

earned cash is rerouted. If the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) represents recognition of the new transnational geography, the risk run by a reconfigured American Studies discipline acknowledging the cultural logic of global capitalism, Martyn Bone points out (217-35), is that of underwriting corporate and governmental interests. The alternative, a return to the traditional regional or neo-national focus, as advocated by (neo-)Agrarians, is no longer viable. Any regional focus on the South's self-sufficiency has always been largely discursive. The marketing of Atlanta on the occasion of the 1996 Olympic Games by look-alikes of Scarlet O'Hara, was just that: a commodification of a past, possessing only an imaginary existence, yet in the all-too familiar manner of Southern boosterism. In a similar manner, Canada's self-identity of a rural, northern country requiring what Northrop Frye called a "garrison mentality" to survive, is an artificially maintained metanarrative, serving to differentiate the North from its Southern neighbor. As Justin Edwards (257-271) argues, Canadian writers like Brad Fraser and Russell Smith have come to rely on a post-industrial American imaginary to signify an urban Canada usually situated beyond its borders. Unlike with the American South's artificial antagonism to the urban North, novels like Timothy Taylor's *Stanley Park* demonstrate the incorporation of city and forest. In the conflict between a restaurant chef specializing in local produce and its main investor, the owner of a transnational chain of coffee bars, the novel demonstrates how cultural specificity threatens to be absorbed by late capitalist forces, yet can also be reconstituted (268-9), albeit in a process of constant negotiation.

To conclude, this is a rich and most satisfying collection of essays, whose coherence turns the reading experience into another dynamic, as each argument harks back or points ahead to others. The photo essay (125-153) in the middle of the book further adds to this dynamic, though readers will wonder who wrote the commentary: the editors alone, in collaboration with the other participants, or selective participants, to the extent that the pictures dovetail with the essays.

Johan Callens

Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB)

Judith Misrahi-Barak, ed., *Revisiting Slave Narratives/Les avatars contemporains des récits d'esclaves*. Montpellier: Coll. "Les Carnets du Cerpac" 2, Université Montpellier III, 2005. 574 pages; ISBN 2-84269-648-4; € 20.

Conference proceedings are usually not very prestigious publications, yet *Revisiting Slave Narratives/Les avatars contemporains des récits d'esclaves* proves to be an exception. Deriving from a 2003 international conference held at Paul Valéry University, Montpellier III, France, this bilingual volume in English and French features, among others, prominent writers and critics like Fred D'Aguiar, Caryl Phillips, and Ashraf Rushdy. It would be unfair to ascribe a predominantly high quality of the volume to the mentioned names only; a number of scholars have delivered excellent

contributions which cast light on the booming genre of narratives of slavery and expand the body of critical and theoretical approaches. Among these Bella Brodzki, Bénédicte Ledent, Ronnie Sharfman, Isabel Soto, and Helena Woodard deserve a special mention.

The twenty-nine essays take the reader on a fictional and historical journey across the continents that witnessed the slave trade and the concomitant abominable institution. They also provide an international intellectual and interdisciplinary encounter between American, African, Caribbean, and European scholars, which is invaluable given the fact that the scholarship on slave narratives and the historical slavery fiction has largely been in the hands of American academics. As the editor's opening remarks and many subsequent essays demonstrate, it is difficult to discuss the revisionist fiction of slavery without including in the discussion the nineteenth-century African American Ur-text – the slave narrative – which underlies its immediate derivative, also in name: the neo-slave narrative. Coined by Bernard Bell, the term has recently been revised by Ashraf Rushdy in his acclaimed *Neo-slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form* from 1999. In his contribution to the volume under review Rushdy differentiates between three types of African American narratives of slavery – the neo-slave narrative (“the pseudo-autobiographical slave narrative” 96), the historical novel of slavery and the novel of remembered generation – of which the first type seems to be of primary interest to the critics. With a clearly determined focus the volume offers critical and comparative readings of a number of texts (fictional, poetic, pictorial), negotiating the relation between different kinds of representation. What is more, its focus on recent literary output enables the reader to study the developments within the genre in terms of style and textual politics, and for those less familiar with narratives of slavery and with the critical and theoretical developments in the field, there is a helpful updated bibliography at the end of the book.

