

Geoffrey V. Davis & Hena Maes-Jelinek, "Introduction", in *Crisis and Creativity in the New Literatures in English*, vol. 1, ed. Geoffrey V. Davis & Hena Maes-Jelinek (Amsterdam & Atlanta: Rodopi, 1990), pp. ix-xii.

Introduction

The essays collected in this volume were read at the XIth Annual Conference on Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies in German-Speaking Countries. Exceptionally, the conference took place in two neighbouring countries, being organized jointly by the Institut für Anglistik of the University of Aachen and the Centre d'Enseignement et de Recherche en Etudes du Commonwealth of the University of Liège. It took place from 16 to 19 June 1988. Apart from 18 June when the conference (over 300 participants) moved to the Château de Colonster on the edge of the new campus outside Liège, the venue was Aachen University. Our collaboration was part of a wider agreement between our two institutions which have set up exchanges in various disciplines. It also reflects the close relations between Aachen and the German-speaking area in Belgium contiguous with the French-speaking province of Liège. Over a thousand years ago our two cities were part of Charlemagne's empire (each city still claims to have been the Emperor's birthplace!). They are now at the crossroads of Europe, hopefully fit symbols of the present trend towards cross-culturalism.

The theme of the conference was "Crisis and Conflict in the New Literatures in English." We have reformulated it for the title of this book in order to express the formidable stimulus to the creative imagination and the individual consciousness provided by the analysis, understanding and sensitive reaction to crisis (historical, political, social or personal). The sub-themes of the conference were "Literature and Liberation"; "Multiculturalism and Ethnicity"; "Reconstructions of History"; "Gender as Politics" and "The Media - Modes of Control and Presentation." Except for the major addresses by some of the creative writers, we have tried as far as possible to retain the original headings under which the papers were

grouped. However, those papers which focused primarily on aspects of language have been grouped under a new heading: "Literature and Language." Because of the large number of papers it was impossible to collect them all in one volume. The papers on South African literature, including Lewis Nkosi's keynote address, have been published separately.¹ The contributions by Canadian writers and the papers on Canadian literature, anglophone and francophone, make up a separate volume also published by Rodopi. These necessary divisions are one more proof, if need be, that the great wealth of creativity and voluminous output in each area of the New Literatures in English now make "Commonwealth Literature" as an entity of critical enquiry unmanageable. The range of papers also shows that the field offers many opportunities for comparative research, as already suggested by Helen Tiffin at the Frankfurt conference in 1981.²

An unusually large number of writers from all over the Commonwealth and from South Africa were present at the conference. They stimulated the participants and contributed to the lively exchanges which animated the proceedings throughout. We regretted the absence of the Malawian writer Jack Mapanje, who had been invited to deliver a keynote address but who was and *still* is in prison. We are grateful to James Gibbs for his programme *Still in Bounds*, which included readings of Mapanje's poems set in the political context of Malawi. The conference participants also signed a letter of protest to the Malawian government.

We hope that this volume will convey to readers some of the intellectual excitement of the conference.

Without the cooperation of numerous individuals and the financial support of many organisations it would be impossible to mount a

conference on this scale. The organizers would therefore like to take this opportunity of expressing their warmest thanks to all those who contributed both to the success of the conference and to the production of the volumes of proceedings.

We owe a particular debt of gratitude to our colleague Rüdiger Schreyer, without whose indispensable computer expertise and considerable investment of time and energy we could neither have run the conference itself nor produced the proceedings. The same goes for Maggi Keulen, Barbara Stute and Andrew Holdsworth who shouldered the massive task of processing and formatting some sixty contributions. The original concept of the conference was worked out by the steering committee consisting of Rudolf Bader (Berne), Gordon Collier (Gießen), and Peter Stummer (Munich); its smooth running was ensured not least by our students in Aachen (Eva Erdpohl, Hans-Georg Golz, Andrew Holdsworth, Brigitte Krause, Maggi Keulen, Kai Mohr, Gabriele Senge, Barbara Stute and Christoph Weißkirchen) and in Liège. Persuasive arguments in favour of funding were advanced by Kaspar Spinner, head of the Department of English, and Ludwig Jäger, professor of German, both in Aachen. We owe a debt of personal thanks to Beverly Mercer of the Australian Embassy, Tony Advokaat, Henry Korn and Walter Larink of the Canadian Embassy, and Rosemary Patterson and Pat Moss of the New Zealand Embassy in Bonn, who saw to it that we were provided with just about everything and everybody we could have wished for, whether it was writers from Québec, movies from Wellington or wine from the Barossa Valley. We are also much indebted to Harold Fish of the British Council in Cologne and James Gibbs of the University of Liège for their resourcefulness in helping us to bring so many writers to the conference. Wolfgang Maier, former Aachen student and now of the *Deutsche Welle*, is to be thanked for filming a memorable video, since shown in many countries of Africa. On the occasion of a conference which opened on the 12th anniversary of the Soweto uprising of 1976, we were most gratified

¹Geoffrey V. Davis, ed., *Crisis and Conflict: Essays on Southern African Literature*, Essen, Verlag Die Blaue Eule, 1989.

²Helen Tiffin, "Commonwealth Literature: Comparison and Judgement," in D. Riemenschneider, ed., *The History and Historiography of Commonwealth Literature*, Tübingen, Gunter Narr Verlag, 1983, pp. 19-35.

that the Soyikwa Theatre Group of Soweto travelled to Aachen to perform Matsemela Manaka's play *Siza*.

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