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Nabokov, Rushdie, and the transnational imagination: novels of exile and alternate worlds

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component of nostalgia with a reflective and critical one. The complex architecture of the book, which brings together texts as different as Naipaul's *Enigma of Arrival*, Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Coetzee's and Lessing's narratives of South Africa in parallel with Bushmen songs, Sebald's *Austerlitz* and Ballard's *Empire of the Sun*, provides as subtle and persuasive a model of how this can be done as any that I have encountered. His textual analyses, as we have come to expect from Walder, are astute, sensitive, tracing often obscured or overlooked connections – the chapter on Sebald being, in my view, an exceptionally illustrative case in point. This critical openness and flexibility, the ability to move with equal ease through very different cultural experiences, is the book's greatest strength; despite its title, it will appeal to a larger readership than the network of scholars and students of postcolonialism.

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Nabokov, Rushdie, and the transnational imagination: novels of exile and alternate worlds, by Rachel Trousdale, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 241 pp., £52.50 (hardback), ISBN 978 0 2301 0261 3

With the aim of providing both a critical and theoretical framework for discussing transnational fiction beyond its featured authors, *Nabokov, Rushdie, and the Transnational Imagination* argues for the "world-fashioning" influence of transnational literature, holding that exiled and migrant writers use "the rhetoric and epistemology of nationalism to enlist readers and writers into a new kind of group identity" (2). Widening the scope of Benedict Anderson's emphasis in *Imagined Communities* on the construction of nationhood through literature, Rachel Trousdale points to the ability of literature to not only "teach us to read people around us as either like or unlike ourselves", but to "redefine the motives and materials of such demarcations, showing how voluntary commitment to a community can trump even the familiar narratives of history" (15).

Situating her approach within postmodern and postcolonial theory, Trousdale adopts Brian McHale's conception of the postmodern "zone" as a means of discussing how transnational literature can address the problems of migration, hybridity and the desire for a rooted identity in an increasingly cosmopolitan world. Yet where postmodern fiction, for McHale, calls on the reader to accept the impossibility of fictional worlds, transnational fiction, according to Trousdale, invites the reader to view national and cultural demarcations as subjective and therefore open to change. Both the writer and the reader are engaged in constructing alternate worlds through the liminal "third space" of literature, in which all readers are outsiders, forced to become educated in other languages, geographies and cultures.

Discussing the work of Nabokov and Rushdie as paradigmatic examples, this study establishes how both authors emphasize the authority of the reader to interpret their puzzle-like texts. In this way, their novels ask "us to recognise that cultural demarcations, like historical narratives and national boundaries, gain their status as 'true' from group consensus" (37). The first half of the book concerns Nabokov's merging of the physical,

in the form of geographical or scientific truths, and the imaginative, as figured either through the novel form or memory. The melding of subjectivity and real-world "truths", for Trousdale, confers authority on the reader to understand Nabokov's multilingual and multicultural reference points in order to construct a unified whole.

This approach is compared in the book's second half with that of Rushdie. While Rushdie also forces the reader to view him/herself as an outsider, Trousdale posits that novels such as *Midnight's Children* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* promote a form of "rooted cosmopolitanism" which allows for both hybridity and national or cultural identifications that can combat the development of nationalist ideology into religious fanaticism or communalism.

While Trousdale's approach offers a valuable re-examination of the constructs of postcolonial and postmodern theory, I felt that a more nuanced conceptualization of "transnationalism" was required, particularly to negotiate the differences in the overall aims of Nabokov and Rushdie and the attempt to attribute their preoccupations to "transnational fiction as a whole" (57). That said, the book effectively and illuminatingly points to the need for a broader discussion of transnationalism beyond the established discourses of postcolonial theory.

Works cited

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London and New York: Verso, 2006.
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Race and the modernist imagination, by Urmila Seshagiri, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2010, 251 pp., £34.50 (hardback), ISBN 978 0 8014 4821 8

Urmila Seshagiri sets herself the difficult task of exploring British modernism's response to race independent of its engagement with the British Empire. *Race and the Modernist Imagination* argues that postcolonial scholarship's propensity to "confine discussions of race in the period to the colonial fictions of Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad, and E.M. Forster", among others, obscures the role of race as a "central organizing aesthetic category" in modernist fiction (6). According to Seshagiri, "it is crucial to recognize that modernism's varied conceptions of race were *often* unrelated to the socio-political concerns raised by colonial contexts" (my italics, 6).

The tensions that arise from Seshagiri's attempt to route modernism's formal engagement with race away from questions of colonialism are felt most acutely in her rereadings of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, a seminal text in colonial and postcolonial criticism, and Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*, which, she argues, has not yet been considered under the spectrum of race. Kurtz is a "race-maddened artist", his gruesome display of mounted Congolese heads forms racial "resources for artistic expression" that manifest further in his aesthetics (46). This depiction of Kurtz as artist skews Marlow's