

Leela Gandhi. *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Columbia UP, 1998. Pp. x, 200. \$42.50, \$17.50 pb.

Leela Gandhi's *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* appears at a time when postcolonial critics have begun a more sober dialogue with postcolonial theory. In this respect, Gandhi joins such critics as Arif Dirlik, Bart Moore-Gilbert, and Robert Young in an effort to map out the philosophical and historical contours of this once new field.¹ While Dirlik is highly contentious in his critique of postcolonialism's ideological and historical complicity, often implicit, with global capitalism, Moore-Gilbert's engagement with postcolonial theory takes a less provocative look at the influential theories advanced by Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak. Gandhi, however, is distinctive in providing an overarching and unprecedented study of postcolonial theory by situating it in the antagonistic exchange between "poststructuralist postcolonialism" and "Marxist postcolonialism." The precision with which Gandhi puts into perspective postcolonial theory's intellectual heritage further enables her to articulate a high level of conceptual complexity while keeping her study free from opacity and playfulness that often accompany this kind of theoretical expositions.

In sketching out postcolonial theory's intellectual heritage, Gandhi traces it back to two historical figures, Frantz Fanon and Mahatma Gandhi, who contributed to enlightening the anti-colonial project by revealing the "ethical inadequacy and undesirability" (21) of the West's colonial civilizing mission. In her sympathetic reading of Fanon and Gandhi, the author assents to their claim that Western civilization must be reassessed against the damaging consequences, psychological, economic, and cultural it has inflicted on overseas colonies; and, accordingly, the edifice of Western modernity must be seen as standing on the very foundation of economic exploitation, cultural manipulation, and military conquest. Well aware of the "stark differences" (18) embodied in their texts, Gandhi nonetheless notes the agreement between Fanon and Gandhi that the postcolonial task for the colonized is to rebuild their liberated nation into a "creative autonomy from Europe" (19), and in this the two thinkers are optimistic about the colonized's ability to not only rehabilitate their wounded psyches and truncated homelands but also to make civilizations finer than those of Europe.

Fanon's and Gandhi's projects anticipate two alternative modes of thinking: Marxist postcolonialism and poststructuralist postcolonialism. Here the author succinctly outlines the major terrains of polemics over which the two sides exchange their voices of dissent: while critics inclined to Marxist analysis of colonialism tend to see colonialism as "a necessary sub-plot to the emergence of market society in Europe, and to the concomitant globalization of capital" (24), critics from the post-

structuralist camp choose to shift the emphasis from the economic terrain to the epistemological domain, explaining colonialism in light of a failing narcissistic epistemology nurtured by the Western tradition of humanism, the founding father of which is, of course, Rene Descartes, the eighteenth-century rationalist philosopher. Gandhi suggests that “the Cartesian celebration of the human subject’s epistemological possibilities” (35) accords to the subject the “power over, and freedom from, the external world of objects” (35); in so doing, Descartes lays the foundation for the Western subjectivist and rationalist philosophy. Worthy of note is Gandhi’s useful distinction between Renaissance humanism (literary humanism) and Enlightenment humanism (scientific humanism). Although divergent in pedagogical emphases, both humanisms assume that “some human beings are more human than others—either on account of their access to superior learning or on account of their cognitive faculties” (29). Against this backdrop, Gandhi sees poststructuralism as a project to dismantle the Western humanist tradition, and figures such as Nietzsche, Derrida, and Lyotard are labeled anti-humanists. While it makes sense to see these thinkers as anti-humanists to the extent that they are all committed to interrogating humanism as a hegemonic epistemological paradigm, I find it a bit unsettling when Gandhi designates Marx as a “humanist” (27), who espouses the possibility of a rational and universal alliance between responsible individuals. It is unsettling because, like Nietzsche, Marx has serious doubts about Descartes’s self-transparent cogito; the difference is that while Nietzsche translates the absolute humanist subject into a space for endless construction, Marx turns it into a dialectical process through which the subject and the other collectively forge the social bond in which the subject and the other become substantiated.

Postcolonial critics’ uneasiness with Marxism, on the other hand, is examined in what Gandhi calls “the Said phenomenon.” Indeed, as Gandhi shows, Said’s theoretical informant derives from French poststructuralism and, more specifically, Foucauldian poststructuralism, and in aligning himself with the French, Said has sometimes misread Marx. Seen in this light, *Orientalism* can be read as “an attempt to extend the geographical and historical terrain of the poststructuralist discontent with Western epistemology” (73). Here Said’s uneasiness with Marxism implicitly exposes a problem that has prevented Marxism from becoming a major theoretical discourse in the humanities. While many seem to be content with Said’s epistemological approach—the power/knowledge explanatory paradigm—few have pondered the kind of power Said talks about. Is this power purely epistemic? Does it have anything to do with Europe’s privileged position as an economic power? What role have modern commodities played in the process of colonialism? Questions such as these evade Said’s often persuasive analyses; but having evaded them, he becomes less persuasive,

and this is why Gandhi's revision of this bias and her calling for a "democratic colloquium" (x) between Marxists and poststructuralists sounds timely and sensible.

