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# Postcolonial Studies Association Newsletter



Chris Warnes with the PSA Conference Team (Left to right) Chris Warnes, Gerri Kimber, Joanne Malone, Asia Zgadzaj, and Christine O'Dowd-Smyth

## Things Coming Together

This special issue commemorates not only the success of the PSA inaugural conference at Waterford, but underscores the professional visibility and important intellectual trajectories underpinning all our work in postcolonial studies. For those of you who were at Waterford, we hope this short collection of articles will further inspire you in your work and remind you of conversations that took place in May earlier this year. For those who were unable to be there, we hope that you will be equally inspired to join us in the future.

Lucienne Loh and Kaori Nagai (Editors)

## Introductory Address to the PSA Inaugural Conference (abridged)

by Chris Warnes, PSA Chair

The PSA was set up to provide a professional home for many of us working in a variety of disciplines, on a variety of topics, using a range of approaches, brought together by a shared sense that the term 'postcolonial' speaks to some aspect of our work or our experience. We have existed as an organisation for just over a year now, and it is testament to the hard work and behind-the-scenes dedication of a number of people that we are here at all. The work that goes into setting up and maintaining an organisation like the PSA is of the kind where people have full-time jobs, families, pressures to publish, teaching commitments, large administrative burdens, and yet these people have also dedicated themselves to all that is entailed in setting up a large, professional organisation.

We have largely spent the first year of our life as an organisation in the way that many human infants spend their first years: learning how to crawl. We have put in place the structures that will see us into the future: a constitution, website, newsletters, members lists, email lists, budget planning, banking arrangements, not to mention this conference. We have met three times before this conference: in Oxford, Cambridge and London. Our membership has gone from non-existent to nearly 200, and I can confidently say that we have now put in place a structure which will be viable for decades to come.

Why did we bother? Firstly, there was an obvious need for a professional organisation in the field. Many of us work in quite isolated ways; postgraduate students in particular need the support of conferences, publications, prizes, that are routinely offered in other fields. There are all kinds of events, readings, seminars and conferences going on in postcolonial studies, and the PSA serves as a hub of information and a spur to community. But beyond these practical benefits lies the question of *the field* of postcolonial studies itself. 'What is postcolonial studies, really?' is a question that has no simple answer, and nor should it. But it's the question that we should be asking ourselves as we enter into this, our first conference. Tentatively, as a way of opening debate about the different forms of intellectual agenda we might adopt, I'd like to propose five interrelated mandates:

- 1) **Postcolonialism as disciplinary intervention.** From a literary studies point of view, ever since postcolonial literary studies emerged out of 'commonwealth literature' it has been realised that expanding the canon raises all kinds of questions about that canon, about who gets to select it, and on what terms. These questions open out on to broader cultural and epistemological considerations about the ways our modes of thought are conditioned by hierarchies which privilege terms like 'white', 'western', 'male', 'rational' over their others. Similar processes have taken place in other disciplines. Postcolonial studies, as an interdisciplinary, multi-focused field, exists in this sense to correct disciplinary bias and blind spots.

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## PSA Inaugural Conference Special Issue

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2) **Postcolonialism as a mode of critique:** There is, I propose, no aspect of past or present human achievement or experience that is immune to the questions foregrounded by postcolonial studies. These are questions that have been learned from allied modes of critique, especially feminism and marxism. Postcolonialism asks questions about the power dimensions inherent in any drive towards knowledge, power, identity and achievement: Who benefits? Who gets to speak? Who gets left out?

3) **Postcolonialism as a political practice:** The rise of postcolonial studies in the western academy coincides with the thriving of all manner of colonialist and neo-colonialist practices. Postcolonial studies gives us some of the tools we need to work against these practices. The logic of invasion, regime change, the neo-apartheid of Israel-Palestine or the global apartheid generated by global capitalism – postcolonial studies is able not only to explain and denaturalise this logic, it is able to counter it too.

4) **Postcolonialism as recovery, correction and affirmation:** Colonialism is always invested in violence. Postcolonial studies may be concerned with recovering what has been lost or stolen, exploring that which has been neglected or marginalised, affirming that which has been traumatised by the legacies of colonial violence.

5) **Bringing all these elements together:** Bringing all these elements together: Postcolonialism can serve as a utopian horizon against which our present deeds and thoughts are measured. This does not mean we should not forget the dangers of idealism, nor forego the value of the specific, the local, and the material. What it does mean, I think, is that the question of justice should be welcomed at every level of our research, teaching, administration and advocacy. Becoming postcolonial means transcending the exploitative binaries of the colonial – a naïve goal perhaps, but a valuable one nonetheless.



