

Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race. By Robert J. C. Young. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest. By Anne McClintock. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity. By Françoise Lionnet. Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 1995.

Shalini Puri, University of Pittsburgh

Under the rubric of (post)colonial studies, these books address issues of race, sexuality, and Empire from different perspectives: Robert Young emphasizes Victorian scientific discourses of racial hybridity, Françoise Lionnet investigates literary critical discourses of cultural hybridity, and Anne McClintock brings together feminist cultural history and psychoanalysis to study constructions of domesticity.

Young's *Colonial Desire* provides a thorough genealogy of the term *hybridity*, tracing its elaboration in various Victorian discourses of race and miscegenation, including Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau's *The Inequality of Human Races*, Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, Bryan Edwards's *History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, and S. G. Morton's *Crania Aegyptica*. The question of the fertility of racial hybrids was crucial to Victorian theories of polygenism and monogenism: "The claim that humans were one or several species (and thus equal or unequal, same or different) stood or fell over the question of hybridity, that is intra-racial fertility" (9). Furthermore, hybridity was a key term in managing and explaining the ambivalent colonial attraction to and repulsion from racial Others. "Theories of race were thus also covert theories of desire" (9), and Young identifies "the [sado-masochistic] violence of colonial desire" (108).

One of *Colonial Desire*'s great strengths is its insistence on rigorous historicization to correct some easy oppositions in contemporary cultural theory: essentialism versus constructionism, race versus culture, hybridity versus racism. Young argues: "The question is whether the old essentializing categories of cultural identity, or of race, were really so essentialized, or have been retrospectively constructed as more fixed than they were. When we look at the texts of racial theory, we find that they are in fact contradictory, disruptive and already deconstructed. Hybridity here is a key term in that wherever it emerges it suggests the impossibility of essentialism" (27). Young's excellent chapter "The Complicity of Culture: Arnold's Ethno-

graphic Politics” shows that Arnold’s construction of Englishness, however canonical, was not the organicist one often ascribed to him and to modernity in general. Even Gobineau’s apparently essentialist notion of race, Young demonstrates, “has always been culturally constructed. Culture has always been racially constructed” (54). Similarly, he cautions that familiarity with the genealogy of the term *hybridity* should make us aware that in our current celebrations of it, we use the vocabulary of the Victorian extreme Right.

Although not explicitly feminist, *Colonial Desire* is a valuable resource for gender studies. First, “in introducing a problematic of sexuality at the core of race and culture, hybridity suggests the necessity of revising normative estimates of the position of woman in nineteenth-century socio-cultural theory” (19). Second, because theories of hybridity are genealogically related to the question of interracial reproduction, “hybridity as a cultural description will always carry with it an implicit politics of heterosexuality, which may be a further reason for contesting its contemporary pre-eminence” (25). Third, the book explores “the emergence of desire in history, its genealogy and disavowal in the history of racialized thought” (xi). In the provocative conclusion, Young argues that (post)colonial studies could usefully complement Edward Said’s analysis of Orientalist representations with an understanding, derived from Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus*, of the Empire as a desiring machine driven by capitalism. This combination, Young argues, enables us to theorize the discursive constructions of colonialism, while recognizing “the material geopolitics of colonial history as, at the same time, an agonistic narrative of desire” (174).

Anne McClintock’s *Imperial Leather* also develops what she calls a “situated psychoanalysis” (72) to effect a “decolonization of psychoanalysis and a psychoanalysis of colonialism” (74) by exploring the relationship among domesticity, desire, and female labor in Victorian England and its colonies. Its central argument is that “the cult of industrial rationality and the cult of domesticity formed a crucial but concealed alliance” (168). McClintock offers insightful readings of Victorian soap and polish advertisements and argues that even as these advertisements fetishized domestic hygiene and cleanliness as part of what she calls “commodity racism” and “commodity spectacle,” crucial to imperial nationalisms, they erased women’s laborious production of that domestic cleanliness. McClintock reads the diaries and photographs of Arthur Munby and his mistress/wife/maidservant Hannah Cullwick as fantasies of transgressing Victorian iconographies of race and domesticity. Of Cullwick’s fetishistic attachment to a slave-band, McClintock argues: “The cross-cultural experiences marked by the fetish fuse in the slave-band: in the triangular relations among slavery as the basis of

mercantile capitalism; wage labor as the basis of industrial capitalism; and domestic labor as the basis of patriarchy. By flagrantly wearing on her body the fetish leather of bonded labor Cullwick threw into question the liberal separation of private and public, insisting on exhibiting her work, her dirt, her *value* in the home: that space putatively beyond both slave labor and wage labor" (151–52). If analyzing the fetish offers McClintock one way of rejoining psychoanalysis and history, Marx and Freud, so does her compelling critique of the Freudian oedipal complex. McClintock argues that the oedipal drama must be entirely rewritten if one takes into consideration the centrality of the nurse and the governess, on whose subordinated labor Freud's middle-class family romance depends (90).

