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Dieter Riemenschneider
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Review of

Bierbaum, Nena, Syd Harrex and Sue Hosking (eds.), *The Regenerative Spirit, Volume 1: Polarities of Home and Away, Encounters and Diasporas, in Post-colonial Literatures*, Adelaide: Lythrum Press, 2003;

Williams, Sue, Dymphna Lonergan, Rick Hosking, Laura Deane and Nena Bierbaum (eds.), *The Regenerative Spirit, Volume 2: (Un)settling, (Dis)locations, (Post-)colonial, (Re)presentations--Australian Post-Colonial Reflections*, Adelaide: Lythrum Press, 2004.

Anna Rutherford once wrote, reading the literature of the Commonwealth, the “regenerative spirit is stressed, a link is established between the old world and the new, between ancient cultures and those of the twentieth century.”¹ It is precisely the attention paid to the regenerative spirit that characterises the essays assembled in these two volumes, papers read at several conferences organised by the Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English (CRNLE) and the School of Humanities at Flinders University in Adelaide. Dedicated to Rutherford’s memory and to honour her as an outstanding pioneer in Commonwealth Literature / New Literatures in English / Post-colonial studies, the two collections address themes of exile and migration, dislocation, diasporan and cross-cultural writing. In Volume 1 two dozen contributions of a more general character composed by scholars from Australia, Denmark, Great Britain, Malaysia and Singapore engage themselves with questions of imaginary homelands, ‘crossing the gaps’ and ‘new world diasporic visions’ and foreground the tenuous relationship between ‘home’ and ‘away’ we so often encounter in the New Literatures in English. But as Kirpal Singh suggests in his introductory remarks, both should also be seen as ‘being two ends of a continuum, rather than as polar opposites’ (2).

Indeed, his colleagues have taken his cue seriously in their responses to writers from as ‘close’ by as Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific, Malaysia, India or China or as far away as South Africa, the West Indies or Canada. The choice of an individual author or a single text permits their close analysis in about a dozen examples dealing with writers as different as David Unaipon, Lloyd Fernando, John Lang, Garry Disher, Christopher Koch, K.S. Maniam, Michael Ondaatje, Kamau Brathwaite, Derek Walcott, Nadine Gordimer and Robert Louis Stevenson. Sue Hosking raises the question of ownership in the Unaipon’s

Aboriginal stories while Mohammad A. Quayum feels that Fernando's novel *Green is the Colour* represents and celebrates an inclusive and indigenous ideology on which a holistic national identity of 'Bangsa Malaysia' might be based. Darren Gaunt and Adrian Caesar are less troubled by the problem of nation as identity marker than interested in defining identity through the imagery of landscape or cityscape. Besides, by focusing on Brathwaite's later poems Gaunt hopes to provide a glimpse of the continued poetic evolution. Caesar relates Walcott's cityscape images to the political realities of the United States, whereas landscapes and seascapes in his St. Lucia poems represent an attractive Romantic escape. By contrast, Rick Hosking's retrieval of 19th century John Lang's 'Anglo-Indian' novel *The Wetherbys* adds to our insight into the colonial literary discourse since 'the text offers a sardonic reading of the British Empire' (53) and vigorous revisionist study for post-colonial readers. Other contributors like Ioana Petrescu, Chad Habel, Brenda Glover and Kirsten Holst-Petersen inform us about more recently published works by such established writers as Disher, Koch, Ondaatje and Gordimer while Graham Tulloch's reading of Stevenson's response to the South Pacific and here, in a letter written from Noumea, makes him conclude that the author's horror of the island provoked a sense of alienation in the traveller-migrant that he did not experience elsewhere.

Comparative studies of two or more writers are undertaken with the purpose of coming to grips with the term 'Asian American' writing in a number of critical studies, anthologies or readers (David Leiwi Li); by exploring a possible 'family closeness' among literary texts by Australian, Indian and Indonesian diasporic writers that reflect their multi-lingual upbringing (Bruce Bennett); and by Kay Schaffer in her most interesting survey of Chinese post-Tiananmen women writing from the mainland and across transnational Chinese diasporas. As her reading of Lillian Ng's novel *Swallowing Clouds* illustrates, this new writing requires particular attention because of its 'conscious shift in explorations of female subjectivity' (148). Further, Tamara M. Athique asks whether returning to one's 'homeland' generation after generation establishes a 'definitive classification of different modes of return' (135). Gillian Dooley's essay discusses similarities in the fate of the main characters in Naipaul's *Half a Life* and Coetzee's *Youth* as both are 'in a way "half-and-half", belonging nowhere' (124), and Peter Doley, not unlike Gaunt and Caesar, focuses on landscape as the literal and metaphorical objective correlative of exile/home in Rastafarian's, Brathwaite's and Lyndon Kwesi Johnson's poetry.