However, Gandhi fully recognizes Said's undeniable leadership role in "single-handedly mov[ing] matters of colony and empire 'center stage' in Anglo-American literary and cultural history" (qtd. in Gandhi 65), and *Orientalism* is regarded as the starting point of the "first phase of postcolonial theory" (64). At the same time, though, Gandhi, like Denis Porter and P. K. Pakshi, notes Said's undue emphasis on the hegemonic nature of the Orientalist discourse and his negligence of the "dissident tradition" (79) from which writers like E. M. Forster and Edward Carpenter speak their anti-colonial dissent. Readers of *Orientalism* will recall that the concept of hegemony, borrowed from Gramsci, supports Said's descriptions of the overwhelming solidarity shared by the West in the attempt to colonize the Orient. Hegemony, in my view, is best understood as "being dominant" rather than "being homogeneous" because Said's subsequent readings of Forster and Conrad in *Orientalism* show that he is fully aware of the ideological ambivalence embodied in both writers' works. Also, my own reading of Forster does not seem to support Gandhi's conclusion that Forster "thought and discovered the Orient . . . as a safeguard against the political and personal repressions of imperial Europe" (79). Although Forster's discourse is frequently intersected by his doubt about British officialism, one thing that Forster never doubts is that England should rule India, however, in a more friendly manner.

Elsewhere, Gandhi analyses postcolonialism's troubled relationship with postcolonial feminism. While both discourses draw on poststructuralist theory and aim at inverting the "prevailing hierarchies of gender/culture/race," postcolonial feminists such as Spivak and Sara Suleri contend that too much "focus on racial politics . . . elides the double colonization of women under imperial conditions"—in this case, "the forgotten casualty of both imperial ideology, and native and foreign patriarchies" (83). They have repeatedly cautioned critics not to let the racial issues override gender issues because, as they argue, subalterns are always gendered. The chapter on the relationship between postcolonialism and nationalism, on the other hand, usefully discloses the inevitable dialectic into which nationalism is caught. On the one hand, metropolitan anti-nationalism bears a grudge against native nationalism for the latter's nostalgic return to cultural roots, yet on the other hand nationalism itself "permeates the expansionist politics of empire" (116), and for Gandhi, the debate between nationalism and cosmopolitanism is best resolved by "postnationalism" based on the globalization of the economic-electronic world. Having offered this alternative, Gandhi reminds the reader of the danger of the McDonald'sization/Americanization of the world. This means, for Gandhi, that postcolonial theory must revitalize itself by overcoming

its own limits, the tendency to organize the colonial experience as a homogenizing and all-inclusive category; in other words, postcolonial theory must find a way to speak simultaneously for the colonized world and for its multiple others within an international context.

LIDAN LIN

NOTE

- ¹ See Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: A Historical Introduction*, forthcoming in 1999; Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics*. London: Verso, 1997; and Arif Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997.



D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke, ed. *Heart of Darkness*. By Joseph Conrad. Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1995. Pp. 245. \$9.95 pb.

D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke's edition of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* brings to our attention a novel that needs to be read/taught with a mind to the politics of power and imperial rule. In an interview on CBC's "Writers & Company," Chinua Achebe pointed out "the problem with professors in the West today who don't see racism in *Heart of Darkness* [is that] they are still reading like young boys and girls who are fascinated by the sound of adjectives and the creation of emotion, a cheap emotion, with fear and stereotype" (Wachtel 104). At a time when we see "a rejection of the problems posed by racial content in Conrad's novella [and] a desire for a termination of dialogue" (Johnson 127), Goonetilleke's edition is timely as it prevents a suppression of Conrad's "complex 'dialogic' posture" (Shaffer 46) and promotes discussion on controversial issues such as Conrad's re/presentation of Africans as well as, in Edward Said's words, Conrad's "residual imperialist propensities" (*Culture and Imperialism* xx). This edition contains, in addition to chronological information and a bibliography, a "very substantial selection of contemporary reviews and documents, including comments by Conrad on the text, and a variety of historical documents that may help to give a sense of the time out of which *Heart of Darkness* emerged" (9).

One of many worthwhile features of Goonetilleke's edition is his introduction, in which he invites the reader to consider the following questions: "To what extent is the text imperialistic? To what extent (if at all) is it racist?" and, further, "What are the attitudes here of Marlow and Conrad? Is the reader led toward any position?" (14). These questions resuscitate the discussion of authorial intention, narrative voice, and "the colonial denigration of African cultures" (JanMohamed 160), despite Achebe's earlier forthright objections on each of these aspects, in his essay, "An Image of Africa: Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*."