Conferences

Anna Rutherford

*University of Aarhus, Denmark*

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Conferences

Abstract
conferences

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Conferences


When the Frankfurt Bookfair 1980 opened its gates in October, the attention of the German reading public was drawn to the literatures of Black Africa written in English, which were part of the central theme of this bookfair. Prior to that, the well attended Caribbean Week in Bremen (24-29 June 1980) had already opened the door to the anglophone literature of the West Indies. Both events, however, cannot conceal the fact that even the scholarly treatment of the literatures of the former British colonies is still in its infancy in West Germany, although one can notice a steady increase in the number of university courses and projects devoted to this particular area of English philology. This new tendency was strongly confirmed by the 4th 'Symposium on Commonwealth Literature in West Germany' (Oberjoch) and the symposium 'English Literature of the Dominions: Literature and the History of Settlement' (Kiel).

While the conference in Oberjoch was concerned with the development of the English language drama outside England and North America (i.e. Australia, Africa, India and the West Indies), the symposium at Kiel dealt with the history of settlement in the British Dominions, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand and its reflection in the anglophone national literatures of these countries.

The vast number of topics covered in Oberjoch ranged from the historical development of the Australian drama to the influence of Reggae on the drama in the Caribbean. Werner Arens (Regensburg) opened the conference with a survey on the history of the Australian drama. He especially emphasized the changing image of the stereotype Australian outback in the dramatic works of the past 25 years, indicating a revision of Australia's national myth that goes beyond merely theatrical interest. These observations were followed by Ortrun Zuber's (Griffith University) analysis of the surprisingly negative depiction of Australian society in Australian drama. Zuber argued that this should be seen as the result of a particular didactic intention. Apparently, most Australian playwrights aim at forming a critical awareness of their public towards the social reality in Australia. The socio-political dimension of Australian drama was touched again when Bernard Hickey (Venice) talked about the 'Eureka Stockade' (1854). Hickey pointed out how this, the only militant rebellion (duration: 30 minutes) in the entire history of Australia, has not only become an important subject matter for Australian dramatists, but also a meaningful linguistic term in everyday life. Concluding the Australian section, Nelson Wattie (Cologne) presented a formalistic approach to the plays of Patrick White, whose literary fame is primarily based on his reputation as a novelist. In consequence, Wattie's interest was focused on the influence of the narrative techniques of the novelist, White, on the playwright, White.

In contrast to the papers on Australia, the contributions to African Commonwealth Literature were commonly determined by a concern for the political implications of the
works analysed. At first, Dieter Riemenschneider (Frankfurt) gave an introduction to the history and development of the anglophone drama in West Africa which also formed the basis for his comparative study of Rotimi’s Kurunmi and Soyinka’s Death and the King’s Horseman. Afterwards, Wolfgang Klooss (Kiel) presented a paper on the reception of Shakespeare in Africa. Apart from some informative remarks about the didactic function and the ‘Africanisation’ of Shakespeare’s plays, Klooss compared Shakespeare’s The Tempest with Aimé Césaire’s Une Tempête, which is one of those Shakespeare adaptations that convey an anti-imperialist message. The reports on the English language drama of West Africa were then supplemented by Peter Stummer’s (Munich) interpretation of Buchi Emecheta’s documentary novel Second-Class Citizen. Stummer showed how Emecheta, a Nigerian expatriate in London, has transferred her own experience of a double discrimination (i.e. as a woman and as a black) into literary form.

Following the structural pattern so far typical for the conference, Gerhard Stilz (Tübingen) introduced the Indian and West Indian part of the programme with an historical survey of the anglophone Indian drama that paid particular attention to the classical traditions as well as to the commercial theatre in India. In a second paper Meena Chagas-Pereira (Reutlingen) dealt with Asif Corrimbhoj’s play Goa. Her detailed analysis primarily revealed Corrimbhoj’s fascination for allegory and melodrama. The only report on the Caribbean drama was given by Gordon Collier (Giessen) who not only presented an intrinsic study of Derek Walcott’s O Babylon!, but was, moreover, interested in the political and social meaning of ‘Rastafarianism’ and the influence of Reggae on Walcott’s dramatic work.

