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Special issue: POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST WRITING

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GUEST EDITORS' INTRODUCTION (pp. v-viii)

With this special issue on Postcolonial Feminist Writing, the *Atlantic Literary Review* reaches the end of its fourth year. It has been an honour for us to edit this issue, not only because of the importance of the theme and the quality of the contributions, but because this has given us an opportunity to confer a particular shape and form on the ongoing global discussion of postcolonialism, feminism and, indeed, writing. We believe that our role as editors is not to be underestimated: if translation theory today points up the visibility of the translator, also to be affirmed in parallel is the visibility of the editor. In preparing this volume - sending out the call for papers, considering, selecting and editing the various contributions - we have striven at all moments to produce a volume that will operate for all - for the authors and works written on, for the contributors and for the readers - as a dynamic contribution to a continuing debate and a stimulus to further reflection and writing, both literary and critical. While the texts written on in this collection have turned out to fall almost exclusively within the sphere of the novel, we meanwhile welcome the geographical diversity of the themes and authors examined, with the Indian subcontinent, Africa, Australasia and the Caribbean all fully represented. In addition, our contributors have between them exemplified a remarkable range of critical approaches and methodologies, thus serving to demonstrate how neither the postcolonial nor the feminist can or should be reduced to a set of predictable formulas.

Our chosen theme, Postcolonial Feminist Writing, embraces three overlapping concepts, and we believe it is useful to examine all three, briefly and in turn. The term "postcolonial" - like "postmodern" - can refer both, descriptively, to that which comes after colonial rule, and, reactively, to that which constitutes a dynamic reaction against the colonial. By now established convention, postcolonial writing is generally considered to include writing both from the colonised nations of the so-called "third world," and that from the "white settler" societies. In the context of world writing in English, the postcolonial is thus most commonly taken to refer to literature in English from anywhere except the British Isles and the United States. The present volume, accordingly, contains discussions of writing from, on the one hand, the non-European contexts of India and Pakistan, the Caribbean and Zimbabwe; and on the other, the settler environments of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. At the same time, the diverse nature of the contributions shows that those categories are far from watertight: among the subjects focused on are writing by or about the Native Australian and Maori communities, the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, and the complexities of the liberation movement in Zimbabwe. It should also be recalled that the Indian subcontinent, unlike other colonised parts of the world, has an enormously rich and ancient tradition of written literature that to some extent sets it apart from regions such as sub-Saharan Africa where the pre-colonial traditions are exclusively oral. The diversity of approaches to the postcolonial phenomenon expressed by our contributors should remind us of the multiplicity of the world's literatures, past and present, as well as their complex and dynamic interrelatedness.

Gender identities cannot be split off from cultural, racial and class particularities. Therefore, theoretical considerations of gender in relation to colonial and postcolonial discourses cover an enormous range of distinctive issues and perspectives. Postcolonial feminist work has indeed looked at the differences between gender experiences according to the race and class of the women involved, emphasising the need to contextualise, taking into account the particular cultural context involved in each case. Thus, for instance, Chandra Mohanty has explored the ways in which Western feminism has constructed a monolithic "third-world woman" as its object of knowledge, due to a lack of awareness of the persistence of colonial modes of representation; the African-American critic bell hooks has argued that feminism had its roots in a world-outlook coloured by racial imperialism, referring exclusively to the experience of white women, so different, for instance, from that of black women; while Chris Weedon has reminded us that the crucial question is "who speaks for whom", underlying the relevance of voice and representation. In this sense, in her well-known essay of 1988, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," Gayatri Spivak postulates that the subaltern female subject is not allowed to voice herself, thanks to colonial and also pre-colonial patriarchal paradigms. Spivak's point is that the combined workings of colonialism and patriarchy make it extremely difficult for the subaltern, doubly disempowered and secondary, to articulate her viewpoint or represent herself, being absent as subject of agency. "Agency" here refers to the ability to act or perform an action, delving into the question of whether individuals can freely act or are somehow constrained by the ways in which their identity has been constructed. Certainly, many postcolonial women are situated at the juncture of two oppressions: colonialism and patriarchy. From this viewpoint, what we discover in this special issue is, to a large extent, the multiple literary representations that have emerged from that situation. The empire writes back, and its women need to do so posing specific issues that concern their double oppression.

It is also useful to interrogate the category of "writing," as manifested in this volume. The last piece included is actually our joint critical commentary, as editors, on extracts from an ongoing creative writing project by Manju Kapur. The distinction between creative writing and criticism is not watertight, even if it is formally observed in the bulk of this collection. What we have in our contributors' articles is in fact a case of meta-writing: a form of writing (criticism) about another form of writing (literature). The role of the critic - like that of the editor and that of the translator - is essential in promoting and diffusing new forms of creative writing and making them available and attractive to readers worldwide. The present collection is thus a contribution to the practice and understanding of both postcolonial feminist writing itself and of the critical exegesis of that writing.

Though the map is not complete, the postcolonial locations present in this issue through some of their women writers cover a representative range. For India, Gina Wisker presents an informative contribution on Anita Desai's fiction, through a cultural and critical reading of two of her most recent novels; Chantal Soeters focuses on another novel by Anita Desai, interspersing motherhood and nation; and Basuli Deb centres on the acclaimed sole novel so far by Arundhati Roy from a social viewpoint. For Pakistan, Tracy M. Wendt delves into Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* through the metaphor of food and its relation to feminism. For South Africa, Cami Hewett's paper concentrates on Nadine Gordimer and her focus on the consequences of apartheid. Dealing with Zimbabwe, Pauline Dodgson-Katiyo offers a highly illustrative view of two women writers from that country, Tsitsi Dangarembga and Yvonne Vera, while Nieves Pascual Soler, also centring on a novel by Dangarembga, reads it from an innovative psychoanalytic perspective. Regarding Australia, Antonella Riem Natale analyses

Janette Turner Hospital's fiction; and concerning New Zealand, Celia Wallhead reminds us of the existence of Maori women through an examination of Patricia Grace's work. Finally, for the Caribbean, Aída Luz Rodríguez Colón reflects on the identity search in the novels of Paule Marshall and Zee Edgell. The Forum section includes two contributions which broaden out the debate into further areas. The first is a comparative essay by Natalia Monakhova, who traces connections between the postcolonial writings of the Caribbean, through Jamaica Kincaid, and the post-Soviet literature of Ukraine, though Oksana Zabuzhko; the second is by Julie Goodspeed-Chadwick, who offers a complex panorama of the challenges facing Australia in the context of Native Australian culture, extending the discussion into the field of non-fiction and, while concentrating primarily on women's literature, including a brief incursion into male writing. Last but not least, in the Writer's Corner section we are pleased to publish two excerpts from the Indian novelist Manju Kapur's forthcoming work, currently in progress, with a critical commentary by the guest editors of this issue, as well as a bibliography.

We now invite our readers to explore, through the diverse perspectives to be found in this volume, the rich and challenging universe of postcolonial feminist writing,. We hope their perusal of these articles will encourage them both to read or re-read the women authors discussed, and to explore further the multiple analytic approaches and discourses expounded by their critics. We extend our heartfelt thanks to Dr Rajeshwar Mittapalli, the Editor of ALR, for giving us the opportunity to edit this volume, as well as to all those who have written for it, each making their individual contribution - as we too have as editors - to a greater project which is, by its nature, ongoing, collective and perpetually in movement.

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