

REVIEWS

Bénédicte Mauguère. *Traversée des Idéologies et Exploration des Identités dans les Écritures de Femmes au Québec*. New York: Peter Lang, coll Francophone Cultures and Literatures, vol 17, 1997. (385 pages, hard-cover).

In her 1997 book, Bénédicte Mauguère proposes an ideological analysis of Quebec women's writing of the 70s and 80s. This period coincides with the so-called 'second wave' of feminism which contributed to the recognition of women as part of a distinct socio-cultural group and led to women's writing becoming a field of study in its own right. As the title suggests, Mauguère focusses on the issues relating to ideology and identity in an attempt to shed new light on this specialised area in Quebec literature.

One of Mauguère's basic assumptions is that writing is a means for women to affirm their identity and difference within Quebec society. Links are established between women's writing and the social and historical context which determines its conditions of production and reception (p 3). Mauguère argues that women's literary texts derive from the existing social conditions in which they are produced as much as they challenge these conditions. Indeed, the author strongly believes that women's literature both inscribes the dominant ideology and criticises it in its quest for a more positive and diverse identity.

In addition, Mauguère asserts that the feminist approach to literature, which allows for a creative and multiple reading of women's texts, has been obliterated by dominant male ideologies, such as marxism, psycho-analysis, and structuralism. In her view, Quebec women's writing of the 70s and 80s constitutes a spiritual quest for collective and personal discovery rather than a political programme. She claims that Quebec women's writers followed the typical path of any repressed minority group, with the awareness of victimisation during the Quiet Revolution of the 60s followed by a rejection of repression. This in turn lead to the self-affirmation of the 80s and 90s.

The book is divided into five chapters, the first four of which study the major ideologies prevailing in Quebec in the 70s and 80s (marxism, nationalism, counter-culture, and psycho-analysis) with the emphasis on the notion of identity (class identity, cultural identity and personal identity). Feminism is studied in relation to the other ideologies in each of the first four chapters and constitutes the essence of the last chapter and the very short conclusion. Each chapter contains what the table of contents refers to as 'critical reflection', which comprises a concise summary and analysis of the particular ideology. This is followed by a second part entitled 'texts' consisting of studies of selected literary works by Carole Paquin, Michèle Mailhot, Hélène Ouvrard, Michèle Lalonde, Anne Hébert, Louise Maheux-Forcier, Louky Bersianik, Michèle Guérin, Dominique Blondeau, Marie-Claire Blais and Nicole Brossard, which are examined in varying degrees of depth.

However, the choice of texts æ dictated simply by the fact that the author considers them, without specifying why, as exemplifying well her points æ seems biased and haphazard. There is a clear predilection for Hélène Ouvrard's works which are studied in much greater detail than any other works (see pp7-112; 133-166; 243-245).

One might also deplore a lack of unity and coherence in the argumentation. The quotations at the beginning of the chapters are distracting and do not compensate for the deficiencies in argument or lack of logical transitions. Some sections are irrelevant or badly placed while some assertions are not satisfactorily demonstrated in the introduction or the textual analyses. These structural and argumentative insufficiencies are compounded by typographical inconsistencies in the headings.

Numerous errors in the cross-referencing and spelling. For example, a quotation is wrongly attributed to *Paroles et musique* by Louise Maheux-Forcier when it is in fact an extract from *Veuillez agréer* by Michèle Mailhot (p 51), the character Julie from *Les Enfants du sabbat* by Anne Hébert is incorrectly named Judith (p 176), and the page references to Michèle Mailhot are erroneously indexed (p 384).

As a result of these problems, the value and impact of this novel approach to Quebec Women's literature are seriously undermined despite the strength of the synthesis and analysis of the ideologies. More editing and revision would have considerably improved this potentially fascinating research.

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James W. St. G. Walker, "Race," Rights and the Law in the Supreme Court of Canada: Historical Case Studies
The Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History and Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997.

This book is an interesting and valuable work of historical scholarship on the relationship between law and racism. The structure for the book is simple and effective. After an introductory chapter on the construction of racism (chapter 1), Walker presents (in chapter 2-5) detailed studies of four cases dealt with by the Supreme Court of Canada during the first half of the twentieth century where the court was asked to rule on aspects of the relationship between law and racism. The book concludes with a chapter in which Walker examines the historical and contemporary implications of his case-studies (chapter 6) and an "Afterword" which critically assesses the impact of human rights law and policy as it has developed in Canada, particularly since the 1950s.

At the heart of each of the four cases examined in this book was a question of racism. Quong Wing, a Chinese-born Canadian cafe proprietor, was convicted under a Saskatchewan statute which prohibited "Chinamen" from employing white females (case decided by the SCC in 1914). Fred Christie, a Black Canadian, sued the tavern at the Montreal Forum which refused to serve him because he was a "Negro" (1939). Bernard Wolf, a Jew, sought to purchase a block of land in a Lake Huron cottage development despite a restrictive covenant attached to the title which provided that the land could not be purchased or rented by a "person of the Jewish ... or coloured race or blood" (1950). Harry Singh, a Trinidadian of East Indian ancestry was deported from Canada as a member of "the Asian race" a year after "race" had been removed from the Canadian *Immigration Act* as a ground for removal (1955).

