Sten Pultz Moslund, *Migration Literature and Hybridity: The Different Speeds of Transcultural Change*

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Sten Pultz Moslund. *Migration Literature and Hybridity: The Different Speeds of Transcultural Change*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 272 p. ISBN (hb): 9780230251465. £ 50.00

- 1 *Migration Literature and Hybridity* is an intelligent, well-researched, and sophisticated response to the celebratory rhetoric that has characterized much postcolonial writing about issues of hybridity and transnational mobility. Moslund counters the triumphalist vision of migration and hybridity with a highly nuanced approach that draws significantly upon the work of Gilles Deleuze and Mikhail Bakhtin, theorists who have been relatively neglected in this field but whose contributions to the debates surrounding relations between migration and migration literature become apparent through Moslund's careful exposition. He states his project very clearly when he writes: "What is most urgently needed today, as I see it, is [...] not an exclusive "migrant" knowledge of the world,' countering an exclusive sedentary knowledge of the world. Rather, it is a dynamic 'knowledge' that dialogises or dialecticises migration and dwelling, movement and stillness, the nomadic and the sedentary, heterogeneity and homogeneity, heteroglossia and monoglossia, the minor and major, for example" (15). It is from the refusal to work within these binary oppositions that much of the value of Moslund's book arises. The book is divided into two sections: a lengthy critical account of theories of hybridity and their relations with the idea of becoming, and a longer section that applies the outcome of Moslund's theoretical analysis to literary texts. It is the first section that is of general interest and applicability to scholars working in the field of migration studies.

- 2 Moslund begins his critique of the celebration of transnational mobility by focusing on the work of Homi Bhabha. He is particularly critical of the perception of transcultural hybridity as offering a representational claim to an anti-hegemonic, decentered, postmodern subjectivity located in a liberatory, non-normative “between worlds” condition or in Bhabha’s “third space.” Allied to this is Moslund’s critique of Bhabha’s theory of “cultural translation” as the process that brings into being the distinct “newness” of migrant discourse. Moslund then moves on to propose two distinct kinds of hybridity which he terms “organic” and “intentional” and which are distinguished by the speed of cultural transformation each enables. Organic hybridity, for example, describes the slow process by which languages are modified by the introduction of foreign words and new coinages. Intentional hybridity works at a much faster pace through such conscious strategies as the formulation of hyphenated identity categories. By analyzing the dynamic relations between sameness and difference that characterize each of these modes of hybridity, Moslund is able to articulate a subtle theory of different processes of being and becoming within migration discourses and literary texts. Using Yuri Lotman’s model of culture as a “semiosphere” akin to Bakhtin’s linguistic concept of “heteroglossia,” Moslund is able to embrace a complex understanding of the individual’s multi-faceted location in respect to dynamic cultural processes and the multiple cultural discourses in which individuals participate: discourses governing racial, sexual, gender, age, class, and religious identities, for example. Within this model, processes of being and becoming are analyzed through the opposed categories of centripetal versus centrifugal or homogenizing versus heterogenizing forces that generate cultural change. Culture is described by Moslund in general terms as “a heterogeneous system in constant movement and becoming, yet held together by an internal mechanism for dealing with and processing signs [...], a *homogenizing* internal force of representation” (51, original emphasis). In the second section of his book, Moslund offers a careful and subtle analysis of Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine*, Jamal Mahjoub’s *The Carrier*, and V. S. Naipaul’s *The Enigma of Arrival*, which shows how the theoretical categories so thoroughly explored in his first section, especially the concept of intentional hybridity, inform a close reading of the linguistic texture of these migration novels. Moslund anticipates his textual analyses when, in the introduction, he explains that “the splitting of the migrant’s voice or vision, or the splitting of the hybrid discourse in a migration novel, does not lead to a singular becoming [...]; rather, it leads to several speeds of becoming – once again depending on the relative strengths of the forces of homogenisation and heterogenization in the discourse or text” (17).
- 3 *Migration Literature and Hybridity* makes a valuable contribution to theorizations of globalization, mass migration, cosmopolitanism, and the dynamics of cultural inclusion and exclusion and deserves to be widely read.

AUTHORS

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Deborah L. MADSEN is Professor of American Literature and Culture at the University of Geneva. She works primarily in the field of Postcolonial American Studies, with a focus on issues of modernity, national rhetoric, and cultural transnationalism. Publications include *American Exceptionalism* (1998), *Beyond the Borders: American Literature and Post-Colonial Theory* (ed., 2003), *Diasporic Histories: Archives of Chinese Transnationalism* (co-ed., 2009), *Native Authenticity: Transatlantic Approaches to Native American Literature* (ed., 2010), and *Louise Erdrich* (ed., 2011).