

## Works Cited

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John Clement Ball, *Satire & the Postcolonial Novel. V.S. Naipaul, Chinua Achebe, Salman Rushdie*. London: Routledge, 2003. Pp. 213. Cloth. U.S. \$74.95.

*Satire & the Postcolonial Novel* makes an important and highly original contribution to the field of postcolonial studies, for it offers the first sustained critique of satire in comparative postcolonial literature. The two outstanding achievements of Ball's study consist in, first, a critical reexamination of satire theories in light of culturally different traditions of writing, and, second, interventive close readings of a wide range of texts by three of the most canonized writers in postcolonial studies: V.S. Naipaul, Chinua Achebe, and Salman Rushdie. Written as a dissertation between 1992 and 1994 and published in Routledge's Outstanding Dissertation series, the book includes a new Afterword with updated research material and sets out to theorize "the generic, rhetorical, and political strategies of satire" (ix), while interrogating "Western formulations of satire" to outline "their uses and limitations for postcolonial texts" (1). Were it only for its unfailingly self-critical perspective and its sound research, the study would be worth celebrating for its scholarly integrity alone. But the study accomplishes more than this. To use Dipesh Chakrabarty's apt term, it "provincializes" satire and the practice of literary criticism. In other words, Ball's study employs postcolonial literary and non-literary texts not only to write a postcolonial genealogy of satire, but, by conceptualizing satire in terms of hybridity, syncretism, multidirectionality, and anti-colonial dissent, it helps both

destabilize received Western notions of satire and reorient them within a culturally heterogeneous and less Eurocentric field of English studies.

In his "Introduction," Ball argues that satire theory and postcolonial texts rely on and often operate through modes of "oppositonality and referentiality" (2). The latter term, Ball observes, signifies "a localized cultural grounding responsible for the claims of 'difference'" made by postcolonial and satirical texts, while the former broadly designates "resistance, subversion, counter-discourse, contestatory narrative, writing back, and critique" (2). Although Ball's insistence on "oppositonality" as the defining feature of postcolonial texts and, specifically, postcolonialism, understood as academic discipline, seems problematic at best, his suggestion to impose restrictions on the "potentially enormous" critical and theoretical embrace" (3) of postcolonialism still proves productive. Following Sylvia Söderlind, Ball considers texts that come from former colonies and engage in an explicit "resistance to the metropolis" as postcolonial, while, along with Donna Bennett, he reserves the term postcolonial for those reading strategies that stress difference rather than similarities and engage in a critique of colonial "dynamics of power" (4). What is of interest in this approach, then, are not so much the particular restrictions—which are contentious today—but, on the one hand, the acknowledgement that postcolonialism is grounded in national discourses of literary criticism and, second, Ball's ethical reminder that "postcolonialism should be used selectively, carefully and non-hegemonically" (4). This ethical imperative recognizes that neither the postcolonial subject nor satire, understood as a genre that (de)constructs subjectivities, can be given the "status of transparent sign" (5), but must be treated with "a certain suspicion" (5) in order to prevent satire from reinscribing "condescending colonial discourse" (23). Methodologically, therefore, Ball advocates an ethics of reading satiric postcolonial texts through a "careful investigation on a case-by-case basis of the gaps that structure their judgments" (23).

The first chapter develops the study's concept of postcolonial satire. In contrast to those conventional forms of satire that conjure an ideal past against which to measure the flawed present, postcolonial satire refrains from nostalgically evoking an uncontaminated pre-colonial past. Instead, Ball suggests, postcolonial satire takes "imperial intervention" as its master target and counters satire's detached gaze, namely its capacity of "Othering" (13) through "satiric multidirectionality" (12). The latter comprises the heart of Ball's notion of postcolonial satire because it facilitates a reading of satire as a historically particular but "continuing process of unsettling hierarchies of value and systems of thought" (Palmeri in Ball 27) in cultur-

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ally specific contexts. More importantly, satiric multidirectionality coincides with postcolonial forms of hybridity and syncretism and, not unlike Homi Bhabha's concept of colonial mimicry, foregrounds the ambiguous and unstable relationships of colonial and imperial power. In contrast to Bhabha's idealizing and overtly textual understanding of anti-colonial resistance, Ball suggests that "to articulate the [postcolonial] text's multidirectional thrusts is to spread its accusations and humiliations, its blame and its shame, throughout an international community encompassing as many subgroups as the text's satiric trajectory can legitimately support" (38). Thus, postcolonial satire remains "grounded in the possible" (39) and committed to non-hegemonic knowledge production and social change.

The second chapter takes a fresh look at a range of V.S. Naipaul's fictional and non-fictional texts and, contrary to the main current of Naipaul criticism, rereads them as multidirectional satires. While most critics, including Naipaul himself, reject satire as a lesser literary genre of either defeat or misconceived optimism that largely denies cultural dignity to its victims, Ball asks that readers differentiate more clearly between the satiric impulses of Naipaul's highly controversial travelogues and his short stories and, in particular, early novels. For example, Naipaul's first travelogue of India, *An Area of Darkness*, evolves into "satiric digression" (48) as it portrays India as a country of colonial dependency whose population is paralyzed by self-deceiving colonial mimicry and intellectual withdrawal. Here, the narrative's cynical and controlling voice inhibits multidirectional reading practices. Yet, close readings of Naipaul's often ignored short story "A Flag on the Island" and his novels *The Suffrage of Elvira*, *The Mystic Masseur*, and *A House for Mr. Biswas* show that these texts' resistance to narrative closure enable "multiple interpretations of [their] satiric trajectory" (52). In this context, the two outstanding contributions to Naipaul criticism are, first, Ball's analysis of "A Flag on the Island" through Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a widely ignored intertext which helps focus the story's satirical thrust. Second, Ball reads *A House for Mr. Biswas* as a "satiric allegory of cultural or national assertion and resistance" that also problematizes Naipaul's "resistance not only through satire, but also to satire" (78). Thus, satiric multidirectionality thematizes what Ball calls the "ironic gap" (63) between colonially imported forms of authoritative rule and their local appropriations—similar to what Gayatri Spivak theorizes as imperial catachresis—and becomes an effective tool for examining the satiric politics of a text.

