

Postcolonial Translocations
20th annual GNEL/ASNEL conference
University of Münster, 21. – 24. May 2009

The 2009 GNEL/ASNEL conference in Münster was in many ways a special one, celebrating the 20th birthday of the Association for the Study of the New English Literatures. The foundation of the Association in 1989 did not, of course, mark the beginning of the study of Anglophone literatures and cultures at German-speaking universities, which took hold already in the 1970s owing to the dedication of select scholars in the field who pursued their interests in research and teaching often against sustained institutional resistance. Yet the establishment of ASNEL does mark the beginning of a thorough institutional consolidation, and of an impressive success story which has made the academic preoccupation with English literatures and cultures across the globe a firm part of most English departments and degree programmes. The huge amount of interest in the field today, especially among younger academics, was evident not least at the 2009 Münster conference itself. Mark Stein and his organising team received an astounding amount of around 250 proposals for papers from all over the globe, of which only a rough half could be considered. This still made the four-day Münster conference one of the largest in ASNEL's history with around 300 delegates from 35 countries, and one that affirmed ASNEL's exceptional appeal as an organisation which is at once the perhaps most international and the most democratic of its kind (involving students, secondary school teachers, post-docs as much as professors, and ideally selecting on the basis quality rather than status).

Thematically, the conference looked into the present and future as much as it looked into the past, by focussing on how 'locations' become ever more irrevocably plural in the age of globalisation. *Postcolonial Translocations* provided a platform for academic work which investigates how "our understanding of what constitutes a specific location has dramatically changed over the last few decades and requires reading practices which reflect the communicative, political and aesthetic concerns of translocal representation" (Call for Papers). This theme accommodated an extremely wide range of topics, with panel headings ranging from "travel narratives," "postcolonial film cultures," "transmigration," "translocating cosmopolitanism," "transcultural cityscapes," "African re-visions," "forced and voluntary relocations," "spaces and communities on the internet" to "gender and the postcolonial," to name but a few. In my personal experience, in fact, the selection was so wide that I did not feel that a cohesive dynamics could evolve which fundamentally added to a thorough and

deepened understanding of the actual conference theme (unlike at the previous ASNEL conference, for instance, which left me more satisfied with the insights I gained on *Commodifying (Post-)Colonialism*). Perhaps, the sheer size of the conference was in the way of such a dynamics, which may be an impossible thing to ask for given that there were at times seven parallel sessions. I should also say that in that sense, my own conference experience was an extremely selective one, and may not at all be representative of the entire event. However, it was also the keynotes which stood in the way: All keynoters were carefully selected experts in the field – but unfortunately, both Edward Soja and Ien Ang clearly underestimated their audience (less innocently so in the first case than in the second, it seemed), and only Diana Brydon, who spoke on the last day, really provided some challenging input.

This aside, I enjoyed this ASNEL conference perhaps more than any other before. For the first time in a while, there was sustained emphasis on the intersection between creative and academic writing again, thanks also to the involvement of the journal *Wasafiri* which organised a panel discussion and reception featuring readings by Tomáš Zmeškal, Samir El-youssef and, not least, Bernadine Evaristo, whose appetizer from her latest novel *Blonde Roots* was a highlight. The second night offered an engaging theatre performance titled *s/w remix* (and another round of free drinks before the show!), while outside the scheduled programme, the conference coincided with the Münster Stadtfest which offered everything from trash metal to blasmusik and raggae on various stages across town for after-hour entertainment. It was fantastic and inspiring to be around the ASNEL crowd again. It was so relaxed and enjoyable, in fact, that it was easy to forget that the entire conference was a massive and elaborately staged event which must have meant an immense amount of work and preparation on the part of the organisers. Mark Stein and his team did this admirably – this was definitely one of the most perfectly organised, and most smoothly and unobtrusively run conferences I have ever attended. Thanks to Mark and his team for a memorable four days in Münster.

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