In each of these cases a victim of racism sought the assistance and protection of the courts. In each case the Supreme Court of Canada chose instead to validate the racist legislation or practice in question. In reviewing these four cases Walker has set out to unsettle the popular Canadian self-image (what he terms the "national dream", p4) of a country characterised by tolerance of racial and cultural diversity. The book scrutinises the impact of law on this "Canadian dream", with particular reference to the jurisprudence of the Supreme Court of Canada.

Walker's detailed analysis of these cases draws on a variety of sources, including court records, case files, media reports, unpublished archival material and interviews with "persons connected with the incidents or with the associations and communities that became involved" (p10). The accounts presented in chapters 2-5, which track events from the precipitating 'incident' all the way through to the Supreme Court of

Canada's final decision, are well compiled, engaging and illuminating. At the end of each chapter Walker discusses the case's "social and legal legacies" — a useful device for emphasising the wider and contemporary relevance of the historical case studies presented in the book. In a similar vein chapter 6 draws together the major themes of the book as revealed by the case studies.

Lest it be too quickly assumed that the lessons of the book are limited to a more accurate understanding of Canadian legal history, Walker offers, in the final section of the book, a commentary on public policy and legal developments since the four cases were decided. In bringing the Canadian story of the relationship between law and relationship 'up to date' Walker appropriately acknowledges the impact of the widespread statutory enshrinement of anti-discrimination principles in Canadian legislation. Nonetheless, he concludes on a note of "sincere apprehension" (p325): despite developments in public policy and law reform over the course of the second half of the twentieth century, evidence of the perpetuation of racist attitudes and practices in Canadian society is readily available. Specifically, Walker warns against overstating the impact of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the years since 1982. Walker's observations about the gap between legal remedies and actual change in social attitudes and conditions with respect to racism are salutary.

"Race," *Rights and the Law in the Supreme Court of Canada* is a well-constructed and valuable addition to the literature on the relationship between law, race and racism. Despite its exclusive Canadian jurisdictional focus it is likely to be of considerable interest in many countries — Australia and New Zealand included — where the historical legacies revealed by Walker in the Canadian context will resonate loudly.

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Ghassan Hage. *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*. Sydney: Pluto Press, 1998. 280pp.

Ghassan Hage's *White Nation* is one of the most provocative books written in Australia for some time and it will find an audience anywhere questions of nation, ethnicity and multiculturalism have resonance. Hage has added to that increasing number of works which have turned their attention away from 'ethnicity' (understood in the vernacular, as Hage suggests, as "Third World-looking") to the construction of 'whiteness'. In contrast to previous commentators who have seen whiteness in representational terms, Hage, drawing on the work of Bourdieu and Zizek, repositions Whiteness in terms of practices of management of the national space and the cultural capital through which one accumulates symbolic power.

White Nation begins with an exchange of graffiti in the male toilets at his former (and my current) university. A student writes "Macedonia for the Macedonians" on the wall, which attracts a response from a student of (presumably) Greek background. Further comments follow, then one from a student asking the others to leave their racism behind, and a second telling them to 'go home'. The 'ethnic' voices disappear, and the 'debate' becomes one between a 'racist' anglo and a 'multicultural' anglo, about 'them'. Hage claims that this is typical of debates about multiculturalism, which end up being arguments about ethnic others, run by (white) people who claim the right to 'worry' about and decide upon the future of Australia. Underlying both these positions — of white racism and white multiculturalism is a fantasy of the white nation.

Hage suggests that it is productive to see both racism and multiculturalism as nationalist practices, rather than about ethnicity per se. Racism, he argues, is best seen not as beliefs, as it is commonly perceived, but as a *practice*. In Bourdieuan fashion, knowledge is practical, about doing things — it is therefore better to look at what is done than whether the belief is true. Analysing the act of the tearing of the hijab from Muslim women, Hage construes this as a *nationalist* practice because it is about managing a particular national space, who is allowed to be there and how they are allowed to act. As such, it constructs the nationalist as a 'master' of that space, and the ethnic as an object, of which there can be 'too many'. This practice also implies an ideal of how the nation should be.

What Hage calls White multiculturalism, however, should not be seen in opposition to racist exclusion — rather, they share a belief in their privileged position as the enactors of the national will. Both exhibit a sense of governmental belonging — the right *over* the nation — rather than passive belonging — the right to benefit from the nation. While multiculturalism seeks to accept, this acceptance is granted by the dominant culture. Tolerance can only be offered from a position of power, and retains that position. The consequence — that many migrants are made to feel *less* national — is Hage's way in to reconstructing this practical nationality as cultural capital, or the sum of knowledges, styles, bodily characteristics, and dispositions which are valued in a given field. By accumulating sanctified styles, this cultural capital can be converted into symbolic capital; that is, recognition of one's national belonging. Migrants accumulate nationality by learning how to speak the language, specific cultural practices, etcetera — by assimilating. They can, however, also accumulate capital through sporting success (as in the case of Cathy Freeman, as long as she doesn't fly the Aboriginal flag). This field of national power Hage dubs 'Whiteness'. Those who aspire to occupy the top positions within this field are White Australians, a position of dominance which requires the repression of the inroads migrants and indigenous people have made in Australia. White multiculturalism, while opening up a space for different cultural forms, is a strategy of containment, maintaining the centrality of White national managers, but presents itself as disinterested. It treats ethnicity as a source of enrichment to be savoured by cosmopolitans.