Christine O'Dowd-Smyth,  
chairing Prof. Kiberd's keynote speech

## PSA Inaugural Conference attracts top delegates to WIT

**Conference report by Revd Dr Christine O'Dowd-Smyth**

**PSA Inaugural Conference Organiser, WIT**

If anybody had told me this time last year that the Postcolonial Studies Association (PSA) Inaugural Conference that I volunteered to organise would turn out to be a huge three day multinational event with over 150 delegates; three 90 minute parallel sessions per day consisting of five panels, as well as three keynote speaker sessions comprising three top 'names' over the three days, I would have turned and run away! However, WIT has excellent resources and I was struck by the peculiar appropriateness of hosting an inaugural conference on the topic of re-imagining identity, in the Republic of Ireland, a truly 'post' post-colonial country in Waterford Institute of Technology, 'a site of privileged resistance to prevailing hegemonies' in that it functions as a de facto university while being continually denied the official upgrade in status.

The title of the conference and the wording of the Call for Papers (CPF) involved a lot of brain storming and to-ing and fro-ing of emails between the PSA Committee and myself. Janet Wilson proved to be an invaluable mentor figure with her mixture of sound advice and gentle but firm pushing to get the CFP out on the website before the summer ended. Without the truly amazing IT and organisational skills (not to mention the encouragement, support & sense of humour) of PSA Conference Committee members Asia Zgadzaj and Gerri Kimber who actively assisted me with the response to the CFP (over 550 abstracts received from all over the world) I could not have handled such a daunting venture by myself. (Thanks especially to Gerri & Asia who came over to Waterford before the conference began to help out and without whom I could not have pulled off such a successful event). Here in WIT, we formed two committees: the selection team and the management team. The selection team comprised myself, Erin McNamara-Cullen the Head of Hispanic Studies; Jonathan Culleton the sociologist, Paul Ryan in French Studies, and Alice Mc Dermott the historian. All of us had one thing in common: a background in literary and cultural studies. We were all veterans of conference organising, editing of conference proceedings and scholarly research and publication. The vast majority of abstracts were in fact literary, and largely confined to literary themes in English language literatures. We faced the task of cutting the selection down to 50%! The process of drawing up the Conference Programme took up all our free time and many weekends. I wish to thank my colleagues, particularly Erin & Jonathan, for putting together and coming up with challenging titles for panels which made for such an excellent programme. My thanks to my colleagues Colette Moloney and Helena Walsh-Kiely for editing the Abstracts & Bios booklet.

The huge turnout was a reflection of the growing interest internationally in postcolonial studies as well as the quality of the conference's three keynote speakers. Bill Ashcroft, twenty years on from his co-authored seminal work, *The Empire Writes Back*, not only pointed to a utopian perspective in focussing on the future of Post-Colonial Studies, but also launched his new book, *Caliban's Voice* (Routledge), at a reception hosted in the magnificent foyer of the Languages, Tourism & Leisure Building. If Ashcroft represented the 'roots' of Postcolonial Studies, Neil Lazarus is very much the voice of the future 'routes' of the discipline. Interestingly, he too emphasised the importance of future-based thinking and comparative methodologies. Perhaps the most popular of the three speakers with both the international and local audiences was Declan Kiberd, who enchanted, entranced, entertained and educated delegates with his evocation of Edward Said, James Joyce and the everyday. Prof. Kiberd commended the Institute for hosting such an important and groundbreaking event in Ireland, and in Waterford in particular.

The management team responsible for the superb organisation, event management, and catering was headed up by my truly amazing colleague Joanne Malone who is a lecturer in Hospitality Management and who had already organised a very successful international conference here quite recently. Joanne's second year Event Management students helped considerably, as did our Head of Department, Ray Cullen, responsible for organising the sumptuous conference banquet. Thanks to Chris Mulhall for the promotions management and Liam Doyle for the webpage & IT advice, and in particular to Frank Heraughty and his team

for providing all the IT support – I have been reliably informed that they have never had such a low uptake on power point presentations at a major conference! My thanks also to colleagues Robert Hyde, Mary Keating, Una Cummins, Fionnuala Kennedy, Aine Furlong, Jenny O'Connor, Fergus Hogan, Michael Howlett, John Ennis, Mary O'Connell, Liam Doyle, Colette Moloney, Helena Walsh-Kiely, Chris Mulhall, Carol O'Byrne, Richard Butler & Anne Marie Lally for volunteering to chair panels, collect people from airports and train stations, help at registration, meet and greet and generally be of enormous support. A big thanks also to Maria Aylward and to Ray Cullen. Thanks to the catering staff and students in the Culinary Arts section, and to the Music postgraduates who volunteered to help out at registration. A big thank you to nature's gentleman – porter PJ Walsh and his impeccable professionalism as always.

Senior Management in WIT was also very supportive of what they perceived to be a landmark event in the Humanities, and in particular Prof. Kieran Byrne, the Director of WIT & Dr Willie Donnelly, Head of Research. Thanks are also due to Dr John Ennis, Head of School of Humanities, who hosted the drinks reception to launch Bill Ashcroft's *Caliban's Voice*.

