

chapter's last sentence speaks of a failure (of Eliot's novels to heal the breaks in community produced by imagination) that produces "if not a community, then a model of 'aesthetic teaching' that continues to be the most effective means of concealing—if not healing—the break that . . . 'has no end'" (p. 281). Pyle doesn't *evaluate* this logic, and even the book's conclusion, which finally opens the question of evaluation, does not push it farther. It may only be vestigial humanism on my part, but I am eager to know more of how he feels about it.

BRUCE ROBBINS

*Rutgers University*

WRITING THE COLONIAL ADVENTURE: RACE, GENDER AND NATION IN ANGLO-AUSTRALIAN POPULAR FICTION, 1875-1914. By Robert Dixon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. x, 228 p.

*Writing the Colonial Adventure* is in many respects a model deconstruction of colonialist narrative, showing how certain texts helped construct nationalist discourse at the same time as they expressed deep uncertainties about any such project. Robert Dixon variously describes his field as "popular fiction," "ripping yarns," "the adventure story," "the adventure tale," and most commonly "romance," which is initially opposed to the supposedly more masculine genre of realism. His formal aim is to undo this generic opposition, starting from the Britain of the 1870s and 1880s where H. Rider Haggard, Robert Louis Stevenson and Rudyard Kipling concocted a "men's literary revolution" in favor of romance, against Zola and the feminization of literature. Transferred to the Anglo-Australian context, the adventure story became a way of talking about profound conflict: "romance fiction must be recognized as an historically important site of contestation between contemporary discourses on gender, race, nation and empire" (p. 8). It was moreover a site of an undoing of centralized certitude, becoming a genre "in which metropolitan discourses on authority come to grief in their own ambivalence and implausibility" (p. 9). Ambivalence and implausibility are what Dixon goes looking for, and that's what he finds.

One of the most impressive aspects of this book is the extremely diverse nature of the material held within the one theoretical frame. There are particularly sound chapters on cross-cultural subjectivity (reading Boldrewood against the *Waverley* novels) and captivity narratives (the white woman taken by natives). Stimulating readings also focus on genre construction (the *New Woman* and the *Coming Man*), various myths of hybridity, and "lost races" within the Australian continent. The general concept of boundary-crossing is then extended into rather more tenuous chapters on occult fiction, crime novels, tales set against Australian traders in the Pacific, and narratives of an invasion from Asia. Although the closing chapters stretch the frame to breaking point, the very possibility that this heterogeneous spread might yet all hold together inspires one's admiration for Dixon's theoretical prowess.

Dixon's basic strategy is to set up "the border" or "the boundary" as an analytical locus able to incorporate thematics from postcolonial studies, gender studies, general deconstruction and snippets of psychoanalysis. The border is the place of hybrids and the fear of degradation; it is thus also the place where purity defends itself, no matter what its nature (race, manliness, civilization, language). The result is a problematic so powerful that any story at all can surely be fitted in. One can never be sure, of course, that all these texts fall into anything like a strict genre, or that they are adequately defined by the "Anglo-Australian" label. To pick at the latter thread, does the Anglo-Australian category cover books published in

Britain, read by the British and dealing with theosophy or adventure in China? If so, the works in question must gain this status through some kind of Australian authorship, and yet Dixon, as a reader of texts, has unfortunately little to say about the backgrounds of his authors. Even if we do accept that all these works can be grouped together simply because Dixon does so, are the occult and crime novels wholly as Australian as the “ripping yarns,” where, according to Dixon, “The proliferation of hybrid identities [. . .] suggests that the Australian identity is trapped between a nostalgia for the purity of Englishness and the vortex of otherness that defines its opposition to Britain” (p. 11)?

To ask such questions is to presuppose the kind of borders that Dixon’s critical readings undo. Yet one might also legitimately ask how Dixon came to select precisely these particular narratives, or why he mostly comments on just a few sections from each work. Not gratuitously, the readings jump across their own internal borders: typically a quote from Homi Bhaba or some similar English-language generalist (“theorist X has convincingly shown that...”), a definition of what we’re looking for (cross-cultural dressing, hybridization, Dracula as “border being,” whatever), preferably a precedent in British literature, then a few illustrations from selected Anglo-Australian texts, and we’re amazed and impressed at how well the theory fits! All this is expressed in sophisticated discourse from the 1970s (I counted the verb “suture” five times in 30 pages). Yes, the theory fits.

