

Review

A Review of K Darian-Smith, L Gunner and S Nuttall (eds) (1996) *Text, Theory, Space: land, literature and history in South Africa and Australia*, London and New York: Routledge.

Jenny Robinson

This book appealed to me at two stages of my engagement with it. On purchasing it, and on reflection after reading it. In between glancing through the essays and then reading each one closely for this review, I was a little frustrated. Perhaps this is because the individual essays are each quite specific and neither a preliminary glance nor reading each essay in turn offered a sense of the thematic coherence of the collection. But having drawn the essays together in my head after reading them all, I was inspired by their coherence and novelty. In their introduction, the editors point to some of the ways in which this coherence emerges around themes of landscape, the role of places in the making of meaning, and the ways in which race, colonial power and gender are played out in the constitution and imagination of specific spaces, borders, boundaries and locations.

One of the truly unusual aspects of the collection is to set together 'spatial histories' (to draw on a phrase coined by one of the contributors, Paul Carter) of South Africa and Australia. Although clearly divergent in all sorts of ways, the colonial and settler pasts of these two countries deserve much more in the way of sustained comparative analysis. This collection makes an initial contribution to such a project by juxtaposing histories, experiences, and analyses of both places. Two papers specifically draw together the two contexts, one through historical connections (the paper by Gillian Whitlock on Lady Barker's writings about both South Africa and Australia during her time spent in each place during her husband's postings highlights the significance of the different settler-native peoples relations in the two places) and another through analytical contrasts (Terence Ranger allows the historiographies of the Matopos and the Uhru to speak to one another's omissions. Liz Gunner attempts a similar although more limited strategy in comparing Aboriginal and Zulu poetry). It is a pity that the collection did not include more papers which were explicitly comparative - or that the editors could not spend a little more time drawing out some comparative insights. But these contributions, and the effect of the collection as a whole in

juxtaposing writings from these different places, should help to inspire a growing interest in comparative studies within southern African studies.

As the title suggests, it is the linking of post-colonial literary studies to an awareness of 'space' which distinguishes this collection. I found much here to be intriguing by, although, to use the geographer Doreen Massey's phrase, the authors have not yet shown how it is that 'space matters'.

The essays cover a range of different types of spaces: tables and ships, frontiers and borders, nations and mountains, homelands and explorations. Introducing the idea of space, the editors discuss Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory* and Paul Carter's *Road to Botany Bay*. As with the essays in this collection, these books bring the social production of landscapes into view, and show how these produced spaces work in some way to constitute histories. But, again in the same ways as these essays, both of these authors avoid programmatic assessments of their 'space' which they put into question. It would have been interesting to consider how it is that a spatial imagination, an attentiveness to spatialities, might shift the kinds of histories we write. Does it make a difference to pay particular attention to 'space', and how? Why should attention to the ship on which settlers made their journey to the other end of the earth, for example, help us to tell different stories about this trip? In her article, 'The voyage south: writing immigration', Kerryn Goldsworthy suggests that shipboard space, in its spatial divisions both mirrored and re-shaped the social hierarchies which characterised Emigrant society. The lack of privacy on board, she argues, also contributed to the disintegration of identities which partly enabled the creation of new social relations, in a new environment. Paul Carter's chapter interrogates the space of the 'table' - from the table of post-colonial negotiations, to the two sides of the heavy Victorian drawing-room tables. He figures these as never passive, changing spaces: from the daylight space of display to the night-time space of study, from the conscious functional surface to the moving unconscious space, and the moving table of the spirit-world's communications through spirit-medium sessions. Reflecting on the multiplicity of this micro-space, he argues, sheds light on the dream-worlds of colonisation (suggested in his piece by the popularity of spirit-mediums) and the place of colonisers' fantasies, at home and abroad, in shaping history. In more contemporary terms, the mobility of the space of the table also destabilises its resonance as an image as representing a level playing field of negotiations: 'Off the ground, it reminds us that the ground is not given' (p 33).

Several of the papers explored the interesting connections between identities and spaces - colonial identities constituted through imagining landscapes as empty, through particular encounters with colonised peoples, through particular

memories of places or displacement. Abner Nyamende addresses African femininity in a discussion of rural/urban identifications in 'The Marabi Dance'. Dorothy Driver shifts the connections between space and identity into a somewhat different register as she thinks about the more metaphorical 'space' of African femininity in *Drum* magazine. Part of her argument is that negotiating rural/urban spaces involves negotiating different masculinities and femininities. She suggests that through *Drum's* articulation of a different form of femininity, which, like female jazz singers, was 'active rather than passive, wild rather than tame, promiscuous rather than domestic, black rather than white in dialogue (sometimes) with male sexuality rather than subordinated and owned' (p239) - a different 'space' was opened up for a while: neither urban nor rural, modern or traditional, but a space of possibility for a new relation between men and women.

This collection then explores the ways in which social relations are articulated through spaces, and begins to point to the ways in which spaces are differently constituted through different social imaginations - that same 'space' can have many different meanings, even as spaces (from home towns, to nations, to nature) can be delimited and used to try and fix identities and meanings for different political projects. What would be the effectiveness of pursuing this interest in space? How could a spatial sensitivity alter our historical interpretations? This text doesn't answer these questions for us, but it certainly indicates that there will be some value in pursuing this path of enquiry further.