I was very pleased and proud to welcome Bill Ashcroft, Declan Kiberd and Neil Lazarus to the Institute as the keynote speakers. It was very appropriate for the Chair of the PSA, Chris Warnes, and the Vice Chair, Ranka Primorac to chair the Bill Ashcroft and Neil Lazarus keynote sessions and to officially open and close the conference respectively. I had the honour of chairing the Declan Kiberd keynote session. All three keynote addresses pointed to a utopian ideal and to the future of postcolonial studies and the new directions to be signposted. I personally found the emphasis on the comparative and the future based thinking to be very interesting, and Kiberd's focus on the everyday and the ordinary to be particularly insightful and relevant.

I have received very positive feedback on the conference. Some of the respondents pointed to the lack of female representation among the keynote speakers. I would like to reassure people that a number of very high profile women were invited but had to regretfully decline due to other previous commitments. I have also received comments about the very English language and literary focus of the conference. We did not receive many abstracts from postcolonial scholars working in Francophone, Hispanophone or Lusophone Postcolonial Studies for instance. I hope that the growing and very wide appeal of the Postcolonial Studies Association will attract the interest of those working in these adjacent rather than parallel fields. To conclude, I would like to highlight the following points:

- ★ The exceptionally high quality and excellence of the conference papers.
- ★ The wonderfully friendly atmosphere and sense of camaraderie amongst the conference delegates, from the UK, Ireland, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Poland, Belgium, Ukraine, Australia, New Zealand, Morocco, Turkey, India, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Nigeria, South Africa, Canada, and from all over the US, including Hawaii.
- ★ The move away from the past and the huge interest in the future direction of postcolonial studies.
- ★ The willingness of all three keynote speakers to engage with the conference as a whole and to engage with all of us on a personal level.
- ★ The success of the PSA as an international research initiative.



Prof. Neil Lazarus and Ranka Primorac

## A Good Start

By Ranka Primorac (PSA Vice-Chair)

To my mind, the PSA Inaugural Conference had three key aims: to launch PSA as a professional association, to test the collegiality and drive of the PSA Executive (which had advised and supported the Conference Organising Committee led by Christine O'Dowd-Smyth), and to work towards turning PSA into a tool for fostering innovative intellectual debate. The first two aims were admirably fulfilled: the event ran smoothly and PSA Executive members worked together in the spirit of professionalism and friendship that could have put more experienced groups to shame. When it came to the third aim, however, there seemed to be, at first, some room for worry. Many of the papers I witnessed added little to the well-established cluster of 'poco' concerns related to the theme of identity: the transnationalism related to diasporic displacement, globalisation-induced 'hybridity', the multiple positioning of subjects and the need to destabilise binaries. For me, the much-needed impetus to turn to the 'new directions' promised by the conference title came on the final day of the event, in the form of the keynote delivered by Neil Lazarus, which I chaired. Neil spoke of the need to question what currently passes for 'Postcolonial Literature' and in favour of a specific understanding of 'World Literature' that is being developed by a group of scholars at the University of Warwick. His speech informed exciting conversations with colleagues during coffee breaks that followed. These exchanges (and the hopes of collaboration they engendered) were centred on three areas of interest:

- ★ The politics of literary form and the need to re-think the notion of *genre*.
- ★ the need to work towards a more inclusive, non-hierarchical literary *comparativism*.
- ★ the need to re-think the *local* aspects, impacts and implications of transnational constructs such as the Postcolonial, Comparative or 'World' literary canons.

I can only hope I can continue these conversations at PSA conferences in the future.



## Conference Keynote Abstracts



Prof. Declan Kiberd with Christine O'Dowd-Smyth

### Declan Kiberd: *Edward Said and the Everyday*

Edward Said, despite his liking for complex art-works, wrote out of the conviction that culture was ordinary and that resistance movements across the world struggled to maintain the everyday values of their traditional cultures in the face of decimation, military oppression and economic exploitation. He interpreted WB Yeats as a poet of decolonisation, for whom 'liberation' meant reconnecting with the quotidian lore of Irish people, as well as challenging the ecological transformation of Irish landscape into a simulacrum of the English Home Counties. Said believed that those who resist do so in the name of everyday values which they perceive to be under threat and that the greatness of Yeats's poetry (influencing Darwish and other Palestinians under occupation) was its search for signs of the persistence of ordinary life in the extreme conditions of war and civil war. Said's writings on Palestine show a deep understanding of the ways in which a people under military coercion will deploy masks, parodic utterances, multiple selves, not as features of modernist art but as tactics of resistance; he demonstrates how such methods may be found as far back as the writings of Jonathan Swift, filtering through the prose and drama of Oscar Wilde, into a postcolonial modernity.

