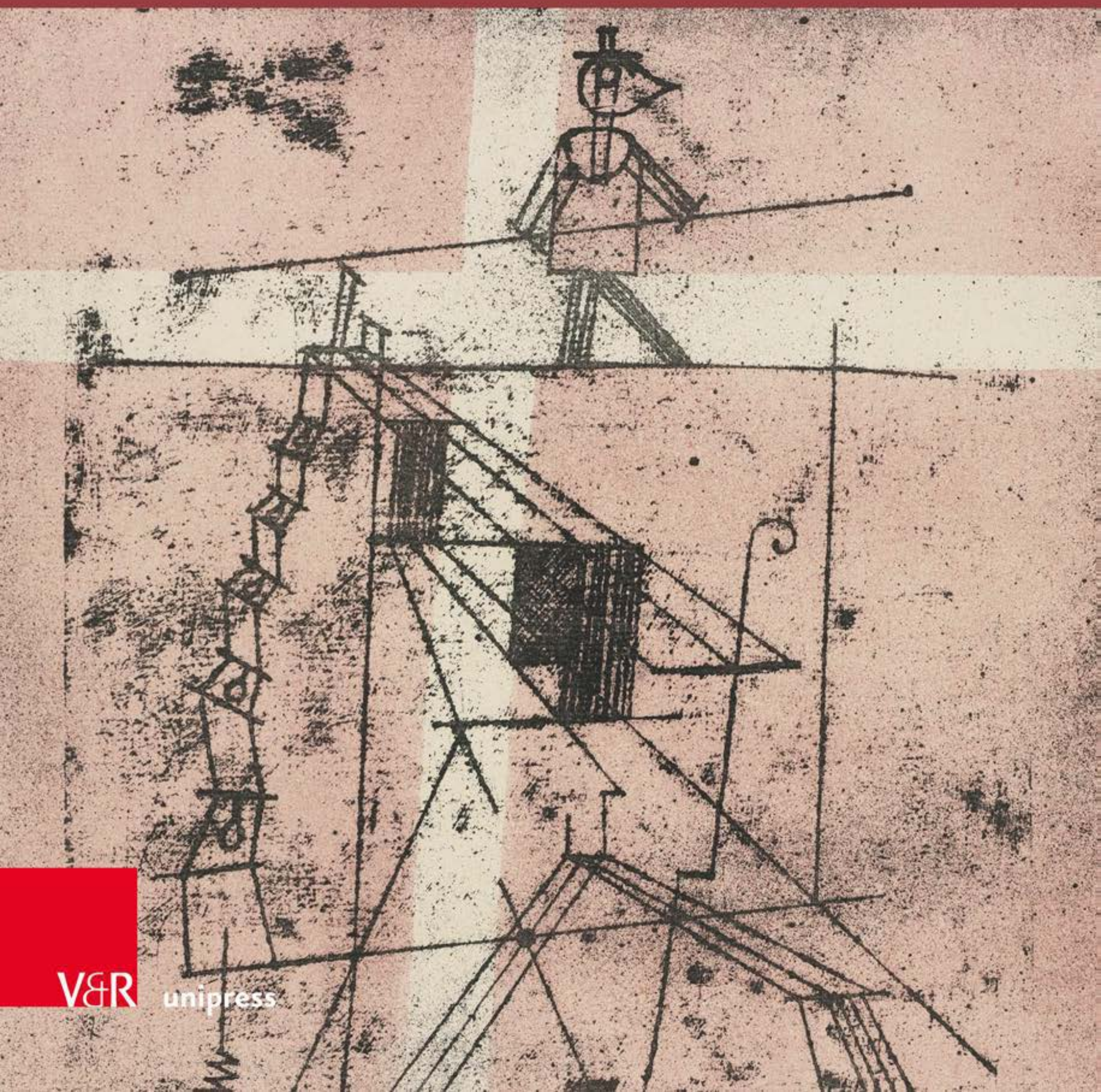
Di Blasio / Coppola / Perletti (eds.)

Always Connect

Transdisciplinarity and Intercultural Contact in Literary Discourse



V&R unipress

unipress

© 2024 V&R unipress | Brill Deutschland GmbH
ISBN Print: 9783847117445 – ISBN E-Book: 9783847017448

TRANSitions.
Transdisciplinary, Transmedial and Transnational Cultural Studies
Transdisziplinäre, transmediale und transnationale Studien zur Kultur

Volume / Band 13

Edited by / Herausgegeben von

Renata Dampc-Jarosz and / und Jadwiga Kita-Huber

Advisory Board / Wissenschaftlicher Beirat:

Lorella Bosco (University of Bari, Italy), Leszek Drong (University of Silesia, Poland), Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello (Salem State University, USA), Frank Ferguson (University of Ulster, Ireland), Odile Richard-Pauchet (University of Limoges, France), Monika Schmitz-Emans (University of Bochum, Germany), Władysław Witalisz (Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland)

The volumes of this series are peer-reviewed.

Die Bände dieser Reihe sind peer-reviewed.

© 2024 V&R unipress | Brill Deutschland GmbH
ISBN Print: 9783847117445 – ISBN E-Book: 9783847017448

Francesca Di Blasio / Maria Micaela Coppola /
Greta Perletti (eds.)

Always Connect

Transdisciplinarity and Intercultural Contact in Literary Discourse

With 3 figures

V&R unipress

© 2024 V&R unipress | Brill Deutschland GmbH
ISBN Print: 9783847117445 – ISBN E-Book: 9783847017448

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;
detailed bibliographic data are available online: https://dnb.de.

The research leading to these results has received funding from the Department of Humanities of the University of Trento.

© 2024 by Brill | V&R unipress, Robert-Bosch-Breite 10, 37079 Göttingen, Germany,
an imprint of the Brill-Group
(Koninklijke Brill BV, Leiden, The Netherlands; Brill USA Inc., Boston MA, USA; Brill Asia Pte Ltd, Singapore; Brill Deutschland GmbH, Paderborn, Germany; Brill Österreich GmbH, Vienna, Austria)
Koninklijke Brill BV incorporates the imprints Brill, Brill Nijhoff, Brill Schöningh, Brill Fink, Brill mentis, Brill Wageningen Academic, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Böhlau and V&R unipress.
All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without prior written permission from the publisher.

