

Bernard De Meyer and Neil ten Kortenaar eds., *The Changing Face of African Literature* (Rodopi, 2009)

This edited collection of 13 papers derives from an international conference on contemporary trends in African literature hosted by CALS, the Centre for African Literary Studies at Pietermaritzburg. The contributors are, in the main, affiliated with African universities, and the volume ends with a note by Mbulelo Mzamane, current director of CALS, who hopes the Centre will become a world resource for the study of African literature with a strong focus on literature of the diaspora.

The volume is divided into three parts: 'Changing Faces', 'Changing Themes', and 'Diversity'. Perhaps in keeping with the idea of diversity, half of the essays in this book are in French, with English summaries, and vice versa. Though the summaries themselves are excellent, the bilingual contributions might well be off-putting for some readers.

The idea, according to the Introduction, was to produce 'an inclusive snapshot [...] of the current state of Africa fiction' (xv). This is, undoubtedly, quite a daunting task. Would it really be possible, in the space of a standard edited volume of conference papers, to come to any useful conclusions about 'African' literature, or even make generalizations that would seem to be pertinent across the board? If this is the standard one would wish to set, it was perhaps an overly ambitious one. On the other hand, this volume does indeed offer several interesting points of departure.

In the first essay, entitled 'New Locations and Changing Paradigms', Nana Wilson-Tagoe provides a helpful overview summarizing what she considers to be some of the major sweeping changes in recent African literature. These include the rise of major fiction by women and the aggressive questioning of gender roles as well as the themes of migration and re-location of Africans and the rise of HIV/AIDS. There is much of interest here to spur fellow scholars on to research and debate.

One of the best essays in the volume deals with the recent rise of detective fiction in African literature. In her fascinating and jargon-free comparative analysis, which is bolstered by a seemingly encyclopedic knowledge of the genre, Karen Ferreira-Meyers examines works by French- (Yasmina Khadra), English- (Alexander McCall Smith) and Portuguese- (Pepetela) language writers, concluding that all three authors use the form in order to reveal social ills and denounce the abuse of power and corruption in their respective societies. This is transnational comparative criticism at its best, setting an excellent foundation for further investigation in the area.

A further essay that opens an intriguing area of inquiry is 'Discourses of Alterity in Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun*' by Cheryl Stobie. Though the title of the paper is somewhat misleading, as it deals almost exclusively with the issue of bisexuality in Gordimer's novel, Stobie's description of bisexuality as a kind of fluidity, a space between identities, 'a space of anxiety, but also of opportunity' (173), is thought-provoking.

Given that Stobie has written a full-length work on bisexuality in South African novels (*Somewhere in the Double Rainbow: Representations of Bisexuality in*

Book reviews: *The Changing Face of African Literature* ed. by Bernard De Meyer and Neil ten Kortenaar. Tamara-Diana Braunstein.

Transnational Literature Volume 2 No 2 May 2010.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

Post-Apartheid Novels, 2007), I was sorry that she did not include occasional references to further contemporary South African works employing the trope of bisexuality, as this would have been helpful for others interested in pursuing this thematic approach (and could only have served to strengthen the argument that its use is becoming more prevalent in current [South] African writing).

As is very often the case, South Africa is extremely well represented in the volume. There is a useful essay by Godfrey Meintjes on the post-apartheid work of André Brink, an essay by Jaco Alant on writing in Afrikaans as well as an essay entitled 'The Woman's Shout' by Annie Gagiano which examines the themes of speech, voice and silence in seven novels, three of which are South African. Finally, Muff Andersson's highly original essay on a South African television series for teens called *Yizo Yizo* in which she enumerates a hierarchy of ten different kinds of violence (including 'violence silence' and 'life-style violence') deserves special mention (196).

There are several papers in the volume which, like Stobie's, focus on a single work by a single author. This could be considered problematic in a volume intended to treat the broad and sweeping topic heralded in the collection's title. In his promisingly titled contribution 'Afropolitanism in literature,' for example, Bernard De Meyer discusses only one work by one writer, Bessora, whose father was from Gabon and whose mother was from Switzerland.

Ludovic Heraud's essay on *The Seventh Oath* by Mozambican author Paulina Chiziane quite simply seems ill-placed in this volume – not only is a single book by a single author discussed, but its focus is primarily on the use of animist tradition and witchcraft in the novel. That is all well and good, but just how this ties in with the *changing* face of African literature eludes me, as I do not think that these particular themes would come as any surprise, whether to Africanists or non-Africanists.

In sum, while some of the individual papers are very useful, the collection as a whole is simply not broad enough in scope to give the reader more than a fleeting intimation of the changing face of African literature.

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