

## **"Postcolonial Studies across the Disciplines"**

### **A Report on the 22nd Annual Conference of the Association for the Study of New Literatures in English (ASNEL/GNEL) University of Hanover, 2-4 June 2011**

For the second time since ASNEL's foundation and its annual meetings, the Conference took place at the Leibniz University of Hanover. Speakers from different countries and academic fields were asked to answer questions on "which factors influence the choices of material and methodology, how to react to globalization and its impact on the regions they work on and how do the new media and especially the rise of the World Wide Web shape teaching and research agendas" (Call for Papers). On my part, I was very much looking forward to this event for two reasons in particular: First, I have known the university and the organisers since the Summer School "Connecting Cultures" in 2009 and I have kept this week full of inspiring lectures and seminars in very good memory. Secondly, this was going to be my first time to present my dissertation in public in the "Under Construction" section.

In her opening address Jana Gohrisch, convener of this year's conference, welcomed the numerous guests and invited them to "look at the world from another perspective". With respect to the huge diversity of disciplines within Postcolonial Studies, Jana Gohrisch emphasised the conference's self-reflexive aspect and encouraged the participants to critically reflect their own disciplinary and individual methodologies for a successful interdisciplinary cooperation. Adding to this, Mark Stein, in welcoming the participants in the name of ASNEL, stressed the changes the status of the postcolonial was undergoing, it being located in various arenas and reshaping disciplines. He made us aware about the postcolonial's transdisciplinary impetus not only to the humanities but also to sociology, ecology, anthropology and economics. Interestingly, he pointed out that the "nature of the text" had changed and that the "national paradigm" had become increasingly complicated since cultural products were travelling through time and space.

Following the inaugural speeches and the award ceremony, the "Under Construction" panels took place. I attended this section in the audience last year in Bayreuth and found it to be a nice context in which to present one's own work. From my experience there I expected a rather small group of PhD students who were interested in exchanging their knowledge and first experiences in writing a dissertation. This year it was slightly different. The conference was scheduled in such a way that there was no other panel running simultaneously, which I think was a great idea. That way the organisers made sure that the majority of the guests – meaning not only the fellow doctoral students but also professors and other "advanced" academics – participated in this section. Of course, this large audience

added to my nervousness, but I take it as a clear sign of how much ASNEL cares about promoting and supporting young researchers. I have to say that by placing "Under Construction" in that time slot the section lost its marginal character and gained in importance and quality. I really benefitted from this improvement and the positive feedback helped to move on. For the next years' conferences I hope that this format will be retained.

The title of this year's conference reflected especially well in the selection of the three keynote lectures. The American Studies scholar Sabine Broeck (Bremen) delivered the first keynote on "Gender and the Modern Abjection of Blackness: Wollstonecraft's Feminism and what Slavery Had to Do with it". She pointed out the necessity of "decolonizing the humanities" and of including the history of slavery in the analysis of modernity as well as in gender theory. Being interested in gender and women's studies and in the (post-)colonial history of the Caribbean/Black Atlantic myself, this lecture was my personal highlight. Tim Watson from Miami, who talked about "Postcolonial Studies and Atlantic Studies: Interdisciplinary Reflections on Slavery and Empire", combined Literary and Cultural Studies with historiographic approaches. Jessica Hemmings from Edinburgh, the third keynote speaker and a specialist in Textile and Literary Studies, gave her paper on "Postcolonial Textiles: Negotiating Dialogue". As Frank Schulze-Engler rightly pointed out this interdisciplinary approach challenged traditionally established borders of the disciplines and moved beyond the humanities.

One thing that should not be left unsaid is the reading by Bernardine Evaristo, in cooperation with the Literarische Salon. Evaristo read from her verse novel *Lara* and her novel *Blonde Roots*. This was also the world premiere of the first drafts of the novel's German translation read by the German voice-over artist of Whoopi Goldberg, whom you could easily imagine being in the room when you closed your eyes. The reading followed by a glass of wine on the balcony of the 14<sup>th</sup> floor of the Conti building was just the perfect ending of a long but very inspiring and thought-provoking day.

If I were to critique one thing it would be the conference dinner at Zwischenzeit. I really enjoyed the get-together but it was simply overpriced. If I remember correctly there was a discussion about the adequate amount for the dinner (which it was not) so that also those with only a small budget were able to attend. Hopefully next year, the organisers will take this into consideration. Besides that it was a successful conference with a very convenient timeframe. The number and topics of panels were perfectly chosen with panel headings ranging from "Postcolonial Re-readings of British and American Literature", "Production of Knowledge in the Caribbean", "Writing and History in Postcolonial Africa" to "Dynamics of Participation in Popular Culture", just to name a few.

Thanks to Jana Gohrisch, Ellen Grünkemeier, Henning Marquardt, Ute Reuter and a great team of students for a perfectly organised, well scheduled and memorable conference.

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