In his late rereading of Erich Auerbach, Said, who had always used 'secular' as a term of praise, celebrated the New Testament Christian gospels as representing an immense democratisation of narrative art. Whereas ancient classic authors had treated ordinary people as comic buffoons, the four evangelists evolved a level style, which treated such people on a basis of equality with aristocrats, even going so far as to evolve a narrative stressing the redemptive power of the marginal and humble. The technical challenges which this posed were not fully responded to in art until the era of universal franchise introduced in the later nineteenth century. James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) is a work in which ordinary people are rendered with innate dignity (and comedy), and in which their resistance at the level of a free consciousness is fully explored. Said followed Joyce in the conviction that in a democratic culture readers, like interpreters of musical scores, were not doomed to a simply passive role, but were in effect co-creators of meaning. In moments of greatness in art, ordinary people suddenly become extraordinary, but this happens also and repeatedly in life, when seemingly marginal folk create movements of world-historical significance. Said's autobiography *Out of Place* is in effect a study of such persons and moments, but so also is his analysis of the cultural

life of Palestinians under occupation in the book (co-created with photographer Jean Mohr) titled *After the Last Sky*.

The category of the 'everyday' had been discredited by Baudelaire and Flaubert as the 'bourgeois banal', and such writers helped to create the idea of a separatist Bohemia, in which alone freedom was possible. Said, like Joyce and Yeats, preferred to seek such liberty in society itself. Although a fastidious dandy, he shared their belief that the ordinary was the proper domain of the artist and that the extraordinary could safely be left to journalists.

### Bill Ashcroft : *Post-Colonial Futures: Globalization and Alternative Modernities*

In the twenty years since *The Empire Writes Back* was published the field of post-colonial studies has had a remarkable trajectory. More fraught and argumentative than many fields, it has ranged widely to cover both the material and discursive consequences of European colonialism and its engagement by post-colonial writers and other cultural producers. A major feature of post-colonial theory has been its ability to analyse historical developments of culture: expressions of anti-colonial nationalism; the paradoxical dissolution of the idea of nation along with the continuous persistence of national concerns; the question of language and appropriation; of the transformation of literary genres; the question of ethnicity and its relation to the state. Many of these concerns will be augmented within post-colonial theory by analysis of a range of issues gaining increasing prominence: the place of translation, of the sacred, of ecological theory and animal rights, of the relation of local and global.

But the broader question concerns the way in which post-colonial theory is positioned to approach the continuing issues of global power, global interaction and cultural difference in the coming century. One answer to this has been a growing, and now well-established, interest in cultural and ethnic mobility, of diaspora, of transnational and cosmopolitan interactions. This rise in global mobility at the same time as state borders have become ever more hysterically protected, has interested post-colonial cultural critics for some time. But post-colonial theory will find itself pressed to use its critical tools to address the issue of modernity and continue its analysis of cultural globalization.

One area in which the field may do this is by harnessing its commitment to the agency of local cultural producers to enter the area of alternative, multiple, coeval or transformed modernities. In this project the phenomena of India and China become strategic. One question facing post-colonial studies is: should we, and if so, how should we include China? Whatever way we answer this the fact of India's and China's very different modernities commands attention from post-colonial studies. These states, by their very size, reinforce the observation that Modernity is not a wave from the West washing over the world, but that it is cultural, indeed transcultural, that it is transformative and available to the particular pressures of local contingency. While post-colonial studies needs to keep its eye firmly fixed on the historical fact of colonialism and the resistant and transformative engagements of post-colonial cultural producers, the theoretical tools it has developed make it particularly well placed to address the cultural transformations of Modernity itself.

## Neil Lazarus: *World Literature and Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a Reconstruction of Literary Studies*

Report by Lucienne Loh

On behalf of the Warwick Research Collective, Professor Neil Lazarus called for a reconstructed post-colonial studies through a vision of World Literature, not only as distinct from an irrevocably Eurocentric Comparative Literature, but as a literary field dedicated to encoding the social logic of modernity. Drawing upon the world systems economic theory of world history in which capitalism is a system simultaneously one and unequal, Lazarus argues for the theory's correlate in World Literature which should exceed post-theory's emphasis on difference, and instead underscore inequality as a process of combined and uneven development.

A conception of World Literature would appreciate and analyze the complex and differential temporalities of capitalism through eras which are discontinuous and heterogeneous. As a repudiation of recent attempts to pluralise modernity through alternative modernities, Lazarus' conception of "peripheral modernities" as located in World Literature registers the singularity and simultaneity of a modernity governed by unevenness. Alternative modernities give modernity a Western provenance rather than locating it within the context of capitalism as a world system and if modernity is regarded as a Western phenomenon, then its alternative forms are always already belated. Drawing on Frederic Jameson's influential essay "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism", Lazarus regards Literature of the World system through a tri-partite conception based on the capitalist world system, modernity and world literature where capitalism is the substrate of world literature and modernity constitutes its subjects.

This new way of thinking of combined unevenness fundamentally requires new types of comparative approaches within contemporary literary studies which rejects world literature as a level playing field where texts from around the globe can combine and intersect with each other. Critical assumptions which treat texts as equal and universalistic (such as in the work of Emily Apter and Gayatri Spivak) fail to readdress the underlying construction of the world as circulating languages, literatures and values keyed to Europe.