Focusing on Chinua Achebe's African trilogy, *A Man of the People*, and *Anthills of the Savannah*, the third chapter seeks to strike a critical

balance between the Achebe the writer and the satirist, while thinking satire through the oral traditions of Igbo proverbs. Ball convincingly argues that Achebe's use of satire derives from the duality intrinsic to the Igbo worldview and best expressed in the "proverb: 'Wherever Something stands, Something Else will stand beside it'" (80). It is in the gap between the proverb's demand for cultural "balance" and such "satiric modes of representation" as "simplification, reduction, selective exaggeration" (87), all of them techniques of both satirist and colonial discourse, that Achebe situates his brand of anti-colonialist satire. But Achebe's satire is also "antithetical to narrative" (88). For example, by opposing narrative closure and coherence and stressing reduction and violent distortion, *Things Fall Apart* develops a form of satire that foregrounds the beginning of the colonial period as an era of multiple uncertainties and constraints. This relationship between satire and narrative emerges as a central element of Achebe's text. It "provincializes" Western notions of satire while "becom[ing] a discursive feature of Nigerian modernity itself" (102).

Ball's final chapter critically reads Salman Rushdie's novels through Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of the grotesque and the Menippean tradition of satire. Given its emphasis on "an extraordinary freedom of plot and philosophical invention" (Bakhtin in Ball 125), Menippean satire not only generates rich readings of Rushdie's texts, but it also shifts the conventional critical understanding of Rushdie's novels as works of magic realism towards what Ball usefully calls the "Menippean fantastic" (128). In Ball's approach, however, both traditions—Bakhtinian and Menippean—are shot through with a set of narrative counter-currents; "negative satiric pessimism" counters "Menippean optimism" and religious and cultural discourses of the pure Indian body come up against narratives of "a secular migrant preference for impurity" (135). Although both of these traditions clearly inscribe a playful form of satire that does justice to the cultural hybridity of Rushdie's early and recent texts, including *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, negative satire increasingly overshadows Menippean democratic multiplicity. It seems to me, however, that both forms of satire are unable to answer to the rise of India's religious right, understood as a hierarchically ordered rather than carnivalesque "grass-roots movement" (161). For this reason, I would have welcomed a more detailed analysis of what Ball briefly mentions as Rushdie's representation of a "polyphonic Islamic culture" (153). If satire is an essentially secular genre of writing, I wonder, to what extent can it address some of postcolonialism's most pressing issues of faith, belief, and ethnic and religious violence?

Conceived simultaneously as “method” and “topic of fiction” (166), satire becomes a productive tool for reading the multiple aesthetic and political concerns of postcolonial texts. In many ways, Ball’s study anticipates the present turn towards a productive fusion of the formal and political concerns of contemporary writing in both postcolonial (e.g., Deepika Bahri’s *Native Intelligence*) and English studies (e.g., Eric Savoy’s recent call for a “queer formalism”). While Ball certainly accomplishes such a fusion in his varied reading practices of satire, I remain curious as to what extent satire is a gendered genre of postcolonial narrative. Taken into consideration that all of Ball’s texts are by canonized male writers and that he but hints at satire’s potential to construct “variant masculinities” (87), it would be desirable to rethink the postcolonial satire through the works of, for example, Bessie Head, Janet Frame, and Dionne Brand. These issues notwithstanding, *Satire & the Postcolonial Novel* presents a highly engaging and stimulating study of a trope and genre that has been neglected for too long.

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Edward Marx, *The Idea of a Colony: Cross-Culturalism in Modern Poetry*. University of Toronto Press, 2004.

By “cross-culturalism” Marx means modern poets’ “fascination with non-Western cultures,” by which in turn he means their “primitivism” and “exoticism.” This substitution of terms is non-trivial; it disguises the actual tendency of the book. “Cross-culturalism” suggests something that is or at least *can* be praiseworthy, an informed and tolerant reaching out to other cultures, even a dynamic of mutual change for the better. “Primitivism” and “exoticism,” on the other hand, suggest a one-way gaze, excited by what appear to be new modes of perception but blinkered by ethnocentricity and ignorance, with any enrichment only on this side of the border. Since it is this second tendency which is Marx’s real subject, a more precise title would have been that of his 1996 dissertation—“The Idea of a Colony: Primitivism and Exoticism in Modern Poetry.” In studying his poets’ primitivism and exoticism Marx is attempting to “rethink modern poetry ... from the perspective of postcolonialism” (4), more specifically to consider the relationship between these interests and the “cultural moment of modernism and imperialism,” that is, the years 1912 to 1914 in which the formation of poetic modernism coincided with the climax