

# COMMONWEALTH

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# Resurgence

Marta DVORAK, Foreword.....	3
Christine LORRE, Introduction .....	4

## SIGNS OF RESURGENCE

Catherine LANONE and Claire OMHOVÈRE, Mourning / Mocking Browning: The Resurgence of a Romantic Aesthetics in Jane Urquhart's <i>The Whirlpool</i> (1986) .....	8
Marta DVORAK, Resurgences of the Extra-Textual and Metatextual in Jane Urquhart's <i>The Stone Carvers</i> .....	22
Corinne BIGOT, "And now another story resurfaced": Re-Emerging Voices, Stories and Secrets in Alice Munro's "Family Furnishings" .....	28

## HISTORY, RESURGENCE, METAMORPHOSIS

Kerry-Jane WALLART, Einstein, Evelyn Waugh and the Wapisiana Indians: Ventriloquism and Eclipses in Pauline Melville's <i>The Ventriloquist's Tale</i> .....	36
Richard SAMIN, Nongqawuse Resurrected: Legend and History in Zakes Mda's <i>The Heart of Redness</i> .....	48
Fiona McCANN, "The past a repast": Past and Present in <i>Butterfly Burning</i> and <i>The Stone Virgins</i> by Yvonne Vera.....	59

## RESURGENCE IN ARTISTIC CREATION

Sandra SAAYMAN, The Resurgence of Prison Imagery in Breyten Breytenbach's <i>A Veil of Footsteps</i> .....	69
Mélanie JOSEPH-VILAIN, <i>The Hangman's Game</i> : Karen King-Aribisala's "Diary of Creation" .....	80
Patricia DONATIEN-YSSA, Resurgence and Creative Resistance in Shani Mootoo's <i>Cereus Blooms at Night</i> .....	93
Kathleen GYSSELS, Scarlet Ibises and the Poetics of Relation: Perse, Walcott and Glissant .....	103

## REVIEWS

Andrew MONNICKENDAM, <i>Global Fragments: (Dis)Orientation in the New World Order</i> . Ed. by Anke Bartels and Dirk Wiemann. ....	117
Daria TUNCA, <i>Translating and Publishing African Language(s) and Literature(s): Examples from Nigeria, Ghana and Germany</i> . By Tomi Adeaga. ....	119
Theo D'HAEN, <i>Postcolonial Postmortems: Crime Fiction from a Transcultural Perspective</i> . Ed. by Christine Matzke and Susanne Mühleisen. ....	121
Timothy WEISS, <i>Critics and Writers Speak: Revisioning Post-Colonial Studies</i> . Ed. by Igor Maver .....	123
Contributors .....	125

# Foreword

In the spring of 2008, the international community lost two great Caribbean writers and intellectuals, Aimé Césaire and E.A. Markham, who both marked their century and have left us with a deep sense of bereavement. In turn, in July 2008, one of the leading European academics who pioneered in engaging with and promoting postcolonial literatures passed away. Hena Maes-Jelinek, a scholar specialized in Caribbean writing, whose book on Wilson Harris we reviewed in our previous issue, will always be remembered with gratitude as one of the founding members of the international Association for Commonwealth Languages and Literatures and its European branch, as well as co-founder and co-editor of the *Cross/Cultures: Readings in the Post/Colonial Literatures in English* series.

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Marta DVORAK

Camfranglais represents a conscious effort by some Cameroonians to create a new and secret code would suggest that linguistic diversity is on the increase.

The volume closes with four essays on teaching, which, like the two previous essays, present a different panorama and a different discourse. Volkmann emphasises that his strategies “introduce students to theories of postcolonialism” (317), though perhaps of equal importance, bearing in mind that we are dealing with secondary students, is Duppé and Gantner’s emphasis on “motivational problems” (328). The essays by Hermes and Feurle are somewhat descriptive, though the latter’s account of intercultural learning is lucid.

On the whole, this thought-provoking volume will presumably attract interested readers to one or another section rather than invite them to read it through from beginning to end. Are there any general conclusions to be drawn? If that is a justifiable question, I would emphasise two. First, there is a careful if not obsessive treatment of, or perhaps it is simply respect for, terminological questions. Second, if “glocal” is the key concern, it is clearly unfair, given the format of each essay, to expect that writers can really conflate local and global; so, in the end, those essays which best define the local, Kistner’s and Pandarang’s, for example, are the most rewarding.

*Translating and Publishing African Language(s) and Literature(s): Examples from Nigeria, Ghana and Germany.* By **Tomi Adeaga**, Frankfurt / London: IKO – Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 2006. 393 pp. Price: 25.90 €. ISBN 3-88939-800-6

Reviewed by **Daria Tunca**

Language has been one of the most hotly debated issues in the field of African literature since the 1960s. The subject of translation has also intermittently occupied centre stage, with discussions exploring the possibilities of translating literary works from African languages into European ones, and vice versa. The questions surrounding the conversion of African texts written in English or French into other European languages have, however, received much less attention. In this regard, Tomi Adeaga’s *Translating and Publishing African Language(s) and Literature(s)*, which focuses on the translation, publishing, and reception of Anglophone (and, to a lesser extent, Francophone) African literature in Germany, constitutes a highly original contribution to the domain of African studies.

