some extent by its very nature comparative, since a creole writer and her critics exist at the crossroads of more than one language and must consciously deal with overlapping literary systems. This may or may not be "instable" but it can encourage a more subtle grasp of identity than the norm within unilingual nations, or those who so consider themselves.

In the case of Mauritius, the topic of this intelligent study, there are at least four languages involved: French and English and *Morisyen* itself (the "national language," Mauritian creole [MC], whose lexicon is largely but not at all exclusively French), plus Bhojpuri and a number of other languages brought from South Asia to this Indian Ocean island. Decolonization, marked officially by the 1968 Constitution of Mauritius, did not impose MC. English remained the usual language of education, though spoken at home, according to the 2000 census, by a mere 0.3% of the population. French dominates many formal situations and is "increasingly a supra-ethnic language, the inherited tongue of the emerging well-off urban class," though spoken in the home by only 3.5% of the population. Between them, MC and Bhojpuri are

preferred by 81.7% of population and in rivalry each with the other, though MC is the common denominator among all sectors of the Mauritian population (pp. 28-29).

It is within this "postcolonial" setting, one which is admittedly complex but probably not more so than elsewhere in the broad sphere to which postcolonial studies lay claim and tend to treat unidimensionally and through the lens of English alone, that an MC literature is emerging.

Accounting for the facts on Mauritian ground requires excursions into creole linguistics, sociolinguistics as well as language planning and standardization policy, domains far from the usual interests of postcolonial scholars. It does not take much imagination, however, to see that the official histories of European literatures are based upon thoroughly assimilated digests of where such and such a language came from (the history of English emerging from Anglo-Saxon, the Norman invasions, etc.), of how it was standardized (*L'Académie française*), how a high literary dialect was devised and disseminated (the history of German up through eighteenth-century). It goes without saying that these histories are not always factual, but we can leave that matter aside here.

From Creole to Standard proceeds from this preparatory groundwork into close and lucid readings of, in the first analysis, theatre in MC, in particular the works of Dev Virahsawmy, whose translations of Shakespeare are intended to demonstrate the literary capacity of MC, substituting the MC versions for the "official" English original and thereby advancing the standardization of the creole as a literary language to be sure, but also as the normal vehicle of public exchange among Mauritians.

A final chapter, on the difficulties of establishing a "narrative voice" in a still inchoate literary language is critically well-informed and offers a perspective on problems with significance to wider scholarship. As Moonerram's discussion of Lindsey Collen's *Misyon Garson* (1996), Sedley Assonne's *Robis* (1997) and Dev Virahsawmy's *Jericho* (2000) make clear, the emerging novel in MC borrows from genres and models well-known in world literature (respectively, the adolescent *Bildungsroman*, e.g. *The Catcher in the Rye*; the detective novel; the historical novel), but it must resolve issues of register, dialect and lexicon which do not plague, or at least to the same degree, authors of narratives in standardized languages. She makes deft use of Bakhtin to clarify some of these devices and inventions, but ranges far beyond him and other contemporary literary scholars, applying relevent research in creole linguistics where needed but not allowing that discipline, which has its own imperatives, to deflect her from her topic.

This is a textbook example—in the best sense of the adjective—of how to approach the multiple "minor" literatures around the world, those in creoles but also others in which standardization is intimately connected with, coeval with the birth of a new literary tradition. Comparatists are used to speaking of the role Dante's Italian and Luther's German as founding texts of the languages themselves. It would seem that the same process is occurring in a multitude of sites around the world, perhaps on a different scale and at a more accelerated pace, but roughly according to the same

logic, one which binds identity to language and fosters the former through refinement of the latter.

Hilger, Stephanie M. *Women Writing Back: Strategies of Response and the Dynamics of European Literary Culture, 1790-1805*. Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2009. Pp. 175. US $47 softcover.

Melanie Adley, University of Pennsylvania

The very first sentence of Stephanie M. Hilger's *Women Write Back* signals the multifarious nature of the study: "This book is about the stakes of writing in politically turbulent times" (11). Are the politically turbulent times Europe in the wake of the French Revolution or Hilger's own time? This very first sentence refers as much to the main matter at hand—eighteenth-century women writers who create a space for themselves in the world of established male authors by responding to and subverting respected texts, thereby generating a political voice—as it refers to the author's, Hilger's, own stance: she frames the literary-historical study with a commentary on contemporary debates in feminist studies. At heart, *Women Write Back* is a piece of feminist scholarship that acts as an intervention at a moment when feminism's future remains uncertain, especially in academic disciplines. Hilger uses her work to point to the reality of the context of her own writing: she, like the writers she researches, is writing back. The force of her own "writing back," however, gets lost in the overall study.

Other reviews have made the mixed success in this effort apparent. The larger feminist, political implications of Hilger's work go largely overlooked. James Hodkinson, for example, writes: "While it has become harder to find rich veins of original material to mine, studies continue to appear that conceptually reframe women's writing of this epoch, arguing for the introduction of lost or lesser-known texts or authors into the canon, or re-examining established canonical texts from new perspectives" (507-09). Hodkinson assigns Hilger's to the latter classification of tiresome research on eighteenth-century women writers. This statement misses not only the feminist imperative behind the work, but it also, in general, dismisses the potential for innovative literary scholarship on women writers. Most literary criticism examines canonical texts from new perspectives: this is the case for work on male as well as female authors. Hilger's study carries with it great potential to act both as a model for new kinds of feminist literary scholarship, but also pushes its reader to consider how the limitations placed upon female authorship in eighteenth-century Europe can result in unexpected forms of protest and political commentary.