Cover image: Paul Klee, Tightrope Walker, 1923, The Cleveland Museum of Art. Creative Commons: Free Reuse (CC0).
Printed and bound by CPI books GmbH, Birkstraße 10, 25917 Leck, Germany
Printed in the EU.

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlage | www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com

ISSN 2751-8345
ISBN 978-3-8470-1744-8

Contents

Introduction 7

Bill Ashcroft (University of New South Wales)
Memory, Writing and Hope 13

Valérie Tosi (University of Pisa)
The 'Other-in-Self': Love, Ecological Interconnectedness, and Socioemotional Vulnerability in Richard Flanagan's *The Living Sea of Waking Dreams* 31

Francesca Di Blasio (University of Trento)
"Right us a wrong and break the thrall / That keeps us low". Indigenous Australian Literature and Human Rights 47

Luca Pinelli (University of Bergamo & Université Sorbonne Nouvelle)
Of Monsters and Cannibals: Literature and the Body between Virginia Woolf's Essays and Simone de Beauvoir's Philosophy and Literary Theory 57

Silvia Purpuri (University of Trento)
The Welsh/English Tapestry. Bicultural Bilingualism in Dylan Thomas' life and work 73

Paola Della Valle (University of Torino)
From Page to Screen: Undermining Nazi Propaganda in *Caging Skies* and *Jojo Rabbit* 87

Chiara Polli (University of Messina)
Graphic Reportage across Languages and Cultures. A Translational Perspective on Zerocalcare's Comics 99

© 2024 V&R unipress | Brill Deutschland GmbH
ISBN Print: 9783847117445 – ISBN E-Book: 9783847017448

Maria Festa (University of Torino)
Crossing Borders with the "Refugee Tales" Project 117

Paolo Caponi (University of Milano La Statale)
When Space Gets in the Way. The Suspension of Disbelief and "the best quality of life possible" 131

© 2024 V&R unipress | Brill Deutschland GmbH
ISBN Print: 9783847117445 – ISBN E-Book: 9783847017448

Introduction

This volume examines the philosophical and scientific debate on cultural contact focusing on multidisciplinary and multiprospective approaches to literatures in English. Our title echoes the epigraph of E.M. Forster's novel, *Howards End* (1910 (2000)), one of if not his finest masterpiece. "Only connect", he writes, drawing our attention to the importance of making connections, a theme he returns to throughout the book. In many ways this novel prefigures the complexities and contradictions of the contemporary world, as it foreshadows a future of increasing urbanization, market logic, massification, and the difficulty of differentiating and cultivating both critical and emotional reflection. Only by continuing to make connections can we discover suitable representations of the real, and this volume invites us to rekindle and preserve our ability to connect.

The complexity of contemporary discourse with its myriad messages, codes, channels, and interlocutors, can only be addressed by preserving our capacity, again both critical and emotional, to create links and connections, and encouraging dialogue between the diverse solicitations that arise from the intricacies of reality. Literature, a device that simultaneously allows for emotional identification and cognitive projection, an artificer of emotive engagement and a promoter of critical thinking, plays a crucial role in this regard. And it is starting from literature that this volume traces the many possible connections that allow us to make our world interpretable consciously and in a convincing way.

Individuals and cultures are mutually involved in complex and protean dynamics. Multidisciplinary perspectives are essential to the representation and analysis of cultural phenomena. Thus, investigating the critical implications of such dynamics through a multidisciplinary literary lens which allows us to bridge the gaps between apparently divergent approaches is an increasingly relevant cultural and scholarly practice (Gurr & Kluwick 2021; Dossanovaa et Al. 2016). The main theoretical framework of this volume is broad yet specific: it spans a range of perspectives from cultural and postcolonial studies to anthropological, historical, juridical and philosophical reflections on cultural difference; it also

© 2024 V&R unipress | Brill Deutschland GmbH
ISBN Print: 9783847117445 – ISBN E-Book: 9783847017448

includes theoretical views on the role of literature and the arts in both cooperative and conflictual cultural interactions in an age of "superdiversity".

In his contribution, Bill Ashcroft focuses on the relation between postcolonial writing and memory, arguing that the latter is a powerful resource because, despite the dangers of nostalgia, "it is not about recovering a past but about the production of possibility". Starting from Edouard Glissant's famous statement, "a prophetic vision of the past", Ashcroft argues that memory cannot only be a source of myth and record of historical contradictions and traumas, it can even show us the way forward, illuminating future action. Ashcroft investigates the connection between memory and the future by reflecting on the nature of time itself and provides a demonstration of circular time in postcolonial writing. Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*, a text of cultural memory, is a case study that intertwines with Ernst Bloch's concept of utopian hope, for which art and literature are the pre-eminent vehicles. In fact, literature is capable of disseminating cultural memory because what we know about ourselves, our culture, our world, comes through stories.

Richard Flanagan's latest novel, *The Living Sea of Waking Dreams*, depicting an era of ecological crisis and social distancing, is analyzed through a psychological, philosophical, and ecocritical lens in Valerie Tosi's essay. Written during the Covid-19 pandemic, Flanagan's novel is a family drama about three middle-aged siblings who have to face their mother's ordeal with a lethal disease in the context of climate change and related environmental catastrophes. Tosi highlights how ecological issues are intertwined with postcolonial discourse and the personal histories of Flanagan's characters who experience alienation as both a psychological state and social phenomenon. Drawing on philosophical concepts such as ecophobia, ego- and eco-resiliency, multidirectional eco-memory, and on the eco-ontology framework developed by Roberto Marchesini, the author discusses how Flanagan creates a fictional world in which "the Other-in-Self" is key to preventing the physical and moral annihilation of the human.

Di Blasio's piece on Indigenous Australian literature reveals how an emotional juridical perspective can re-create a sense of cultural belonging by narrating Aboriginal versions of the Australian story. Her paper looks at the works of two writers, Oodgeroo Noonuccal and Kim Scott, who employ two different literary genres, poetry and fictional prose, focusing on the role literature can play in tackling the issue of Indigenous people's human and political rights. It is argued that literature functions as a metadiscoursive counterpart of any discourse on human rights, because it promotes the kind of critical understanding that enables us to distinguish merely 'legal' definitions from the varieties of meaning they take on in diverse human contexts. Di Blasio's contribution highlights "the close and yet not unequivocal ties" that connect human rights and social justice, and how emotions stirred by the aesthetics and ethics of literature can relate to this nexus.

