

Group, although Martin Bell (1918) was also a prominent, though older figure of the circle.

8. Claire Buck ed., *The Bloomsbury Guide to Women's Literature* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1992).

9. Tamás Bényei, "Texts, Theories, and Lives," *The AnaChronisT* 11 (2005) 359–368.

10. Philip Tew, *The Contemporary British Novel* (London: Continuum, 2004).

Is Variety the Spice of Postcolonial Criticism?

Anne Holden Rønning and Lene Johannessen (ed.), *Readings of the Particular: The Postcolonial in the Postnational* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007)

Rodopi publishers are well-known for their academic publications, which include more than sixty series; the volume under discussion here came out as the 89th of the 96 issues published so far in the "Cross/Culture – Readings in the Post/Colonial Literatures in English" series since its launch in 1990. The majority of these numerous volumes usually have a broad theme to explore, but occasionally individual authors (e.g.: Wole Soyinka, Wilson Harris etc.) or countries/regions (e.g.: India, the South Atlantic etc.) come under scrutiny.

As its title reveals, *Readings of the Particular* belongs to the former cate-

gory: the editors in their "Introduction" emphasize globalization and the concomitant transculturality as forces with a powerful impact on the postcolonial, whose present position they try to clarify with the help of the selected essays. "The process of transculturation and the focus on the particularities of the realities underlying various locations form the background for this volume of critical essays" (ix–x), describes the context in which scholars, though taking various perspectives, present their analyses. It is by combining the examination of globalization, a worldwide phenomenon, with observations of its local forms that the volume tries to strike a balance between the two competing tendencies of postcolonial criticism.¹ One of them is more cosmopolitan and fits a postnational approach, as it focuses on migrant writers and their fluid identities and hybridity, a phenomenon itself closely related to transculturality. However, the editors of the volume are very much aware of the fact that such an approach could be regarded as conflating issues and homogenizing cultures, and might thus come under attack, as did Homi Bhabha himself, whose work, especially *The Location of Culture*, theorizes about what happens in the contact zone to produce hybridity.² To counterbalance such possible universalization, the editors have made great efforts to include in their collection essays that examine cross-cultural exchanges in works produced in clearly identified

regions where a plurality of voices can be heard. This kind of dialogue between the global and the local is both a merit and a challenge in the volume as a whole and, as the book suggests, an examination of the interactions between the two – with a special emphasis on the local refractions of the global grand narrative – could be fertile ground for postcolonial criticism.

In keeping with a pluralistic approach then, the book is divided into three main sections; in addition, there is the abovementioned “Introduction” to orient the readers, which is especially useful in a collection of such diverse essays. All this is further expanded with a “Prelude” placed after the “Introduction,” and a poem beginning the last section of the book, giving the reader quite a bit of surprise, as no hints whatsoever have been made to it in the “Introduction,” while all the pieces which follow it have been properly highlighted. The separation of the “Prelude” from the rest of the essays becomes understandable after one reads its few opening pages, which, unlike the other writings in the collection, contain no references to literary works, but become a rather theoretical exposé about cultural belonging, be it related to a diaspora or citizenship in a society at large. The diasporic experience resulting from dislocation has by now become a common topic in postcolonial studies, and Wenche Ommundsen’s essay only enhances its significance as a site where identity

becomes especially problematic – due to its unavoidably hybridized nature and the dissolution of the binary of the local and the global because “diasporas [are] national, transnational and post-national sites of cultural allegiance” (6) and as such are “the exemplary communities of the transnational moment” (Tölölyam quoted in Ommundsen 6). Later on, several of the essays will return to the quintessential question of the diasporic experience as it is treated in various literary works. On its fifth page, however, Ommundsen’s writing takes a turn towards literature and becomes, as the last word of her title has promised, a kind of “airport fiction,” a parable of the diasporic situation (x). In this unorthodox yet entertaining manner, she illustrates problems a diaspora faces, such as discrimination, stereotyping, assimilation and cosmopolitanism.

