

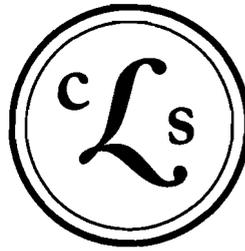
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GUEST EDITORS: *Djeral Kadir*

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Special Issue: Globalization and World Literature

Guest Editor: Djelal Kadir

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MIMESIS AND EMPIRE: THE NEW WORLD, ISLAM, AND EUROPEAN IDENTITIES

By Barbara Fuchs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. xiii + 211 pp. \$ 58.00.

Just down the street from the romance-language department offices at Yale University stands a strange building with thin, vertical windows and columns supporting half-arches of striped voussoirs surrounded by swirling and vegetative arabesque grillwork, all clearly suggestive of classical Islamic architecture. As the building is not a mosque or a religious site of any sort, but a campus monument, there can be little doubt about the meaning of the allusion: the presence of Islamic buildings, no matter how Disneyesque, especially among the neo-gothic architecture that dominates its surroundings, evokes a medieval European tradition, particularly, the parturiant Arab-influenced world of medieval scholasticism from which all Western universities ultimately derive.

Whether built to suggest some notion of an intellectual *translatio imperii* to the West or with some other intended evocation in mind, this appropriation of European history through mimicry is not without its larger implications. It is precisely this sort of meaningful reproduction that Barbara Fuchs, albeit for a different age, explores in her recent survey of the uses of *mimesis* within the context of early modern culture. Entering an arena of historical criticism identified with the work of critics such as Walter Mignolo and Stephen Greenblatt, she proffers her own insights into the curious phenomenon of cultural imitation as a useful new way to consider a well-worn topic. Evoking a critical tradition, as she says, starting with Auerbach's *Mimesis*, Fuchs aims not only to chart the role of imitation in various sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literary and historical texts, but to uncover its ideological implications within the wider context of nation-building and colonial imperialism. The real perpetuation of this mimetic tradition in our post-colonial world of multicultural aspirations makes her study not only historically enlightening, but politically and historically opportune.

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Fuchs does not, however, simply mimic the tradition she evokes. Her innovative additions and transformations to the study of mimesis simultaneously unfold in various new critical directions. She extends her analysis beyond literary mimesis to include equally compelling instances of social influence and imitation. Thus, for example, her discussion of Spanish *moriscos* (the Muslims who remained in Spain after the fall of Granada and were forced to convert to Christianity) is not limited to fictional manifestations such as the translator in part one of *Don Quijote*, but also addresses the real polemic regarding "fully integrated" *moriscos* in 16th-century Spanish society, which led to the *morisco* rebellion of Alpujarras in 1568 and, ultimately, to their expulsion from Spain in 1609. She also looks at the role of mimesis in the power struggles between competing colonial nations such as Spain and England, exploring both the historical maritime skirmishes between renegades, pirates, and privateers as well as the literary representations of these rivalries that instilled that history into the cultural consciousnesses of both nations. Fuchs also examines Spain's imperial aspirations from the perspective of its colonies, exploring real and fictional imitations of Peninsular culture in Peru by tracing the appropriation and representation of anti-Muslim "chivalry" associated with the *Reconquista* by a colonial indigenous population.

Fuchs has composed her ambitious study carefully, showing sensitivity to the subtle overlapping of her various sub-topics. The density of the text does not detract, however, from its rhetorical coherence. Fuchs weaves the various threads of her argument into a laudably unified theory that deftly situates her text within a relevant critical context without forestalling her own innovative treatment of the topic by drowning it in hackneyed critical posturing. Responding to what she calls the study of difference, both in post-structural and post-colonial terms, she explores "the political and rhetorical valence of *sameness*—identification, mimicry, reproduction" (4). Starting from previous notions of the use of imitation within a colonial context such as those of Homi Bhabha and Michael Taussig, she proposes that mimesis is "a deliberate performance of sameness that necessarily threatens, or at least modifies, the original" (5). Fuchs is judicious in her incorporation of these ideas, and the effect is a highly sophisticated and thoroughly original work of interdisciplinary cultural criticism.