© 2024 V&R unipress | Brill Deutschland GmbH
ISBN Print: 9783847117445 – ISBN E-Book: 9783847017448

Intercultural contact and philosophical views on [the experience of] the body are the main foci of Luca Pinelli's survey of Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir's theories on literature and the body. He emphasizes how literature is a continuously ritualized trade of embodied experiences. In "On Being Ill", Virginia Woolf famously stated that "literature does its best to maintain that its concern is with the mind; that the body is a sheet of plain glass through which the soul looks straight and clear, [that it] is dull, and negligible and non-existent. On the contrary, the very opposite is true". In a similar but perhaps more philosophical vein, Simone de Beauvoir argued in "Que peut la littérature?" that literature is a way of "overcoming separation by affirming it", that it is, as Proust maintained before her, it is the "privileged locus of intersubjectivity". Pinelli's paper creates a channel for communication between these two authors. He argues that a new view of literature emerges if we consider Woolf's description of the body as a "monster" and her oft-quoted idea of the novel as a "cannibal" alongside Beauvoir's philosophy, which looks at reading and writing as intercorporeal acts. Any approach that crosses different sorts of boundaries – national, disciplinary, generic – must emphasize the importance of the body of/in literature.

Silvia Purpuri's contribution explores the intricate linguistic and cultural duality of Welsh bilingual biculturalism, focusing on the life and work of the renowned Welsh poet, Dylan Thomas. Thomas was intimately tied to his Welsh roots but also embraced English influences. Purpuri explores how this interplay between Welsh and English languages and cultures shaped Thomas' life and creative expression, and fueled the enduring impact of his work, which foregrounds the unique dynamics of bicultural bilingualism in Welsh society. Providing a deeper understanding of the cultural and linguistic heritage that shaped Thomas' creativity, her paper sheds light on the broader implications of bicultural experience.

Any contemporary critical discourse on forms of inter-connection must address the interplay between novels and films, with their overt visual impact. Paola Della Valle focuses her study on the drama-comedy *Jojo Rabbit*, written and directed by Māori Taika Waititi who won the Oscar for best adapted screenplay in 2020. The film was inspired by Christine Leunens' bestselling novel *Caging Skies* and is also set in 1945 Nazi Germany. It shows the fall of Hitler through the eyes of a 10-year-old protagonist, Jojo, a Nazi fanatic, brainwashed by state propaganda. Della Valle demonstrates how the transition from literary text to film allows for unexpected alternative perspectives on one of the most dramatic periods in the history of the 20th century. Waititi's transgressive adaptation turns a serious topic into a parody that undermines power figures and power structures, leaving them open to ridicule. In so doing, it proves Brewer's point: that interdisciplinarity is 'the appropriate combination of knowledge from many different

© 2024 V&R unipress | Brill Deutschland GmbH
ISBN Print: 9783847117445 – ISBN E-Book: 9783847017448

specialties – as a means to shed new light on an actual problem' (Brewer 1999, p. 329).

Chiara Polli's paper continues this exploration of the visual, looking at English translations of Zerocalcare's comic *Kobane Calling.* Polli first examines the intersection of comics and graphic reportage, the latter being one of the most accessible means for building socio-political awareness of the complexity of current events. The ninth art is often linked to this specific subgenre, as is the case with *Kobane Calling.* Translation is another element that must be considered in any critical discussion of cultural contact, and in this sense Polli's contribution stands at the crossroads of multiple discourses connecting text with text, source context with target context, and written communication with visual communication. She investigates textual forms that have resulted from contact between literary genres, with their multiple approaches to reality.

Continuing to consider alternative approaches to reality, Maria Festa's paper examines the role literature in the contemporary socio-cultural-anthropological scene, specifically in relation to the phenomenon of migration. Due to the proliferation and pervasiveness of new media, migrants' accounts often rely on multimodal media to relate on their journeys. Current technologies can also turn postcolonial literature into a fresh, diverse and at times hybrid act of narration, that engages readers in an interactive conversation with authors or addressers. The act of narrating may even take on a digital turn. Digital storytelling means authors no longer need to negotiate platforms to tell their stories; their voices can directly reach public spaces; narration can become a tool to advocate for a cause. Using this theoretical premise, Festa highlights the multi/inter/trans/disciplinary approaches to postcolonial literature evident in Reni Eddo-Lodge's *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race* and the "Refugee Tales Project". She shows how they are examples of hybridity "as a special mode or language of representation" (Paultz Moslund 2010, p. 4).

Paolo Caponi's contribution on narrative medicine, examines a recent study of great interest and equally great emotional intensity. A group in the medical team of the Istituto Nazionale dei Tumori in Milan has been experimenting with a new approach to terminally ill adolescent patients, encouraging them to project themselves onto alternative, different worlds or scenarios so as to detach themselves from their status quo. This palliative treatment can find its roots in Coleridge's speculative vision that poetry involves a "suspension of disbelief". By creating a benign vacuum in terms of their cognitive processing of their illness, these patients can attain "the best quality of life possible" (Clerici et Al. 2018) during the time they have left. In line with this vision, dreams they have during the terminal phase of illness are interpreted as movements towards auto-healing related to this "suspensive" approach to life and illness. Caponi focuses on this

© 2024 V&R unipress | Brill Deutschland GmbH
ISBN Print: 9783847117445 – ISBN E-Book: 9783847017448

touching and affecting practical application of theory while addressing the general issue of recent developments in the Medical Humanities.

The further exploration of literature and its interactions with other disciplines such as history, philosophy, law, anthropology, the visual and multimedia arts, science and technology studies, the social sciences, and medicine, is promising. Such investigations can start from the field of literary discourse, while embracing multifarious multidisciplinary approaches. Literature can be seen as a complex and dynamic system, in which issues of cross-cultural contact can be tackled from different theoretical and methodological points of view. This volume examines the philosophical and scientific debate on cultural contact by investigating the critical implications of these dynamics through multidisciplinary perspectives within literary studies, and contributes to bridging the gap between apparently divergent approaches to texts, genres, genders, disciplines, media, theories, and cultures.

