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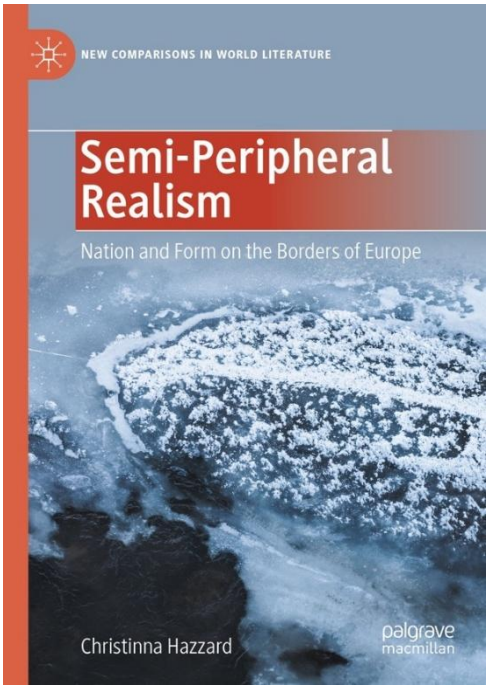
BOOKS

Christinna Hazzard, *Semi-Peripheral Realism. Nation and Form on the Borders of Europe*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2024, 230 p.



Christinna Hazzard's 2024 study, *Semi-Peripheral Realism: Nation and Form on the Borders of Europe*, undertakes the ambitious task of navigating the shifting frontiers of world literature, aiming to chart its unexplored and neglected territories and provide—if not new, then at least renewed—insights and interest in the field. Focusing on the semi-periphery and drawing on the theoretical frameworks and methods of Fredric Jameson and Franco Moretti, Christinna Hazzard sets out to investigate the asynchronous development of global capitalism, seeking to demonstrate how this otherwise abstract "unevenness" (1) has taken concrete shape within–and has, in turn, reshaped–both literature and literary theory.

The first chapter introduces the current setbacks and roadblocks in world literature and postcolonial studies in order to highlight the significance of researching the semi-periphery and, thereby, to justify the rationale behind the chosen texts. Hazzard's engagement with semi-peripheral literatures is as essential to her study as it is relevant to the field. On the one hand, it intends to decenter the Eurocentric foundation of both the Western literary canon and postcolonial and comparative studies. On the other hand, the approach also creatively connects world-economic theories—that is, the world-systems theory and the theory of uneven and combined development—and the study of world literature, as a means of articulating what she calls *semi-peripheral realism*. This semi-peripheral "literary

mode" (33), propounds Hazzard, fleshes out, via form and theme, "the unevenness of capitalism with particular intensity" (1). Accordingly, Hazzard proceeds to define the semi-peripheral aesthetic and its key features in the latter part of the introduction. The book's thesis is then developed through two case studies corresponding to the regions from which the texts originate—the North Atlantic (Iceland and the Faroe Islands) and the south-eastern margin of Europe (Turkey)—across four chapters, each offering a distinct analysis of two texts by two different authors to illustrate her argument.

The second chapter offers a comparative reading of two different historical novels—Halldór Laxness *Iceland's Bell* (1943) and William Heinesen's *The Good Hope* (1965)—considering their depictions of national histories and post-independence cultural identities. Although traditionally associated with Latin American, Caribbean, Indian, and Nigerian literatures, both novels, as Hazzard argues, adopt the "magic realist" mode, also allegorical in form (44), to convey the trauma of imperial violence and the ongoing effects of the postcolonial condition, alluding, for instance, to how older economic and social systems clashed with or were supplanted by capitalist ones (53). Furthermore, central to Hazzard's analysis is the idea that these novels perform "palimpsestic" rewritings of authentic historical material (50) to interrogate the pervasiveness and inescapable omnipotence of Danish rule. To do this, she examines the novels' symbolic tension between realist and surreal descriptions of nature, as well as the interspersion of written (i.e., letters, manuscripts, contracts) and oral registers (i.e., sagas, epic poems), emphasizing how these strategic interplays disrupt notions of historical consistency and continuity. In the second part, she turns to the novels' "allegorical configurations" (Hazzard 2024, 56) of the legal and criminal systems, remarking that their fictional portrayals of "subjective violence" ultimately expose the broader, "invisible systemic violence of colonialism and capitalism" (83).

