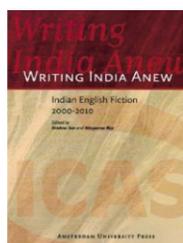


India: a watershed decade

This collection of fourteen critical essays is an eclectic mix of scholarship which addresses, in the editors' words, "the new corpus of writing" (9) in Indian English fiction (IEF). This 'new corpus' refers to contemporary IEF, that which emerged in the first decade of this millennium and can be distinguished from seminal novels such as Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) and the work of well-known authors like Vikram Seth, Anita Desai or Shashi Tharoor. The editors suggest in their introduction that contemporary IEF has freed itself from the shackles of traditional theoretical categorization including 'postcolonialism' or 'postmodernism', yet they acknowledge that it is evidently concerned with the issue of transculturalism and mobility as international borders, both real and imagined, become increasingly porous.

Louise Harrington



Reviewed title:
Sen, K. & R. Roy (eds.) 2013.
Writing India Anew: Indian English Fiction 2000-2010,
Amsterdam University Press,
ISBN 9789089645333

THE 'STUDY OF A DECADE' approach of this edited collection is an attractive one and will be of interest to those readers looking for a broad impression of IEF in the years 2000-2010. This book joins two other notable publications which employ the same approach and coincidentally were published in the same year (2013): E. Dawson Varughese's *Reading New India: Post-Millennial Indian Fiction and The Indian English Novel of the New Millennium* edited by Prabhat K. Singh. There is considerable overlap across these three publications with Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, the motivational writing of Chetan Bhagat, and graphic novels all emerging as common subject matter. Nonetheless, such exciting scholarship on new and emerging literary genres along with critical discussions of how IEF has changed in the last decade are most welcome in the ever-expanding field of critical writing on fiction from or about India in the English language.

Charting new territory

The introductory chapter from the editors of this book provides a review of criticism on IEF from 2000-2010, focusing on three categories of publications: broad overviews of literature, books on single authors or texts, and those on specific themes. After detailing a comprehensive list of the current critical field, the editors suggest that their publication adds to the extensive canon by revealing how critical material on IEF in the decade of 2000-2010, "a watershed in India's history", might write India anew (13).

This aim seems to be borne out of a desire to argue for the current, or lasting, importance of IEF with the goal of exposing the present trends and preoccupations in fiction writing from India as it evolves alongside the country itself. The reader gathers this intention because, on the first page, the Introduction asserts that IEF has been "dismissed as derivative or dispossessed" (9); it does not however provide a reference for such criticism, thus leaving it unclear to which scholars or publications this edited collection is responding. Despite this, those interested in Anglophone fiction will have no doubt that IEF continues to break new ground and that it offers inventive and varied creative readings of modern India.

Writing India Anew is also framed as charting new territory in IEF since, in the decade under review, fiction writers are suggested to have now moved on from the long-held obsession

with imperialism and nationalism. Indeed, empire and its effects are mentioned frequently throughout the Introduction as being irrelevant to contemporary IEF. This is an interesting observation that begs the question – what is the role of Empire in India or in Indian writing in English in the present period? IEF may have moved beyond a committed focus on the Raj, but clear connections to this historical period are apparent in many of the essays in this collection. For instance, among the themes discussed in the various chapters are India's relationship with Britain and America, the ever-shifting forms of Indian nationalism, crises in national identity, language politics, class and gender inequalities, and India in a global context. Significantly, Bill Ashcroft, in his opening essay 'Re-writing India', explores the idea of the nation in post-Independence India, engaging largely with matters of (anti-)nationalism and (post-)colonialism in novels including *Midnight's Children*. From the outset of this volume, then, it would seem that the legacy of imperialism continues to feature in critical material from this recent decade.