Francesca Di Blasio
Maria Micaela Coppola
Greta Perletti

Works Cited

Brewer, Garry D.: 'The Challenges of Interdisciplinarity', in: Policy Sciences. The Theory and Practice of Interdisciplinary Work 1999/34, 4, pp. 327–337.

Dossanovaa Altynay Zh. et Al.: 'Interdisciplinary Approach to Understanding Literary Texts', in: International Journal Of Environmental & Science Education 2016/11, 10, pp. 3615–3629.

Forster, E.M.: Howards End [1910]. Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth 2000.

Gurr, Jens Martin / Kluwick Ursula: 'Literature and …? Perspectives on Interdisciplinarity', in: Anglistik: International Journal of English Studies 2021/32, 3, pp. 5–18.

Paultz Moslund, Sten: *Migration Literature and Hybridity: The Different Speeds of Transcultural Change*. Palgrave Macmillan, London 2010.

© 2024 V&R unipress | Brill Deutschland GmbH
ISBN Print: 9783847117445 – ISBN E-Book: 9783847017448

© 2024 V&R unipress | Brill Deutschland GmbH
ISBN Print: 9783847117445 – ISBN E-Book: 9783847017448

Bill Ashcroft (University of New South Wales)

Memory, Writing and Hope

In George Orwell's *1984* two things abolished by Big Brother were memory and writing. The intent of this is clear. Without memory we would no longer be fully human. Without memory we become robots. Memory is dangerous, not only because remembrance confirms our humanity, but because it's a reminder of what might be. In the postcolonial imagination, in particular, memory is not about recovering a past but about the production of possibility – memory enacted in postcolonial literatures is a recreation, not a looking backwards, but a reaching out to a horizon, somewhere 'out there'. This has been captured famously in Edouard Glissant's phrase, "a prophetic vision of the past," (1989: p. 64) a vision that informs all postcolonial writing. Postcolonial writing is dangerous, because it is the vehicle of cultural memory which enables vision of the future. In Ernst Bloch's terms the In-Front-Of-Us is always a possibility emerging from the past (1986: p. 4). In traditional postcolonial societies the radically New is always embedded in and transformed by the past.

While it runs the risk of nostalgia when a colonized society romanticizes a precolonial past, memory is a powerful tool available to the oppressed and marginalized. It is a source of myth, a recapitulation of historical contradictions and traumas, and a stimulus for future action. Myth may be positive or negative in the way it conceives cultural identity, but as history it is strategically placed to contest the ultimate imperial hegemony – history itself, which, as Chakrabarty claims, is always a version of the history of Europe (1992: p. 1). Nietzsche, in his essay "The Use and Abuse of History," discusses the usefulness of the quest for historical knowledge. On the one hand, too much engagement with history "mutilates and degrades lives" since it drains the vitality needed to build for the future. In this sense, "forgetfulness is a property of all action." But, on the other hand, the past, particularly "the monumental" past, is in his view one of the main sources of motivation for any great action. Thus, "the unhistorical and the historical" – forgetfulness and memory – are equally necessary to the health of an individual, a community and a system of culture." 'Historical men,' as Nietzsche calls them, are those who achieve an appropriate balance between the two: "Their vision of

© 2024 V&R unipress | Brill Deutschland GmbH
ISBN Print: 9783847117445 – ISBN E-Book: 9783847017448

the past turns them towards the future.... They believe that the meaning of existence will become ever clearer in the course of its evolution; they look backward at the process only to understand the present and stimulate their longing for the future." In the postcolonial context, forgetting the experience of invasion but remembering its political reality is key to the hope for liberation.

While history, and its associated teleology, has been the means by which European concepts of time have been naturalized for colonized societies, the postcolonial re-conception of history is very clearly designed to "understand and stimulate their longing for the future" as Nietzsche puts it. For Edouard Glissant, "The past, to which we were subjected, which has not yet emerged as history for us, is, however, obsessively present" (1989: p. 54). A past which projects into the future, offers a prophetic vision. Such a vision, according to Glissant, is neither 'a schematic chronology' nor a 'nostalgic lament.' But ultimately its imagination, its hope for a future from the *past* is a critical strategy designed to resist the master discourse of History, a discourse from which Hegel notoriously excluded Africa in his "Introduction" to *The Philosophy of History.*

The conflict and disruption engendered by colonization have the potential to enhance creative work and writing is just one example of the insurgent creative power which refuses to be locked in to the status quo. The postcolonial situation stimulates change because the effect of colonial power is the *production* of hybridization and for Bhabha this is a positive (Bhabha 1994, p. 160). Writers writing from the in-between space of hybridization grapple at the same time with the challenges of identity formation, and with questions of place, nation and history. These writers envision renewal out of conflict, doing what Bhabha calls 'borderline work,' where conditions of displacement and disjunction have the potential to rewrite boundaries and borders, to reconceive the future in order to re-imagine the meaning of human community. This process deploys a radically transformed sense of the relation between memory and the future:

> The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, re-figuring it as a contingent "in-between" space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present (Bhaba 1994, p. 10).

The very location of the future in the past establishes it as an "insurgent act of cultural translation." Thus, the postcolonial text in English can be understood as an insurgent transcultural act in which the writer and reader functions together produce a vision of the future.

© 2024 V&R unipress | Brill Deutschland GmbH
ISBN Print: 9783847117445 – ISBN E-Book: 9783847017448

Retrospective Future Thinking

While a prophetic vision of the past is a distinctive aspect of postcolonial narrative, a fascinating study by Roderer and Bonn demonstrates the way in which the past may be connected to the future for anyone. The study asked participants to imagine they were 100 years old and to reflect on the events they consider most important to their 100-year-old life. The authors discovered that "engaging in retrospective future thinking, taking a step forward in time and reflecting on one's life as if it has already been lived, provides several opportunities for investigating autobiographical events" (p. 23). But more importantly,

> retrospective future thinking enables a person to remember both past and future events as if these events had already been experienced – from a perspective that is more psychologically distant to the current self. This novel method allows examining the construction of both remembered and imagined autobiographical events in one paradigm, enabling the consideration of both theoretical and practical implications, for example for creating meaningful life narratives (p. 23).