Women Write Back breaks down into four chapters, each investigating the work of one specific text by a woman writer who responds directly to a respected text by a

male author. Chapter one considers the way in which the British author Helen Maria Williams' work *Julia, a Novel* responds to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*. Williams abandons the epistolary form, one that would have been deemed suitable for a female author, and instead creates a hybrid text that incorporates various textual forms. Boundaries between private and public break down as the novel strives to represent social and political change. Chapter two continues with the theme of social and political change as Hilger turns to Ellis Cornelia Knight's *Dinarbas; a Tale: Being a Continuation of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*. Knight's *Dinarbas* takes issue with Samuel Johnson's *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*. Like Williams, Knight assumes a hybrid form in her response; unlike Williams, Knight chooses specifically those forms deemed "appropriate" for female authors: the epistolary, gothic, and sentimental. This chapter allows Hilger to investigate the possibility of "writing back," of protesting within the bounds of gender expectations. In the fourth chapter Hilger introduces Julie de Krüdener's *Valérie* as a novel that plays with Goethe's *Die Leiden des Jungen Werther* and assumes both the epistolary form and the sensibility of its predecessor.

Chapter three is arguably both the strongest and weakest link in Hilger's project. The chapter demonstrates the skilled way in which Hilger avoids overly universalized statements about eighteenth-century European women writers by allowing each chapter to explore the idiosyncrasies of the individual author's circumstances. Nevertheless, this chapter also demonstrates the risk that each chapter might become too independent from the rest of the project, breaking the cohesiveness one desires from a book-length study. Karoline Günderrode's *Mahomed, der Prophet von Mekka* takes center stage. Hybridity seems the catchphrase of much of the "writing back" featured in this study, and Günderrode's "Lesedrama" is no exception. By means of her drama Günerrode challenges Voltaire's *Mahomet ou le fanatisme* and Goethe's translation, *Mahomed, der Prophet von Mekka*. Interestingly, Hilger highlights the way in which Günderrode had more freedom in her version of Mahomed than Goethe, because of the lack of an authoritative figure overseeing her project. Günderrode is able to prioritize the desire for knowledge over religious and political fanaticism. In the drama the prophet represents the quintessential Romantic poet, and Günderrode is the woman writer capable of competing with the male Romantic poets of her time. Hilger's analysis of Günderrode's work both revisits familiar ground and opens up Günderrode's oeuvre, arguing for more attention given her dramatic works. The chapter clearly fits in with the thesis of the entire study, but, at the same time, its content pushes the limits of a single.

Women Write Back sets out to establish a feminist methodology that will highlight the uniqueness in each authors' work. The approach is biographical, textual, and theoretical. In Hilger's own words it is "a critical, (post)feminist reconsideration of the conditions of not only literary production but also textual transmission and canon formation" (35). The ambition of the project, however, ultimately jeopardizes its coherence. Hybridity might serve the eighteenth-century women writers Hilger

studies, allowing them to challenge male authors and assert their own voice, but in her work it threatens to diminish the effectiveness of any one of the very legitimate and important intentions of the book.

Work Cited

Hodkinson, James. Rev. of *Women Write Back: Strategies of Response and the Dynamics of European Literary Culture, 1790–1805* by Stephanie M. Hilger. *The Modern Language Review* 106.2 (April 2011): 507-509.

Spitta, Silvia. *Misplaced Objects: Migrating Collections and Recollections in Europe and the Americas*. Austin: U of Texas P, 2009. Pp. 280. US $50.00 cloth.

M. Elizabeth Boone, University of Alberta

Silvia Spitta contends that Spain and the Spanish colonial history of the United States have been erased from national consciousness, resulting in the ethnic, economic, and environmental crises confronting the world today. The U.S. Southwest, she writes in the introduction to this expansive book on objects and their movement back and forth between Europe and the Americas, "invariably falls off the table in the construction of the U.S. national imaginary, which grounds itself in the original thirteen colonies and cannot (yet) embrace the many parts out of which it is constituted—and particularly not its Hispanic colonial legacy" (16). The multifaceted nature of national identity is important, an idea that scholars engaged in comparative cultural, as well as American, Spanish, Latin American, and Latino Studies are exploring with increasing frequency; recent research is demonstrating that even the notion that the original thirteen colonies were homogenous, non-Hispanic entities, is a fiction of the American imagination.[1] With this book, Spitta seeks to show how what some might call a Spanish-American perspective disrupt monolithic narratives of modern history.

Silvia Spitta, a Professor of Spanish at Dartmouth College, begins her text with the "paradoxically simple thesis that when things move, things change" (3). She follows this observation with a cogent discussion of the subject/object dichotomy in modern western thought and introduces examples from literature and the arts to show how a consideration of Spanish, Latin American, and Latino culture can help to shatter, refract, and perhaps even escape from this destabilizing binary. The book is organized into three parts: the first, consisting of Chapters One, Two and

Three, explores the disrupting force caused by the movement of massive numbers of previously unknown American objects to Europe following the 1521 conquest of Tenochtitlán; the second, including chapters Four, Five and Six, traces the reverse, albeit asymmetrical, movement of things from Europe to the Americas that began at this same moment in history; and the third, chapters Seven and Eight, examines the work of several Latina artists working in the 1990s—a collaborative book project by sisters Sheila and Sandra Ortiz Taylor, published as *Imaginary Parents: A Family Autobiography*, and a group of prints and installations produced in Cuba by Sandra Ramos—as a means of exploring some of the more personal, creative, and both affirmative and alarmist responses to the current situation. An Epilogue that introduces the work of Spanish painter Cristóbal Toral provides Spitta with an opportunity to reflect upon two of the global problems—inequitable wealth distribution and environmental degradation—afflicting the world today.

