

such masters as Frost and Ezra Pound, Walcott values the beneficence of poetry despite the inadequacies of the man behind the art: "A great poem is a state of raceless, sexless, timeless grace . . . too full of such benedictions for this reader not to pick it up and continue" (114).

Joseph Brodsky, Seamus Heaney, and Derek Walcott are not about the task of breaking new interpretive ground in these essays; they read Frost and his text as poets, rather than critical theorists. Consequently, *Homage to Robert Frost* is at least as valuable for what it reveals about the aesthetic priorities of its contributors as it is for its contribution to Frost criticism.

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WORK CITED

Walcott, Derek. *Another Life*. New York: Farrar, 1973. R.405.



Malashri Lal, ed. *Feminist Spaces: Cultural Readings from India and Canada*. New Delhi: Allied, 1997. Pp. xxiii, 236.

Part of the occasional monograph series produced under the auspices of the University of Delhi Centre for Canadian Studies (UDCCS) and released at the recent XIV International Conference on Canadian Studies hosted by Pondicherry University, Malashri Lal's latest book is, in her own words "an anthology with a focus on feminism" (vii). Of the fourteen essays by new and established Indian and Canadian scholars included in the collection, twelve are directly concerned with exploring aspects of the differing cultural and institutional ideologies of race and gender that have dominated and continue to oppress women in Canadian multicultural society. Most of these explorations take the shape of critical readings of literary and theoretical texts by mainstream and minority women writers from Canada. Works by authors such as Sara Jeanette Duncan, Mavis Gallant, Margaret Laurence, Maria Campbell, Margaret Atwood, Carol Shields, Claire Harris, M. Nourbese Philip, Dionne Brand, Joy Kogawa, Beatrice Culleton, Audrey Thomas, Pamela Boyd, and Wendy Lill are opened to sensitive scrutinies informed by feminist, postcolonial, and postmodern reading strategies. The well-known Métis writer Emma LaRoque's moving autobiographical essay "Tides, Towns and Trains" is a forceful indictment of the inhuman, callous victimization of Native Canadians by mainstream Canadian society. In another subjective essay, Canada-based Indian writer Uma Parameswaran, through her own creative writing, draws attention to the diasporic woman writer's "conscious or subconscious sense of addressing a community within the larger community of humankind," thereby bridging the cultural chasm that exists in her world (12). Sukrita Kumar's engaging conversation with French Canadian writer Lola Lemire Tostevin is distinctive for its at-

tempts to clarify a feminist poetics in relation to both biologically and culturally determined female experience.

In addition to giving space to issues of culture, race, class, language, and gender—issues that often problematize the identities and writings of Native, Asian, African, and European women in Canada—*Feminist Spaces: Cultural Readings From India and Canada* also makes room for several unchauvinistic masculine points of view. By including her enlightening interview with Canadian novelist Robert Kroetsch, an essay on award-winning Indian-Canadian writer Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*, and four insightful feminist studies by male scholars from India, Lal avoids limiting her book to the gendered space of a "women reading women's writing" project.

The few problems I encountered with Lal's text are related to matters of approach and theoretical referencing. An anthology that claims to be "constituted of cross-cultural responses" (as noted on the back cover) might have benefitted from a deeper probing of the cultural differences and similarities underlying the Indian and the Canadian context. Apart from Shirin Kudchedkar's tentative formulation of distinctions between feminism in India and Canada, Coomi S. Vevaina's approaching marginalized Canadian women's poetry from her own minority position of a Parsi woman living in India, Kavita Sharma's comparative study of Indian, Greek, and Japanese immigrant experiences in Canada, and the conversation between Lola Lemire Tostevin and Sukrita Kumar, there is relatively little cross-cultural engagement from the Indian reader's point of view.

I felt also that the book's theoretical referencing within the intersections of feminism, postcolonialism, and postmodernism could have been more fully articulated and clarified. Although Lal attempts in her introductory essay to situate and link Canadian "postmodernism, feminism, postcoloniality . . . [the three] issues that direct [her] enterprise" (xvii), her theorizing results in a superficial linkage. Taking Linda Hutcheon's cautionary call for differentiation between white Canadian historical experience of colonialism and postcolonialism and that experienced by the Third World as her starting point, Lal constructs a hasty parallel between the inherent "differentials within postcolonial discourse" and the "indeterminate area of subject position for those engaged in the interpretation of texts about Canada" (xiii). In the next few paragraphs, she moves past the subject of cultural difference and the differently constituted postcolonial relations of power in Canada and India to the common "rubrics of interest" (xiv) shared by Canadian and Indian scholars, which she proceeds to identify as the problem of national and individual identity formations in postcolonial discourse, the politics of gender in feminist discourse, and "the indeterminacy of location" (xiv) in the theory and practice of postmodernism. All of these, in her view, demonstrate the classic postmodern position (albeit infused with political agency) of the

“ex-centric” in relation to any notions of centrality (xv). Although Lal’s conclusions are valid, I feel that her theorizing just does not succeed in knitting the three apparently distinct and conflictual critical discourses into a unified, cogent paradigm for interpreting female experience.

It would be fair to accept Lal’s admission in her concluding paragraph that “perhaps inclusiveness rather than integration is the merit of this anthology” (xxi). That does not prevent *Feminist Spaces: Cultural Readings From India and Canada* from being a highly relevant and valuable resource for teachers, students, and researchers in Canadian Studies programmes in India and abroad.

ABHA PRAKASH LEARD



Frank Birbalsingh. *Novels and the Nation. Essays in Canadian Literature*. Toronto: TSAR, 1995. Pp. xvi, 183. \$19.95.

Frank Birbalsingh gives us the results of more than 20 years of interest in Canadian and postcolonial literature, particularly Caribbean and African. Such a broad outlook enables him to create distance in space as well as in time. The early essays are influenced by Northrop Frye’s myth criticism and makes consistent use of Margaret Atwood’s survival and victimization paradigms. But they also bring fresh insights to a number of the writers under full consideration—about half of the 60 listed in the index.

The 18 essays progressively move from authors such as Stephen Leacock who denied their Canadianness while in fact establishing its roots, to the self-conscious and highly sophisticated sense of nationhood in Neil Bissoondath and Michael Ondaatje. The grouping of essays has some advantages as well as drawbacks. They are self-sufficient and sharply-etched, but some silences remain and repetitions occur. As the title of the collection suggests—“Novels” rather than “the Canadian Novel”—the view is panoramic but does not aim at comprehensiveness: Hugh MacLennan and Margaret Atwood are not given the full-scope examination one could have expected, and a number of important novelists, such as Timothy Findley, Jack Hodgins, Robert Kroetsch, Carol Shields, are left out altogether. Conversely, the essay on E. J. Pratt’s poetry remains alien in a study of the novel. Finally, it might have been advantageous to fuse chapter 16, “South Asian Canadian Novels in English—the 1970s,” and chapter 17, “South Asian Canadian Writers from Africa and the Carribean.” Avoiding repetition concerning Harold Sonny Ladoo or Reshard Gool would have given more room for the particularly illuminating consideration of those writers and possibly others. What I am really saying is that I hope this collection will have an enlarged second edition; the omissions are minor restrictions in a study in which the central concern with na-