Similar to the conference in Oberjoch where the international character of Commonwealth Studies had become very evident, the Kiel Symposium was attended by a considerable number of participants from abroad. In this context one has to mention the writers Yvonne du Fresne (New Zealand), Henry Beissel (Canada), and Rodney Hall (Australia) who introduced selections from their literary works to the audience and thus helped to prevent the conference from lapsing into purely ‘academic small talk’.

At first, however, Colm Kiernan (Dublin) presented his ideas on ‘Waltzing Matilda’, Australia’s unofficial national anthem. He understood this highly popular song, which goes back to the Irish ballad of ‘Bold Jack Donohoe’, as a musical realization of the concept of the alienated hero. Kiernan provoked sceptical reactions when he established a connection between ‘Bold Jack Donohoe’ and the development of an Australian national consciousness in the 19th century. The focus was then shifted to Eleanor Dark’s documentary novel Timeless Land. Gordon Collier tried to defend Dark’s novel against the attacks of the critic H.M. Green who regards Timeless Land as a well perceived historical account of the Australian past, but which is, at the same time, void of any aesthetic qualities.

In the next paper Jørn Carlsen (Aarhus) discussed the Canadian aspect of the history of settlement and its reflection in the novels of the Danish-Norwegian writer Aksel Sandemose. On the basis of a biographical approach, Carlsen analysed Sandemose’s immigrant trilogy (unfortunately not yet available in an English translation) which he placed in the tradition of Canadian prairie realism. Considering an historical as well as an ideological point of view, Konrad Gross (Kiel) talked about the image of Franco-Canada in the early Anglo-Canadian novel. Gross showed how the English Canadian novel has mirrored a development that began with the total rejection of La Nouvelle France and ended in the recognition of Old Quebec as a reliable source for the search of a Canadian identity.
At the beginning of the New Zealand part of the programme Anna Rutherford (Aarhus) commented on Yvonne du Fresne's autobiographical short story collection, *Farve*. Du Fresne's Danish-Huguenot descent led Rutherford to viewing *Farve* against the background of the minority literatures of Australia and New Zealand. Although she was critical of the nostalgic past in du Fresne's writings, this did not, on the other hand, restrain her from an appraisal of the quality of the short stories as social documents. One of du Fresne's forerunners was Lady Barker whose experiences on a sheep station in the New Zealand Alps found their literary expression in two novels entitled *Station Life in New Zealand* and *Station Amusements in New Zealand*. In the last paper of this symposium Nelson Wattie gave an impressive account of Barker's novels which do not only propagate the English upper-class consciousness of the author, but also reveal a solely materialistic outlook on nature. Nature does not bear any romantic features. It is totally reduced to its function within the realm of colonization.

With regard to the extensive number of topics covered at both conferences (shortly to be accessible in two essay collections) and the enthusiastic response of the numerous participants in Oberjoch and Kiel, one can only conclude that both symposiums marked an important step towards a more solid establishment of Commonwealth Studies in West Germany.

WOLFGANG KLOOS


Paris III and Paris XII combined to hold a conference to honour the visit of President Senghor to Paris. The theme of the conference was 'Images of West Africa: the Press, Mass Media and Literature'. The conference took place from 20 to 22 November 1980 and was organized by Michel Fabre and Robert Mane. Below is a list of papers given in the English section which was organized by Paris III:


These papers will be published. For further information contact Michel Fabre, Paris III.

ANNA RUTHERFORD
First Spanish Seminar on Commonwealth Literature, 3-5 March 1981.

The study of Commonwealth literature in Spain is relatively recent. In fact, the course which I introduced for final year students in 1979 was the first of its kind.