Lazarus further rejects Edward Said and Rey Chow's collective idealism through analyses of *Culture and Imperialism* and Chow's 2004 essay "The Old /New Question of Comparison in Literary Studies: A Post-European Perspective." He feels both demonstrate the same tendency to substitute the civilizational category of the West for the category of capitalism as the object of analysis, a substitution which has the effect of dematerialisation.

Calling for a renewed commitment to close-reading practices, sensitive to social determinants and the structuring conditions of existence, within the overarching theory of the world system, Lazarus hopes to undo the intrinsic assumptions of Eurocentrism that persist in current approaches to comparative literature.



## Postcolonial Studies : Still an Anglophone Empire ?

Patricia Little

The inaugural Conference of the PSA was a stimulating affair from many points of view, and the organisers are to be congratulated on bringing together such a wide variety of scholars and academics for a sumptuous three-day feast on 'the Postcolonial'.

However, as we passed from course to course – a tempting appetizer here, a robust main-course-with-trimmings-there, a mouth-watering dessert to revive the palate – it can have escaped nobody's attention that there were certain significant absences at the feast, and that the postcolonial assumed a very monocultural and Anglophone aspect. To read the titles of most of the papers, and to listen to the general tenor of what was being proposed, it was as if the debates within Francophone postcolonial studies of the last number of years (both in the universities of the Anglophone world and in metropolitan France itself and in the former colonies) had never taken place. Are the worlds of Francophone studies and postcolonial studies condemned to remain forever as 'ships passing in the night', to use Alec Hargreaves's graphic image?<sup>1</sup> From the Francophone point of view, that perspective would seem to be thoroughly outmoded, as the recent *Postcolonial Thought in the French-Speaking World* makes plain.<sup>2</sup> In their masterly 'Introduction', the editors, Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, chart the way in which Francophone postcolonial studies has addressed not only the questions raised by the debate in the Anglophone world, but also the development of a specific postcolonial voice in the French-speaking world itself.

But is anyone listening to that voice? Representatives of this current were sadly lacking in number, and despite the excellence of many of the presentations, it would seem that much of the thinking behind them repeats the implicit division of the world into Anglophone postcolonialism v the rest, thus perpetuating the old divisions of Empire.

1. Alec G. Hargreaves, 'Ships passing in the night? France, Postcolonialism and the Globalization of Literature', *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*, 1.2: 64-69
2. Charles Forsdick & David Murphy (eds), *Postcolonial Thought in the French-Speaking World*, Liverpool University Press, 2009.





## Conference Jottings by Gerri

Looking back on the conference, it is hard to believe that so much was achieved by Christine and her team at the Waterford Institute of Technology in such a short space of time.

Asia and I arrived on the Sunday prior to the conference in order to help facilitate the set-up by Christine and the rest of the WIT team, including the indefatigable Joanne Malone. Our base for the week was the Ramada Viking Hotel, also the main base for most of the conference delegates. Indeed it would be fair to state that the 'Asgard Gastro Bar' at the Ramada swiftly became the unofficial after-hours conference 'hub'.

On Bank Holiday Monday, Christine, Asia and myself sat down in the bar and spent several hours constructing the 'Delegate-Master-List'. We started with soft drinks but were pretty much on maximum proof alcohol by the end of the session. Tuesday saw us in WIT itself with Christine and the team, filling conference bags, matching bags to badges, etc etc. It was our first time in the venue and as Christine gave Asia and I a tour of the campus, we were amazed at the facilities on offer and excited at the thought of a superb conference to come. We took a quick walk down to the Waterford Crystal shop and marvelled at the £54,000 chandeliers. Back in the bar later that evening we kept a look-out for possible delegates: 'Do you think he could be one? I'm sure she's one.....'

Delegates registered thick and fast on the first morning and a worryingly long queue formed almost immediately. In the spirit of postcolonial democracy, keynote speakers Bill Ashcroft and Neil Lazarus also queued to register – and were swiftly bundled away in VIP fashion as soon as we realised who they were....

The award for 'wittiest conference speaker in the face of adversity' went to Professor Kieran Byrne, Director of WIT, who, having been interrupted 10 seconds into his prepared conference-opening speech, threw it away, and hilariously ad-libbed his way through his allotted time – a true pro. He was a hard act to follow. After speeches from Christine and Chris Warnes - Chair of the PSA, Professor Bill Ashcroft gave the first fascinating keynote speech, leaving us all wanting to know more on the subject of 'post-hyphen-colonial futures'. The rest of the day was taken up with eating, drinking and listening to wonderful papers by multi-panels of speakers, not necessarily in that order. However, special mention must be made of the conference catering, which was, by any standards, exceptional. At the end of the day's sessions, we congregated in the beautiful Atrium of the TL building and toasted, with a glass of wine, the launch of Bill Ashcroft's inspirational new book *Caliban's Voice*. And finally, a get-together at the 'Asgard Gastro Bar' at the Ramada, where new friendships were made over a glass or two of the 'black stuff'.

