

**Review: Sarah Comyn and Porscha Fermanis, eds., *Worlding the South: Nineteenth-Century Literary Culture and the Southern Settler Colonies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021) 430pp. ISBN 978-1-5261-5288-6, £30.00.**

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IN RECENT YEARS, what was once treated as the largely unidirectional travel of metropolitan culture to colonial periphery during the long-nineteenth century has been reassessed and remodelled. This shift has partly been invigorated by growing attention to the local specificities of settler interactions with the material culture of different indigenous colonised peoples. Instead, global nineteenth-century literary cultures are increasingly framed in ways that reject the binary of metropole and periphery, Europe and World. Recent debates about 'worlding' have emphasised how the logics of Enlightenment and universalism have continued to inform contemporary research into non-European literary cultures, particularly those from settler colonised lands. Emerging critical work increasingly focuses on the ways non-European peoples have been appropriated and rendered within a European globalising of the world since exploration began in the sixteenth century. For instance, work by Nikki Hessel, James Clifford, and David Chandler and Julian Reid has undermined British periodisations (Romantic, Victorian) of the non-European nineteenth century in favour of indigenous epistemes and notions of time.<sup>1</sup> Recent calls to 'undiscipline' likewise draw on the longstanding work of Indigenous and Black scholarship from settler colonised places, with theorists like Linda Tuhiwai Smith drawing attention to the ways decolonising studies attend to long-term methods of divesting colonial power.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nikki Hessel, *Romantic Literature and the Colonised World: Lessons from Indigenous Translations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); James Clifford, *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); David Chandler and Julian Reid, "Being in Being": Contesting the Ontopolitics of Indigeneity', *The European Legacy*, 23:2 (2018), 251-268.

<sup>2</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Auckland: Zed, 1999).

The issue of 'worlding' is, as the title of this work suggests, thematically and methodologically central to *Worlding the South*. In its eighteen chapters, this ambitious edited collection draws together literary studies of the British southern colonies in nineteenth-century Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, South America, Southeast Asia, and the South Pacific Islands. With its focus on southern colonies, the editors propose a paradigm shift in their approach to the global nineteenth century. They take as their starting point the tension between north and south through which peoples of the south have been shaped by their approximate otherness to a northern gaze. As such, the editors consider the south less as a location and more as an indexical category of conceptual space, 'belated, inverted, nugatory, and even pathological in its relation to the time/space coordinates exported by Euro-American capital and territorial expansion'; the antithesis to northern modernity.<sup>3</sup> The book thus proposes a shift away from the dialectical comparatism between Anglo-America and elsewhere, which imagines the literary histories of the southern hemisphere as largely 'nation centred and globally marginalised'.<sup>4</sup>

In their exceptionally rich and critically wide-ranging introduction, Comyn and Fermanis explain the collection's aims with broad reference to ground-breaking recent works in the field of global/settler nineteenth-century literature. These aims primarily involve the need to reflect on the historical interconnectedness between southern colonies, drawing out shared 'thematic concerns, literary forms and tropes, and aesthetic and stylistic practices' in these regions.<sup>5</sup> In bringing together studies on such a diversity of geographic southern locations, the collection imagines how methodologies ranging from worlding to hemispheric analysis can displace prevalent nation-based forms of literary scholarship to emphasise oceanic and local accounts.

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<sup>3</sup> Sarah Comyn and Porscha Fermanis, eds., *Worlding the South: Nineteenth-century Literary Culture and the Southern Settler Colonies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 3.

The chapters that follow are ordered around a set of dialectic themes which speak to some of the problematics of the project: 'Globe/World', 'Acculturation/Transculturation', and 'Indigenous/Diasporic'. Chapters in the first section, 'Globe/World', respond to theories of the imperial processes of worlding that have historically drawn the globe into a temporal and spatial order in line with European systems of knowledge. Peter Otto's chapter on the 1828 panorama 'A View of the Town of Sydney' stages a particularly clear example of how colonial media technologies enacted world-making, with the panorama representing both the 'modernising' processes of settlement and the unsettling of these processes. Likewise, Comyn's chapter on 'Southern doubles' brilliantly exposes how 'antipodean thinking' reflects the inversion between north and south that the collection is invested in unravelling. Drawing on a selection of examples from the Australian periodical press in the 1850s, Comyn unveils a trajectory of antipodean self-positioning in relation to the British Empire's origin, which followed Australia's move from colonial self-governance to nationalism in the 1880s. The chapters in this section highlight how literary forms did more than replicate settler politics: they embedded the logics of settlement within burgeoning settler groups, sustaining increasing expansion by naturalising the settler imaginary of new lands awaiting domestic conquest.