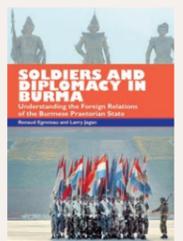
Identifying trends in the new canon

The edited collection is divided into four sections: Re-Imagining the Nation; Revisiting the Past; Reviewing the Present; Reinscribing Home. These sections are not all created equally since they contain four, two, six, and two essays respectively. 'Reviewing the Present' is the longest section with six essays,

Burma's foreign relations

In recent decades, few regimes have been as secretive and reclusive as Burma's. However, this pariah is hardly cut-off from the outside world, as the recent volume by Renaud Egretteau and Larry Jagan make clear.

Shane J. Barter and Yuko Nakajima



Reviewed title:
Egretteau, R. & L. Jagan. 2013.
Soldiers and Diplomacy in Burma: Understanding the Foreign Relations of the Burmese Praetorian State,
Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, ISBN 9789971696733

Soldiers and Diplomacy in Burma provides a thorough examination of contemporary and historical foreign relations between Burma and a variety of global actors. This sometimes sprawling volume brings together an impressive range of materials while remaining accessible to a variety of readers, making this the definitive account of Burma's foreign relations.

The book's core argument is that, while the country's foreign policy has changed significantly between periods of openness in the immediate postcolonial era, isolation under Ne Win, and now something in between, a constant throughout Burma's postcolonial history has been the praetorian role of the military. The authors argue convincingly that Burma represents a praetorian state instead of a junta, militaristic, authoritarian, or pseudo-civilian state. The army pervades the state and society, serving as guardians of their national vision against various threats. The authors explain that praetorian regimes tend not to respond to international threats with military force, preferring instead to remain isolated; "praetorians are more concerned with political power and leadership than the systematic use of force, conflict and/or domestic repression – although they are ready to use them to achieve their goals" (29). This constant in Burmese politics suggests that, despite meaningful reforms, we should expect that the military retain a guardian rule for the foreseeable future.

Soldiers and Diplomacy in Burma unfolds through five chapters. Chapter one categorizes the regime while providing an extensive review of the related literature. Chapter two provides a historical survey of post-colonial foreign relations, moving from U Nu's early internationalism to Ne Win's isolation and recent openings. The U Nu era in particular provides a useful history lesson, as Burma was at one point an outspoken international actor and a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement. From here, the book examines Burma's relations with specific countries, especially China, India, the ASEAN nations, and the United States, as well as the United Nations, Japan, and several Western countries. The discussions of country dyads are fascinating, especially the unique ways that Japan and India approach Burmese issues in ways that are distinct from their allies.

While maintaining an international focus, Egretteau and Jagan never lose sight of domestic politics, noting the centrality of factionalism within the country's security forces and the ways that personal connections drive foreign policy. The authors are quick to point out that much of Burma's post-2010 opening must be explained by domestic factors. The book also delves into the ideational aspects of Burma's security apparatus, noting the extreme xenophobic nationalism that reinforces the country's isolationist tendencies. The book contains many policy insights. The authors suggest that the so-called great game between India and China, as well as the formidable Chinese influence in Burma, are exaggerated. Chinese investment in Burma is relatively limited, although it dwarfs that of other countries and provides Beijing with considerable influence. Burmese leaders recognize this and have worked to retain their autonomy, namely by purging pro-Beijing intelligence officers and pivoting towards the West. Burma does not appear to be divided between pro-China

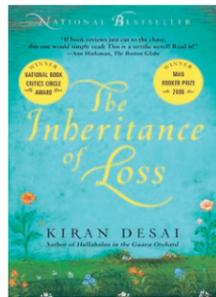
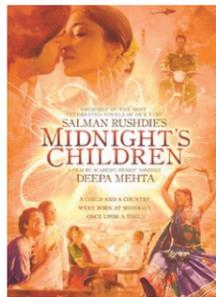
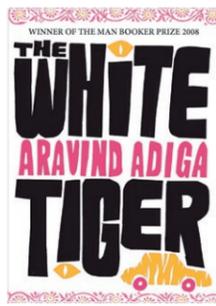
and pro-Western camps, but instead pro-foreign and pro-isolation ones, meaning that those who favour expanding interactions with Beijing also favour doing so with Washington, Bangkok, Tokyo, and Brussels.