This book will be most useful to readers who have already read closely focused arguments about material culture, philosophy, and the nature of objects; those interested in an overview of this expansive field may wish to consult the anthology recently edited by Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins (*The Object Reader*, New York: Routledge, 2010). Spitta's use of the word "object" is loose, for in her view people are objects, and they move as well, a stance that allows her to consider such issues as mestizaje and transculturation, immigration and exile, memory and place. She often moves in a single chapter from the historical to the contemporary, as in chapter Three, which begins with a discussion of Charles Willson (mis-spelled Wilson in the text) Peale and P.T. Barnum and concludes with the work of Rosamond Purcell (one of her favorite artists), Fred Wilson, and Mark Dion. "The forms of misplacement that underlie the aesthetics of artists," she writes perceptively at the end of this chapter, "depend on inverting the gaze, putting people in place of the specimen, and generally messing with the order of things" (90). Spitta brings up and illustrates many fascinating objects, such as Luis Thiebaut's *Quadro de Historia Natural, civil y geográfico del Reyno del Perú*, hidden away in the director's office at Madrid's Museo de Ciencias Naturales, and Victor Martínez's stunning *Guadalupe hubcap*, reproduced on the cover of the text. And she returns several times in her text to the assertion that objects are the "identity kit" that surrounds people and makes them who they are.

Spitta's sprawling definition of the object allows her to explore a much broader number of topics than a precise definition would allow. Her work is grounded in contemporary theory, especially Michel Foucault's *Order of Things*, as well as literary works by Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel García Márquez, visual and material culture, personal (and anecdotal) experience, the Internet, and the popular press. No one person can attain expertise in all the topics covered in this book, which include everything from early modern Cabinets of Curiosity (*Wunderkammern*), the history of Spain's inconsistent support for the natural sciences, and the current fascination with dinosaurs displayed by American children in Part I to the cult of Guadalupe in Mexico and the United States, low riders in New Mexico, the pilgrimage to Chimayó,

and the Taos home built by Mabel Dodge Luhan in Part II. In place of gathering expertise, as one might find in an anthology of individual essays, this author presents a work of cultural criticism by pursuing topics that have captured her attention—the politics of display, the history of visuality, even the use of trash in contemporary art—often in interesting ways. Specialists in some of these specific areas will find missing bibliographic sources that might have further enriched her discussion (I was curious, for example, as to why the excellent work being done on New Mexico, California, and the "Spanish fantasy heritage" by William Deverell, Phoebe Kropp, and Charles Montgomery was not mentioned in Chapter Six).[2] But Spitta is a writer who is sensitive to the meaning of words and images, and she often brings new ways of thinking about her chosen topics to the fore.

This wide-ranging and flexible approach toward defining the object, an approach that often leads to fascinating insights, is unfortunately extended to the treatment of objects reproduced in the text, and I was frustrated by the inconsistent use of figure numbers to point readers toward the works under discussion, a somewhat random selection of images in relation to the text, and the occasional reproduction of objects that fail to make the author's point. In a few cases, image and text simply don't match, as with figure 0.7b, which depicts a folk sculpture where, according to the caption, the Peruvian army and Sendero Luminoso have pitted Indians and campesinos against one another. The text associated with this illustration, however, discusses a series of "haunting photographs that appeared in the news in the 1980s during the dirty war in Guatemala and other parts of Central America. They often showed one man, in military uniform, pointing a machine gun at Indians (maybe friends and family) in Maya-Quiché villages in the highlands (Figure 0.7b)" (12). True, both the photographs and the sculpture depict the ability of institutionalized power to divide communities with tragic consequence; but such carelessness in image choice—where an example of Peruvian folk art substitutes without comment for a photograph from Guatemala—is unsettling in a book that claims "to *think through the object* (23, emphasis in original). The introduction contains other suggestions of inattention as well, such as when Chapter Five, which charts the migration of the Virgin of Guadalupe across the United States, is mistakenly introduced as Chapter Six (15), and chapter Six, which covers the enchantment of Santa Fe in the 1920s and 30s and the appropriation by the Chicano movement of this same region as Aztlán in the 1960s and 70s, is referred to as Chapter Seven (16). An editor, if not the author, should have picked up such obvious errors. These complaints aside, the book as an object is beautifully designed, printed on high quality paper in an easy-to-read typeface, with a large number of color illustrations. It brings together a variety of current subjects in an original and innovative way, allowing the reader ample opportunity to exercise her own imagination in an exploration of objects misplaced, displaced, and otherwise transformed.

NOTES

1. See, for example, the essays in Edward J. Sullivan, ed. *Nueva York, 1613-1945*. Exh. Cat., New York: New York Historical Society in association with Scala Publishers, 2010.

2. The term "Spanish fantasy heritage" was coined by historian Carey McWilliams to describe the fabrication of a Spanish colonial history by an Anglo elite determined to keep power from and ignore the concerns of Mexican and Indian inhabitants in the American southwest. See William Deverell, *White-Washed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of Its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2004); Phoebe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2006); and Charles Montgomery, *The Spanish Redemption: Heritage, Power and Loss on New Mexico's Upper Rio Grande* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2002).

YU, TIMOTHY. *Race and the Avant-Garde: Experimental and Asian American Writing Since 1965*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009.

