

truth. However, in spite of this excursion into a kind of an American critic's dream, *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars* offers thought-provoking interventions into the ongoing debate on multiculturalism and the reading of black culture—interventions which incorporate contemporary theorizing in a critically balanced manner.

DIETER RIEMENSCHNEIDER

Emmanuel S. Nelson. *Reworlding: The Literature of the Indian Diaspora*. NY: Greenwood Press, 1992. pp. xvi, 184. \$45.00.

Migration brings with it questions of identity and rootlessness, cultural difference and assimilation. Expatriate writers deal with the exile's dilemma about self and home, and the psychological and political effects of alienation. Expatriates are, to use Salman Rushdie's term, in between; their works are interstitial, capturing the texture of their lives at the very crack between cultures.

*Reworlding: The Literature of the Indian Diaspora*, which is a compendium of critical analyses of writers of the diaspora, is one of a kind. Explicitly designed to study the writers of the diaspora together, and encompassing an exhaustive bibliography, it explores the contiguous and variant themes of identity, community, home, and homelessness. One knows of Sam Selvon, V. S. Naipaul, Bharati Mukherjee, and Salman Rushdie as simply writers of Indian origin. But only recently have scholars seen in these and other writers of subcontinental origin "a common diasporic experience." Emmanuel Nelson, in his Introduction to *Reworlding: The Literature of the Indian Diaspora*, argues that the writers of the diaspora living in different parts of the world share a common experience of colonial dislocation. Therefore, the experiences of Indian indentured workers who left India to work in the sugar industries of Fiji and Trinidad are comparable to the recent professional émigrés, for example, in Europe and the United States.

What is striking about *Reworlding: The Literature of the Indian Diaspora* is its organicism; the shape of the diaspora, the grain of expatriate experiences in different cultures, and the similarity of motifs, such as the journey, are the contours of this book. Vijay Mishra analyzes the writings of Subramani, Raymond Pillai, Satendra Nandan, and Sudesh Mishra, who explore the beginnings of the Indian experience in Fiji, from the indentured workers to the present day Fiji-Indian population. He finds that central to their works is the "Girmit consciousness" (a vernacular form meaning "agreement"), the fossilization of the diaspora through its refusal to merge with the native population. Not only did this fossilization of the past breed insularity, but it also trapped the Indian émigrés in a linguistic vacuum, thus making them vulnerable to exploitation by the colonizers. Elsewhere in the book, Helen Tiffin picks up the subject of Fiji-Indian literature and provides a broad historical sweep, from indenture writing to the hybridized present. She ends her

chapter with an important question of the effect Fiji's Rambuoka coup of 1987 will have on the Fiji-Indian writers.

The major themes of homelessness and assimilation are explored in detail in the chapters on Indo-Caribbean literature by Victor J. Ramraj, K. Chellappan, and P. S. Chauhan. Ramraj picks up key Indo-Caribbean authors such as V. S. Naipaul, Sam Selvon, Seerpersad Naipaul, Sonny Ladoo, and Neil Bissoondath to show how they experience the difference between what he terms the "traditionalists" and the "assimilationists." The difference between ghettoization and assimilation underscores the nature of the immigrants' dilemma—they are in between and do not belong anywhere. At the same time the assimilationists, as Bissoondath's imagination portrays them, are "alone and adrift"; their experience is the essence of the human condition itself.

The immigrant's homelessness, as V. S. Naipaul and Raja Rao experience it, is beyond any physical sense of belonging. By delineating the fine details that underlie Naipaul's major works, Chauhan in "V. S. Naipaul: History as Comic Irony" concludes that central to Naipaul's oeuvre is the essence of the Hindu consciousness, the knowledge of "the terrible fluidity of things human and non human" (22). On the other hand, Raja Rao's perception of Self and Other, the Other being India or his alienated self, exists on two levels as Chellappan points out. At one level, he is aware of his alienated space from India; at the other, boundaries collapse and he sees that home lies within the self, not outside, since the self is the ultimate reality. Whereas, Chellappan contends, Naipaul journeys "through several layers of history" to make sense of his alienated condition. Harold Barratt's chapter on Sam Selvon focusses on his ability to create through his characters, particularly Tier, "an authentic Indian diasporic identity in the Caribbean" (xiv).

Like Indians in the Caribbean, Asians in Africa, too, have a long history. Arlene A. Elder leads the reader through a careful historical sketch of Indian life in East and South Africa, and against this informative backdrop discusses the works of three prominent Asian-Africans, Peter Nazareth, Bahadur Tejani, and Ahmad Essop. Elder concentrates on the key differences among these writers to show their individual approaches to the immigrant's dilemma. While Nazareth's writing explores the marginal and fossilized existence of the immigrant, Tejani's work holds out the possibility of transcending separatism through interracial marriage. Elder finds in Essop's narratives powerful depictions of the psychology of his characters rather than any sociopolitical themes.

The immigrant's terrible need to belong underlines all of the literature of the diaspora. The *Nowhere Man* discussed in "Kamala Markandaya and the Indian Immigrant Experience in Britain" is precisely what the novel's title tells us. Hena Ahmad's analysis of this novel only drives the point home that the crux of the immigrant's dilemma is the "ques-

tion of identity" (142). The protagonist, Srinivas, not only feels totally alienated from England and India, but is rejected by his son, who merges with English culture and expects his parents to do the same.

Kirpal Singh provides a useful introduction to Indian writers in Singapore: Edwin Thumboo, Gopal Baratham, Chandran Nair, and Rosaly Puthachery, who in their distinct ways capture the complexity of conflict and assimilation. Similarly, Craig Tapping in "South Asia/North America: New Dwellings and the Past" discusses the works of Ved Mehta, Rohinton Mistry, Sara Suleri, Michael Ondaatje, Bharati Mukherjee, and Suniti Namjoshi, whose unique voices "foreground and articulate their personal, familial identities and sociopolitical contexts, explaining how and why they came to be where they are and write what they do" (39).

The epigraph to the Introduction of *Reworlding: The Literature of the Indian Diaspora* emphasizes that "exiles or emigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss." Rushdie's observation is true to most of the writers of the diaspora. Agha Shahid Ali, the thrice-exiled poet, portrays loss as deeply engraved in the human psyche, observes Lawrence Needham in his insightful analysis of Agha's poems.

But is the immigrant at an impasse, because of the ruthless choice between either assimilating with the new culture or rejecting it totally? Some writers, such as Mukherjee and Rushdie, offer a strikingly new perspective, as we see in the essays by Chua, Vijay Lakshmi, and Anuradha Dingwaney. Both Chua's sweeping survey of Mukherjee's works and Lakshmi's survey of Rushdie key into these two writers' creative way out of the dilemma. Self-invention, the creation of new worlds, is the positive note in Mukherjee's fiction. Mukherjee invents a new voice within the enclave of American literature. So does Rushdie within contemporary British literature.

*Reworlding: The Literature of the Indian Diaspora* finds its finale in two essays on Salman Rushdie. Finally, the immigrant's dilemma is the human dilemma. The immigrant as the nowhere man is the existential person who is alone and adrift, in the process of arriving home, the condition of the human being in this postmodern age. Emmanuel Nelson has edited an important work, one that shows the shaping of the diaspora, its evolving history, and its promise of being a field ripe for ensuing critical debates. An exhaustive bibliography completes this useful study of writers of the Indian diaspora.

PRAMILA VENKATESWARAN