While mostly impressive, *Soldiers and Diplomacy in Burma* falls short in some respects. The book feels quite long due to impressive details, but also some poor organization and editing. The book's chapters run over 100 pages long with only a few section breaks per chapter and seemingly distinct topics lumped within each section. Several parts of the book could have been trimmed, as discussions of many events and concepts are repeated at several points, such as Burma leaving the non-aligned movement, Ne Win's anger towards North Korea after a 1983 attack on South Korean citizens, Russia's Rangoon Embassy, Israel's complex relations with Burma, and Khin Nyunt's 2004 purging. Next, while discussions of bilateral relations are interesting, it is not clear whether Burma's relations with the Ukraine, Canada, or New Zealand demand dedicated discussions, let alone repeated ones. Another area that could have probably been trimmed relates to the authors' tendency to incorporate literature reviews throughout the book, breaking from their own analyses to provide long, encyclopedic surveys. The authors also opt for a journalistic style, introducing writers in terms of their nationalities, professions, and sometimes home institution when making citations, despite already having footnotes. This is especially strange when authors are referred to repeatedly, such as Andrew Selth, described as an "Australian veteran watcher of Burmese affairs" (8), "a prominent *Tatmadaw* specialist" (38, 52, 138), and "Australian academic" (66, 155, 334). While Selth and others are indeed noted experts, the repeated in-text introductions become tiring. This and other editorial decisions add unnecessary length to an already long manuscript.

The major substantive quibble we found was with the book's treatment of history. The authors refer to colonial traumas to explain Burmese xenophobia. Pre-colonial history is absent, save for a brief mention in Thai-Burmese relations and in discussing the shift to the new capital of Nyapyidaw. It might have been interesting to have some discussion on precolonial Burmese politics, namely the role of the military, a dominant institution well before the arrival of Europeans. Some brief mention of previous historical eras would also help explain contemporary ethnic dynamics, which were exacerbated, but not caused, by colonial experiences. Even if one is critical of colonialism, starting history with it may exaggerate its effect, blurring efforts to discover the roots of this praetorian system.

These quibbles aside, *Soldiers and Diplomacy in Burma* remains an impressive achievement. This is essential reading for those seeking to comprehend not only Burma's politics and foreign relations. The product of a decade of research, the authors must be commended for unearthing a range of fascinating points and assembling such a detailed story of the foreign relations of this pariah.

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and perhaps is the most true to the book's overarching purpose of exposing the latest trends in IEF, since it includes scholarship on science fiction, graphic novels and the effects of globalisation. Himansu S. Mohapatra's critique of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* is effective in debunking some of the claims of the novel and its supporters, while Nandana Dutta's essay is thought-provoking on the topic of the everyday in women's writing and the significance of small stories in the post-postcolonial novel (149). The four remaining chapters of the section are notable in their innovative approach to IEF. Subir Dhar's focus is on the inspirational writing inspired by bestseller Chetan Bhagat; Sreemati Mukherjee's subject is cyber-literature and the novel *Tokyo Cancelled* by Rana Dasgupta; Abhijit Gupta's piece offers an overview of the current state of Indian science fiction; and Rimi B. Chatterjee gives a comprehensive survey of comics and graphic novels and speaks to the potential for this genre in India. All of these essays are refreshing in their engagement with, what many readers will identify as, distinctly contemporary concerns and undoubtedly distinguishes them from the IEF of the 1980s for instance.