Juliana Chang, Santa Clara University

The avant-garde is generally conceived of in formalist terms, as an assemblage of artists whose techniques push at the limits of aesthetic norms and conventions. Race, meanwhile, is commonly considered a sociohistorical formation, a set of categories that are shaped by social institutions and practices. As Timothy Yu notes in *Race and the Avant-Garde: Experimental and Asian American Poetry Since 1965*, such assumptions of the avant-garde and race have led to a narrowly circumscribed understanding of late twentieth century and contemporary American poetry. In this limited view, experimental poetry associated primarily with white male writers is seen as formally innovative yet socially ineffectual, while much Asian American and ethnic poetry is considered socially authentic but aesthetically conventional.

In contrast, Yu understands the avant-garde as "an aesthetic and a social grouping defined as much by its formation of a distinctive kind of community as by its revolutionary aesthetics" (2). In this way, he interprets both Language and Asian American poetries as avant-garde developments. Yu's two major contributions to the field of contemporary American poetry studies are (1) an analysis of how avant-garde poetry communities such as Language poets are ethnicized, that is, made culturally particular; and (2) a demonstration that Asian American identity was mediated through poetic form, not the reverse. In the first case, an aesthetics that is often abstracted from its social location is returned to this specificity. In the second, the notion that social identifications provide the foundation for aesthetic practice is questioned; these social identities are shown instead to be contingent upon poetic formulations. These highly original insights from Yu's study will indelibly influence critical understanding of contemporary American poetry, especially experimental and ethnic

poetries.

Yu's analytic method consists of unpacking the productive tensions between the particular and the universal in the work of Allen Ginsberg, Ron Silliman, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, John Yau, and some of the pioneering Asian American poets of the 1970s. *Race and the Avant-Garde* begins with a reading of Ginsberg's "Howl" as a "delicate balance of the particular and the universal," but notes that "such a synthesis may no longer be possible in the social landscape of the 1960s and after" (36), given the critique of universalism by social movements such as feminism and the Black Power movement. The book then moves to Silliman's writing as an example of the way that post-1960s experimental writing acknowledges, critiques, and even resists the social positioning of its own (white male) writers and subjects. For example, Yu thoughtfully interprets a series of apparently disjunctive sentences and images in Silliman's *Ketjak*, then explains that "the technique of parataxis, of following one sentence with another that is apparently unrelated, refuses to allow [the author's social] perspective to cohere—serving, in essence, as the author's bulwark against himself" (71). Yu not only considers how the avant-garde may be understood sociologically, he also makes the case that poetry itself can operate as a critical sociological method.

Yu's reading of Asian American poetry and poetics is similarly inventive. While 1970s Asian American poetry has been generally understood as straightforward and activist in its articulations, Yu shows through his archival work that Asian American poets were quite concerned with questions of form. In questioning aesthetic norms and expectations, Yu argues, Asian American poets of this period may be considered an avant-garde formation. Yu encourages us to read the poetry and poetics of Francis Naohiko Oka and Janice Mirikitani in new and fresh ways. Through these re-readings, Yu intervenes in an understanding of avant-garde writing as a "new" or exceptional development in Asian American literature. In this way, he helps us to re-periodize Asian American poetry and recognize its avant-garde roots in earlier times.

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and John Yau are perhaps the best known artist-writers of Asian descent that engage in experimental technique. Yu undertakes a comprehensive review of the critical reception of Cha's ground-breaking and genre-confounding work *Dictee*, and notes the limitations of criticism that is bound by "postmodern Orientalist" or "ethnic history" frameworks. Yu astutely notes that most critics have focused on the first half of *Dictee*, which is easier to understand through such Orientalist, ethnic, or historicist lenses. It is the second half of *Dictee*, Yu notes, that foregrounds Cha's critiques of and emptying out of myth and history. "[H]istorical monuments must become abstract, unmarked, before they can be reclaimed for the project of writing. The objects of history must become meaningless before they can become meaningful again; they must become arbitrary markers, like linguistic signs, before they can be used as language" (134-5). This is not to say that they remain empty; rather, their abstractions are then reclaimed as agency by "the ritual function

of art" (135). As in the previous chapter, Yu shows how writing and art provide foundations for ethnic identity and history, rather than only the reverse.

In the final chapter, Yu notes that Yau's writing implicitly questions the flattening abstractions of universalist writing: "received discourses of history that shape the individual cannot be easily discarded," for they are in fact "irresistibly attractive" to the individual subject (154). Yu considers several examples from Yau's oeuvre, including the prose poem "Peter Lorre Improvises Mr. Moto's Monologue." Here the hybridized and melded persona of Lorre-Moto (the Austrian actor Peter Lorre and his Japanese character Mr. Moto) is presented as a mechanized monster: "My mechanized eyes are spherical rooms bisected by new dancing knives….Matching black eyebrows and hair. I'm better than a laboratory frog because I don't need batteries to send my electricity" (*Forbidden Entries* 77). The marked ethnic creature "contaminates" the white audience: "I float outside your window on rainy nights, a blanket of gray mist you can't peel from the glass…I'm a rug of glistening grit settling on the shelves of atomized fat lodged beneath your epidermal layers…I'm a high end pastoral inmate, an ingratiating drip of diseased music scratching against your fidelity" (*Forbidden Entries* 77). The subcultural and the mainstream—the particular and the universal—find themselves mutually, viscerally, and uneasily embedded.

Yu argues that Yau's writing offers a dual corrective: "When seen against mainstream Asian American writing, Yau shows how seeing Asian American poetry as a poetry of pure content can lead to a deadening commodification….But Yau's poetry also warns us against reading 'experimental' poetic techniques too abstractly" (159). R*ace and the Avant-Garde* similarly provides a nuanced understanding of ethnicity and experimental writing, noting that the particular and the abstract should be considered not as oppositional, but as radically relational to each other.