On the second day of the conference there were more parallel sessions, more exciting papers to engage with and more delicious food and drink to be consumed. In the afternoon, as I chaired an absorbing panel on 'Difference, Disjuncture & Culture in Postcolonial Theory', with both Bill Ashcroft and Neil Lazarus already present, an unassuming man slipped into the small crowded room and quietly sat down next to me. Having an idea who the dark-coated stranger was, but not being absolutely sure, I slipped him a hastily hand-written note which read: 'Are you Professor Kiberd?' 'Yes', he nodded. And so the speakers in that room had the honour of being the only panel to have all three keynotes present at their papers. So no pressure then..... Professor Kiberd's marvellously entertaining keynote speech on Edward Said and Ireland was followed by drinks in the Atrium and then the Conference Banquet, where the students of the WIT catering and hospitality school made an outstanding job of both the menu and the waiting at table. Oh, and guess where most people ended the night?

The last day of the conference passed all too quickly. More excellent papers and a fruit smoothie 'coffee' break was then followed by Professor Neil Lazarus's immensely enjoyable keynote speech on a 'reconstruction of literary studies', which left us with plenty to think about. After our final delicious taste of WIT lunchtime catering and a last session of parallel papers, closing speeches by Christine, Dr John Ennis, Head of School of Humanities at WIT and PSA Vice-Chair Ranka Primorac finally ended the inaugural conference of the PSA.

Final memories? Christine's charm, kindness and generosity, even down to the loan of her wonderful husband David, who ferried so many of us to and from the airport and prepared a delicious curry for Asia and myself on our first night. Nothing was ever too much trouble. Joanne Malone's tireless presence, without whom the conference would not have run as smoothly as it did. The keynote speakers - what a privilege it was to get to know them. And finally the delegates – so many new friendships made over so many hangovers.... the sign of a truly great conference.



Waterford is the City of Crystal.  
[Photo: Gerri Kimber, taken at the  
Waterford Crystal shop]

Gerri Kimber

## Conference Jottings by Asia

Conferences are the highlight of academic life. Sitting at home glued to the computer screen and endlessly sifting through books, running through exams papers and preparing for lectures takes up most of our lives. But once we arrive at the conference - the real fun begins. For a short period of time, no more students, exams, lectures, or emails. Having the privilege of being one of the co-organisers of this fantastic event gave me an incredible opportunity to meet truly fascinating and committed people. This is a story about some I had the pleasure to meet.

I was sitting on a late Monday night after a long day of work with Christine and Gerri, in the Ramada Viking Hotel bar, with maybe three other guests. Gerri had decided on an early night, and I had my nose stuck in some papers I wanted to go through. 'Excuse me, are you for the conference?' Thank God, I thought, finally a fellow soul. That was the unforgettable Nath Aldalala from Oman, who had arrived early for the conference. We spent a long night talking about Islam, Allah, veils, the meaning of life, golf and of course the conference. I think it was around 2am by the time I went to bed.

Tuesday was a bag-day. Stuck in one of the WIT rooms, Gerri and I went through all the packs, papers, badges, wine, bags, more papers. After having squeezed in a short trip to see the crystal chandeliers, Gerri and I were sitting outside Waterford Crystal chilling out in glorious Irish sunshine (no irony here as the weather was absolutely marvellous) when we bumped into another earlycomer, a very good friend and a fellow PhD student, Ole Birk Laursen.

There were many others to come. Sophie Lavin, an American scholar, who despite jet lag spent long hours talking with me about women's rights and motherhood in academia and about her involvement in Northeast MLA. Dorota Kołodziejczyk, a Polish scholar from my hometown University of Wrocław, told me about her new, exciting project: a Centre for Postcolonial Studies and Comparative Literature. I am thrilled to say that Dorota's project has received huge support from the PSA and I am looking forward to seeing how we can work together to enlarge our postcolonial community, so you will probably hear at some stage about a postcolonial conference being held in Poland. On many occasions I spoke to Nath Aldalala about the conference he is organising this December in Oman devoted to Anglo-Arab and Muslim writing. Nath has been extremely encouraging and Gerri, Nancy Roberts and myself are now working on a joint proposal to attend Nath's conference. I chaired a small but exciting panel on African novelists after which I engaged in a conversation with Nancy Morkel, from the University of Fort Hare in South Africa. It turns out Nancy and myself are both interested in women's narratives and motherhood. We have already exchanged emails on how we can bring our meeting forward. Helen Cousins, with whom I have now been exchanging emails for some time, I met for the first time at the PSA conference, which was fantastic.