While the remaining sections of the book are less obviously connected to what the novelty of the decade 2000-2010 might be, Bill Ashcroft's opening essay is commendable. His reasoned piece on contemporary Indian English novels is most effective in its argument that, following the (seldom-observed) anti-nationalist utopianism of Tagore and Gandhi, prominent novels and novelists reveal a deep skepticism about the idea of the nation state in independent India. Taking Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* as a starting point, Ashcroft discusses some inheritors of Rushdie's prize-winning revolution (29), that is, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* and Hari Kunzru's *Transmission*. He contends that three themes emerge in how these novels express their resistance to nationalism: class and socio-economic inequality, inherited colonial borders and boundaries, and mobility in the global era. The author concludes that the historical skepticism of nationalism evident in the writings of Tagore and Gandhi abounds in contemporary literature, while it simultaneously maintains an eye on the past and the future, the home and the world.

Another compelling chapter which delves into theories about the nation-state in India, national allegory and literature is Krishna Sen's discussion of Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* and M.G. Vassanji's *The Assassin's Song*. Her argument is that the concept of *desh* – the land or place of one's birth or familial origin, and therefore of one's ancestral heritage and spiritual and cultural belonging (76) – is more relevant when reading IEF, such as the novels above, than Western models of the homogenous nation. The two essays in the section called *Revisiting the Past* are also stimulating in their engagement with the historical. Paul Sharrad explains how some contemporary writers have tried (with little success) to rework classics like the Mahabharata for audiences today, while Rituparna Roy considers Mughal India and art in her reading of Kunal Basu's novel *The Miniaturist*. In the latter essay, Roy interestingly contends that a turn towards historical fiction is a new trend of the decade 2000-2010 (112), as writers move past their preoccupation with the colonial in favour of the pre-colonial period. Unfortunately, there is little development of this claim which leaves the reader wishing for more, particularly because the edited collection as a whole often mentions potential trends in the recent canon of IEF without drawing any unified conclusions.

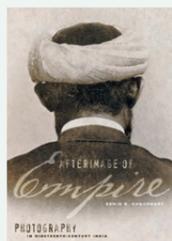
In the absence of editorial interludes at the beginning of each new section to create an argument for the book as a whole and to link the ideas within the diverse essays, it becomes somewhat unclear what the critical or theoretical trajectory of the collection is. It would have been useful to have some guidance on how these fourteen disparate essays address the editors' initial questions: what makes this decade special? What is new about their approach? Alternatively, a concluding chapter would have been most valuable in answering the above questions and in offering the reader a cohesive analysis of these contemporary essays on Indian English fiction in light of India's altered landscape in the first decade of the new millennium. As individual chapters, however, many of these essays will be of interest to general readers, as well as to students and scholars of the individual authors and texts. The list of references at the end of the book is also a useful resource on contemporary writing from India and literary theory.

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Photography in nineteenth-century India

Afterimage of Empire is a rich and thought-provoking study of early colonial photography in the Indian subcontinent, drawing on extensive theoretical observations and interdisciplinary methods.

Eve Tignol



Reviewed title:
Chaudhary, Z.R. 2012.
Afterimage of Empire: Photography in Nineteenth-Century India,
Minneapolis: Minnesota Press,
ISBN 9780816677498

THE BOOK, BORN OUT of Chaudhary's doctoral dissertation at Cornell University, contributes to scholarship on Indian colonial photography notably developed in J. Gutman's, J. Falconer's and C. Pinney's works. Rather than proposing a descriptive historical account of photographic practice, this book explores the role of photography in the way people sensed (and made sense of) the world in history and inquires into its social implications in the modern world. As the author explains in the introduction, the primary focus of the book is what the colonial history of the medium [photography] may have to teach us about the making of modern perceptual apparatus, of the links between perception and meaning, and of the transformation of aesthetic experience itself. Interested in how this particular media is influenced by history and, in turn, influences history, Chaudhary starts his ambitious investigation with the arrival of photography in India (about the same time as it develops in Britain) and divides his argument into four thematic chapters, each relying on different material and exploring particular aspects of colonial photographic practices.