Ty, Eleanor Rose. *Unfastened: Globality and Asian North American Narratives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. Pp. 175.

Jessica Tsui Yan Li, York University

Globalization has flourished since the late nineteenth century and gradually became a worldwide phenomenon in the 1990s after the end of the cold war. With international division of labour and use of advanced technology, globalization has brought about intensified commercialization, thus leading to massive transnational movement of people, products and cultures. With *Unfastened: Globality and Asian North American Narratives*, Eleanor Rose Ty adopts a balanced view to examine the impact of globalization and the condition of globality in her critical reading of Asian North American literature, films and plays. She argues that identities of characters in Asian North American creative works have become unfastened to specific nations,

languages, religions, class and gender due to the changes brought about by global interconnections.

In her introductory chapter that stands as the book's tour de force, Ty has outlined both problems and progress caused by globalization. For the undesirable consequences, she has cited Masao Miyoshi's idea that many postcolonial countries in the Third World are forced to negotiate with the knowledge of the outside world. Moreover, instead of their own nations, workers are increasingly required to be loyal to transnational corporations, which are indifferent to the improvement of the poverty or the rights of workers. Other problems include the loss of indigenous culture, the creation of homogeneity of the transnational class, the development of urban slum, and environmental destruction. For the advancement, Ty has quoted Robin Cohen's idea of new opportunities created by globalization, such as the rise of a world economy, international migration, global cities, cosmopolitan and local cultures, and a fluid social identity. Ty combines both Miyoshi and Cohen's arguments to have a justified perspective on the impact of globalization and apply such idea to study Asian North American literature, drama and films. Adopting James Clifford's view on the notion of travel, Ty argues that globalization both constrains and empowers Asian North Americans, whose creative works not only present the inequalities brought by the impact of globalization on them, but also portray their search for new geographical and psychological spaces as well as ethnic, racial and gender alliances.

While globalization refers to a social process characterized by transnational economic and corporate activities, globality signifies a global condition or state as defined by Martin Shaw. Ty has cited Shaw's account of today's globality as a transgression of temporal and spatial limits in order to achieve global interconnections. Ty also names some concerns of globality that include issues of earth and environment, health and pandemic, and globalization of markets and production. What interests Ty most is the attitude, "critical globality," a term Alys Weinbaum and Brent Edwards label as a critical engagement with the effects of globalization and globality. Ty focuses on these current issues of globalization and globility and their consequences in her analysis of Asian North American literary and performing productions. She argues that since globalization has more significantly affected the people in the south and the people in the north, Asian North American authors are critically engaged with the social dimension of globalization and the condition of globality, such as structures of domination across and within nations, gender, class and racial discrimination under western imperialism and overdevelopment, the overuse and misuse of natural resources, and the results of the compression of transnational space.

Among the social dimension of globalization and globality, increased mobility became one of the major phenomenon experienced by Asian Canadians and Asian Americans in recent decades. Ty quoted Sau-ling Wong's early studies of Asian American literature. Wong claims that since the nineteenth century, American writers have profoundly depicted the image of mobility, albeit mainstream Americans and Asian Americans have significantly different experiences. While the experience

of the former is associated with "extravagance" that connotes freedom, adventures and self-actualization, that of the latter is linked to "necessity," which signifies subjugation, survival and even immobility due to their undesirable economic, social and political circumstances in the first half of the twentieth century. However, Ty argues that the boundary between "extravagance" and "necessity" experienced by these two groups have been shattered in the last two decades due to the advancement in communication and travel and the increase in the professional and affluent Asian American and Asian Canadian immigrants, whose worldview and livelihood are different from those of the earlier immigrants. Ty observes that since the 1990s the Asian North American narratives have changed from mainly auto-ethnographic to loosely or even no longer tie to ethnic identities. These works have more experimental forms, structures and content.

While the coalitions among Asian Canadians and Asian Americans have been founded on their shared experience of having been racially and ethnically discriminated, Ty challenges the value of maintaining a group identity by perpetuating the sense of otherness and points out the varying experiences of this diverse group. For the term Asian North Americans, she includes the east, southeast and south Asian Americans and Canadians. She claims that recent Asian North American authors portray relations not only between dominant Caucasians and themselves, but also among Asian Americans, Asian Canadians and members of other ethnicities. They treat their culture not as a pre-given identity, but as a "performative" one, as Judith Butler has used in her analysis of gender studies. Asianness is seen as one aspect rather than a stereotyped identity of the character's life. In defining the term Asian North Americans, Ty has acknowledged the diversity of this group and embraced a wider membership than the traditional sense of Asian Americans. Her naming of the term can recognize the cohesion of this group of people, thus strengthening their political and socio-cultural power. However, would the zeroing of this group of people inevitably alienate them from the rest of North Americans, particularly the mainstream Americans and Canadians? Perhaps so far it is necessary and powerful for Asian North Americans who share similar experiences to command attentions as a group so as to fight for their common interests.