Finally, half a dozen studies tackle 'crossing the gaps' and 'new world diasporic visions' from a more basic perspective. John McLaren's chronological redrawing of diasporan Indian prose closing the geographical gap between India and the 'New World' is complemented by Helen Tiffin's observations on the 'processive nature of native-to-indigene' (160), and here in particular in Caribbean narratives where Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* and *The Enigma of Arrival* represent this process. Ken Arvidson is similarly interested in the geographical aspect of the gap, now between Australian and New Zealand writing, which according to critics from both sides of the Tasman has been handled from rather different ideological and poetic angles and with as differing conclusions as to their exclusiveness or closeness. This is a question also aired by Noritah Omar who shows us the linguistic gap the Malaysian writer faces who uses English vis-à-vis the 'nation's obsession with nationalism, national literature' (114) and the use of Malaysian as national language. Brooke Thomas's survey on a whole region closes the volume's collection of critical essays and places the various island literatures of the South Pacific under the umbrella term of the 'Ocean', a dual metaphor she says, that relates texts as simultaneously separate and cohesive items. Thomas's essay is, I think, a fitting coda for a collection that comprises a wide scope of writing in English. *Regenerative Spirit Volume 1* testifies to the world-wide range of thematic approaches to the issues of identity and 'home and away' and ends with Syd Harrex's beautiful poem "A Window View" dedicated to Anna Rutherford.

To respond briefly yet fairly to Volume 2 with its array of five editors and thirty essays grouped into four sections is not an easy task for the reviewer who, besides, faces scholars of English, French, Greek and Italian literature, media studies, archaeology, history and the Social Sciences. Nearly all of them were (or are still) teaching at Flinders University or in the process of completing a PhD thesis. Indeed, the wide range of contributions to *The Regenerative Spirit* weaves an interdisciplinary net of manifold links between the old world and the new, stressing historical conjunctions and movements as well as more recent discursive responses. The first two sections, '(Un)settling' and '(Dis)locations' are informative and instructive and take the reader from historically-oriented overviews of the early settlement especially of South Australia to presentations of the various immigrant groups making up the regional multicultural pattern. The last two sections, '(Post)colonial' and '(Re)presentations', to which I will confine the following remarks, turn our attention to the literary 'appropriation' of the land by focusing on texts of a wide range of writers, genres and thematic concerns. It is perhaps not coincidental—but nonetheless underscores the importance of this particular juncture of 'home and away'—that all four pieces are subsumed under the heading '(Post-)colonial' and centre on the relationship of Aborigines and white Australians. Kay Schaffer's emphatic presentation of the lessons to be learned from personal testimonies of the 'stolen generation' of Aborigines is complemented by Susan Hosking's discussion of two Aboriginal 'life stories' where she again—as earlier with Unaipon's stories—registers ambivalent responses to concepts of home (141) and raises the question about marketing strategies of Aboriginal texts pursued by Australian publishers. Similarly critical in their reading of Andrew Bovell's play *Holy Day* and Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines* are Victoria K. Haskins and Clare Johnson. While the play of 2001 'provides a story with scapegoats that clearly operate to remove guilt from certain elements in our society' (156), Chatwin is taken to task for denying 'Aboriginal Australians ownership of their own knowledge' (164).

Almost every second piece of the volume is devoted to literary '(Re)presentations' of 'home and abroad' and introduce quite a few less well-known writers of the past and the present, many of them of South Australian origin. Here we are tempted to speak of familiarising the reader with a kind of regional survey, not unlike Bruce Bennett's past efforts about familiarising us with West Australian literature. In her historical outline Anne Chittleborough draws attention to South Australian women writing while Margaret Allen talks about 19th century Catherine Martin and Gay Breyley. Both Martin and Breyley are categorised as 'in-between' female authors, one of Jewish and the other of Aboriginal descent, and each has a role of mediating between their 'old' and new homes. A similar position can be ascribed to migrant writers—those who move in and out of the country and those who present an 'other' culture like that of Timor as the essays by Dymphna Lonergan, Richard Hillman and Graham Tulloch illustrate. Questions of genre and cultural context are addressed in two highly reflexive articles by Phil Butterss and Bruce Bennett that remind us of the need to evaluate a text's achievement by looking closely at the temporal interplay of its production and reception. Because of their important role in the cultural life of the nation at a particular period one can speak of the film versions of *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke* and the short fiction from Sydney in the 1960s and 1970s as cultural icons that have not lost their attraction even today.

I would like to end with a note on Lesley Williams's 'Saying Places: Finding a "Voice" in Landscape' because it questions the dominant critical approach to the Australian landscape as an 'alienated "away"' (272). Illustrating her methodological considerations based on Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas of dialogic and interrelated communication with reference to Michael Meehan's novel *The Salt of Broken Tears*, she demonstrates that the language of the novel 'becomes the language of landscape' (277). Williams's excursion into ecocriticism

opens a window into a critical discourse that might very well offer us new insights especially into ‘nature writing’, a characteristic phenomenon in Australian literature. At the same time her contribution comes full circle at the end of a collection that begins with Robert Sellick reviewing the naming of Australian spaces, of natural places, in a process of appropriation, of othering, by Western explorers like Matthew Flinders or Nicholas Baudin in the early 19th century.

The Regenerative Spirit volumes deserve the close attention of every student of the New Literatures in English because they do not only testify to its world-wide practice but also demonstrate a vibrant and interdisciplinary critical scene in—for many of us—far away South Australia. Personally, I enjoyed coming across recent writing of colleagues I have known for a good while, but also of very interesting ‘new’ voices, both of which underline the continuing importance of English language writing on all continents.

NOTES

¹ Anna Rutherford, *The Regenerative Spirit: (Un)settling, (Dis)locations, (Post-)colonial, (Re)presentations—Australian Post-Colonial Reflections* Vol. 2, Sue Williams et al (eds) (Adelaide: Lythrum Press, 2004) v.

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