Chapters one and two are both devoted to the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857 and its echoes in colonialist photography. In chapter one, *Death and the Rhetoric of Photography*: X marks the spot, Chaudhary studies post-Rebellion

photographs by John Dannenberg and Harriet Tytler who memorialize British loss and death by reproducing in pictures the now empty spaces where tragic events had taken place, thus repeating patterns of traumatic shock. Chaudhary here addresses the indexical power of photography, which persuades us that the things photographed did really take place, in showing that photography is allegorical (and polysemic), and works along the same dynamics as those of rumour. Despite its assumed objectivity, the author argues that the photographic media is in fact a technology of propaganda which does not provide any narrative in itself but needs captions; here colonialist ones.

In chapter two, *Anaesthesia and Violence: a colonial History of shock*, Chaudhary continues his analysis of post-Rebellion photography through the work of commercial photographer Felice Beato. In pictures of unearthed bones and hung rebels, Chaudhary sees what he calls, in Walter Benjamin's terms, a phantasmagoric aesthetic. As the author argues, photography participates in the dialectics of (in)visibility which enable the viewers to experience the violence of their own destruction and transform it into a commodity. This process, which compensates the bodily shock of modernity and negotiates relations of domination by managing the colonized, is, for the author, symptomatic of a change in colonial ordering and governmentality, to borrow Foucault's words. Here, Chaudhary argues that photographic practice has a crucial role in the production of colonial knowledge and is instrumental to colonial governmentality: it perceptually alienates the colonials and the colonized and justifies the ideology of the colonial state's civilizing mission.

Chapter three, *Armour and Aesthetics: The Picturesque in Difference*, examines the picturesque aesthetic and the nostalgia for home that unfolds in Samuel Bourne's landscape photography in the 1860s. By converting the Indian landscape into the familiar through the resort to picturesque conventions, colonial photography reveals a perceptual change insofar as the world was increasingly appreciated as picture-like. This chapter also investigates the works of Indian photographers Lala Deen Dayal, Darogha Abbas Ali and Ahmed Ali Khan and their adoption of the picturesque aesthetic. Instead of seeing traces of resistance in photographic practices, Chaudhary emphasizes the differences displayed in Indian photographs by reading them as attempts to mould themselves in the

terms of English picturesque conventions, while the continued invocation and re-adaptation of local artistic traditions are considered as examples of the evolution of Indian aesthetic expressions.

In chapter four, *Famine and the Reproduction of Affect: Pleas for Sympathy*, Chaudhary explores the role of photography in stimulating emotions and sympathy especially through photographs taken by Captain Wallace Hooper during the Madras famine in the late 1870s. The author argues that such photographs enabled an identification with others that shaped English subjects through a sense of belonging to a benevolent nation, and thus served social cohesion.

In *Afterimage of Empire*, Chaudhary impressively juggles both theoretical and historical material. Photographic evidence is also always echoed by other contemporary sources like travel writings, memoirs, or newspaper articles which render the narrative lively. The author's detailed studies are insightful; chapter three and the analysis of the work of Indian photographers – notably his investigation of albums containing blanked photographs of *pardanashin* women – are particularly captivating. Chaudhary's arguments, choice of examples and selection of photographs, compiled in a glossy edition, render the book an engaging read. The reader may find the author's theoretical explanations relying on specialized jargon hard to follow, and a proper conclusion, rather than a brief coda, would have helped bring together the different aspects addressed in the book. Moreover, while Chaudhary certainly emphasizes the importance of history and of historical determination in his study of the phenomenological impact of photography in the late nineteenth-century, there is relatively little detailed analysis of the photographs reproduced and of their historical context. More attention to the context in which those photographs circulated as well as to the intentions of the photographers, and to the reception and use of photography by various audiences would have further enhanced the study. Chaudhary's *Afterimage of Empire* is nonetheless an extensive study which undoubtedly opens up reflection not only on the role of photography in the Indian subcontinent but on the cultural and sensorial changes brought by modernity both in the Western and non-Western worlds.

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