Throughout, McClintock is concerned with analyzing the articulations and displacements among race, class, gender, and sexuality and with answering the question, "What kind of *agency* is possible in situations of extreme social *inequality*?" (140). To this end, she advocates a fourfold feminist theory of nationalism, which involves "(1) investigating the gendered formation of sanctioned male theories; (2) bringing into historical visibility women's active cultural and political participation in national formations; (3) bringing nationalist institutions into critical relation with other social structures and institutions; and (4) at the same time paying scrupulous attention to the structures of racial, ethnic and class power that continue to bedevil privileged forms of feminism" (357). In the course of addressing these concerns, McClintock provides productive analyses of Frantz Fanon's and Homi Bhabha's conceptions of agency (360–68), ideologies of motherhood and family in competing South African literary and political nationalisms, the white colonial feminist Olive Schreiner's account of the relations between marriage and prostitution, and the politics of *The Long Journey of Poppie Nongena*, a memoir written "collaboratively" by a black and a white South African woman. Lucidly written, wide-ranging in its scope, supple and rigorous in its analysis, and impressive in its consistent theorization of gender in relation to other axes of power, *Imperial Leather* is a major contribution to materialist feminist scholarship.

Françoise Lionnet raises the issues of hybridity and female agency in relation to a more traditionally construed literary criticism. *Postcolonial Representations'* interest in focusing on literary texts is twofold. First, literature and literary criticism analyze and represent "the *subjective* experience of muted groups" (187–88). Second, "the ambiguities and indeterminacies inherent in the literary texts prevent the articulation of rigid or universalizing theoretical conclusions" (186). Yet the book is neither relativist nor antitheoretical. Rather, in analyzing a wide range of texts from Africa, the Caribbean, Mauritius, and France, Lionnet attempts a "*comparative* femi-

nism" (187). The texts "evinced a pattern of influence and cross-fertilization in their use of themes and in their concern for the negative mythic images of women (Medusa, Jezebel, Salome, the Furies, the Amazon, the mad woman, the hysteric) which they exploit and translate into powerfully subversive fictions" (106). Theorizing them comparatively contributes to Lionnet's project of understanding diversity and commonality together. Thus, she argues, "*métissage* (hybridity or creolization) is 'universal,' even if, in each specific context, power relations produce widely varying configurations, hierarchies, dissymmetries, and contradictions" (4). Yet Lionnet distinguishes between the universalist humanism of the Enlightenment and that of postcolonial women's fiction and between postmodernism's relativization and fragmentation and those of postcolonial women's fiction. The distinctions would be made clearer, however, if the postcolonial universalisms and multiculturalisms were precisely and consistently defined.

The book's two excellent chapters on the North African practice of female excision serve as a test case for various claims about cross-cultural universality and relativism, human rights, cultural autonomy, and female choice and agency. One difficulty arises, however, when Lionnet opposes French criminalization of the practice rather than its prevention by education: while her arguments for cultural autonomy and respect for customs do persuade about judicial racism in France, they also risk reinstating the very cultural relativism she elsewhere critiques so eloquently (156, 158, 164). Moreover, the charge of French disregard for the "custom" is a tricky one, given Lionnet's acknowledgment of resistance to that custom from within the immigrant Malian community in France. In her richly nuanced reading of Nawal El Saadawi's novel *Woman at Point Zero*, she takes up this issue of internal cultural resistance, analyzing the interaction of two women, separated by class and education, but both excised—one a prostitute jailed for murdering her pimp, the other the psychoanalyst narrator who visits her in jail. Her reading of the novel carefully addresses questions of feminist activism, identification, and intersubjectivity.

Complementary in their choice of eras, regions, and texts, the three books interrogate the historical relationships among cultural hybridity, psychoanalysis, universalism, and imperial capital. Equally important, they all provide insightful metacritical analyses of the consequences of the current emphasis on cultural hybridity for "contemporary" feminist and postcolonial studies. I