



The Event of Postcolonial Shame (Translation/Transnation)

Timothy Bewes

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In a postcolonial world, where structures of power, hierarchy, and domination operate on a global scale, writers face an ethical and aesthetic dilemma: How to write without contributing to the inscription of inequality? How to process the colonial past without reverting to a pathology of self-disgust? Can literature ever be free of the shame of the postcolonial epoch--ever be truly postcolonial? As disparities of power seem only to be increasing, such questions are more urgent than ever. In this book, Timothy Bewes argues that shame is a dominant temperament in twentieth-century literature, and the key to understanding the ethics and aesthetics of the contemporary world.

Drawing on thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Frantz Fanon, Theodor Adorno, and Gilles Deleuze, Bewes argues that in literature there is an "event" of shame that brings together these ethical and aesthetic tensions. Reading works by J. M. Coetzee, Joseph Conrad, Nadine Gordimer, V. S. Naipaul, Caryl Phillips, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and Zoë Wicomb, Bewes presents a startling theory: the practices of postcolonial literature depend upon and repeat the same structures of thought and perception that made colonialism possible in the first place. As long as those structures remain in place, literature and critical thinking will remain steeped in shame.

Offering a new mode of postcolonial reading, *The Event of Postcolonial Shame* demands a literature and a criticism that acknowledge their own ethical deficiency without seeking absolution from it.

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