Explicit discussion of her theoretical framework is limited to the introduction and conclusion. Fuchs fills the greater portion of the six main chapters of her study with focused readings of carefully selected texts from eleven different authors from Italy, Spain, Peru, and England. Starting with

such fascinating scenes as the staging of chivalrous battles with Muslims in New World public celebrations, in which the newly Christianized Indians played the roles of the Andalusian infidels, her examination of the topic proceeds through textual explication, framed by enticing anecdotal examples of the "use" of mimesis to further the imperial cause. After a preliminary study of Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* in which Fuchs examines colonialist fears of the secularizing "contagion" of romantic chivalrous literature on New World subjects, she focuses directly on Spain's "struggle for *imperium*" (9) in the New World as it is represented both in literary and historiographical texts of the period. She compares the epic-style *La Araucana* of Alonso de Ercilla, about the Spanish campaign against the Araucanian Indians in Chile, and Pérez de Hita's *Guerras civiles de Granada*, a historical work about the life of the Muslim population in Spain from 1492 to the *morisco* revolt. Through their incorporation of "real-life" eye-witness accounts, both texts, she argues, with or without intending to, "undermine the account of Spanish greatness which the text[s] ostensibly offer" (9). Her comparison of El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega's *Comentarios reales de los Incas* and Guaman Poma de Ayala's *Nueva corónica i buen gobierno* shows how the authors use Spain's racial and religious categories for their own purposes (10). Her study of Francisco Núñez Muley's petition to Grenadine officials to preserve *morisco* culture documents how Muley's argument that *morisco* culture had become a part of "Spanish" culture through mutual imitation backfired and served only to further support the separatist intentions of the Christians. Fuchs also depicts the imperial rivalry between Spain and England, manifested most strongly in the maritime pursuits of both nations, by including a study of three English texts about the role of pirates in Jacobian England: Heywood and Rowley's *Fortune by Land and Sea*, Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the West*, and Massinger's *The Renegado*. She then looks at a Spanish perspective on this same conflict, in Lope de Vega's poem about Francis Drake, *La Dragontea*, which villainizes the English as the "new Muslims" against which Spain has to fight. Her final consideration of Cervantine tales of piracy explores the challenge of ethnic and religious ambiguity to the aims of Christian statehood.

In all of these individual studies, although Fuchs repeatedly claims her interest is European imperialism, the focus is primarily the Spanish Empire of the sixteenth century. Although she does not present her readings of texts and events from Latin America and England only as examples of challenges to Spanish imperial expansion, the work as a whole makes most sense when understood in this way. Thus chapter five, which treats England's

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perspective on its rivalry with Spain, stands apart from the rest of the chapters because its place within the ongoing argument is not immediately apparent. A discussion of English imperialism would require equal treatment if it were a parallel example to Spain in a general study of European imperialism. Her inclusion of one chapter about the English perspective is potentially confusing without a clearer elaboration of its relevance to a discussion of Spain's sixteenth-century empire. The awkward presence of chapter five signals a more general deficiency in Fuchs's study: although it is clear in the introduction and conclusion and could be inferred from the structure of the text, the unifying argument is not present enough in each separate chapter. Because she claims in the introduction to be studying European imperialism, it is left up to the reader, somewhat marooned on the islands of each individual reading, to deduce the tacit focus on Spain and make it back to the mainland of the conclusion.

The final chapter, however, adeptly unifies all the previous material just as promised in the introduction, leading to a single theoretical conclusion about the role of mimesis in nation-building. As Fuchs admits, the preceding chapters only present her own "privileged cases" (165), suggesting that the same kind of reading might be used in other relevant contexts. This new critical direction makes manifest another implication of the oft-repeated insights of post-structuralism—namely, that because of the "constructedness of homogeneity" (166), imitation and reproduction, even when intended as forms of homage or obedience, paradoxically produce subversive variation. Although Fuchs rejects the modern romantic privileging of artistic and intellectual originality because, she says, it is tied to exclusion and political discrimination (166), her text offers a lucid set of examples of an admirably original and, more importantly, useful insight into the nature of cultural and political influence both at the point of nationalism's emergence and in its present decline.

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