Such an experiment demonstrates the ways in which the past may open up a particular kind of future. Although the subjects were asked to imagine future events, these were always based either on past experience or a sense of personal aptitude, interest and expectation. Future projections were guided by expectation inspired by past events. The (retrospective) future was envisaged in a combination of experience and hope and significantly, future hope was seen to be inextricable from the past. The beauty of such an experiment is that one could readily imagine it for oneself. Events seen from the perspective of my 100-year-old memory must be an extension of what I know to be possible from the experience of my past. This possibility lies at the very heart of creativity.

Memory is Performative

This study confirms that memory, like consciousness itself, is performative. It doesn't just happen, it is something that is done. If we think of memory as simply picturing the past we do well to consider Susan Sontag's discussion of the relationship between memory and photography:

> All memory is individual, unreproducible – it dies with each person. What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that this is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds (Bertens 2020, p. 15).

This applies to all memory but is most prominently displayed in cultural memory:

© 2024 V&R unipress | Brill Deutschland GmbH
ISBN Print: 9783847117445 – ISBN E-Book: 9783847017448

> When applied to memory and remembrance performativity provides a framework for understanding the construction of memories. Like gender, memory has no fixed original which can be copied and passed on. For like gender, the construction of memory is not about the recreation of a historical truth, but is rather an answer to needs and desires in the present (Sontag 2003, p. 22).

The chequered history of eye-witness accounts confirms that there is no objectively correct memory; "each individual constructs memories, both personal and collective ones, by taking up elements of expressions of memories seen elsewhere and in turn expressing these. Even our own individual memories are not stable and every recounting of a memory in fact recreates and alters it slightly, according to the new context and purpose.

> On a cultural scale the performativity of memory means that each representation of a memory (in for instance film, literature, museums, oral history etc.) forms part of a dynamic and ongoing construction of that very memory (Bertens 2020, p. 186).

Writing produces cultural memory. But also writing, insofar as it is capable of producing unfamiliar and unstable perspectives and subjectivities, has the capacity to bring into presence that which is yet to exist, such is the function of the imagination. The poetic practice of writing trespasses the 'limits' of familiar and stable subjectivities viewpoints and voices and any relations that might exist actually or potentially between a reader and an author. "The unstable and unfamiliar is actively produced and changed in the process of writing and reading" (Agamben 1999, p. 68–9). Deleuze, following Nietzsche, notes that to create, one attends to forces not as 'form' but as being 'in a transformation' (1998, p. 105). The world's future in terms of its absolute potentiality, is immanent in our labour, our doing, creating and inventing. For Blanchot, "To write is to surrender to the interminable," and what is expressed in writing is "an absolute writing that no one writes: a potential to be written" (1982, p. 27).

Memory and Time

A full understanding of the capacity of the creative spirit to harness memory to anticipate the future requires close attention to the nature of time itself. Technically, the present doesn't actually exist, at least not in stasis, but is *always* a process of the future becoming past, anticipation becoming memory. To remember does not bring the past into the present, but the act of remembering or the invocation of memory transforms the fluid present. Memory refers to a past "that has never been present" not only because the present is a continual flow, but because memory invokes a past that must be *projected* so to speak, into the

© 2024 V&R unipress | Brill Deutschland GmbH
ISBN Print: 9783847117445 – ISBN E-Book: 9783847017448

future, not only the future of its recalling, but the future of the realm of possibility itself. Put simply: "To speak of memory, is also to speak of the future."

The characteristic of Modernity with its concept of chronological 'empty' time, dislocated from place or human life separates past, present and future. Although the present may be seen as a continuous stream of prospections becoming retrospections, the sense that the past has gone and the future is coming separates what may be called the three phases of time. Friedrich Kummel proposes that the apparent conflict between time as succession and time as duration in philosophy comes about because we forget that time has no reality apart from the medium of human experience and thought (1968, p. 31). "No single and final definition of time is possible… since such a concept is always conditioned by man's understanding of it." (31) Or as Mahmoud Darwish puts it, "Time is a river / blurred by the tears we gaze through." (2002) Each moment is a flow of the past into the future. The present is the crucial site of the continual motion by which the New comes into being. Just as Roderer and Bonn found, memory is constantly connected to the future.

We think of time as either flowing or enduring but Kummel makes the point that duration without succession would lose all temporal characteristics. A theory of time therefore must understand the correlation of these two principles. Duration arises only from the stream of time and only within the background of duration is our awareness of succession possible. The critical consequence of this is that

> if something is to abide, endure, then its past may never be simply 'past,' but must in some way also remain "present" by the same token its future must already somehow be contained in its present. Duration is said to exist only when the "three times" (put in quotation marks when used in the sense of past, present and future) not only follow one another but are all at the same time conjointly present… the coexistence of the "times" means that a past time does not simply pass away to give way to a present time, but rather than both as *different* times may exist conjointly, even if not simultaneously (1968, pp. 35–36).

The present is the crucial site of the continual motion by which the New comes into being. One of the features of postcolonial texts, particularly those from Africa and the Caribbean, is a transformed conception of time that sees it as layered and interpenetrating rather than linear. This conjoining of time in these texts is related to a radically different epistemology – a different way of knowing.