The problem, of course, is that the narratives have also been selected to fit the theory. No one need doubt this can be done, that X can be read as Y. Yet one must also ask who is doing the reading, and why. Dixon’s history not only has few authors but also is particularly devoid of publication details and historical readerships. This cleansing of context leaves him virtually free to indulge in classically unfalsifiable propositions. Consider the following: “the obsessive interest in black bodies in imperial romance can be read as a narcissistic displacement of the forbidden physicality of the self” (p. 65). Indeed it can. And again: “These descriptions of the male body can be read as a displacement of the homoerotic attraction that underlies the discourse of mateship” (p. 75). Yes, why not? But then: “Because of the military prowess of the black man, the white man’s heroism is increased whether he lives or dies” (p. 70). Well, yes, this is true too. Essentially the same relationship has just been interpreted on three different levels: “physicality of the self,” “discourse of mateship,” and power strategies. There is no sense asking which reading is correct, since none can be proven incorrect, not even probabilistically (in the absence of a strict corpus, one citation is as good as a hundred). In the end, the shifts of reading reflect a shifting reader. Between gender and power, no choice need be made. It’s all there, already. Boundaries are rather easy to find and to challenge.

The borders in Dixon’s history have basically two sides and a hybrid middle. The task of his readings is to reveal the ambivalent middle, and this is as valuable as it is fashionable. Yet the geometry is won at a price. For example, the binarism of the Anglo-Australian border ignores the possibility of direct French influences: Jules Verne is mentioned only once, and there is not a word about why Becke was called “Louis” and why Archibald, director of *The Bulletin*, liked to be known as “Jules François.” There is no translation in this history; we are in the closed space of the English language, with English-language narratives succumbing to English-language theory. Only on this basis can Dixon turn the border into everything, finally concluding that “Like the Nation, the Australian male subject is premised on a ceaseless patrolling of boundaries that ceaselessly collapse” (p. 200). Ultimately this might be Dixon’s own position, patrolling boundaries (for whom?) to make them collapse (in favor of what?).

*Writing the Colonial Adventure* has nevertheless stimulated me to reread a few of the stories that I and many other Australians were brought up on. Critical reading, of course. Now that such activities are politically correct, I, perhaps like Robert

Dixon, can indulge in the stories without feeling so guilty, as if they belonged to someone else. And the pleasure, which Dixon conveys but does not manage to theorize, is somehow so much greater.

ANTHONY PYM

*Universitat Rovira i Virgili*

TRANSLINGUAL PRACTICE: LITERATURE, NATIONAL CULTURE, AND TRANSLATED MODERNITY—CHINA, 1900-1937. By Lydia Liu. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995. 474 p.

In the global market it no longer makes sense to insist that a certain product is made in America or in Japan. This recognition of mixture has provided critical wisdom for understanding cultural goods and even cultural formations, which often involve the convergence of multiple traditions and cultures in their making. Taking a historical and dynamic approach to partnership or “coauthorship” (p. 46) in cultural production through translation, this book addresses experiences of modernity in China’s contact and collision with Western languages and literatures from the turn of the century to the beginning of the Anti-Japanese War in 1937, a period that witnessed “the rise of modern literature and its early canonization” (p. xvi). It is a scholarly truism that modern Chinese culture came into being as a response to the violent pressures and challenges of the West and is a mixture of Eastern and Western cultural resources. But it is far from Lydia Liu’s purpose to rehash exhausted influence studies or to retread much traveled terrains of hybridity, traveling theory, or migration of culture. On the contrary, the book tries to unmask the rigid binaries between East and West that inform much contemporary theory, Chinese studies, and cross-cultural interpretations.

An extended concept of translation, as implied in the title’s “Translingual Practice” and “Translated Modernity,” is the key to this study of the formation and legitimation of modern Chinese literature. Liu takes translation far more metaphorically than literally. The literal aspect, to be sure, is given the meticulous attention of a literary historian and linguist, as in her detailed and erudite description of loanwords and neologisms that circulated from the West to China to Japan and then back to China. The Appendixes, a very large collection of loanwords traversing several languages, attest to the immensity of the scholarly effort that went into just the literal aspect of translation. These loanwords and neologisms were so numerous that they changed the Chinese language and constituted modern Chinese vernacular. Liu argues persuasively from empirical data that it is impossible to consider the rise of modern Chinese literary discourse without reference to a vast supply of translated western literature and discourses. Modern Chinese literature resulted from a cross-cultural breeding facilitated by translation.

More important, however, is translation as a trope. Mere translation and borrowing do not lead to the creation of a new literature or national culture. There are questions of what to translate and why. Liu frames the question thus: “In whose terms, for which linguistic constituency, and in the name of what kinds of knowledge or intellectual authority does one perform acts of translation between cultures?” (p. 1). She uses the term “translingual practice” to designate a dynamic process of meaning making and culture building in the historical contact between China and the West. “Broadly defined, the study of translingual practice examines the process by which new words, meanings, discourses, and modes of representation arise, circulate, and acquire legitimacy within the host language due to, or in spite of, the latter’s contact/collision with the guest language. Mean-