In the third chapter, Hazzard traces the "accelerated modernisation" (89) captured within Halldór Laxness' *The Atom Station* (1948) and William Heinesen's *The Black Cauldron* (1949) "formal incongruities," with a view to how these novels engage with "the paradoxes of nationalism" as well (90). First, Hazzard argues that the *Bildungsroman* structure of Laxness' novel encapsulates "Iceland's uneven transition from a primarily agrarian economy to a modern industrial economy" (92). This historical transformation is, consequently, embodied in the protagonist's movement from the rural, traditional north to the urban, modern south. Notably, however, the surreal elements that puncture the narrative blend seamlessly into the fabric of the main character's perspective, which, according to Hazzard, underscores how "the novel's irrational form" is a reflection of "the unevenness of Icelandic society" (99). Similarly, *The Black Cauldron* is an example of the Scandinavian *kollektivroman*, or collective novel, a form that, suggests Hazzard, employs a "shifting" narrative perspective that expresses "both the feelings of heightened connectivity brought about by the war and the destabilizing effects of the accelerated and uneven modernisation that accompanied it" (Hazzard 2024, 105). Together, these four novels showcase the historical nodal points Iceland and the Faroe Islands traversed, which, while temporarily disruptive, fundamentally and irreversibly altered their temporality.

The final two chapters survey the spatial cartographies of four Turkish texts, with particular attention given to the geographical arrangements marked by what the author characterizes as a "concentrated unevenness" (184). More precisely, Hazzard looks at the "peripheralization" (142) of Turkey and the changes its hectic transition to global capitalism entailed through a comparative reading of the spatial configurations or "cognitive mapping" (184) of the city and the border. If Chapter Four compares two representations of the city of Istanbul, as rendered in Latife Tekin's autobiographical novel *Dear Shameless Death* (1983) and Orhan Pamuk's memoir *Istanbul: Memories of a City* (2005), Chapter Five shifts focus to different works by the same authors—Tekin's *Swords of Ice* (2007) and Pamuk's *Snow* (2005)—to delve into the theme of borders, mediated by the protagonists' journeys across incongruous strands that "overlap and coincide in complex ways" (205) throughout the storylines.

Lastly, in the sixth and final chapter, Hazzard thoughtfully reiterates the book's main premises, objectives, and arguments. Additionally, she reasserts the need to re-integrate the nation's role within comparative world-systems analyses, noting that the "aesthetic instability" featured in all the works counteracts the programmatic national historical narratives of progress (Hazzard 2024, 222). Hazzard astutely concludes that this aesthetic reveals how, within the capitalist structure, the "local, national, and global perspectives" (222) are persistently negotiated across a complex web of often paradoxical and contradictory dialectical tensions—between the past and the present, tradition and modernity, the margin and the centre, the urban and the rural, the individual and the community, the secular and the sacred, the state and the market—that resist tidy alignment and strict delimitations.

Methodical and incisive, the study evens out the theoretical strata with detailed historical and cultural layers, all the while maintaining a focused close reading of the texts. The readings, for their part, are supported by sufficient textual evidence and skillfully threaded interpretations of narrative devices, genre, character, language, imagery, setting, and symbolism. One potential limitation, however, is the absence of summaries for the texts analyzed within each chapter. Readers are often plunged directly into the analyses without prior context, which can be challenging, especially given that some of the works are not widely known. As such, including brief synopses would have enhanced the reader's grasp of the material. Nonetheless, Christinna Hazzard's daring—and, indeed, political—choice to select a range of translated texts from Faroese, Icelandic, and Turkish literatures constitutes a vital endeavor to recalibrate a system that is, in itself, deeply stratified, and, in doing so, to revitalize the established avenues and expand the latent possibilities within the discipline.

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