In her critical readings, Ty examines the less-known contemporary Asian North American literature, films and plays. While most of them criticize the consequences of global migration, some of them present the potential of globality. Ty's book is divided into three sections. The first one, "Doing Global Dirty Work," mainly investigates the narratives that reflect the negative effects of globalization, such as the discrepancy between the economic failures and high expectations of the Pilipino immigrants in Brian Roley's *American Son* and Han Ong's *Fixer Chao*, the deprivation of the Chinese prostitutes in Singapore in the late nineteenth century in Lydia Kwa's *This Place Called Absence*, and the oppression of the Korean camptown women by the American militaries in Nora Okja Keller's *Fox Girl.* The protagonists, nevertheless, manage to negotiate power within their degraded lives. The second

section, "Performing and Negotiating Traditional identities," analyzes the navigation between Asian and North American traditions and values. For instance, while Betty Aquan's *Mother Tongue* and Sunil Kuruvilla's *Rice Boy* associate the dimension of disability with ethnic issues of immigration and assimilation, Nina Quino and Nadine Villasin's play *Miss Orient(ed)* and Deepa Mehta's film *Bollywood/Hollywood* present new subjectivities produced by hybrid globalized cultures. The third section, "Future Perfect: Feminist Resistance to Global Homogeneity," showcases the most innovative Asian North American creative works. For examples, Chitra Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices* and Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl* employ fantasy and surrealism to destabilize the social order of global capitalism and consumerism. Hiromi Goto's *The Kappa Child* and Ruth Ozeki's *All Over Creation* criticize environmental destruction and undermine stereotypes of the model minority of Asian North Americans.

By studying the social issues of globalization and globality in Asian North American narratives, Ty shows possibilities of ways characters negotiate with the changes brought by transnational interconnections, which break down the boundaries of national, ethnic, linguistic, religious, class and gender identities, through the presentation of vivid images, imaginative plots and innovative techniques. Her definition of Asian North Americans both strengthens and confines this group of people, which nevertheless suits their current needs and benefits. Her critical reading highlights less-known creative works, which contributes to the existing scholarship of Asian North American literary and performing arts studies. This book adds a valuable asset to the research of globalization, globality, mobility and Asian North American literature, films and plays.

Chapman, Rosemary. *Between Languages and Cultures: Colonial and Postcolonial Readings of Gabrielle Roy*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2009.

Sophie Marcotte, Université Concordia

Alors qu'elle séjourne en Angleterre en 1938, Gabrielle Roy prend la décision de consacrer sa vie à l'écriture, comme elle le raconte dans son autobiographie, *La Détresse et l'Enchantement*, publiée à titre posthume en 1984. La jeune femme, qui s'éveille un beau matin dans une chambre du *Century Cottage*, à Upshire, en banlieue de Londres, où elle «entend» justement l'appel à la vocation d'écrivain, ne choisit pas alors d'écrire en anglais, la langue dans laquelle elle a pourtant reçu toute son éducation au Manitoba. Elle se met plutôt à écrire en français, la langue du Québec de ses ancêtres, celle que ses parents ont réussi à transmettre à leur tour à leurs propres enfants : « Or, cette histoire que j'avais découverte m'attendant pour ainsi dire au réveil et qui venait si bien, elle me venait dans les mots de ma langue française.…les mots qui me venaient aux lèvres, au bout de ma plume, étaient de ma lignée, de ma

solidarité ancestrale » (*La Détresse et l'Enchantement* 392). Ce choix d'écrire en français peut-il constituer une forme de réaction au colonialisme anglophone?

Between Languages and Cultures de Rosemary Chapman examine justement cette question en étudiant le rapport problématique de Gabrielle Roy—qui a passé les trois premières décennies de sa vie dans un milieu essentiellement anglophone—à la langue et à la culture francophones. En effet, Roy a non seulement étudié en anglais, le Gouvernement du Manitoba ayant adopté, au tournant du XXe siècle, une loi restreignant l'usage du français dans les écoles, mais elle a également travaillé en anglais au cours des années où elle a pratiqué le métier d'institutrice dans sa province natale. Lorsqu'elle a quitté le Manitoba, en 1937 à destination de l'Europe, « to complete her linguistic and cultural education » (4), précise Chapman, elle a séjourné successivement à Paris et à Londres, baignant une fois de plus dans les deux contextes linguistiques et culturels qui ont marqué son enfance et sa jeunesse. Puis, de retour au Canada à l'aube de la Deuxième guerre mondiale, elle choisit de s'installer à Montréal, où elle est devient journaliste pour le compte de différents périodiques, dont *Le Jour* et *Le Bulletin des agriculteurs*. C'est également à cette époque qu'elle commence à rédiger *Bonheur d'occasion*, qui sera publié en 1945. Or, Roy, qui écrit en français, et dont l'intrigue du roman qu'elle rédige est campée dans le quartier francophone de Saint-Henri, habite alors le quartier anglophone de Westmount. D'ailleurs, pendant toutes les années où elle demeurera à Montréal, à l'exception de deux années passées à Ville LaSalle avec son mari (1950-1952), elle habitera ce quartier. Il s'agit vraisemblablement là d'un autre élément qu'on pourrait ranger parmi les manifestations de l'ambivalence linguistique et culturelle dont on trouve à la fois des traces dans la vie et dans l'œuvre de la romancière.