Whiteness here is partially metaphorical, in that it exists in relation to phenotypical whiteness, but is not reducible to it, and is historically in flux. It is something to be struggled over, as are all things in a Bourdieuan field. While nationalist exclusion and White multiculturalism both embody a fantasy of the White Nation, they differ over their forms of capital. Hage is at pains to understand the phenomenon of Hansonism, like other racist movements, not simply to condemn. Pauline Hanson's supporters, he insists, are not simply racists or backward-looking people — but ones who experience crisis because of the declining value of their cultural capital and their inability to retain their spatial power in the nation. They articulate a discourse of anglo decline, in the face of the changes migrants and indigenous groups have made to Australia and in the face of this new cosmopolitan Whiteness. It's not just that these two forms of White fantasy are in conflict, for White multiculturalism needs Hansonism, it is the justification for its politics of tolerance and the success of its own national belonging.

White Nation is a confronting and demanding work, always requiring that you come up with a better interpretation if you don't agree with the lines of argument Hage explores — and it's often hard to. The book is not without its flaws, however, as Hage shifts from nuanced arguments to leaps of faith. For a scholarly work which gives so much attention to detail — the dissection of the removal of the hijab — the book lacks elaboration where it counts.

While the strength of *White Nation* partly lies in its recasting of Whiteness as a practice involving the accumulation of cultural capital, it loses something of the ability of previous analyses to see Whiteness relationally. It is too easy to read Whiteness as whiteness, despite the book's caution against this, because Whiteness remains too undifferentiated as a concept (ask any Australian of Irish ancestry). It needs greater unpacking than a simple list of features to establish what makes one powerfully White. Importantly, a book about Whiteness in Australia cannot afford to talk about indigenous people in passing. Hage 'apologises' for this, but this cannot be an adequate response in the contemporary world. His brief references to ethnicity as 'negative capital', and the gendered constraints on accumulation of capital, are similarly frustrating.

His emphasis on nation as a practice, as fantasy, and as having an affective dimension is a much needed riposte to two decades of framing the nation as just an imagined community. Yet the separation of race and nation seems forced, especially given that White and nation are premised on a history of the subjugation of indigenous people in Australia. But more than this — the book is at pains to argue that what is often seen as racist is actually nationalist, but the book's thesis is about Whiteness: there seems a contradiction here that needs attention.

Much of the book rests on a notion of a 'dominant culture' — while this is used Hage wants to stress the field of struggle between competing groups which aren't

clearly reducible to classes, it ends feeling too homogenous. It's not clear what a dominant culture is — sometimes it just seems to be those with white skin, as though that constitutes a culture. The struggle Hage discusses is between White multicultural intellectuals and bureaucrats, and farmers and workers. There is little sense of where the really powerful people in Australia sit in this.

His analysis of White multiculturalism and its relation to the power relations is insightful, but it's not clear who is a White multiculturalist (Hage discusses Paul Sheehan and other critics of multiculturalism, but few proponents). It implies that whenever whites participate in a discussion about multiculturalism they take it over. This does great disservice to many people who have contributed to the battles against racism without necessarily being able to convert this to symbolic power. It also too easily lumps together different positions and problems. I am happy to exclude from 'my' nation many things — clitoridectomies, child labour, arranged marriages, cannibalism, military state — many of which are associated with cultures who are identified as racially different from my own. Is the desire to exclude necessarily nationalist/racist in the negative sense Hage uses? Isn't this desire to participate in governance also central to democracy? How do we decide what is proper and not to participate in?

Hage also suggests that non-white voices are few in the debates about multiculturalism. This again does a disservice to many from non-English-speaking backgrounds, unless you accept his premise that to be present in the debate, they have to be White (that is, possess the appropriate symbolic capital), which becomes a circular argument. An irony here is that, for me, the logic of this argument rests on a process whereby those bureaucrats can convert their 'ethnic capital' as it were, into Whiteness.

More importantly, it's not clear where the analysis leads politically. He suggests that the multiculturalism of being is better than a (White) multiculturalism of having but doesn't take this up, except to reassure us that on the ground, such a multiculturalism exists without the intervention of bureaucrats. If this is true, then why all the fuss?

If the success of a work lies not so much in its ability to convince you of its position, but to compel you to do your own thinking through and against its arguments, then *White Nation* is an impressive piece of writing. It is terrifyingly convincing in places, abrasively provocative, and always challenging.

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