Another work of literature, Geoff Page’s poem, however, has been made part of section three, entitled “Poetic Sites of Intertextuality,” which gives the impression that the essays in the collection have been grouped according to the type of literary work they examine, the third section thus being dedicated to poetry and giving, quite naturally, room to Page’s poem “I Think I Could Turn Awhile.” It is a lyrical meditation of an Australian on his chances of imitating American models in his poetry, ending with a rejection of American examples and, at the same time, including some of Robert Frost’s

lines together with a re-affirmation of his own Australian identity. All this expresses an ambivalent attitude to intertextuality, which, with the dialogues it creates between literary works, between literatures from two different cultures, as in the above case, can easily be related again to transculturation, one of the main themes of the whole collection, as one form of hybridity. Interestingly enough, the editors have not chosen the related term “appropriation” instead of “intertextuality,” “appropriation” being much more commonly used in postcolonial criticism in studying the relationship between cultures, though its meaning is often contested because of its political edge, which “intertextuality” lacks. But by the time the reader reaches the end of the section this choice will be justified because intertextuality will not represent a dialogue between cultures in the majority of the cases if it appears in a meaningful way at all, and it is not intertextuality through which the question of transculturality emerges in the works discussed in the section. Then why have the editors given this term such a prominent place, one wonders.

Returning to the beginning of the volume, however, it can be observed that the first chapter is unified by the overarching topic revealed in the title “Novels and Their Borders,” which is a much more appropriate description of the whole section than the title of the third chapter. As indicated, all the essays focus here on fiction, even if not

on novels in each and every case; but borders and their crossings, either in a literal or a metaphorical sense, are touched upon in each article in the section; this topic is an integral part of postcolonial critical discourse and organically connects with the question of transculturality and hybridity. If in the above-mentioned part of the collection citizenship theory and globalization theory have supplemented the already heterogeneous field of postcolonial criticism, now a theory of borders is added by Johan Schimanski. He uses the tools of border poetics to discuss the meanings of temporal, symbolic and topographical borders in the short story “The Wind and a Boy” by Bessie Head, a naturalized Botswanan of South African origin. Addressing the question of the postcolonial border, “the border between the local and the global – an embankment separating the village and its outside” in the story (85), he also provides insights into the neocolonial situation of Botswana.

A border theory usually implies the existence of homogenized binaries on its two sides, appearing in the form of the local and the global, or the portmanteau “glocal” as the concept is denominated in this collection; but as already inherent in the term used by Priscilla Ringrose, the binary is often transcended in transcultural relationships. As she explores “*beur*” narratives, narratives by descendants of North-African migrants to France, she presents even more levels on which

“the self is shaped culturally” (31) in a diasporic context. Hybridity resulting from engagement with different cultures is a key feature of Alan Freeman’s perceptive article on the ambivalent attitude of the Scottish to Britain and its empire in nineteenth-century novels by Sir Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson, and also in novels by the contemporary writer of Scottish descent William Boyd.

This chapter becomes more focussed, however, on Africa than on Europe, as novels by South African authors André Brink and Zakes Mda come under scrutiny. Writing in a postmodern mode, a more or less Western phenomenon, about the need in post-apartheid South Africa to preserve memories and construct history, especially from a female, so far marginalized and unfamiliar, point of view, “[Brink’s] approach is indeed transcultural, and his writing-practice aims at a dialogue between European ideas and South African identities” (58). In his first three novels, published in the late 1990s, Zakes Mda concentrates more on his particular, vernacular region, as he presents oppressors – “imperialist Europeans, the neocolonial rulers of African states, or the leaders of the revolution in the new South Africa” (95) – exercising their power to silence the oppressed. To give voice to this silent majority and to help bring about cultural renewal, he emphasizes the need for the revival of authentic traditions and the creation of a synthesis between the old and the

modern, because that is the way to a flexible, live African culture. Yet another region, the Caribbean, is represented at the end of this chapter through a textual approach to Jean Rhys’s “On Not Shooting Sitting Birds.” Ulla Rahbek examines the question of control in the short story by considering the issues of memory, character and interpretation, explaining that the colonial aspect of the tale about the encounter between a white Creole woman and a young Englishman is only one of at least three: the feminist, the colonialist and the modernist (115).