Par ailleurs, Rosemary Chapman évoque assez longuement l'éducation qu'a reçue Gabrielle Roy au Manitoba, dont il est notamment question dans quelques textes autobiographiques de la romancière, qui contiennent des marques plus ou moins importantes d'un certain discours de la « résistance » : « Souvenirs du Manitoba » (1954), « Ma petite rue qui m'a menée autour du monde » (vers 1978) et « Mes études à Saint-Boniface » (1976), ainsi que *La Détresse et l'Enchantement* (1984). Les souvenirs d'école de Gabrielle Roy évoquent en effet une opposition entre les anglophones et les francophones au Manitoba et, à plus petite échelle, entre Winnipeg et Saint-Boniface. Il y est certes question de « provocation » et « d'hostilité de la part de petits froupes de fanatiques », comme le rappelle Chapman, cependant rarement n'est-il fait mention d'une opposition tranchée entre les deux camps. L'ambivalence est reconduite à travers les matières étudiées, parmi lesquelles la littérature française, que Roy avoue avoir trouvé pendant un bon moment « bien pâle à côté de l'anglaise » (« Mes études à Saint-Boniface »,1976), et la littérature anglaise, qui «livrait accès à ses plus hauts génies » (Ibid.). Cela dit, alors qu'on aurait pu s'attendre à l'évocation d'un jeu de pouvoirs largement dominé par les anglophones au détriment de la minorité francophone, Roy s'attache plutôt à montrer que la relation de pouvoir est même renversée, à un certain moment, alors que l'inspecteur d'école (anglophone), devant lequel la

jeune Gabrielle récite des extraits de *Macbeth*, devient à son tour l'objet de curiosité lors de sa visite « en territoire ennemi » (57).

L'étude proposée constitue incontestablement un apport important à la recherche sur l'œuvre de Gabrielle Roy en ce sens qu'elle en renouvelle les perspectives d'analyse et qu'elle pose un regard très sensible sur des questions fondamentales liées à la compréhension des littératures canadienne et québécoise, entre autres la relation à la culture et à la langue. Car, malgré l'abondance de la production critique sur l'œuvre royenne, peu de chercheurs avaient insisté jusqu'ici sur les conséquences de cette dualité culturelle et linguistique sur l'œuvre de la romancière.

Enfin, la liste des sources documentaires consultées par Chapman est impressionnante. Tous les travaux fondamentaux en études royennes et les textes fondateurs en matière de colonialisme et de postcolonialisme sont convoqués. La recherche historique qui a par ailleurs été menée sur l'éducation au Manitoba et au Québec est particulièrement fouillée.

L'ouvrage de Chapman se range donc parmi les livres les plus intéressants consacrés à l'œuvre de Gabrielle Roy qui ont paru au cours des dernières années, tant par la qualité de son analyse, son originalité, sa sensibilité aux textes de la romancière, que par la grande valeur de sa recherche au plan historique. Il serait à souhaiter que le livre soit éventuellement traduit vers le français.

Blum, Cinzia Sartini. *Rewriting the Journey in Contemporary Italian Literature: Figures of Subjectivity in Progress*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2008.

Rebecca West, University of Chicago

In this densely argued study, there are many surprising juxtapositions of authors, texts, and issues. It is not often that Italo Calvino is put into critical dialogue with feminist theorists such as Rosi Braidotti or postcolonial thinkers such as Gayatri Spivak, or that Gianni Celati's work is used as a salient example of modernist and postmodernist writing allied to radical alienation and self-reflexivity, a line that extends back at least as far as Baudelaire. Feminist writers—Biancamaria Frabotta, Dacia Maraini, Toni Maraini, and Maria Pace Ottieri—are analyzed in the company not only of Calvino and Celati, but also in congenial critical and theoretical contact with migrant writers who have expanded the boundaries of Italian literature in essential ways over the last few decades. Binding together the numerous topics and moments in literary history analyzed in Blum's book is the trope of the journey, understood both as literal travel and as a search for self-identity and understanding of the other. According to the author, female mobility as it is articulated in modern Italian prose fiction and poetry by women provides a powerful challenge to post-

modern melancholic writings (by men) that express a sense of impasse, of the end of history, and of solipsism.

This book is itself constructed as a journey, which begins with modernity and literary modernism and (provisionally) concludes with the open-ended writings of migrant writers. The trajectory goes from the modernist figures of the belated traveller and the *flâneur* who represent a melancholic concentration on loss and lack, to the emblematic personage known as Gradiva as articulated in works by Freud and Jensen, and then on to detailed analyses of the four women writers mentioned above, ending with a chapter devoted to selected migrant writers in today's Italy. Thus the central focus of the book—writing by women—is set in a complex context that enriches, by contrast and comparison, the positive value to be found in work that goes far beyond the usual critical boundaries of "feminist writing," as it enters into implicit conversation with other historical and contemporary arenas of literary and cultural production both before and after the heyday of second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s. Blum's construction of this layered context is one of the most original aspects of her book. One may not agree with all of her conclusions, but it is difficult to reject the value of such a capacious approach.

As a scholar who has written extensively on Gianni Celati, I found Blum's reading of his work the most challenging and, in part, perplexing. She chooses him as the emblematic voice of the melancholic, end-oriented exhaustion that haunts so many postmodernist texts. His attempts to find a kind of new ethics of writing are fairly much ignored in favor of emphasizing his "alienating self-reflexive attitude" seen most clearly, according to Blum, in his *Avventure in Africa*. While it is true that Celati's essays on history and modernist literature, which he wrote mainly in the 1960s and early 1970s, reveal an orientation to fragmentation, lack of foundations, literariness, and other topics of postmodernist preference, he made a radical turn away from his early work in the 1980s and beyond, seeking ways to connect with the external world and with otherness. He became committed to listening and observing, and to a form of writing that eschewed purely literary effects in favor of basic storytelling. He embraced the disorientation that travel brings, as well as an openness to other forms of life, such as in the Senegalese village where he dwelt among the people there for a sustained time, and about which he wrote in his fictionalized travel diary, *Avventure in Africa*, and filmed in a collaborative project, *Diol Kadd*, which involved much work with an African actor. (I should add that he also worked in the village to help construct a badly needed communal well.) While there is a melancholic cast to much of Celati's writing since his turn in the 1980s to the external world and to otherness, his dogged search for an ethics of living is anything but self-serving or end-oriented; he has continued to look for ways of creating a sense of the commonplace's value in his return to basic storytelling and in his incessant wandering as well as in his encounters with others. If he fears the negative effects of so-called progress, he nonetheless goes on believing in the positive potential of commonly shared values such as friendship, community, and family, which he sees as

antidotes to the alienation of our postmodern existences.