All creative work makes this possible but writing, through its facility to produce narrative, has a particular relationship with time. The crucial characteristic of the genre of the novel, for instance, is its engagement with time. Stories are the way in which we have a world, and the telling of stories appeals to us because they offer the progress of a world in time and thus can become narratives of temporal

© 2024 V&R unipress | Brill Deutschland GmbH
ISBN Print: 9783847117445 – ISBN E-Book: 9783847017448

order. But magically, by unfolding in time they take us out of time. It may be that narrative, whose materiality is isomorphic with temporality, provides a way (though not the only way) of communicating different experiences of time. How then can the novel convey a different knowledge of time, specifically knowledge of what has been called the 'broken' time of the traumatized colonized subject? One way of doing this is through the 'circular time' developed from the forms of oral story telling. But a more common way is to convey experience itself as a palimpsest of different phases of time and different orders of reality as Chinua Achebe does in a scene in which elders of the tribe perform the dance of the *egwugwu* or spirit beings, an occasion in which the ontological distinction between acting and reality, the human world and the spirit world, dissolves (1958, p. 85). Exactly the same laminating of time can be seen in the Aboriginal Dreaming, but it is more widespread than we realize. Salman Rushdie explains that the techniques of *Midnight's Children* reproduce the traditional techniques of the Indian oral narrative tradition going 'in great swoops, it goes in spirals or loops' rather than beginning, middle and end (Rushdie 1992, pp. 7–8).

This technique of circling back from the present to the past, its structure of building tale within tale, and its persistence in delaying climaxes are all features of traditional narration and orature. This oral technique is a way of articulating circular time, but in the postcolonial novel there is a further dimension, the circularity of the narrative is overlaid on an ontological circularity that revolves around the cultural disruption of colonialism. Emmanuel Eze to suggest that a prominent feature of the African novel is the presentation of 'broken' time. The African writer

> not only writes about African cultures as 'broken' by the experiences of colonialism but also appears to experience language itself – in this case, the language of writing – as reenactment of otherwise de-centered traditions (2008, p. 25).
> It is as if in the writing, the writer historically inaugurates a different order of language and time, *a different sense of place* (p. 35).

On first consideration the idea of broken time, a brokenness that reflects the broken cultures of postcolonial African societies is persuasive. The colonial experience represents a moment of fracture between the traditional and the modern that is constantly negotiated in the language of the text. But it implies a culture that is a static object suddenly fractured and 'denatured' by colonialism, a fracturing that, just possibly, may be mended by a return to an essential cultural reality. This myth of return is common in postcolonial writing, but cultures are never static, they are always in process, in response to various historical influences. Without diminishing the traumatic historical event of colonialism and recognising the immense upheavals caused in African societies, the assumption of 'brokenness' underestimates the adaptability, the transformative power and

© 2024 V&R unipress | Brill Deutschland GmbH
ISBN Print: 9783847117445 – ISBN E-Book: 9783847017448

coeval nature of African modernities. Although Eze uses the term 'broken' he has an astute sense of the way in which African writing captures the fluidity of culture

> on one level, postcolonial African writing is a language in movement: it is a language *in* time. On another level, however, just like the best of the modern African compositions in music, such a language, literally and figuratively, composes itself and its what [sic] in hiddenness: it is a language *of* the movement of time (p. 34).

It is a language in time because it is a transformed and appropriated English, but at the same time it is a language of time because African culture is deeply affected by the movement of time. This is not to say, however, that African time is 'broken' or that brokenness is the only way in which postcolonial time is known. Eze's main interest is in language but also in the way in which fiction operates in communicating the experience of time. The novel in particular, a form that hinges on temporal movement, is adept at communicating a different experience of time.

Postcolonial literatures continually affirm this sense of circular time, of the future in the past, and bring us back to our understanding of revolution as a revolving or spiralling into the future as well as a revolt against the failures of the past. The present is the crucial site of the continual motion by which the New comes into being. In such transformative conceptions of utopian hope, the future emerges from the past, not as nostalgia but as renewal. In traditional postcolonial societies the radically New is always embedded in and transformed by the past. For those Caribbean writers and artists working in the borderland of language, race, identity the past is the constant sign of the future.

Art, Literature and Cultural Memory

Cultural memory may not be *embodied* in individuals but *embedded* in much the same way as Anderson's concept of *Imagined Communities* embeds the concept of nation, in various kinds of texts. Indeed, we could say that

> literature is culture's memory, not as a simple recording device but as a body of commemorative actions that include the knowledge stored by a culture, and virtually all texts a culture has produced and by which a culture is constituted. Writing is both an act of memory and a new interpretation, by which every new text is etched into memory space (Lechman 2008, p. 301).

Such memory comes through the medium of stories, in whatever way the story is narrated. Tanzanian Sam Raiti Mtamba's puts it somewhat hyperbolically in his story "The Pound of Flesh":

© 2024 V&R unipress | Brill Deutschland GmbH
ISBN Print: 9783847117445 – ISBN E-Book: 9783847017448

> … only art and literature could unlock the mysteries of life. Before men of letters there was nothing either cabalistic or magical. It was the open sesame, the sea into which everything flowed, the sea from which everything had its source and succor (2011, p. 167).

This is the euphoric outpouring of a man who wants to be a writer. Nigerian Chris Abani puts it more temperately in a talk on the stories of Africa:

> What we know about how to be who we are comes from stories. It comes from the novels, the movies, the fashion magazines. It comes from popular culture. In other words it's the agents of our imagination who really shape who we are (2007a).

The imagination has the capacity to shape who we are by anticipating what we might become.

Paul Ricoeur's magisterial work, *Memory, History, Forgetting* argues the case for the political and moral imperative of remembrance. Despite the scope of the book, however, according to Suzi Adams (2019) Ricoeur did not address collective memory as cultural memory as articulated in Jan and Aleida Assmann's influential accounts (1995). The Assmanns cast cultural memory as a variety of collective memory that is embedded in social frames not embodied in human minds. Its sociality is irreducible to interaction and intersubjectivity. (112) For Ricoeur memory is a requirement of a self in order to exist; but cultural memory needs a living tradition and serves as a point of anchorage in a "tide of contradictory influences" that may come about through the various and possibly contradictory memories of individuals. Literary writing is a powerful way which cultural memory becomes embedded and its importance lies in its capacity to bring the embedded memory to mind. When the memory is articulated in literature it immediately prefigures future possibility.

