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Journals, Conference Reports

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Abstract

Journals, Conferences

Journals

THE HUMANITIES REVIEW

The Humanities Review, a 'journal of contemporary ideas' published in India and edited by a recent visitor to Australia, Dr Chaman Nahal, is planning an edition devoted to the literature of the South Pacific, with particular reference to Australia.

The review carries a fair amount of creative writing and literary criticism and this forthcoming edition, Vol. II, Nos 3 and 4 (October-December 1980) will include pieces by Frank Moorhouse and Michael Wilding.

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Conferences

KARIBIK — The Caribbean in Bremen, 24-29 July 1980.

'Karibik', 'the Caribbean', was the title of a cultural week held in Bremen from 24 to 29 July 1980, organized by the University in co-operation with the Überseemuseum. The rich programme combined an introduction to the history and culture of the West Indies with a critical survey of the problems West Indians living in Britain today have to face. In both cases, the concept of Black identity emerged as the main theme: identity to be developed out of the African as well as the European strands of history; identity to be gained and maintained in the face of social and cultural oppression; identity to be arduously and subtly formed through intellectual, artistic and educational endeavour. An impressive variety of lectures, films, slide shows, theatre and dance performances did justice to the wide scope of the theme. During this week, the much advertised image of the West Indies as the palmfringed, sunsplashed and carefree tropical islands gratefully ready to accommodate any number of tourists was countered by the presentation of the growing culture of peoples struggling to free themselves from suppression and foreign dominance both in the past and in the present.

The groundwork was laid by Edward K. Brathwaite, poet and historian. In his lecture on the history and culture of the Caribbean he argued that the present-day fragmentation of the West Indies is not without alternatives. Fragmentation, he said, is not only a geo-physical condition of the archipelago, but also a social and cultural condition. The enforced migration from different African countries, the influx of human beings from other countries, the overlordship of different European nations, the ensuing pressures of colour and race, of social stratification and ideology, the dependence on foreign power structures, all these factors were conducive to the present state of ethnic, cultural and political fragmentation. In order to find a solution, one will have to take up the useful traditions from Europe and Africa, one will have to make use of the humanitarian thinking and the industrial development of Europe and at the same time draw on the African kernel of identity, the irreducible core of African man, his cultural and spiritual vitality. Thus there will be an alternative to European domination, thus a new identity is in the process of being created, thus the fragments will be capable of becoming a universe.

I felt that the other contributions illuminated various aspects of Brathwaite's magnificent vision. (My impressions will, of course, of necessity be partial and incomplete.) Ian Hall (Guyana/London), in a vivacious and entertaining lecture, traced musical traditions from their West African origin to popular West Indian music forms like Calypso or Reggae. The London Schools Steel Orchestra and the Trinbago Carnival Club (London) demonstrated to an enthusiastic audience how Blacks in London use their music, their costumes, their dances and their Carnival in order to define themselves in a white society. Derek Walcott's play *Pantomime*, performed by the Black Theatre Group London, took up the topic of white master/ black slave (as it is encapsulated in Defoe's *Robinson/*

Friday-relationship) and developed it into a drama of white insufficiency and black self-assertion. The education of Black children in Britain is John Agard's (Guyana/London) present field of activity; with the aid of poetry and folk tales from the West Indies, danced and sung in class, he hopes to convey to the second generation of Blacks in Britain a sense of their African and West Indian roots. Linton Kwesi Johnson (London) contributed Reggae lyrics which relate to the British context. The situation of Blacks in Britain (characterized) by discrimination, youth unemployment and low educational standards, among other things) was further explained not only by Darcus Howe's lecture on the place of Blacks in the English class society, but also by various TV and film productions (as for example from the series 'Empire Road' and the film 'Pressure', to name but two).

The task of defining the situation of West Indians, of giving meaning to their world and of showing possible directions of action, appears largely to be the task of the creative artist. Four major writers were assembled to read and discuss extracts from their work. Wilson Harris (Guyana/London) urged the artist to extend the boundaries of perception. John Agard explained his writings for children. Gil Tucker (Jamaica/Frankfurt) talked about his lyrics in the context of Jamaican Rastafarianism. Edward K. Brathwaite read from his volume 'The Arrivants'.