Adeaga’s book opens with an introduction describing the context in which her research was conducted and clearly outlining the structure and aims of her work. The volume is then divided into three main sections, each of which further contains one to three chapters. The first part delineates the methodological approaches that have informed the study: on the one hand, the author provides an account of reception theory and considers its possible applications to twentieth-century African literature influenced by orality; on the other, she examines theoretical

issues more particularly related to translation studies in order to lay the foundation for her subsequent assessment of the German versions of two Ghanaian and two Nigerian novels, namely Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Kojo Laing's *Search Sweet Country*, Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* and Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. The second part of the book concentrates on the publishing of African literature in Germany, suggesting reasons for the industry's relative lack of vitality and proposing possible solutions. The third part deals with the reception of this literature, and provides a close examination of the influence and legacy of the 1980 Frankfurt Book Fair, whose main theme was African writing. Adeaga convincingly advances a triple explanation for the relatively modest sales and lukewarm reception of African novels in Germany: first, the poor translations of such literary works; second, the existence of racist clichés that still shape the expectations of the German readership; and third, inadequate publishing and marketing strategies.

Adeaga's study is based on a wealth of research. The non-academic sources she cites, including interviews with translators and publishers, are particularly enlightening, for they invariably remind one that much remains to be done in the dissemination and understanding of African literature outside the narrow circle of specialists. The author also raises a number of challenging issues concerning the translation of African literary texts into German. For example, one of her most interesting points relates to the difficulties inherent in the rendering of West African Pidgin, a linguistic code mixing English and West African languages, but which has no German equivalent. Such a case clearly emphasizes that the translator's task is not simply one of "imitation", but truly one of "re-creation" (53).

Paradoxically, however, the strong point of Adeaga's study, i.e. the impressive amount of material it tackles, also tends to become its weakness. Indeed, one sometimes feels that complex subjects would have deserved more extensive treatment, or that promising textual investigations do not fulfil their true potential. For instance, Adeaga announces in the last chapter that a comparative examination of over two hundred articles and reviews written in German on African works will be undertaken, but the actual analysis turns out to be sketchier than one might have expected. One also feels that some of Adeaga's evaluations might have benefited from greater terminological precision. In one case, the syntactic rhythm of a translated passage is commented upon favourably because "[t]he words are alive and they spring out of the quotation" (76). Such occasional impressionistic comments are, unfortunately, supplemented by a number of typographical errors, misspelled names, erroneous dates, and a puzzling use of commas that tend to mar the author's otherwise enjoyable writing style.

Despite these reservations, Adeaga's work is a most valuable investigation into a fascinating yet under-researched topic. The volume carefully examines the interrelatedness between the translation, publishing and reception of African literature in Germany, always with a view of seeking to remove existing stumbling

blocks. The book may not offer all the answers it sets out to provide, but this is probably because, as Adeaga puts it herself, “[t]he complexity of translation knows no end” (323).

*Postcolonial Postmortems: Crime Fiction from a Transcultural Perspective*. Edited by **Christine Matzke** and **Susanne Mühleisen**. Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft 102. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2006. 333 pp. ISBN-10: 90-420-2014-8I; SBN-13: 978-90-420-2014-6

**Reviewed by Theo D’Haen**

The first thing to be said about this book is that its subtitle is a little misleading in its unspecified expansiveness; in fact, only English-language fiction features in this volume. Second, the generic expectations raised by the use of “crime fiction” are only partially satisfied, as, next to discussions of a number of works that indeed fit the popular formula marker usually associated with the genre, the volume also includes essays on such decidedly non-formula works by Michael Ondaatje, Shyam Selvadurai, Romesh Gunsekera, and Kazuo Ishiguro. To be fair, the editors of the volume immediately indicate as much in their introduction, when they stipulate that “ultimately, the ‘postmortem’ can also imply an examination of postcolonial literature which increasingly uses elements of crime fiction for ‘social’ rather than ‘criminal’ detection” (8). To explore the state of the postcolonial nation via the figure of the detective indeed seems to be the greatest common denominator for the material here presented.

As “alibi” for their use of the term “postmortem,” Matzke and Mühleisen invoke that “a dissection of a body to determine the cause of death, the ‘postmortem’ of the postcolonial not only alludes to the investigation of the victim’s remains, but also to the body of the individual text and its contexts, or the ‘corpus’ of crime fiction labeled as ‘postcolonial’ ... from a historical point of view” (8). The ensuing essays take up one or other of the possibilities just sketched. Stephen Knight, in “Crimes Domestic and Crimes Colonial: The Role of Crime Fiction in Developing Postcolonial Consciousness,” performs what his title promises upon both Australian and, to a lesser extent, Welsh crime fiction. Wendy Knepper, in “Confession, Autopsy and the Postcolonial Postmortems of Michael Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost*,” dissects how the novel in question, set in Sri Lanka, “perform[s] postmortems in the forensic and figurative senses of the word” (57). In “Sherlock Holmes – He Dead,” Tobias Döring gives an illuminating reading of Kazuo Ishiguro’s *When We Were Orphans* as appropriating English Golden Age detective conventions to show up the very cultural constructedness of the society this set of conventions is usually taken to uphold. Significantly, this revelation comes about through the novel’s postcolonial aspects. Suchitra Mathur unleashes a Bhabhaesque mimicry analysis upon Satyajit Ray’s Feluda stories and concludes that “the