

NOTAS DE LECTURA

THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER: GAZING THE EXOTIC IN THE NEWEST ARTISTIC PANORAMA. ISABEL SANTAOLALLA, ed. "New" *Exoticisms: Changing Patterns in the Construction of Otherness*. Amsterdam-Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000. 264 pp.

This book is based on contributions by researchers of diverse origins and academic extracts. It is intelligently divided into three parts, going from the general and mostly theoretical chapters to the most concrete ones which deal with specific literary works and other artistic pieces, including cinema, scripts, philosophy and postcolonial studies. In the introduction, Isabel Santaolalla explains and clarifies the concept of 'exoticism' as an ambivalent term which embeds both the foreign, alien, 'introduced from abroad' (as the Greek etymology of the prefix states), that is something that leads to hostility, and on the other hand, the attractive, charming and interesting for the unknown, that leads to artificial adaptation, and the seduction of objects, *manières* and clichés of the exotic. The book is, then, polarized into both affirmative and negative approaches to the polysemy of the 'exotic', giving also a contextual, theoretical and cultural meaning to that topic.

The first five chapters are a valuable contribution to the expansion of this theory. They discuss on the deconstruction of the phenomenon, either contextualizing it historically and ethically, reassessing the dominant views or, what is more interesting, understanding its subversive, ironic and de-stabilising power, its fashionable method to *épater les bourgeois*. Specially attractive are the 'translations' of terms which had been taken for

granted in the cultural, collective mind of the majorities, into the modern theoretical concepts of neohistoricist, poststructuralist and subaltern tendency. The topic of homosexuality is not forgotten in the content of this plural book, with an article on the cinema director and scriptwriter Derek Jarman, and is suggested as part of the interest in an essay about the famous film, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, or in others with minor details about *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. Emphasis is also put in postcolonial issues of race, class and gender, like the ones written about *Baraka*, 'exoticism and ethnicity', 'American colours: White, Black and Italian', 'the representation of whiteness', not to forget Hanif Kureishi's film aforementioned. The elements of dislocation, border, bodies and the exotic, so central in postcolonial studies, are representative in essays about Chicana lives (Gloria Anzaldúa's *La Frontera: the New Mestiza*), the idea of 'Home' in Audre Lorde's poetry and 'identity' in American literature written by ethnic minorities. A third important topic is based on the concept of 'otherness' and its implications, not only in Saidian terms of re-visioning the cultural constructions (or the WaThiongian 'decolonization' of the mind) but also in terms of exoticism as a manipulated medium to highlight intertextuality, detachment and political engagement. Examples like Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Bharati Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* or William Gibson's *The Neuromancer* represent that ironical vein in which hybridity, dissociation and identity serves the purpose of deconstructive reading of complex realities. Associated with Said's 'orientalism' already commented is

the article about the evolution of 'Hollywood's Oriental Odalises' (from Maria Montez, Yvonne de Carlo and Maureen O'Hara to the Disneyan portrait of Jasmine, in *Aladdin*).

Such seemingly diverse interests and objectives appear almost on the verge of not having much cohesion among them. However, they are pretty well unified under the light of postcoloniality and modern multicultural theories. In Huggan's essay about 'Exoticism, Ethnicity, and the Multicultural Fallacy' reads "[each film] re-

veals the limits of multicultural diversification in countries still beset by fears and fantasies surrounding the (eroticised) figure of the ethnic other" (91). And through changing patterns, parodying Satendra Nandan's title of her essay: this is a long travel 'from Erotica to Exotica to Exile', that is to say, from the marginal side of the 'exo-tic other' to the central homely charm of familiarity.

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