Yet the time seemed to me to be ripe for a conference on Commonwealth Literature to be held in Spain. There were pockets of interest all over the country. Among the general public there seemed to be a growing awareness of this other area of English literature. Dr Doireann MacDermott had begun, in 1978, to create an interest in Australian literature among large numbers of students at the Central University of Barcelona.

The initial proposal for a seminar received the wholehearted support of the staff of the Modern Languages Department of the Autonomous University, though doubts were expressed. Who would lecture? Who would come to listen? Who would provide funds?

The first question was answered in the most heartening way. A nucleus of lecturers existed here in Barcelona. From the University of Granada Dr Villar Raso expressed his interest in delivering a paper on Canadian Literature. The British Council agreed to fund a lecturer from a university in Britain, and Professor William Walsh accepted the invitation. In addition I sent a circular letter to some 50 people in various European universities — EACLALS members, and those whose names were published in Notes and Furphies list of teachers of Commonwealth Literature. Seventeen of those contacted submitted titles of papers they proposed to present. To me, this was the most exciting element of the total experience and bears witness, not just to the extent of interest in Commonwealth Literature, but to the willingness of those involved in the field to give support and encouragement to others. The more so in view of the fact that most of those who came had to fund themselves.

The decision to limit the scope of the seminar was based on certain harsh realities: severe lack of money; the absence of any kind of infrastructure, including secretarial service; the fact that the university is 27 kilometres from the city; that the majority of students have afternoon jobs, and this traditionally is an annual seminar designed primarily for students.

The final programme was based on a desire to include all the main geographic areas of the Commonwealth. The first morning was devoted to Australia, with Christine Pagnoulle (Liége) talking on 'Time and Atonement in Patrick White's Riders in the Chariot', Bruce Clunies-Ross (Copenhagen) outlining 'Recent Developments in Australian Short Fiction', and Anna Rutherford (Aarhus) compensating for the neglect of Thea Astley. In the evening the location shifted to the British Institute, where Professor William Walsh gave a lecture on 'Katherine Mansfield and the Rejected Country'.

Catalan socio-linguist Pilar Casamada outlined 'The Role of English in India' on the second morning. This was followed by Kirsten Holst Petersen's comparison of Achebe’s A Man of the People with Armah’s The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, and an enthusiastic introduction to Isak Dinesen by Aranxa Usandizaga (Central University). Professor Walsh lectured on Achebe at the Central University.

In the evening John Thieme (North London) gave an illustrated lecture on 'Calypso Allusions in Naipaul’s Miguel Street'.

The final day opened with an introduction to Indian Literature in English given by Professor Walsh. This was followed by Professor Villar Raso speaking on Canadian Literature, and my own brief analysis of black literature from Papua New Guinea. The
concluding paper was presented in the British Institute by Doireann MacDermott, and bore the title 'The Aborigine in Australian Literature'.

Thanks for the success of the seminar go to all those who participated, and all who supported in various ways. Special mention should be made of Michel Fabre (Paris) who attended both to participate and to support. Thanks go, too, to the New Zealand Embassy, Paris, which provided two excellent feature films, a photographic exhibition, and a selection of books. The other embassies were singularly lacking in interest, although the Canadian Embassy has since compensated by donating some 50 books to the library.

The seed has now been sown in Spain. I am confident that we will now see an expansion of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies in this country.

CARROLL SIMONS

EACLALS Conference at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, Frankfurt, 23-27 March 1981.

