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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ces/5848>
DOI: 10.4000/ces.5848
ISSN: 2534-6695

Publisher

SEPC (Société d'études des pays du Commonwealth)

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 September 2013
Number of pages: 109-110
ISSN: 2270-0633

Electronic reference

Kerry-Jane Wallart, "Françoise Král, *Critical Identities in Contemporary Anglophone Diasporic Literature*", *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* [Online], 36.1 | 2013, Online since 16 April 2021, connection on 22 July 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ces/5848> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ces.5848>

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Françoise Král. *Critical Identities in Contemporary Anglophone Diasporic Literature*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 189 pp. ISBN-13 (hb): 9780230220416. £58

- 1 While she discusses texts that mostly belong to what is generally called “second generation immigration” literature and, as such, have been under academic scrutiny for quite a few years, Françoise Král adopts a new and very personal perspective towards “diasporic” literature. In the course of her introduction and first chapter the author positions herself within the context of both a theoretical and a literary shift. She recalls that in the wake of Hall, Bhabha, and Gilroy among others, diasporic studies now make wider use of such concepts as liminality, interstitiality, double consciousness, in-betweenness, transnationalism and the outlining of a “third space” in order to escape the narrow opposition between the point of departure and the place of arrival. Král carries the widening of the scope further in claiming that the diasporic lens has become “a metaperspective which brings together radically opposed contexts and systems of values” (37) in a whole that transcends binarism. Yet the focus of the study remains aesthetic and its foremost quality lies in a systematic deployment of close literary readings to clinch its argument.
- 2 In her second chapter entitled “Identity, Interstitiality and Diaspora,” Král deals solely with texts penned by first-generation immigrants and draws a useful comparison between the diasporic and the (de)colonised selves. The loss of a home can thus be read in the light of names and languages as well as that of the impossibility for any post-colonial author to erase the colonial past. This argument is mainly developed through

taking Mudrooroo and wa Thiong'o as examples. While the following chapter retains the concept of interstitiality it brings in those of authenticity and postmodernity – the paradox looming behind the association of these two terms being solved by Král as she demonstrates that if authenticity remains a horizon, it must be redefined as a quest rather than as an ontology. By scrutinizing texts by Andrea Levy, Hanif Kureishi, Gish Jen, and Moyez Vassanji, the author shows that diasporic novels help redefine Britishness at the same time as they deploy the paradigm of character formation or transformation. The concept of authenticity is maintained but freed of any essentialist necessities.

- 3 A fourth chapter is concerned with how diaspora literature re-members places, that is to say that it also brings fragments together, often in an imaginary way. It registers phenomena of the recreation of space in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, Hari Kunzru's *Transmission* and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, but also through the critical lens of Appadurai's theory and Zygmunt Bauman's linguistic research. After a fifth chapter on "Disjunction, Ethics and the Diasporic Subject" (an engaging examination of the possibility for ethos to be recast in a world without borders and strictly defined communities), comes an inspirational chapter dedicated to the question of language. This chapter closes the study and functions as both an acme and as a conclusion since it goes through most of the issues previously addressed. While discussing the customary debates, such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o's famous rejection of English, Král also formulates the idea that this very English language is itself diasporic, as it is spoken around the world, including in countries that are strictly speaking not Anglophone. An analysis of NourbeSe Philip's poetry is the occasion to develop the idea of a "father tongue," one which is symbolic, not affective, while English becomes, in *Brick Lane*, a "stepmother tongue."
- 4 *Critical Identities in Contemporary Anglophone Diasporic Literature* is a well-structured volume and its alternating theory and analyses of novels is refreshing and thought-provoking. The author often dares to speak her mind or simply to contrast a widely accepted notion or theory with an alternative perspective. The style is clear and never jargonistic, yet it expresses an always sophisticated reflection. If one were looking for flaws, the main omission that could be pinpointed is the fact that the "diasporic," or "cosmopolitan" authors, as they are also sometimes called, have been under the recent scrutiny of such critics and theorists as Neil Lazarus, Timothy Brennan and Simon Gikandi, none of whom appear anywhere in the entire volume. The latter see their prominence in the postcolonial field as a sure sign that the West favours texts which are easily accessed but which consequently erase any rootedness in a precise context – Salman Rushdie being the ultimate case in point. Král might have justified and specified her choice of corpus and positioned herself in relation to this tendency. Nonetheless this study is insightful, intelligent and very clear; it is also written primarily with literary texts as a focus, not theoretical ones. It opens interesting paths and surely represents a landmark in the field of diasporic studies.

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Kerry-Jane WALLART is a Senior Lecturer at Paris-Sorbonne University, where she teaches postcolonial literature. Her research focuses both on the Caribbean and drama and she has written articles on Derek Walcott, E. K. Brathwaite, Wilson Harris, Pauline Melville, Claude McKay, David Dabydeen, Fred D'Aguiar, Ben Okri, Seamus Heaney, among other writers.