

Feroza Jussawalla and Reed Way Dasenbrock. *Interviews with Writers of the Post-Colonial World*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1992. pp. 312. \$37.50; \$15.95 pb.

In the extremely broad and diverse cultural arena now designated as a postcolonial world, both writers and critics have attempted to define the qualities of the literature variously called "Commonwealth," "new literatures," "non-British literatures in English," or "postcolonial literature." No term happily contains the diverse specifics of the writers concerned, many of whom are now deservedly world-ranking authors. One of the virtues of this collection is that it suggests the nature of those specifics which challenge categorization.

The shared ground of the fourteen novelists interviewed by Jussawalla and Dasenbrock is defined in the introduction as "a common heritage of colonialism and post-colonialism, of multilingualism and multiculturalism, of displacement and migration" (14). The editors broadened the usual definition of "postcolonial" to embrace "minority" writers within the United States. There is one indigenous New Zealand writer, Maori Witi Ihimaera, though no native writers from Canada or Australia are included. Major players such as V. S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, and Wilson Harris are not included, presumably because their views have been more widely publicized. The "Chicano" or Hispanic writers (labels are often discussed) are Rudolfo Anaya, Rolando Hinojosa, and Sandra Cisneros, whose refreshing and confident voices do add a whole dimension to previous debates. The editors have thus left out what they call the "dominion" or Second World writers of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand to focus on indigenous and minority writers: as Guyanese writer Roy Heath suggests, it is often the voices of "intelligent articulate blacks" (137) which are not heard. This collection implicitly sets out to redress some of that imbalance, and so articulates a racial or ethnic boundary sometimes left buried in post-colonial discourse. It will also add to many readers' store of cultural information and to their reading list. The questions most often addressed in the interviews are the writer's relationships with cultural context and linguistic communities, though many other engaging practical, personal, autobiographical, and historical details do come up, and the interviews all convey a sense of lively and pleasant encounters with the interviewers. The interlocutory style is structured but open-minded.

The running argument articulated in the introduction and headnotes to the interviews is that these writers who have been displaced from their communities and language of origin come to English with an innovative force from the outside, and carry a more urgent burden of meaning than more thoroughly assimilated writers. It is hard to disagree with this, though it can only be tested by the writing itself. Some of the writers interviewed have a conscious sense of themselves as "New World" people, creating out of their multi-faceted heritage a unique synthesis of themselves and their work. Most do not feel any primary

obligation to the political world or even to the English language, though almost all speak of writing "in the service of something" (Dasenbrock 284) and most express an allegiance to "the experiential content of what they pen" (Farah 53). Writers such as Kenyan Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Maori Ihimaera speak of a total allegiance to their community and its values, yet they live and write outside those communities. Their fiction is often an attempt to resolve such questions of belonging and estrangement—which occur when the writer is "a fish in the stream of migration" (Anaya 246) and when the act of writing itself creates meaning and identity in a world of many displacements, evoking a new sense of place. Writing becomes "a matter of planting your feet" (Hinojosa 283).

Most of the writers find a strength in exile or in the "spiritual corridors" (Anaya 248) of migration, a strength often belied by postcolonial theory with its insistence on dispossession and historical victimization. What emerges is a picture of successive colonization and successive migration as the insistent pattern of world history. As Raja Rao puts it, "history is only politics deeply assimilated" (153). Yet Rao calls himself an "Indian imperialist" (143) who carries his Indianness everywhere; Anita Desai says something similar. Clearly, such a rich and ancient heritage is never abandoned, only reshaped where the writer happens to be. The African writers concerned have been exiled by more directly political exigencies, and it is a striking fact that Ngugi, who suffered imprisonment for his critiques of Kenyan politics, should be the one most strongly voicing a commitment to an indigenous language and audience. Severe political penalties hone commitments, but Ngugi's penalties were incurred under African dictatorships, not under colonialism. Pakistani-born Zulfikar Ghose, in contrast, speaks of an almost mandarin quest for style, describing an artist as one who "in no way explains the world" (184). He calls himself "more Anglo-Saxon than the Anglo-Saxons" (187). Parsi writer Bapsi Sidwani wants to "tell the story of [her] community" (209). Nigerian Buchi Emecheta sees herself in the context of black women's diaspora and sees African American women writers, particularly, as forging a modern black consciousness by joining the slave tongue and African consciousness: "It's women who are doing it. Women are carriers of culture in whatever language" (99). (Toni Morrison is sufficient proof of Emecheta's thesis: is Toni Morrison postcolonial? Where are the edges of postcolonialism?)

Many of the writers speak of the politics of publishing, of generational differences and respected forerunners, of uninformed critical responses, of gender politics, of individual and community, of what Chinua Achebe calls "ferment" and "multiplicity" (79). Achebe could be said to speak for many when he says: "Our future depends on our constant putting together of the past and the present through the story" (81)—as could Emecheta when she says that writers must write their "own truth" (86). Roy Heath points out that not all writers from former

colonies are necessarily radical voices, thus challenging the automatic oppositional status of postcolonial writing as constructed in the theory of an empire "writing back" (6) in an adversarial way. It might be more accurate to say (instead of overextending the now too-familiar Rushdie phrase) that, as Anaya puts it, "colonization destroys the roots that bind you to the authentic self," and thus our roots are fed in a special way by this literature (248). Anaya speaks of his writer's quest for inner liberation which sets others free (254). Postcolonial writers are writers who, having experienced the multiple impact of forms of colonization and dispossession, use English to engage in a particularly intense quest for self-integration through literature. Arriving at a set of fictional coordinates which forcefully create a new space within which to live and be themselves, they have become the artists who increasingly express with great passion the plight of rootless and migrant beings who are always in a "spiritual corridor" which must become home. The courageous, candid, and thoughtful voices which speak through these interviews remind us how important it is that storytellers tell the story the way they see it, "not the way the emperor wants it to be told" (Achebe 81). Postcolonial writers create the conditions of their own freedom in fiction by exploring the "multicultural consciousness" (Jussawalla to Selvon 113) which has been the legacy of colonization and cultural imperialism. This collection exposes the "deliberate and instinctive" acts (Desai 164) out of which their fictions are made. Everyone working in the field of postcolonial literature can learn from these writers of the historical constraints and paradoxical freedoms out of which they create the postcolonial world and thus recreate themselves and others.

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M. R. Ghanoonparvar. *In a Persian Mirror: Images of the West and Westerners in Iranian Fiction*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1993. pp. 177. \$18.95

The sudden reversal in the Iranian attitude towards the West since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 has prompted a great deal of interest in the analysis of this phenomenon. The Western media often portray the Iranian position as irrational and inexplicable or simply "fundamentalist," rejecting the West as the hostile Other. This view is buttressed by the well-known *fatwa* (edict) issued against Salman Rushdie by Ayatollah Khomeini. In fact, the Rushdie affair has deepened the gulf between Iran and the West.

Professor Ghanoonparvar's book *In a Persian Mirror* offers an interesting insight into the Iranian psyche concerning its perception of the West, and it helps one understand that the Iranian attitudes towards the West did not develop overnight, but rather evolved over more than two centuries of Persian-Western contact. Professor Ghanoonparvar examines a wide range of Persian prose, both fiction and travel literature,