

Book Reviews

Barbara Buchenau, Virginia Richter, and Marijke Denger, eds. *Post-Empire Imaginaries? Anglophone Literature, History, and the Demise of Empires*. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2015. Pp. xiii, 465. US\$168.

In their introduction to the collection *Post-Empire Imaginaries? Anglophone Literature, History, and the Demise of Empires*, Barbara Buchenau and Virginia Richter assert that empire poses a paradox: despite the unanimous announcement of Empire's death as a formal political structure, empire proliferates in the present. Emerging from the Association for the Study of the New Literatures in English's 2012 conference, the diverse essays in this volume of *Cross/Cultures: Readings in Post/Colonial Literatures and Cultures in English* offer a glimpse into the archives of empire.

Examinations of empire's significance are nothing new. The footnotes in the introduction are overwhelmingly extensive, gesturing to the immense volume of scholarship on the topic of empire and revealing the editors' careful consideration of ongoing debates across disciplines. Despite the magnitude of scholarship on the topic, Buchenau and Richter establish a gap in the research that *Post-Empire Imaginaries?* occupies by foregrounding the "imaginary" as the premise of the collection.

Initially drawing on Lacan's conceptions of the imaginary as "an image of totality which is placed in an irrecoverable position of alterity" (Buchenau and Richter xix), the introduction lays out the ways in which empire thrives in the imaginary, serving as a source of creativity and social cohesion. Pointing to Wolfgang Iser's work on the imaginary as a generative and playful space and referencing recent literary scholarship on the imaginary's community-forming power (Laura Bieger, Ramón Saldivar, and Johannes Voelz), the editors ask what can be *done* with empire. This engagement with the productive potential of the post-empire imaginary opens the possibility for the concept of empire to be an active and continuously changing repertoire, no longer paralyzed by the formal death of Empires. Through the continued preoccupation with the histories, legacies, and practices of empires, the post-empire imaginary keeps the concept of empire alive.

Buchenau and Richter argue that the post-empire imaginary constructs itself from the repertoires and archives of empires. The repertoires of historical Empires, composed of flexible "rules, gestures, and styles" (xxiii), are established through social processes, which are then transmitted through

archival practices. Buchenau and Richter emphasize that the multi-pronged approach of repertoire and archive resituates the concept of empire as generative, affective, and open. In this way, despite the temporal limits of Empires, empire is always future-oriented and “cannot truly end” (xxxi).

The theoretical framework of the introduction solidifies the purpose of the collection: to collate an archive of the post-empire imaginary. Under the heading of “Conceptualizing Empires, Mapping Empires,” the first section of essays addresses how the theoretics of empires are put to work for temporal and spatial organization, education, and ideological development. Shifting away from narrow conceptions of empire as restricted to British Empire, the second section, titled “Different Imaginaries: Comparing Empires,” offers perspectives on the Roman and Ottoman Empires. These essays focus on the legacies of diversity, tolerance, and learning as a way to broaden debates that focus on the negative effects and affects of empire. The third section, “(Post) Empire Imaginaries in Historical Media,” attends to the connections between the post-empire and the post-modern, pointing to the ways in which both of these concepts defy fixity and are underpinned by paradox and provisionality. Titled “Contested Imaginaries, Perilous Belonging,” the final section explores the sociality of the post-empire imaginary. Through a study of twenty-first century literature, the essays in this section analyze how the concept of empire simultaneously produces social cohesion and exclusion. The essays divided between these sections form a testing ground for Buchenau and Richter’s provisional claims about the post-empire imaginary.

As Buchenau and Richter suggest in their introduction, spatial and temporal modalities support the post-empire imaginary, which resonates with Alfred Hiatt’s opening essay on cartographic investigations of empires, titled “Maps of Empires Past.” Examining three maps from diverse historical moments, including a world map from the fourteenth century, a late-sixteenth-century map of the Roman Empire, and a twenty-first century artistic reimagining of a medieval map, Hiatt’s essay considers maps as both the archival traces of Empires and evidence of repertoires. Through explorations of these maps, Hiatt provides insight into how the power structures of empires “translate” themselves across time and space. Using the medieval concept of *translation imperii* (“the translation of empire”), which is the biblically sanctioned belief in the right to rule, Hiatt demonstrates how “empires have a way of recurring” (19). Hiatt’s essay sets the tone for the collection, illustrating how a singular conception of empire fails to account for the way it shape-shifts across time and space, as well as how empire lacks historical closure.

In “Imagine a Country Where We Are All Equal,” Elena Furlanetto analyzes contemporary Turkish literature as a way to parse what she terms

the “Ottoman utopia” (159), the idealized and nostalgic conception of the Ottoman Empire as a locus of tolerance and romanticized multiculturalism. To bolster the perception of a “Western” Turkish republic, Kemalist nationalists dismissed celebrations of the Ottoman Empire in the 1920s, yet under the influence of a new political order, nostalgia for the Ottoman Empire gained new traction in the 1980s. Furlanetto argues that the imaginary of the “Ottoman utopia” originates in the neo-Ottomanism of the 1980s, but is paradoxically coupled with American narratives and themes of cultural diversity in contemporary Turkish literature. Examining *The Bastard of Istanbul* and two journalistic columns by Turkish American author Elif Shafak, Furlanetto persuasively argues that nostalgic fantasies of the Ottoman Empire and desire for the American “melting-pot myth” function as a Turkish political project to re-envision the contemporary Turkish nation as cosmopolitan, inclusive, and tolerant (171). The repertoires of empires, *Pax Ottomanica* and *Pax Americana*, are thus reemployed to imagine a new societal model for the future.

Offering a critical analysis of twentieth-century travel ads, Judith Raiskin’s chapter, “No One Belongs Here More Than You,” argues that America’s relationship to the world is entrenched in colonial ideology and imperial nostalgia because of fantasies constructed around travel. Raiskin claims that travel ads, a selection of which are reproduced in colour and included as an appendix to the essay, express American entitlement and the belief in the tourist’s “right to experience pleasure on another’s soil” by drawing on the heritage of nineteenth-century British imperialism (273). Despite the hegemonic self-perception of America as anti-imperialist and distinct from European colonial histories, Raiskin demonstrates how nostalgia for empire appeals to American tourists through travel ads. The travel ads thus illustrate the ways in which the repertoires of British Empire repeat themselves in contemporary practices, further reaffirming that the concept of empire proliferates in the present.

The collection’s significance lies in the way it introduces the theoretics of the post-empire imaginary to encourage readers to reconceptualize empire as elusive, paradoxical, ambivalent, and profuse; the concept of empire, as each of the essays suggest, is not located in the past, but operates in the present and extends into the future because of the post-empire imaginary’s playful and generative engagement with the archives and repertoires of empires. Hiatt’s examination of the translation of empire, Furlanetto’s exploration of the “Ottoman Utopia,” and Raiskin’s evaluation of imperially nostalgic travel ads, as well as the other essays in this collection, evidence how the archives and repertoires of empires reproduce and renew themselves through the post-empire imagi-

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nary. While the collection fulfills its mission statement to “offer a broad . . . panorama of historical cases, theoretical elaborations, literary engagements, and representations culled from various media” (xvi), *Post-Empire Imaginaries?* is aware of the omissions in its archival project. The introduction acknowledges the collection’s Western-centrism and focus on Anglophone literatures. Despite the (necessary) limitations of this collection, the project of documenting the post-empire imaginary offers the potential to reenergize discussions of empire and reevaluate empire as active and future-oriented.

Sarah Kent