

Africa Writing Europe:
Opposition, Juxtaposition, Entanglement

ED. MARIA OLAUSSEN AND CHRISTINA ANGELFORS
Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009.
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The Changing Face of African Literature
(Les nouveaux visages de la littérature africaine)

ED. BERNARD DE MEYER AND NEIL TEN KORTENAAR
Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009.
216 pp. \$72.00. ISBN 978-90-420-25806.

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Transcultural English Studies:
Theories, Fictions, Realities

ED. FRANK SCHULZE-ENGLER AND SISSY HELFF
Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009.
469 pp. \$145.50. ISBN 978-90-420-25639.

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The Cross Cultures series at Rodopi has already extended our understanding of the minefield we now refer to as postcolonial studies. Each of the three books in the series under discussion here adds something uniquely important to our rapidly enlarging conception of the field. Although how and, indeed, whether Western discourses developed for anglophone expressions in literature, film, and art that originate mostly outside the borders of Britain and the United States to counter Eurocentric perceptions of the world can continue to be the treat they have been as explanatory categories is a subject of heated debate in a cluster of essays, it is the thinking of the majority of the contributions that as more and more on-the-ground evidence from around the world emerges, carefully developed theories such as those gathered in the Schulze-Engler and Helff volume will be needed to provide useful templates for detailed studies of particular regional data.

Under the rubric of the updated umbrella term "transcultural," a concept that has been given many names in its critical history (such as "Multiculturalism," "Cosmopolitanism," and "Internationalization" or "Globalization"), the editors of *Transcultural English Studies* have accommodated a scrutiny of a wide variety of issues thrown up by what the twenty-seven contributors to the book call the gradual merging of cultures that is blurring distinctions of region and ethnicity as well as of social practices across the globe. Especially with the onset of the rapid movements of people and ideas through migration, travel, exile or expatriation, transmigration, and flight, some of the authors note, the concept of ethnic or cultural and even national exclusiveness is increasingly becoming a vanishing subject. Oddly enough, ethnic plurality in the opinion of others in no way vitiates but actually complicates the consciousness of difference. All the essays in *Transcultural English Studies* have one common thread: while coming to

different and often conflicting conclusions, they deal with a nexus of problems clustered around culture as a shifting site of identity—the irony that in the cultural transformations that are taking place, dichotomies of local and global may be coming under increasing challenge, but the old hierarchies such as those that obtain in relations between powerful or first nations and their others have remained intact. Though largely uneven, the sample critical reactions to African and Caribbean literature, to minority writing from Ireland, Scotland, and New Zealand, to Native Canadian, Black British, and Jewish American authors writing from and to Germany included in the volume can all be taken as collectively offering a defense of the claim that location is crucial in shaping identity, but contact with other peoples often both throws into sharp relief and transforms this sense of identity. In light of how processes of accommodation, hybridization, assimilation, resistance, and the dynamism and complexity of cultures spawned under the new methodologies are unsettling the received ideas, some contributions call for new methodologies that could assist our understanding of multiple identities to which individuals who find themselves thrust into the midst of such situations can lay claim. It is the opinion of still others that cultural fusion or synthesis has become so commonplace in contemporary times as to render obsolete not only divisions like colonizer/colonized, oppressor/oppressed, and center/periphery but also exclusive identification of modernity with the West.

In the collection *Africa Writing Europe: Opposition, Juxtaposition, Entanglement*, contributors bring out the implications of inverting the protocols of looking, the conventional order of stereotyping, whereby Africa is perennially the passive object of the often amused and contemptuous gaze of the West (Europe and America). Turning the camera over, and including some deft portraiture, several outstanding insights, and an abundance of delightful information, to herald what the editors describe as the dawn of new relationships between Europe and Africa—one in which Africa is displaced by Europe as the target of spectatorship—many of the lively essays challenge the dominance of the Western perceptions of the other by examining images of Europe and of Western philosophical traditions filtered through the prism of gender, location, or region, as reflected in the works of several African authors, both male and female, living in exile in Europe and America as well as in West, North, East, Central, and Southern Africa, including Leila Aboulela, Tatamkhulu Afrika, Alice Solomon Bowen, Eric Ngalle Charles, Soleiman Adel Guomar, Njabulo Ndebele, Dan Jacobson, Ken Bugul, Marie Cardinal, Tayeb Salih, and Abdulrazak Gurnah. Within a framework in which Europe is held in the reflective mirror that is presumed to be Africa-centered, the African authors write up/against or appropriate, as the mood takes them, dialogic and polyphonic pictures of the parts Europe plays or which they wish it to play in their lives.

The Changing Face of African Literature (Les nouveaux visages de la littérature africaine) collects essays from papers given at a conference held in 2005 at the Center for African Literary Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. It is not uncommon for new realities to engender literary interventions, even though while every literary tradition both absorbs and refracts tangential political, historical, moral, philosophical, and economic changes that are taking place around it, there are always continuities, and the case of the African literary tradition can be no different, proclaim the organizers of the conference. The task that *The Changing*

Face of African Literature has set itself is—as far as one can make out through the six essays, among the mixed array of pieces, which are in English and within this reader's linguistic range (the remaining seven are in French)—to track the modification literary expression has undergone in Africa of recent against the backdrop of the immutable patterns. As might be expected in papers sourced from the conference setting, there is a fair amount of overlap of coverage in the presentations. At the center of these discussions, however, is the recognition of the emergence of new genres such as crime fiction, postapartheid confessional narratives of reconciliation as well as expansion in the conventional thematic preoccupation of African literature with the cultural, psychological, spiritual, and economic effects of the colonial encounter and the subsequent postindependence disillusionment to include recent maladies such as the AIDS pandemic, urban violence, women's expanded consciousness, and the combative ethnic wars ravaging many regions of the continent. The ensuing discussions are adequate but not authoritative, which is not surprising given the format in which they were first aired; yet, despite the uneven results, some sense of the essential qualities of African literature comes across quite clearly and often passionately from the collection.

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