Mythistory: Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography*

Kamila Shamsie's novel *Kartography* has been widely read as a document of cultural memory. It functions as a cautionary tale for the future. The historical consequences and trauma of Pakistan's 1971 war against Bangladesh are presented through fictional characters who personify various political, religious, and ethnic beliefs. Since *Kartography* fictionalises critical events in Pakistan's history and exploits characters as personifications, it qualifies as a mythistorical text (Liaqat and Mukhtar 2002, p. 156). The novel is set in Karachi city and chronicles the story of the two generations, recording the historical memories of post-colonial Pakistan by means of stereotyped characters. Set in 1971, and 1990, it narrates the history of four friends (Ali, Zafar, Yasmin, and Maheen) who belong to various provinces, races, and ethnicities of Pakistan. For instance, Zafar is a

© 2024 V&R unipress | Brill Deutschland GmbH
ISBN Print: 9783847117445 – ISBN E-Book: 9783847017448

Muhajir – someone who migrated to Pakistan after the Partition – and is engaged to Maheen, a Bengali, whereas Ali is a Punjabi and is engaged to Yasmin, a Pathan. The diversity of the group gestures towards a diverse future for Pakistan and "all the characters' narrative voices and perspectives stage the historical contingencies of Pakistan.

Zafar is a prototype for the Muhajir community, an ethnic division of those who migrated to Pakistan at the time of partition in 1947 and who are still considered allies of India, traitors, and outsiders in post-Partition Pakistan. Zafar represents this community and the prejudices the group faces in Pakistan still today (Shamsie 2002, p. 223). Similarly, Maheen represents the Bengali community, which was marginalised in the aftermath of the Partition (Shamsie 2002, pp. 42, 182, 183, 191, 232). Ali stands as a stereotypical Punjabi and Yasmin represents the Pathan community in Pakistan. Raheen epitomises the spirit of Pakistani Anglophone writers seeking to include marginalised voices of post-Partition Pakistan into the mainstream meta-discourse of Pakistani nationalism. Karim (Ali and Maheen's son) is a representative of the diasporic community of Pakistan, wanting to integrate a disintegrated post-Partition country into a cohesive map with all its singularities and diversities (Liaqat and Mukhtar 2002, p. 157).

Kartography's retelling of the tragic bloodshed of the 1971 civil war and ethnic riots of the 1990s in Pakistan is a cautionary projection into the future, implying the necessary corrective foreign and domestic policy changes needed for a more peaceful South Asian political environment. Many of the prejudices outlined in the novel still exist, fed on the ideas of religion, race, ethnicity, gender and political affiliation by providing insight into the cultural memories and identity politics of a postcolonial state where multiple ethnicities, races and groups are still trying to achieve stability it opens the way for future change. A novel such as *Kartography* projects into the future without seeming to, because it provides a warning about the political mistakes made on the basis of race, ethnicity and socio-economic division in a nascent postcolonial state. According to J&M,

> this novel also warns other postcolonial South Asian states to avoid ethnic, religious, sectarian and racial discrimination. It arguably implies the need for states to admit past mistakes rather than sweeping them under the proverbial rug, since – if they remain unresolved – these sensitive political issues will worsen relations in the South Asian region.

While novels such as *Kartography* act as a warning for the future, literary texts also open the path towards the future by giving voice to dreams of transformation.

© 2024 V&R unipress | Brill Deutschland GmbH
ISBN Print: 9783847117445 – ISBN E-Book: 9783847017448

Writing and Hope

At a rally in support of Salman Rushdie, Ben Okri made a statement that could almost have come from Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* so steeped is it in the anticipatory power of literature:

> Writers are amongst other things the dream mechanism of the human race. Fiction affects us the way dreams affect us. They share the same insubstantiality. They both have the capacity to alter reality. Dreams may be purer because they are not composed of words, but when fiction has entered into us, it no longer exists as words either. We can control our fictions to some extent, but we cannot control the effects that they have on the world and we can't wholly control our dreams (Okri 1990, p. 77).

For Bloch dreams are "a stepping stone to art…" (1986, p. 94) and the dream launches art beyond political commitment. As Caryl Phillips puts it, whatever the commitment or the politics of the writer his or her first commitment is to "write well".[1] Writing well means more than writing fluently, elegantly, or convincingly: it means writing in a way that realizes the full potential of the imagination. This is what launches the anticipatory consciousness of art and literature beyond the ideological environment of its production. "Literature as utopia is generally encroachment of the power of the imagination on new realities of experience" (Ueding 1978, p. 7). This is not, of course, to dismiss the revolutionary function of anti-colonial literature but to see this function as just the beginning of the political trajectory of postcolonial creative work. Seeing this is to more deeply understand 'revolution' itself.

For Bloch art and literature have a significant utopian function because their *raison d'être* is the imaging of a different world – what he calls their *Vorschein* or "anticipatory illumination". The anticipatory illumination is the revelation of the "possibilities for rearranging social and political relations to produce *Heimat,* Bloch's word for the *home* that we have all sensed but have never experienced or known.

"It is *Heimat* as utopia… that determines the truth content of a work of art" (Zipes 1988, p. xxxiii). *Heimat* becomes the utopian form in postcolonial writing that replaces the promise of nation.

As the home we have sensed but never experienced *Heimat* remains a constant beacon for the spirit of liberation even after the goals of colonial independence appear to have been achieved.

> What is envisioned as home (*Heimat*) in childhood is in actuality the goal of the upright gait toward which human beings strive as they seek to overcome exploitation, humiliation, oppression and disillusionment. The individual cannot attain such a goal, which

1 Talk at EACLALS Conference, Venice, March 29th 2008.

© 2024 V&R unipress | Brill Deutschland GmbH
ISBN Print: 9783847117445 – ISBN E-Book: 9783847017448

> is only possible as a collective enterprise. Yet the measure of the individual's ethical backbone can be determined by his or her struggle to stand and walk upright and contribute to the collective goal (Zipes 1988, p. xxvii).

The significance of the phrase "the upright gait" towards which human beings strive is that it identifies *Heimat* as the stimulus of a process rather than an identifiable goal. Indeed the individual may not be able to attain such a goal, but the collective enterprise, the sharing of the goal by writers and readers, may be achieved in art and literature.

One of the most common, and popular, examples of the performativity of cultural memory is the limbo dance, a performance of slave history, which re-enacts the crossing of the Middle Passage in a continual reminder of memory, survival and cultural resurrection. As Kamau Brathwaite puts it,

> Limbo
> Limbo like me
> Long dark deck and the water surrounding me
> Long dark deck and the silence is over me (Brathwaite 1969, p. 35).

