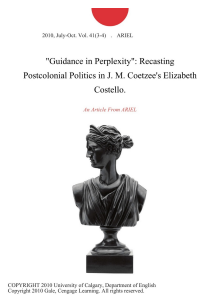


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GUIDANCE IN PERPLEXITY RECASTING POSTCOLONIAL POLITICS IN J M COETZEE S ELIZABETH COSTELLO EBOOKS 2019



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In recent years postcolonial studies has come under increasing scrutiny, more for its institutional successes than its failures. The May 2007 issue of PMLA featured a roundtable discussion, provocatively titled "The End of Postcolonial Theory?" in which participants from both inside and outside the Western academy (Sunil Agnani, Fernando Coronil, Simon Gikandi, and Susie Tharu to name a few) debated whether postcolonial studies' entrenchment within the university, its widely disseminated methodologies and familiar objects of inquiry, evidenced the ossification of a once thriving and oppositional discourse (Agnani, Coronil, Desai, Dilouf, Gikandi, Tharu and Wenzel 633--651). Two years earlier, the collection *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* provided a thorough state of the discipline with speculations on its future "beyond" analyses of the nation-state, borderlands, and other well-trodden geographies. In seeking to reinvigorate a field which may be resting on its laurels, they suggest that postcolonial studies engage with such up-and-coming discourses as environmentalism and Black Atlantic studies as well as reframe its central questions to contend with the complexities of contemporary globalization and American hegemony (1--38). Of course, a collection which stresses the "beyond" should orient itself toward the future, and *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* is forward-looking in its attempts to chart new pathways for postcolonial studies. However, the collection's intriguing final essay is an important exception. Neil Lazarus' "The Politics of Postcolonial Modernism" looks backward to an unlikely source for both postcolonialism's indictment and its rejuvenation--European modernism. At first, Lazarus argues that modernism offers an important analogue to postcolonial studies, in that its critical practitioners authorized an extremely narrow body of texts as "modern," thus eclipsing a great many works whose aesthetics and politics differed from their preferred paradigms. He complains that postcolonial literary studies are guilty of the same crimes of omission, the steep penalties for which are "leadenly reductive" readings of a "woefully restricted and attenuated corpus of works" (424). This corpus, or canon, reinforces a specific set of scholarly interests in liminality, hybridity, subalternity, and multiculturalism as the universal criteria for postcolonial literature. While Lazarus' essay (including its allusive title) is clearly indebted to Raymond Williams' analysis of the ideological underpinnings of modernism as institution, his position should not be mistaken for a wholesale rejection of modernism as art. Indeed, he professes faith in the "ongoing criticality of modernist literary practice" whose protocols inflect postcolonial writing's most important tasks: refusing the "integration, resolution, consolation, and comfort" of the ideological systems that would strip literature of its provocations (431, italics in original). In Lazarus' formulation, the modernist legacy of critical restlessness inherited by postcolonial literature offsets the ossifying institution of postcolonial modernism. To expand the boundaries of postcolonial critique then, restlessness must become an enduring facet of its institutionalization. (1)

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