Universals in particular

The topic of the conference was 'History and Historiography of Commonwealth Literature'. Although this topic gives a wide scope for discussion about the relationship between history and literature the main subject became the relationship between the universal and the particular and, in this case, between the cosmopolitan centre and the Commonwealth periphery, to borrow a deliberately provocative term. The subject is inexhaustible and offers a welcome opportunity to vent colonial anger against the great tradition. Helen Tiffin set the tone by refusing to accept universals and declaring that they were just a British hoax to minimize the achievements of culture-specific art, which they didn't understand because they didn't know the background to it. This was a sentiment which was shared by other Australian participants. Both Bruce Bennett and Brian Matthews discussed the interaction between specifically Australian and universal (British) criteria for criticism. The Indian contingent, which was particularly well represented at this conference, carried on this theme, but shifted the tone slightly. Instead of talking about the pretentiousness of the English G.N. Devi spoke about the wind and the roots, and D.D. Baskiyar vindicated the Indianess of Raja Rao's novels. The Caribbean, African and South African sessions concentrated more on history than historiography, and this shift produced papers of a slightly different nature, like Victor Ramraj's paper about Naipaul's approach to history in The Loss of Eldorado, Ian Glenn's paper on the Kenyan elite and Stephen Watson's analysis of Liberalism in South Africa. The theme of specific Africanness was not completely neglected and occurred in connection with oral literature in the papers given by Richard Taylor and Taban Lo Liyong. Finally, Cecil Abrahams urged everybody to work actively for the overthrow of the white racist regime in South Africa.

One of the papers which created most interest was not so much on literature but on film. This was Susan Gardner’s paper on Bruce Beresford's film Breaker Morant which is published in this issue of KUNAPIPI.
The full attendance at each session was a tribute to the high quality of the papers offered.

Dieter Riemenschneider should be congratulated on organising a very successful conference.

New Zealand Film Festival in Dijon.

Between 16 and 20 March, with the help of the New Zealand Embassy and Film Commission, the department of English in Dijon organized a New Zealand Film Festival. The subject was of special interest to the students since most of the productions of this young industry have centred on novels or plays by NZ writers. Before moving on to fictional subjects, directors have started with documentaries on life in their region of the world. Our audience particularly appreciated *Children of the Mist* based on a Maori community of the Urewera. Three years ago, the evolution took a radical turn with *A State of Siege* by Vincent Ward which won the gold medal at the 1978 Miami Film Festival and the Golden Hugo at Chicago. Based on the novel by Janet Frame, the plot centres on a study of loneliness and fear in the face of a long-desired and yet anguishng freedom. Obviously inspired by Ingmar Bergman for his choice of colours and his love of chiaroscuro, Ward excels at bringing out the power of speechlessness and the dense symbolic evocations contained in a single visual detail or a sound.

Sam Pillsbury's *Against the Light* (1980) dramatizes Witi Ihimaera's story 'The Truth of the Matter'. The plot gives a different version of an incident narrated by four different characters. Written fiction can easily select and reconstruct in a way which leaves a lot of room for the reader's imagination to fill in the gaps. With a picture projected on a screen, the viewer's eyes are left with less freedom to interpret the event. Thus Pillsbury's task was almost an impossible challenge. In spite of much esthetic research (which sometimes appears to be done as a pure exercise in virtuosity) the result is not wholly satisfactory. The urban conflict which involves three men and a woman, Maoris and Pakehas tends to appear as four different stories rather than the subjective expression of several points of view.

*The Old Man's Story* (1978) matches Frank Sargeson's story for its power of suggesting very deep human needs conflicting with the basic rules of a society. The love between the old man and the young girl could have become sentimental melodrama but, thanks to an art of the understatement, the director achieves on the screen what Sargeson had so marvellously written on paper.

*The God Boy* takes up the same point of view of a child who discovers the cruelty of life and feels rather than expresses surprise and anger. Based on Ian Cross's famous novel, the film describes very convincingly the plight of a young Roman Catholic boy whose family is falling to pieces.

David Sims' *Jack Winther's Dream* was the only slightly disappointing part of the festival. Following Baxter's 'Play for Voices' fairly closely, it fails to translate the poetic language into convincing images. The result is a rather drawn-out production.