The collection offers a number of comparative readings which put individual works into geographical, historical or theoretical perspective, yet the volume's internal division into four thematic and geographical units– Thresholds, The Americas, The Anglophone Caribbean, and Africa and the francophone Caribbean – appears restrictive. On the one hand it may seem to undermine the whole project's intention; to combine memory and historical imagination of the traumas of slavery (D'Aguiar 21). On the other it proves that geographical divisions are subordinate to individual projects that bridge the continents and languages. One example may be Pierre Gomez's critical reception of *Roots* in Gambia written in French; another Kathleen Gysse's comparative reading of Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba sorcière... , noir de Salem* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, also in French. Further, if we agree with Isabel Soto's premise that the threshold is a governing principle in all neo-slave narratives and that similar political issues lie behind them as Rushdy seems to suggest, then the country of origin seems less important than, say, the aesthetic project itself or textual politics, even though the volume's bilingual profile may speak in favour of the editor's choice.

Part One, Thresholds, comprises six miscellaneous essays that in different ways explore aesthetic, ethical, generic, political, racial, spatial, structural, and temporal configurations that inspire contemporary fictions of slavery and the memory of African diaspora. Its organization principle – from the particular to the general – may seem surprising, given the fact that Isabel Soto's essay, which in part lends its title to the section, appears at the section's end. However, bearing in mind that Fred D'Aguiar delivered the keynote address at the Montpellier conference, one can understand the editor's choice of textual chronology. With Caryl Phillips' Conclusion and an excerpt from his 2003 novel *A Distant Shore* – the editor's politics of framing becomes apparent. Another plausible reason for the quasi-inverted structure of Part One may have been the editor's wish to give primacy to creative writers over the scholars' pronouncement on their textual production.

Focusing on the intuitive fiction of the Guyanese writer Wilson Harris, whose thematic and narrative experiments defy history as truth in favour of a subjective truth and the synchronicity of past and present, D'Aguiar offers an intertextual reading of *Palace of the Peacock* (1960) and *The Mask of the Bagger* (2003), and argues for the fluidity and heterogeneity that result from the interplay between opposites (master/slave, man/woman, black/white, Old World/New World). Intertextuality, polyphony, dialogical principle, and writing back to previous sources Misrahi-Barak identifies with contemporary Caribbean authors in particular (17), whereas the analyses included in the volume demonstrate that these textual strategies are in one way or another present in all fictions of slavery. Numerous examples could be selected, but Ronnie Sharfman's "Africa Has Her Mouth on Moses: Zora Neale Hurston Rewrites the Exodus Narrative," Helena Woodard's "Troubling the Archives: Reconstituting the Slave Subject," and Louise Yelin's "'Our Broken Word': Fred D'Aguiar, David Dabydeen and the Slave Ship Zong" have caught this reviewer's attention in particular. Sharfman successfully argues that Hurston's novel is an exercise in midrash (a hermeneutic strategy embedded in the Hebrew Bible), which makes the Bible both the novel's intertext and an analytic tool. Woodard on her part, with recourse to Derrida, discusses the gap between the historical slavery fiction and the archive, arguing for a critical adoption and alteration of history that "undertakes the unfinished business of slavery" (88), and Yelin's reading of three Zong texts reveals how fiction, poetry and art infect and inflect history (360).

If intertextuality and dialogism serve as governing principles of the contemporary fictions of slavery, the editor appears to have organized the volume on a similar principle: thematic nearness, textual similarity or strategies, analysis vs. theoretical reflections about the genre become the axes around which the subsequent parts that bear geographical headings are structured. The logic is internal yet clear and textual concatenation reveals an attempt to structure this voluminous collection. While one can charge this reviewer with pettiness when it comes to her demands to such a versatile volume as this one proves to be, it is difficult to condone the volume's inconsistency with regard to individual essays' bibliographies and at times slack copy editing which could have been improved with minor effort. However, these formal-

ties by no means damage the high quality of the majority of contributions, and it is my unreserved recommendation to all who work with contemporary fictions of slavery to read this intellectually and scholarly rewarding volume.

Zeljka Svrnjuga

University of Bergen