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## Conferences

Anna Rutherford  
*University of Aarhus, Denmark*

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### Abstract

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translates the New Testament 'robbers' as 'rubber trees'. Jumbam excels in this art of Africanizing English. His perfect balance of humour and tragedy accounts for much of his success. The African English conflict novel is already well established by the likes of *Things Fall Apart*, but *The White Man of God* is clearly a map of future directions within the genre: less epic and more inward.

TAYOBA NGENGE

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### Projecting Women — Film Festival, Aarhus, 16-20 November 1981.

This women's film festival was organised by Anna Rutherford, Kirsten Holst Petersen and Susan Gardner. The films shown included 'Some American Feminists'; 'Margaret Laurence: The First Lady of Manawaka'; John Ward's prize-winning film 'In Spring One Plants Alone'; 'A State of Siege', also directed by Vincent Ward and based on Janet Frame's novel of the same title; 'The Grass Is Singing'; 'The Woman at the Store', based on a Katherine Mansfield story; 'Staying On', film version of Paul Scott's novel; 'Women in Process'; 'The Getting of Wisdom', based on Henry Handel Richardson's novel; 'Caddie', based on a novel by Dymphna Cusack; 'The Singer and the Dancer' from a short story by Alan Marshall; 'South Africa Belongs to Us'; and 'Dilemma', based on Nadine Gordimer's novel *A World of Strangers*. Some copies of the annotated programme are available on request.

ANNA RUTHERFORD

### ATCAL and Commonwealth Institute Conference, 6 March 1982 — *Black Writers in Britain.*

On 6 March 1982 a one-day conference, organized jointly by the Association for the Teaching of Caribbean and African Literature and the Commonwealth Institute, was held at the Commonwealth Institute in London on the theme of 'Black Writers in

Britain'.

As the opening speakers, poets Sebastian Clarke and Faustin Charles gave their views on the position of young black writers in Britain today and on the special problems faced by such writers in relation to the contemporary publishing scene. In the course of their discussion an inevitable contrast was drawn between the cultural situation of second-generation black British writers and that of writers from the Caribbean and Africa whose work began to be published in Britain after the Second World War. This issue was developed and expanded upon in an energetic and suggestive debate in the afternoon session which was chaired by Alex Pascall — producer of BBC Radio's *Black Londoners* programme — and framed around a panel consisting of playwrights Cas Phillips and Mustapha Matura, novelist Buchi Emecheta, and publisher Margaret Busby. The main focus of the debate was on the subjects of definition, identity and literary nationalism. In the course of the discussion it became apparent that there was some significant disagreement as to whether literary categorization was a necessary process of self-definition in the growth of a new tradition. Certain speakers resisted the application of easy critical formulae to a literature still involved in the exploration of new subjects and forms. While important common features and threads of continuity could be recognized, it was felt by these speakers that it would be a limited and limiting endeavour to insist upon a monolithic label for writers as individual and diverse as, say, Jean Rhys, George Lamming, V.S. Naipaul, Chinua Achebe, and Buchi Emecheta. The raising of the names of such celebrated and successful writers led back naturally to the question of publishing opportunities today and the problem of how to assess literary quality and value. A number of speakers accused the large, mainstream publishers of being too conservative in their publishing policies, of being essentially traditional in choosing to publish only the established writers from outside the orthodox English literary tradition. Others disagreed and argued that the big publishers were more willing than in the past to experiment and commission less well-known artists.

One of the highlights of the conference consisted of poetry-readings by Frederick Williams and James Berry. James Berry gave a fine reading, among other pieces, of his recent Poetry Society Prize Poem 'Fantasy of an African Boy'.

SUSHEILA NASTA

#### Fourth International Janheinz-Jahn Symposium, Mainz, 21-23 May 1982.

The fourth international Janheinz-Jahn Conference had as its theme 'The Woman in Africa as Writer and Literary Figure'. Not surprisingly, the organizers of the conference had invited female African writers and critics to give talks about various aspects of their struggle. Miriam Tlali from South Africa spoke about women in rural areas and cities, Annette M'baye d'Erneville from Senegal about women and religion and about the great impact which Mariama Ba's book *Such a Long Letter* has had on the literary scene of Senegal, and Wanjiku Matenjwa from Kenya about the treatment of women in African literature.

The speakers were faced with the impossible task of representing African women, a task which was made even more difficult by the great variation in their ages and person-

alities. Annette M'baye had gained the status of a pioneer in the battle for basic female rights and self-respect, and she carried with her an aura of a fighter to whom much respect is due, but whose views have been partly superseded by a following and more angry generation. Wanjiku Matenjwa was of that generation. Very firmly rooted in the Ngugi school of criticism she refused to contemplate any notion of global sisterhood with what she called 'Western bourgeois feminism' but instead she drew attention to neo-colonial economic exploitation as the real source of inequality.

Despite the potential emotional content of the subject the talks moved along much in the manner of an ordinary academic conference until the last session. It seems ironic that it should be the talk given by a German writer, Ingeborg Drewitz which acted as a catalyst for the pent-up emotions of the predominantly young and feminist participants. The chair as taken over by a woman, the vocabulary gained a recognizable feminist slant, and the conference sprang into belated life with a debate between the European and African participants about the aims of feminism. It was soon discovered that there was very little shared ground, that the Western feminist discussions about mother/daughter relationship, about lesbian or political feminism meant very little to the African participants who were concerned with gaining basic social acceptance and rights and not with changing their consciousness. If this ground had been covered on the first day of the conference it could perhaps have moved on to discuss the touchy and important subject of the role of feminism in a colonized or neo-colonized country, but as it was, the conference was a due warning against too easy assumptions of universal sisterhood.

KIRSTEN HOLST PETERSEN