During Wednesday's private dinner at the Jack Meades pub (based on the original thatched cottage pub), I had an unforgettable conversation with Neil Lazarus with whom I chatted about world literature, Japanese fiction and new directions in literary studies, thus having a foretaste of the keynote speech he delivered on the last day of the conference. Bill Ashcroft kindly put up with my smoking as we conversed on the deck outside the restaurant. The long intellectual and non-intellectual debates that evening finished with a live band of singing ladies, Gerri, Lyn McCredden (unforgettable voice and energy) and myself, after which we ran to the cars in the rain to get back to our hotels to continue networking at the hotel bars with other delegates.

On the way back to the airport, together with Neil Lazarus, Ranka Primorac, Nazneen Ahmed and James Graham, as we happened to be all on the same flight back to London, we had a few more hours to spend together and engage in telling our stories to each other.

There are a few more people I will never forget and who became, in the very short but intensive time we spent together, very good friends. Christine who welcomed Gerri and myself into her home where we met her extremely helpful and wonderful husband David and their lovely daughter Lily Mei. Joanne Malone, who with amazing patience always found the time to answer my numerous questions in situations of crisis. And the people who may have been unnoticed by most of the delegates but thanks to whom this conference turned out a real success: the security guard Paul (always calm despite the madness of last minute changes and help needed), the chef Ron Hyde (hmmm-the food he cooked for us), a WIT lecturer Robert Hyde (who also happens to be a short radio operator, I can hear my dad calling his sign now), and the very friendly and helpful students of WIT who often helped us at the registration desk throughout the whole conference. Oh, and did I mention that Gerri and I loved the local Irish fashion we spotted on Irish ladies in WIT!

Thanks to the people I met at the conference there are new projects, as I write these words, taking shape, which hopefully I will be able to share soon with all of you. And most importantly, on a personal level, thanks to the encouragement I have received throughout the conference and intellectual debates I engaged in, I believe the work we all do is relevant and worth pursuing. I cannot wait for the next event.



*Asia Zgadzaj*



# Re-Imagining Identity: New Directions in Postcolonial Studies

Birte Heidemann

(Chemnitz Technical University,  
Germany)



As its title already implies, this conference can, in many respects, be considered as a signpost paving the way for new directions in postcolonial studies. Being the inaugural conference of the Postcolonial Studies Association, it basically put into practice what the PSA intends to develop, which is the bringing together of scholars working on postcolonial topics in any discipline or language and thus creating an interdisciplinary forum for information exchange, networking opportunities or research collaborations.

In a way, this has already been achieved by its first conference, which was held at the Waterford Institute of Technology, a campus university that proved to be the perfect venue for three intense and inspiring days. In fact, it was a meeting place for scholars from such diverse places as Australia and Canada, Germany and Hawaii, India and South Africa, or the UK and the US. The speakers did not only come from different nations, but also from various fields of study and, thus, the issues discussed in the papers displayed a variety of scholarly interests and methodological approaches.

The conference thematically focussed on a broad re-consideration of the cultural, political, theoretical and practical re-imaginings of the concept of 'identity'. The participants had also set out to find answers to a question which although complex, is inevitable within the scope of such a gathering on a global scale: What is the future of postcolonialism as a discipline? Due to the conference's commitment to an interdisciplinary approach, the wide range of presentations shed light on the need to re-imagine identity from different perspectives. Hence, in such diverse papers as those on gendered and sexual identities, feminism, African novelists, indigenous/aboriginal identity and memory, Dalit voices in India, postcolonial cinema, photography and music, globalised literatures, contested spaces, threatened identities, re-imagining of linguistic identity, postcolonial 'Francophone' identity as well as on schooling, just to mention a few among the rich range of the conference's key issues, the idea of following new directions in postcolonial studies was all the more underlined.

The opening plenary address on "Post-colonial Futures: Globalization and Alternative Modernities" was given by Bill Ashcroft. It can be regarded as an ideal opening to a conference that aimed both to explore current understandings of 'identity' in a multicultural, globalised and conflicted world and to encourage disciplinary self-reflexivity. In addition to the lecture, Ashcroft's latest publication, *Caliban's Voice: The Transformation of English in Post-Colonial Literatures*, was launched and very well received. In his brilliant keynote lecture on "Edward Said & Ireland", Declan Kiberd provided the audience with a remarkable knowledge on Said which he constantly linked with an original and expanded view on Irish literature and culture. The third keynote speaker, Neil Lazarus, introduced the participants to "World Literature and Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a Reconstruction of Literary Studies". He, thus, once again, put his finger on an issue that determined the conference's agenda.

As this conference attracted such a great number of participants, the programme was extensive with 4 to 5 parallel panels which already became obvious when we received our conference pack containing a heavy folder full of abstracts. Due to the wide variety of approaches, we were spoilt for choice and, as a consequence, had to miss many interesting papers. Yet, a selection of the papers held is going to be published and it will be indeed most valuable to read through the proceedings in order to be able to catch up with the papers one had missed. Nevertheless, it was in many respects a perfectly organised conference, in terms of hospitality, accommodation, which also included a regular bus shuttle from the hotel to the WIT, and a daily lunch buffet. Last but not least, it was an outstanding conference also with respect to its technical facilities, without any preventable problems during paper presentations.

