

Dunja Mohr (ed.), *Embracing the Other: Addressing Xenophobia in the New Literatures in English* (ASNEL Papers 11), Rodopi, Amsterdam-New York 2008, ISBN 978-90-420-2377-2, 325 pp.

This collection of essays presents a very wide spectrum of criticism on emergent literature and authors, as well as a variety of literary genres: poetry, drama, fiction, short stories. It ranges from very well known authors, such as Nadine Gordimer to many non canonical ones, and in this respect it can be considered a welcome addition to the body of work on the so-called new literatures in English. The collection includes essays on Anglo Caribbean David Daberdien, Carlos Bulosan and Bienvenido Santos, Adib Khan, Carl Muller, Indian Canadian M. G. Vassanji, Australian Peter Cary and Indian Arundhati Roy. In addition it includes essays on geographical areas such as Maori literature, contemporary Nigerian women writers, West Indian queer fiction, Canadian Native theatre and South African theatre.

The essays look into issues of discrimination and race, approached from a variety of angles and critical perspectives. It also includes an analysis of so the called “while angst” in post apartheid South Africa in the works of John Conyngham by Jochen Petzold. The volume is divided into sections which are thematic and in one case geopolitical: *Theory, Writing History and Textuality, Migrant and Border Narratives, Transitional States, Negotiating Identity and Alterity, Diaspora and Orientalism*, and *Canadian and South African Theatre*.

In a long essay by Edwin Thumboo, *Conditions of Cross-Cultural Perceptions: The Other Looks Back* there is an attempt to categorize difference(s) and other(s) into a good number of subcategories, twelve in fact. Such distinctions could be to an extent useful for an understanding of the processes pertaining to alterity, but they should not be overestimated. Textuality, dialogism and multivocality are the approach of an very interesting long essay by Mary E. Modupe Kolawole *Multicultural Strategies and Alterity: Transgressing the Other in Contemporary Nigerian Women's Short Stories*. In Nadin Gordimer's later fiction, Natividad Martinez Marìn discloses an overall more optimistic vision of contemporary South Africa, in novels like *The House Gun* (1998) and *The Pick Up* (2001).

The attempt of this volume, that is very much appreciated, is to cover less explored areas of research in postcolonial criticism. For anybody interested in Indian migration writing I would recommend Mala Pandurang's essay *How Brave Is Our New World?* In this brief but dense essay she brings into sharp focus problems relating to the positions of the critics themselves (which is not innocent, of course). In order to bring these issue into focus she takes as an example and reads problematically the

work of Vikram Seth. On a different note, Virginia Richter's excellent essay *The Civilized Ape* is very much in line with recent scholarship on the so called "post humanism". It investigates the shifting and uncertain border between the animal and the human, through three short stories: by Edgar Allan Poe, Frank Chalice Constable, and Arthur Conan Doyle.

Henning Schafer examines in depths the problematic question of authenticity in minority literature in *Disappointing Expectations: Native Canadian Theatre and the Politics of Authenticity*, making general and theoretical reflections on this issue that are indeed still quite necessary to this day, in order to avoid creating a ghetto of Native literary productions, among other "dangerous" implications. The essay on Canadian author M. G. Vasanji *Race and Racism in Contemporary Canadian Fiction* foregrounds the issue of race which becomes problematic and ultimately obsolete. In its stead one should consider ethnicity: "describing a person's cultural upbringing in terms of language, community, and subculture ethnicity differs from race because it is a dynamic concept" (p. 138). In other words, one's ethnicity, as opposed to one's race, is open to modification and change.

Surprisingly enough, there is only one indirect reference in the book to Emmanuel Levinas, one of the major thinkers on alterity and its processes of recognition and/or rejection etc. through the face of the other. Theoretical references throughout the essays (but not in all of them) are to the work of Said, Bhabha, Spivak, Fanon, and Clifford, among the major ones.

*Embracing the Other* borrows its title from a satirical poem by Rudyard Kipling *We and They* (1926); in the *Introduction* Mohr interestingly explores the ambiguities of the expression that are further investigated in the essays in this volume which constitutes a welcome addition to the scholarship on the so-called New Literatures in English.

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