Sarah Upstone’s study is a welcome addition to the contesting perspectives that presently seek to frame literary representations within the post colonial paradigm. Echoing its debt to theory, her book favours an open-ended framing which refutes closure ‘that risks mirroring the colonial absolutism’ and fixes ‘meaning from outside’ (181). Although Upstone does not reject postcolonial history, her aim is to privilege spatiality alongside temporality as a mode of analysis for the literary texts which she chooses to consider. Establishing her terms of reference, Upstone reasons that ‘if there is a non-linear history at the centre of postcolonial subversions of official western historiography, so chaotic spatiality might question any colonial ordering of location’ (15). To better serve the purposes of her outlook she brings into play the term ‘post-space’. Alluding to two major academic movements of modern times, poststructuralism and postcolonialism, which are intertwined throughout her analysis; Upstone positions ‘post-space’ within a complex and contested discursive field. She goes on to define ‘post-space’ as an ‘interrogatory chaos ... where a chaotic sense of the spatial on all scales becomes a resource towards the re-visioning of the postcolonial position in society and consequent issues of identity, the possibilities inherent in postcolonial spaces as a direct result of their hybrid histories’ (15).

Well worth reading alone, her introduction provides an excellent and accessible review of current theories of space. Eventually, the author concludes that “theorists seem to find little consensus when it comes to defining what is meant by “space” let alone reasoning what spaces should be focussed upon’ – a position with which this reviewer heartily agrees (2). Therefore, in ordering her literary appraisal, Upstone makes her choices independent of geographical location. For Upstone, space is ‘hybrid, shifting, and reflective of the elaborate relationships that construct our sense of place in the contemporary world’ (15). Pointing the way to her critical emphasis, she surveys her authors from the perspective of five different spatial themes: the nation, the journey, the city, the home and the body. Significantly, the idea of multiple and differential spatial scales of engagement in relation to cultural practice is introduced. Upstone adopts this approach from Gilroy: ‘Bodily scale is certainly important ... Varieties of solidarity other than the local and the national assert their presence and have to be placed within an explicit hierarchy of scales with multiple patterns of determination’ (35).

At the centre of this survey are works, both magical realist and realist, by Salman Rushdie, Toni Morrison and Wilson Harris. The respective oeuvre of each author is expertly and deftly examined which grounds the theory of each chapter in textual analysis and traditional close reading. In this respect Upstone’s credentials as a literary critic are impeccably established. Amongst others whose works merit discussion are: J. M. Coetzee, Azar Nafisi, Arundhati Roy, Michael Ondaatje, Leila Aboulela and Tsitsi Dangaremba. Such a diverse selection gives Upstone a broad transnational grouping from which to launch her comparative literary and spatial study. Appropriately, the first chapter deals with the relevance and viability of the

nation-state. Not only applicable to postcolonial scholarship, this topic has recently come to the fore in a number of disciplines. Upstone begins by surveying the notable theorists in postcolonial and nationalism studies. Formed by liberating and emancipating movements, newly established post colonial nations found expression in new national literatures. Early postcolonial criticism sought to emphasise the specific social cultural and historical terms from which these literatures emerged. Upstone’s cross border, post-national scrutiny suggests that different literary cultures can be merged in a broad conceptual analysis, which emanates from the historicity of the global area established by the British Empire and the use of the English language.

Inherited from the Imperial centres, the nation-state model of many post-colonial nations has proved to be an artificial and arbitrary aggregate, as in Malaysia and India once the colonial regime departed. Since the initial, emancipatory euphoria of independence, many post-colonial nations have fractured into ethnic communities. As well, under the pressures of transnational capitalism, many have failed to address pervasive systems of internal inequality. Therefore, in her analysis of latter day post-colonial authors, Upstone finds that: ‘as authors undertake essential movements away from national scales directly related to specific geographical contexts, an alternative for politics located at other spatial scales develops’ (56). She proposes that perhaps, transformation is now possible in the spaces between nations – those spaces of non-belonging – such as migrations and Diasporas (56). The second chapter, with its thematic of the postcolonial journey logically moves this premise forwards. Here, Upstone suggest that: ‘it is the freedom of the journey, its status as an unbordered space open to interpretation, its focus as the ambivalent site where identities are negotiated, that makes it the pivot – the fulcrum – upon which post-space turns’ (82). Organised around the thematic of the public space of the city, the third chapter bridges the gap between the nation and the journey and the domestic and the intimate, as the final two chapters are organised around readings of the microspaces of home and body.

Suggesting that the political ideas framed within this spatial ordering might command new literary insights; her book title incorporates the word ‘politics’ alongside ‘the postcolonial novel’. As to how literary space might operate within her paradigm, Upstone proposes ‘not to reduce post-space to a literary phenomenon, and the fact that I see it as represented in the written text, rather that enclosed within it, means that the written text is more of a reflector of other spaces, than one that should be studied alongside them.’ (182). Upstone’s work is theoretically ambitious; readers who are suspicious of abstraction need to beware. However, they should be more than compensated by the sustained textual scrutiny that Upstone delivers. All in all, for this reviewer, Upstone’s political and theoretical commitment delivers a lively, enlightening and ‘on the ball’ development for post colonial textual studies.

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