

Race and antiracism in black British and British Asian literature, by Dave Gunning, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2010, £65.00 (hbk), 256 pp., ISBN 978 1 8463 1482 7

Terms such as "race" and "ethnicity" have often been used in literary criticism focusing on so-called black British and British Asian writing, and understandably so. Rarely, however, have they been as subtly defined and as carefully contextualized as in Dave Gunning's *Race and Antiracism*, which discusses ten novels published between 1995 and 2006 and explores how these engage with antiracism, a concept viewed here as "a category of practice as much as one of analysis" (3). The volume strikes a fine balance between attention to the material world and a concern for the way in which intellectuals and artists have conveyed it in their works. Based on a richly documented critical survey of the ideological debates around race relations that took place in Britain at the turn of the 21st century, the book never loses sight of the crucial ethical role that literature can play in "offering the means for the reconceptualization of the connection between political discourse and the individual" (9).

The introduction to *Race and Antiracism* is an integral part of the study and bespeaks Gunning's remarkable ability to develop a well-structured and convincing argument. Not only does this opening chapter provide an in-depth delineation of the rationale underlying the volume, it also contains a brief but useful discussion of three recent non-fiction works which address antiracism from different angles and to which the rest of the book responds: Kenan Malik's *From Fatwa to Jihad* (2009), Arun Kundnani's *The End of Tolerance* (2007) and Ben Pitcher's *The Politics of Multiculturalism* (2009). *Race and Antiracism* is then organized in three chapters, each devoted to a different facet of the issue at hand. The first one discusses novels by Ferdinand Dennis, Mike Phillips and Fred D'Aguiar and examines how they problematize the black British historical connection to Africa. The impact of religion on antiracist discourse, especially after the Rushdie affair, is at the centre of the second chapter, which analyses fiction by Hanif Kureishi, Nadeem Aslam and Monica Ali. The final section looks more particularly at multiculturalism and ethnicity and how these slippery notions are tackled in texts by Meera Syal, Gautam Malkani, Zadie Smith and Caryl Phillips.

There are several reasons to recommend *Race and Antiracism* in addition to the burning topicality of its subject: one of them is Gunning's ability to enter into constructive dialogue with extant criticism and another is his refusal to simplify the various literary responses to antiracism, which he systematically compares with each other. One should also commend his impressive and rigorous knowledge of texts, contexts and intertexts, illustrated, for example, in his discussion of *White Teeth* (2000), which not only cogently traces the various stages in the critical reception of this famous novel but also expertly analyses its links with Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992).

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Arguably, Gunning's dense, solidly argued book is not an easy read, but it will reward the careful reader with a sophisticated understanding of antiracist discourse and of the many tensions that it harbours, particularly that between the individual and the community.

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