I hope that I have made it clear that I consider this Caribbean week a highly informative, important and valuable event. It not only provided new and necessary insights into the reality of the lives of West Indians, it also fostered the idea that their struggle for freedom and identity is related to other similar movements in the world, also in this country.

JENS-ULRICH DAVIDS

The Welsh Arts Council International Writer's Prize 1980 Conference,
Gregynog, Newtown, Powys, 17-19 October 1980.

It is not often that the poetry of Wales, the Caribbean and South Africa are discussed together and in relation to each other, even in the context of Commonwealth Literature, so that those who travelled to mid-Wales to attend this Conference, organized by the Welsh Arts Council as part of its programme of events in celebration of the work of Derek Walcott, this year's recipient of the International Writer's Prize, were fortunate indeed to have the opportunity of participating in a debate which was much fresher and more immediate in its implications than the stated theme of the Conference, 'The Writer in a Multi-Cultural Society', might have at first glance suggested.

Walcott, who was present for much of the Conference, provided the central focus of the discussions, his work both as playwright and poet in the Caribbean functioning virtually as a paradigm of the Commonwealth writer's search for wholeness and integrity in rendering his own society in terms that both reflect its shattered history and assert its multi-faceted identity. Hearing Walcott reading some of his latest poetry, a humorous dialect poem, a haunting elegy on the death of Jean Rhys, one was aware of the variety of his experience and the continual choices in terms both of language and form the poet has to make.

Kenneth Ramchand's appraisal of Walcott's radical poetry was inevitably filtered to us through the experience of having already heard the South African Mbulelo Mzamane's account of the disparate yet irrevocably linked cultures of his country and the new poetry

that has arisen in the townships since the sixties and the growth of the Black Consciousness movement. In some ways nothing could be further from the measured distance achieved in Walcott's political poems than the strident uncompromising harshness of the poems Mzamane read for us and which Christopher Heywood's searching paper put into a total-historical and intellectual context.

It was left to Ned Thomas to provide a direct link between Walcott and Welsh poetry in the paper with which the Conference concluded, 'The Landscape in the Poet', although what he had to say had in some sense been implicit in the proceedings from the very start. The Welsh poets he introduced were for the most part unknown to the majority of us, but his selection of Waldo Williams's poem 'Pa Beth Yw Din' conveyed to all of us that sense of a common task, a shared responsibility, that precedes all poetic endeavour and which every writer in whatever society he finds himself has to discover for himself:

What is living? To have a large hall
Between narrow walls

...

What is being a nation? A talent
In the deepest places of the heart.
What is loving your country? Keeping house
In a cloud of witnesses.

MARGARET BUTCHER

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

John Clanchy, Australian short story writer; *John Green*, New Zealand short story writer; *Michael Morrissey*, New Zealand short story writer and poet; *Judith Rodriguez*, Australian poet, teaches at La Trobe University and is poetry editor of *Meanjin*; *Agha Shahid Ali*, Indian poet; *Robert Kroetsch*, Canadian novelist and poet; *Anna Rutherford* teaches at Aarhus University and edits *Kunapipi*; *Hena Maes-Jelinek* teaches at the University of Liège; *Howard McNaughton* teaches at University of Canterbury, New Zealand; *Michael Sharkey* teaches at the University of New England, Australia; *Rosemary Colmer* teaches at Macquarie University, New South Wales; *James Wieland* teaches at Wollongong University, New South Wales; *Dick Harrison* teaches at University of Alberta, Edmonton; *Albert L. Jones* takes the reggae programme on Danish Radio as well as Pop Then and Now; *Wilson Harris*, Guyanese novelist and critic; *Peter Carroll* is an Australian actor; *Bob Marley*, reggae star; *Armand Petré* is a Belgian whose photographs of New Zealand will be one of the exhibits at the New Zealand Arts Festival to be held in Aarhus, 10-17 November; *John de Visser*, Canadian photographer.