“Performing Possibilities,” the second chapter of this collection, includes essays mainly about Canadian drama, though it starts with a filmic piece about Langston Hughes and gay masculinity. The poet and the Harlem Renaissance, that is, the literary aspect of the essay, usually recede into the background to give room to more theory related to the methodology of interstitial or intercultural cinema while examining the decolonization of the gaze and spectation. It is followed by Evelyn Lutwama’s informative, yet rather descriptive historical survey of African (theatrical) performances from pre-colonial times through the colonial period to modern day African theatrical practices, emphasizing the results of Western influence on issues of gender in the world of the theatre. She is very much aware of the danger of homogenization implied in her treatment of African theatre as such, but tries to

counterbalance it by selecting her examples from various regions of the continent to prove her points. Similarly, Anne Nothof's article on contemporary Canadian drama has a broad scope, as the piece examines the discrepancies between the term "national drama" and Canadian multicultural society it addresses. As national symbols and myths are deconstructed in the plays she has selected, they turn out to be the products of a transplanted European culture ignorant of the local diversity. Two Canadian Native playwrights, Tomson Highway and Daniel David Moses, are the subjects of case studies locating borders, this time between the reservation of the indigenous population and Toronto, presented as the predominantly white city; however, the appropriation of culture can take different directions, producing diverse results in the two plays. The penultimate piece in this chapter is another example of curious positioning, since its analysis of the intertextual use of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* by the black, "Africadian" poet George Elliott Clarke, in his *Execution Poems*, would find a more fitting place in the third chapter.

Identity formation is a central issue not only at the beginning of the collection but throughout and as such it is very much foregrounded in the articles in the third section as well, where a poem together with a novel by David Dabydeen, and poems by William Butler Yeats, Seamus Heaney and Paul

Muldoon are examined. However, in the first essay of the chapter the question of intertextuality, so much emphasized in the title, as a basic tool of analysis is almost wholly absent: it does not play a part in the discussion of Dabydeen's work on black identity as it meets English culture here; moreover, the question only appears in a fleeting reference in the second essay, as "Yeats's adoption of Eastern practices" (212) is mentioned in connection with his use of masks. Yet its focal problem, "whether he [Yeats] should be placed in the camp of the dominating or the subjected powers, or whether he is of essence a more liminal figure" (206), turns this essay into an absolutely relevant contribution to the volume as a whole.

With its references to Yeats, Ruben Moi's essay forms a logical sequence, and it promises to fulfil the expectations raised by the title of the chapter finally by stating that "this article intends to examine the transtextualities between Paul Muldoon and Seamus Heaney" (218). Its supposition that Muldoon is a postmodern alternative to Heaney, not afraid of creating controversies, is amply supported by textual evidence. The transtextual relationship between the two is especially apparent in their respective poems on forms of ancient or more contemporary barbarity as analogies of British brutality in "Northern/Ireland." On the other hand, the examination of their resemblances and differences as users of

classical mythology in poems published at about the same time in the late 1990s hardly qualifies as intertextual analysis, unless the more diffuse, “weaker,” usage of the term applied by Roland Barthes is employed.³ The closing piece of the collection starts with a narrower definition of intertextuality and uses it accordingly, documenting “the artistic influences, or literary conventions, that occur between writers of . . . different generations” (229). To explore black male identity in America and the supportive function of communal traditions, especially the blues, the article focuses on the interconnections between novels by Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray, puzzling the reader again by its inclusion in this part of the volume, as these novels can hardly be defined as poetic sites per se.

On the whole, the divisions of this book are often baffling, and the heavy reliance on various theories and its jargon-ridden style do not make it an easy read either. Even after carefully studying it, the reader may not be any more certain than before as to the direction postcolonial criticism is about to take: the discipline is already diverse enough and even more diversity is added by the multiplicity of approaches taken and issues addressed in the collection. However, some of the theories open up new possibilities as combined with postcolonial criticism and provide food for thought even if the reader is not familiar with all the primary texts

the articles cite. In this way the collection is a real eye-opener, and, due to the emphasis placed on some questions – such as border crossings and intertextuality as related to transculturality in postcolonial literatures – the reader does find routes worthy of further exploration.

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Notes

1. Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford & New York: OUP, 1995), p. 249.
2. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).
3. Roland Barthes, “Theory of the Text,” in *Untying the Text: A Post-structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young, trans. Ian McLeod (London: Routledge, 1981), p. 39.