Calvino is read as a contrastive voice to Celati's, the former seen as a writer and essayist many of whose beliefs and values are shared by feminist and postcolonial writers and thinkers. Calvino's choice of a female authorial figure in *Il cavaliere inesistente* allies him, in Blum's view, to feminist concerns with affectivity, and his embrace of nomadism in "Le sculture e i nomadi," a piece included in the volume *Collezione di sabbia*, connects him to Braidotti, Spivak, and other "nomadic" feminist theorists. To my mind, the rather stark opposition set up between Calvino and Celati, while allowing Blum to activate her basically contrastive critical structure (the solipsistic, belated modernist/postmodernist male symbolic vs. the open, other-oriented postmodern female symbolic), overlooks or simply chooses to ignore aspects of both writers' work that do not fit so easily into clearcut oppositional positions. Calvino's oft-repeated desire to attain a completely self-cancelling kind of writing (not "I write" but "it writes"), for example, is anything but affectively open, and his validation of female perspectives is a sporadic rather than a constant element of his work. In short, I am not convinced by the choice of these two writers as the most representative of the two contrastive directions that Blum seeks to articulate. It is true, however, that the many issues raised by Blum in the first part of the book are extremely valid and approached with rigor.

Having engaged briefly so far with the many issues raised in the first chapter, I have arrived only at the threshold of the book's main content, which is contained in five more chapters of great density and complexity. After having analyzed what she sees as the "end of the journey" mentality that characterizes much of modernist and postmodernist writing primarily by male authors, Blum turns onto her own critical journey's next path, which is to investigate what she calls the "feminist trope" of the figure of Gradiva. The subsequent chapters are devoted to extensive analyses of selected works by Biancamaria Frabotta, Dacia Maraini, Toni Maraini, and, lastly, some migrant writers. Having constructed a rich literary historical context for her analyses of feminist issues, Blum gives her readers enormous stimulus for finding numerous connections back to earlier literature and forward to today's writers.

The Gradiva chapter is much more than a consideration of the trope of the "walking woman" as embodied in the figure of Gradiva; in the first part of the chapter Blum thoroughly reviews the work of Cixous, Muraro, Cavarero, the Diotima Collective, and the salient contrasts among Anglo-American, French, and Italian feminist theorization and practice. She sees recent feminist work of whatever kind as preparing for a new opening onto literary tradition and specifically onto the recovery of feminine figures "from a long process of repression and 'metaphysical cannibalism'" (54).

Gradiva is one such figure, the "walking woman" foreshadowed in Dante's Beatrice, D'Annunzio's female apparitions, and Baudelaire's "A une passante." Blum goes on to consider Gradiva as she appears in Wilhelm Jensen's novella, Freud's writing on Jensen's work, in Surrealist visual art, in Cixous's *Le Troisième Corps*, and lastly in Italian feminism and specifically in Biancamaria Frabotta's poem "Gradiva." Blum's

analyses are astoundingly rich, and impossible to summarize in this brief venue due to their complexity and the centrifugal nature of their many resonances that solicit our deeper understanding of both verbal and visual representations. Similarly, the subsequent chapters on individual women writers are packed with subtle analyses and excellent insights, again articulated around Blum's central critical metaphor of the journey.

Vagabondage; wandering through both personal and collective history; finding signposts in past cultural and literary history to guide one's journey towards a deeper comprehension of self and others: these themes regarding "figures of subjectivity in progress" are integrated into and surpassed by the phenomenon of "actual migrations," which Blum explores in her final chapter. The massive displacements of peoples that we have witnessed in recent decades have resulted in literature that now helps to shape "an evolving notion of subjectivity (and humanity) in progress" (202-203). Blum sees two major categories of stories about migration recently published in Italy: accounts by Italian writers and texts by the immigrants themselves. These writers provide "figures of mediation" that move between "categories such as reason and affect, critical distance and affective proximity, resistance and interaction, individual freedom and ties to family or community" (203), all of which have been addressed in previous chapters. As one would expect, Blum concentrates on women's voices, beginning with Maria Pace Ottieri and moving on to immigrant writers such as the Senegalese Top Niang, the Brazilian Christiana De Caldas Brito, and the Somalian Shirin Ramzanali Fazel. Blum refers often to the important work on migrant literature promoted by the American-based Italian scholar Graziella Parati and, returning to her initial chapter on postmodern travel literature, Blum concludes that "the new literature of migration shares a fundamental characteristic with postmodern travel literature, as it typically replaces the traditional heroic journey with stories of loss and disillusionment" (253). The important difference is to be found, however, in the refusal by migrant writers of a self-centered mode of crisis such as is often seen in postmodern writers; instead the migrant writers create in their works "meaningful tension between detachment and intimacy, transformation and continuity, similarity and difference, home and away" (253). They see themselves as "historical subjects" who can both reflect and shape experience and culture(s). Blum's book is thus not only a rich exploration of the theme of metaphorical journeying, but also a call to what she terms "interactive universalism," which might make of us all more ethically attuned *witnesses* to the often harsh realities that are shaping present and future "subjectivities in progress," and more aesthetically attuned readers who might find once more a "home" in literature.