Tuire Valkeakari, *Precarious Passages: The Diasporic Imagination in Contemporary Black Anglophone Fiction*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2017. x + 336 pp. (Cloth US\$79.95)

Precarious Passages is a thoughtful, detailed reading of several contemporary Afro-diasporan Anglophone writers from Canada, England, the United States, and the Caribbean, that extends over 5 chapters and 332 pages. They include such more or less familiar names as Charles Johnson, Lawrence Hill, Andrea Levy, Edwidge Danticat, Caryl Phillips, Cecil Foster, George Lamming, and Toni Morrison, whose work covers diasporan routes across the Atlantic from Africa to the Americas, and between the Americas and Europe, and whom Tuire Valkeakari sees as articulating a diasporan community and identity by way of the literary imagination. In confronting diaspora as *event*, at once translocal (transatlantic) and transhistoric (500-plus years), she has faced a conundrum already confronted by other scholars with more or less success. For the linguistic plurality of diaspora—that is, its potential breadth by way of writings in the colonial languages Portuguese, French, Spanish, and Dutch—*Precarious Passages* finds an escape hatch by proposing a part-for-the-whole method through its concentration on Anglophone works, and by the somewhat curious rationale that the hypothetically broader span covered by the other languages, would be of questionable “reliability or usefulness” (p. 8). Readers are thereby left to ask whether the diversity of opinion existing among the works in English being studied, and their particular takes on black “memory,” “sensibility,” and “identity formation,” are sufficiently representative of the numerically larger body of enslaved Africans and Afrodescendants, and of their experiences in other parts of the diaspora.

Undoubtedly, black memory, sensibility, and identity formation—and national belonging, for that matter—are as close to the crux as any other themes in the imaginary of diaspora. But to the degree that these inform or might inform a counternarrative or critique of the larger process itself—that of the making of modernity, of the world system, capitalism and slavery, or of race and their unavoidable interrelatedness—readers are hard put to find a rhetorical pushback in *Precarious Passages*. Instead, the book tends to stay within the confines of dominant (liberal) renderings on the topic, with its purported anti-essentialism, and its suspicion of Afrocentrism. As a result, the depths of potential critique available in reading diaspora’s narratives of belonging and alienation, arguably its primary thematic axes, are not quite plumbed, in spite of the close readings informing the book, and whiteness, the epistemic creator of blackness, is largely left untouched, even as great care is taken by Valkeakari to avoid appearing to veer too far left of such generalities as black “conscious-

ness” or transnational “community” that purportedly inspire the novelists in question. There is little, in other words, in the book’s critical and ideological posture that might lead toward a liberation from race itself.

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