The second section on 'Acculturation/Transculturation' pertinently approaches settlement as an aesthetic process of acclimatisation and adaptation – or indeed, failure or refusal to adapt – which evinces the 'affects of belonging' in examples of cultural encounter and colonial blending.<sup>6</sup> Following the subversive travel from metropole to colony and vice versa, and the subsequent recontextualisation of literary artefacts draws together Jane Stafford's chapter with that of Ken Gelder and Rachael Weaver. They trace the journeys of *Robinson Crusoe* from Britain to New Zealand, and the antipode naturalisation of the kangaroo hunt narrative from Australia to England respectively, reflecting on the nuances of cultural proliferation from metropole to periphery and its reversal as transcultural colonial import. Lindy Stiebel and Matthew Shum's chapters consider the geo-political significance of Southern African exploration and mapping in

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<sup>6</sup> Terry Goldie, *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1989), p. 13.

critically underappreciated reports of colonial expedition. Stiebel examines the artist-explorer Thomas Baines as a writer and mapper of settler interests, looking particularly at his accounts of his last expedition to Zululand for Cetshwayo kaMpander's coronation. Meanwhile, Shum considers the naturalist William Burchell's two-volume *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa* to problematise readings of the colonial scientist as merely a conduit of empire.

The final section, 'Indigenous/Diasporic', perhaps best achieves the useful comparatism of local specificity and contextualisation of south-south relations proposed in the introduction. This is in no small part down to the particular staging of the relationship between settler colonised and indigenous which these chapters investigate. As Comyn and Fermanis highlight, there are practical and ethical tensions that exist between Settler Colonial Studies and Indigenous theorists, who attest that Settler Studies reify and replicate the 'structural inevitability' of colonial power.<sup>7</sup> The editors carefully draw on the work of Indigenous Studies scholars to position *Worlding the South* as something of a porous intermediary between these divided fields. Indeed, chapters that attend to indigenous ontologies and epistemes throughout the collection are some of the most effective in their analysis. For example, Grace Moore's chapter on Louise Atkinson's recasting of the Australian landscape thoroughly accounts for indigenous ways of knowing land and succeeds in being neither appropriative nor reifying of settler logics.

Chapters in 'Indigenous/Diasporic' particularly address the racialised nature of the colonial archive. Anna Johnston's contribution, for example, considers the efforts of Australian colonialists Eliza Hamilton Dunlop and Harriott Barlow to learn local indigenous languages, while Michelle Elleray examines the Cook Islander Kiro's travel journals in England. Others are concerned with imperial literacy and specific indigenous and diasporic reading and writing cultures under colonisation. Nikki Hessel's brilliant chapter concerns the reappropriation of Thomas Babington Macaulay's verse by Aotearoa Mauri in petitions to secure their lands in colonial New Zealand. Meanwhile, Manu Samriti Chander examines the tensions raised by literary productions in British Guiana, where the rise of periodical culture furthered a systematic othering of the Indigenous Guianese. Chander's analysis of the

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<sup>7</sup> Comyn and Fermanis. p. 8.

political role of periodical culture is complemented by Porscha Fermanis' chapter on the *Straits Chinese Magazine*, in which she reads subversions of imperial notions like European comparatism to reveal a strategically anticolonial project.

The sheer number of chapters, and geographic scale, of the literary cultures covered in *Worlding the South* is both a strength and a weakness of the volume. In the introduction, Comyn and Fermanis propose that the chapters each speak to a methodological position that prioritises 'southern perspectives and south-south relations'. Simultaneously, however, they emphasise a focus on "'worldings" – rather than on south-south exchange'. At times, it can be difficult to comprehend the nuances of this position, and particularly to trace these unifying themes through a study of this size. Rather, the reader is left to draw their own conclusions as to the nature of 'south-south relations' from the ordering of the studies. Specific attention to these relations will be a fruitful next step for nineteenth-century global literary studies.

Nevertheless, the collection certainly achieves the editors' broader aim of reorienting the competing perspectives of the British empire's southern colonies and their peoples against metropolitan perspectives; achievement enough in a study of such widescale and heterogenous literary cultures. Although some scholars of global long-nineteenth-century literature may be inclined to read this collection as a whole, its wider use may be as a reference for those researching specific southern literary cultures. Either reading mode will have value, although, as Elleke Boehmer puts it in her afterword, understanding southern hemisphere histories holistically reveals many 'tenuous and yet still tenacious conjunctions [...] often realised in or crystallised through maps, books, letters, panoramas, and other kinds of inscription and installation'.<sup>8</sup> Boehmer imagines the south as network – verbal, textual, cartographic – with *Worlding the South* presenting the kind of transnational and transactional account that undermines existing approaches to the colonial archive that reinforce notions of inevitability. This theoretical variety and exercise in 'worlding' render the book an exceptional introduction to settler colonial literary cultures. It is an important read for any scholar of the global nineteenth century.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 379.



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