Reappraisals: Foreword

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Foreword

Issue 34.2 was going through typesetting when the academic community was informed of the demise of Jean Sévry. Jean was a pioneer scholar in the field of African studies and published extensively in *Commonwealth Essays & Studies* before and after his retirement from the university of Montpellier. He contributed to the recognition of the scope, variety and import of African literature, as Jean-Pierre Durix, editor of CES between 1983 and 2005 and Honorary President of the Société d'Etude des Pays du Commonwealth, explains in the homage concluding the present volume. I am grateful to Jean-Pierre Durix for sharing with us his fond memories of Jean, reminding us all of Jean's indefatigable character, his enthusiasm and uncompromising devotion to the development of African studies.

The spring issues of *Commonwealth Essays & Studies* are traditionally open numbers, and although 34.2 was not initially planned as a tribute to Jean's legacy, the coincidences of submissions and selections led to a volume which, I hope, he would have enjoyed. Out of the twelve contributions that compose it, six of the essays and one of the reviews engage with poetry and fiction from the African continent, from South Africa and Botswana to Nigeria. Diverse as the objects of their investigations may be, the contributors have opted for approaches that vindicate the choice of the title "Reappraisals" for the whole volume.

The first two essays are concerned with two facets of Nigerian poetry. While Sule Emmanuel Egya analyzes the fresh orientations taken by Nigerian female poets in recent years, Ogada Okuyade probes the traumatic silences found in Civil War poems in order to reappraise the project of a new Nigeria against the backdrop of self-rule. Khadidiatou Diallo scrutinizes the functioning of interior monologue in Bessie Head's *Maru*, problematizing Hayden White's claim that "Narrativity [...] is intimately related to, if not a function of, the impulse to moralize reality, that is, to identify it with the social system that is the source of any morality that we can imagine" (14). Eric Njeng opts for a comparative perspective to discuss in parallel the figure of the artist in Washington Irving's "Rip van Winkle" and in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Almost a full decade into the existence of The Rainbow Nation, Madeleine Laurencin and Mélanie Joseph-Vilain chart some of the directions South Africa and its literature are taking today in two complementary essays reflecting upon the interrogations and genres that have emerged with the end of apartheid.

The three essays concluding this volume move to scenes beyond the African continent but reappraisal remains their strong focus. Cindy Gabrielle studies the influence of Buddhism and Zen on Janet Frame's writing, with detailed references to "Jan Godfrey," a short story from Frame's first collection *The Lagoon and Other Stories* in which the writer experiments with the dilution of narrative identity. Likewise, Mélanie Heydari goes back to *Grimus*, Salman Rushdie first and perhaps most neglected novel, which she re-envisions from an intertextual perspective in the light of its transmogrification of *The Conference of the Birds*, a twelfth-century allegory by the Persian Sufi poet Attar. Finally,

Erik Martiny illuminates an original aspect of Derek Walcott's poetry in an essay which retraces the evolution of animal imagery from his early collections to the most recent ones, and addresses the mutations in Walcott's bestiary by relating them to the theories of the French philosopher Michel Pêcheux.

Claire OMHOVÈRE, general editor

Works Cited

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