The dancer goes under the limbo stick in an almost impossible bodily position, emulating the subjection of the slave body in the journey across the Atlantic but rising triumphant on the other side. The performance of memory is a constant reminder of a future horizon, a 'return' that performs each time the 'rising' of the slave body into a future marked not only by survival but also by renewal, hybridity and hope. The dance is a metaphor of slave history that celebrates the present with the continuous re-enactment of future hope.

So past present and future are conjoined in the creative work in a radical transformation of the reality of slave exile. The descendants of the slave labour of sugar plantations have developed a culture that draws its ontological energy from the very fact of displacement, of homelessness, heterogeneity and syncreticity. This is a form of revolution as transformation, but its relation to time is exactly the same as that on which revolution depends, because the revolt is also a revolving, an evolution in which past present and future are conjoined and mutually enforcing. In the case of the African novel for instance, what Emmanuel Eze sees as the 'fractured time' of colonial experience is in fact a layering of past present and future. Kummel sees this relation between past present and future as a feature of all human life so that "the openness of future and past is, in other words, the vital condition for the conduct of man's life and all his actions" (50). We make the past our own by bringing it into a free and positive relation with the present. "The natural discrepancy of future and past constitutes a productive tension, which forms the real medium for new action and new mediation" (50). In other words, the tension of revolution is rendered productive by its location in a spiraling compression of time.

© 2024 V&R unipress | Brill Deutschland GmbH
ISBN Print: 9783847117445 – ISBN E-Book: 9783847017448

The Limbo dance, while a performance of the journey across the Middle passage and a triumphant emergence into a transformed future, demonstrates the distinction between individual and collective memory. Individuals performing the dance might have no thought about its origins or meaning, but when it is recapitulated in narrative and poetry the broader cultural significance becomes clearer.

Literature is particularly strategic in the production of cultural memory. “Memory and processes of remembering have always been important and dominant topics in literature” (Neumann 2008, p. 333). Literature contributes to the larger discussion of the ways in which societies recollect their past. Even more than this,

> literature is culture’s memory, not as a simple recording device but as a body of commemorative actions that include the knowledge stored by a culture, and virtually all texts a culture has produced and by which a culture is constituted. Writing is both an act of memory and a new interpretation, by which every new text is etched into memory space (Lechman 2008, p. 301).

Of course, literature’s role is not limited to record keeping. It interprets existing memories and literary texts also act as ‘Relay stations… stabilisers… Catalysts… Objects of recollection… [and] Calibrators’ (Rigney 2008, pp. 350–351) of collective memory. In fact, literature ‘forms an important part of…cultural repertoire’ (Burke 2017, p. 20).

The contingency of the past disrupts the apparent polarity between past and future and for Ernst Bloch this disruption is absolutely necessary to understand the nature of the relationship between being and possibility. He asserts that for Plato ‘Beingness’ is ‘Beenness’ (1984, p. 8) and he admonishes Hegel because “What Has Been overwhelms what is approaching… the categories Future, Front, Novum” (p. 8). The problem with the concept of Being in Hegel was that it overwhelmed *becoming* – obstructing the category of the future. It is only when the static concept of being is dispensed with that the real dimension of hope opens (p. 18). The core of Bloch’s ontology is that ‘Beingness’ is ‘Not-Yet-Becomeness’:

> Thus the Not-Yet-Conscious in man belongs completely to the Not-Yet-Become, Not-Yet-Brought-Out, Manifested-Out in the world… From the anticipatory, therefore, knowledge is to be gained on the basis of an ontology of the Not-Yet (p. 13).

While utopias exist in the future, utopianism, anticipatory consciousness, is heavily invested in the present. In Bloch’s re-interpretation of Marx his ontology of becoming has a political, liberatory dimension. The energy of the masses in the German (1525), French and Russian revolutions “were attracted and illuminated by a real future place: by the realm of freedom” (p. 143). Bloch’s cyclic theory is of

© 2024 V&R unipress | Brill Deutschland GmbH
ISBN Print: 9783847117445 – ISBN E-Book: 9783847017448

the future in the past and this is a characteristic he allocates to Marxist philosophy itself (p. 9).

A very clear example of this can be found in the strategic use of a postcard called "Visit Palestine." designed in 1936 by Franz Kraus.

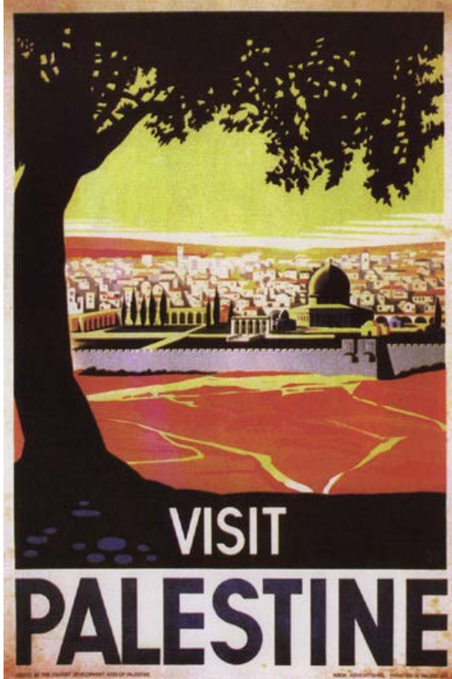


Fig. 1

This operates as an iconic point of connection between past present and future. The postcard embeds memory by identifying Palestine as a destination – an actual identifiable place in the world before the Nakba – and out of the reality of the country as a destination emerges the utopian concept of destiny. The postcard operates as a hinge between past present and future by becoming a palimpsest. The past is present in Amer Shomali's *Visit* in which the wall testifies to the attempt by the state of Israel to not just incarcerate the Palestinians but to wall off the past (see Fig. 2).

For Palestinians the original *Visit Palestine* published by the Tourist Development Association of Palestine in 1936 has come to be seen as an iconic reminder of their historical presence in the Holy Land. This image of the past drives the Palestinian view of a separate and liberated state in the future.

© 2024 V&R unipress | Brill Deutschland GmbH
ISBN Print: 9783847117445 – ISBN E-Book: 9783847017448