Paul Maunder's *Sons for the Return Home* (1979), though a little long in places, marvellously translates A. Wendt's first novel focussed on the meeting of the Samoan and the Palagi (European) worlds. Filmed both in New Zealand and Samoa, the action even manages to avoid some of the excesses contained in Wendt's first work without losing any of the vigour or anger which are the stamp of Polynesia's prominent writer.
But the apotheosis of the festival was no doubt the projection of Vincent Ward's *In Spring One Plants Alone* (1980). Pursuing the quest started with his previous film, the twenty-five-year-old director has produced a documentary which goes beyond realism and reaches the level of pure symbols. The elderly maori lady who lives alone with her handicapped adult son seems to embody all the suffering and all the love in the world. The extreme tension and silence are only punctuated by obsessional rituals and mumbling. The voyeuristic eye of the camera forces the audience to share in the limitations and strange beauty of this restricted environment. Images are present and speak, almost beyond language. They soar up and glide, like the heron whose flight opens and closes the story. In years to come, Vincent Ward should prove to be a leading figure in the development of New Zealand's young but extremely creative film industry.

FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES

The second 'Commonwealth in Canada' Conference is scheduled for 1-4 October 1981 at the University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, Manitoba. The theme of the conference is: 'The Use of Language in Commonwealth Literature'.

Papers may explore how writers use dialects, indigenous diction, rhetorical techniques, structural elements and other literary characteristics which result from the linguistic factors of the culture represented. Some flexibility will be allowed for papers which interpret the theme more widely.

Abstracts of papers for the conference should be no longer than 300 words. Abstracts and enquiries concerning the conference should be forwarded to:

CACLALS
Department of English
University of Winnipeg
515 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3B 2E9

UNIVERSITY OF DIJON

During the fourth week of November 1981 we are organizing a conference on Caribbean Literature in English. As this should coincide with the publication of *The Secret Ladder* in French translation, we have invited Wilson Harris. It is hoped that one or two other writers from the area will take part in the proceedings. We would like a number of papers to be focused on the work of Wilson Harris, but, of course, contributions on other Caribbean authors are most welcome. Could you please let us know before 15 June whether you will attend this conference, give a paper and on what subject.

Jean-Pierre Durix
ARTICLES AND ESSAYS

Allfrey, Phyllis: 'Hurricane David: The Skeleton of a Survival Tale' 118 (1)

Alvarez-Péreyre, Jacques: 'Does it Matter About Don Mattera?' 1 (1)

Colmer, Rosemary: 'The Human and the Divine: Fragments and Why Are We So Blest?' 77 (2)

Dingome, Jeanne N.: 'Soyinka's The Road as Ritual Drama' 30 (1)

Fabre, Michel: 'The Reception of Palace of the Peacock in Paris' 106 (1)

Griffiths, Gareth: 'Experiments with Form in Recent Australian Drama' 70 (1)

Harris, Wilson: 'Carnival of Psyche: Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea' 142 (2)

Harrison, Dick: 'The Imperial Heritage in Canadian Prairie Fiction' 107 (2)

Hulston, Denis: 'A Note on Albert Wendt's Flying Fox in a Freedom Tree' 96 (1)

Jones, Albert L.: 'An Herbal Meditation with Bob Marley' 132 (2)

McLeod, A.L.: 'Claude McKay's Adaptation to Audience' 123 (1)

McNaughton, Howard: 'From Animism to Expressionism in the Early James K. Baxter' 49 (2)

Maes-Jelinek, Hena: 'Fictional Breakthrough and the Unveiling of »unspeakable rites« in Patrick White's A Fringe of Leaves and Wilson Harris's Yurokon' 33 (2)

Murray, Les A.: 'The Boeotian Strain' 45 (1)

Rutherford, Anna: 'A Vision or a Waking Dream?: Ron Blair's The Christian Brothers' 23 (2)

Rutherford, Anna: 'In Spite of Dungeon, Fire, and Sword: a Personal Account' 5 (2)

Sharkey, Michael: 'Gypsies, City Streets: Four New Zealand Poets on the Road' 60 (2)

Wieland, James: '»Making light of the process«: Nissim Ezekiel's Poetic Fictions' 91 (2)
CORRESPONDENCE

O'Connor, Mark: 'A Reply to Les Murray' 160 (1)

FICTION

Clanchy, John: 'Mrs Murphy' 1 (2)

du Fresne, Yvonne: 'Armistice Day' 91 (1)

Green, John: 'Nadia Answers the Call' 43 (2)

Markham, E.A.: 'A Continental Romance' 113 (1)

Moorhouse, Frank: 'Tortures, Jealousy Tests and Getting Tough' 65 (1), 'Mechanical Aptitude' 67 (1)

Morrissey, Michael: 'The Letter, Bells, Creeping Boys' 57 (2)

Talbot, Norman: 'The Third Labour' 42 (1)

INTERVIEWS

Carroll, Peter 17 (2)

Gordimer, Nadine 20 (1)

Harris, Wilson 100 (1)

Kroetsch, Robert 117 (2)

Marley, Bob 132 (2)

POETRY

Ali, Agha Shahid: 'The Snow Kali' 104 (2)

'Day Seeing Kosintsev's 'King Lear' in Delhi'

'Birthday Poem'

Dabydeen, Cyril: 'The King Has No Clothes' 109 (1)

'All the Elements'

'How to Save a Life'

'Partnership'

Ghose, Zulfikar: 'Notes Towards a Nature Poem' 88 (1)

'E.G.'

'The Dragonfly in the Sun'

Gray, Stephen: 'Hottentot Venus' 27 (1)

184
Kroetsch, Robert: 'Zoo Poem 2' 128 (2)
'The Calgary Lover'
'The Calgary Morning'

Mahapatra, Jayanta: 'The Thirteenth Year of My Daughter' 41 (1)
'Beyond the Himalayan Ranges'

Rodriguez, Judith: 'Four Photographs' 31 (2)
'Tutorial'

REVIEWS

Armah, Ayi Kwei: The Healers — Rosemary Colmer 164 (1)

Curtin, Philip, Steven Feierman, L. Thompson and Jan Vansina: African History — Sven Poulsen 165 (1)

Dabydeen, Cyril: Distances; Goatsong; Heart's Frame — Inger Hastrup 172 (1)

du Fresne, Yvonne: Farvel and Other Stories — Anna Rutherford 161 (2)

Fraser, Robert: The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah: A Study in Polemical Fiction — Rosemary Colmer 162 (2)

Fugard, Athol: Tsotsi — Kirsten Holst Petersen 162 (1)

Garrison, Len: Black Youth, Rastafarianism, and the Identity Crisis in Britain — Albert L. Jones 169 (1)

Harris, Wilson: The Tree of the Sun — Nathaniel Mackey 168 (1)

Harrison, Dick (ed.): Crossing Frontiers. Papers in American and Canadian Western Literature — Jørn Carlsen 158 (2)

Ireland, David: A Woman of the Future — Judith Rodriguez 159 (2)

James, Louis: Jean Rhys — Elaine Campbell 152 (2)

Matshoba, Mtutuzeli: Call Me Not A Man — Kirsten Holst Petersen 163 (1)

Naipaul, V.S.: A Bend in the River — Margaret Nightingale 170 (1)

Pacific Quarterly Moana (Vol. III, 1-4; Vol. IV, 1-4) — Hans Hauge 185 (1)

Rhys, Jean: Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography — Elaine Campbell 152 (2)

Schild, Ulla (ed.): Zeitschrift für Kulturaustausch, XXIX. 2-3 — Nelson Wattie 167 (1)

185

Staley, Thomas F.: *Jean Rhys: A Critical Study* — Elaine Campbell 152 (2)

Stow, Randolph: *Visitants; The Girl Green as Elderflower* — Bruce Clunies Ross 184 (1)

The New Quarterly Cave (Vol. I, 1-4; Vol. II, 1-4) — Hans Hauge 185 (1)

Thelwell, Michael: *The Harder They Come* — Albert L. Jones 151 (2)

Wendt, Albert: *Leaves of the Banyan Tree* — Peter Alcock 175 (1)

White, Patrick: *The Twyborn Affair* — Veronica Brady 178 (1)

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