At this point, we would very much like to thank the organising committee, chaired by Christine O'Dowd-Smyth, and everyone involved for contributing to this warm and welcoming atmosphere we all experienced in Waterford. In addition, the organisers were able to realise the PSA's major objectives and thus paved the way for the many conferences that will hopefully follow. But, in doing so, this inaugural conference definitely set a very high standard.

*Note: The original version of this conference report first appeared in the EACLALS newsletter (Summer 2009). The Editors are grateful for Birte Heidemann's permission to reproduce it.*



## Waterford Conference: Book Launch

The Waterford conference featured a book launch for Bill Ashcroft's *Caliban's Voice*. The drinks reception was hosted by the School of Humanities, WIT. Professor Ashcroft presented a copy of the book to Professor Kieran Byrne, the Director of WIT (see the photo below), and Dr Christine O'Dowd-Smyth, Conference Organiser, gave a speech of introduction.



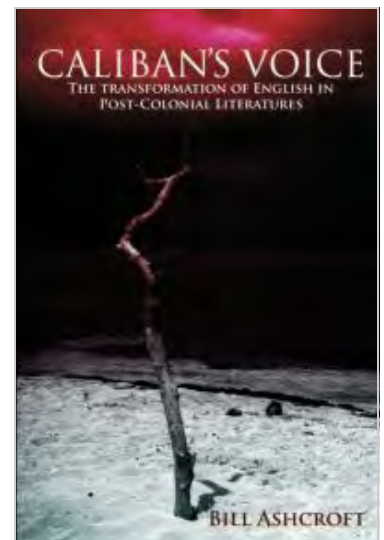
### **Bill Ashcroft, *Caliban's Voice: The Transformation of English in Post-colonial Literatures***

Routledge: December 2008. 208pp ISBN: 978-0-415-47044-5

In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Caliban says to Miranda and Prospero: 'you taught me language, and my profit on't is, I know how to curse'. With this statement, he gives voice to an issue that lies at the centre of post-colonial studies. Can Caliban own Prospero's language? Can he use it to do more than curse? *Caliban's Voice* examines the ways in which post-colonial literatures have transformed English to redefine what we understand to be 'English Literature'. It investigates the importance of language learning in the imperial mission, the function of language in ideas of race and place, the link between language and identity, the move from orature to literature and the significance of translation. By demonstrating the dialogue that occurs between writers and readers in literature, Bill Ashcroft argues that cultural identity is not locked up in language, but that language, even a dominant colonial language, can be transformed to convey the realities of many different cultures. Using the

figure of Caliban, Ashcroft weaves a consistent and resonant thread through his discussion of the post-colonial experience of life in the English language, and the power of its transformation into new and creative forms.

**'Caliban's Voice ... recognizes the extraordinary power of literary writing to intervene in the political domination of colonized cultures by the use of a global language. It celebrates the inventiveness, strength and power of writing from post-colonized cultures'**



## **News from Various Centres**

### **Dialogues across Boundaries: Debating Local Cosmopolitanisms (November 21-22, 2009: CFP)**

The University of Southampton is holding a two-day interdisciplinary conference on the theme of local cosmopolitanisms. Confirmed keynote speakers are Neil Lazarus, Stephanie Newell, and John Thieme, with the participation of creative writers Brian Chikwava and Deon Meyer.

Historically, meanings attached to the notion of cosmopolitanism have often placed it in an opposition to the local; moreover, the term itself bears a legacy of complicity with various forms of imperialism and global violence. The conference seeks to make a contribution towards repositioning 'cosmopolitanism' as a de-colonial term (in line with the broad intellectual project of 'provincialising Europe'), and to help interrogate those of its postcolonial usages that would equate it with un-localised 'hybridity' brought on by globalisation. To that end, the conference aims to underscore the local embeddedness of texts and practices that would speak to difference and to experiences of the universal – and, conversely, to examine the local aspects, impacts and implications of transnational institutions and constructs (such as, for example, the postcolonial, comparative or 'world' literary canons). Contributions from across disciplines are invited to trace and problematise instances of local cosmo-

politan practice that could include (but need not be limited to) textualities and genres, institutions, rituals, modes of subjectivity and action, bodies, music, arts and architecture. Panels organised around named geographical spaces or types of location (cities, countrysides, deserts, oceans, islands, types of landscape etc) are welcome. Please send 200-word paper proposals or 500-word panel proposals to Ranka Primorac ([R.Primorac@soton.ac.uk](mailto:R.Primorac@soton.ac.uk)) by **1 October 2009**.

### **Global Youth Cultures Conference at Kent (October 24-25, 2009):**

This is a two-day event hosted by the Centre for Colonial and Postcolonial Research in association with the Canterbury Festival. It will bring together academics, writers and spoken word artists to dialogue about our collective future – the generations to come. The first day will be devoted to academic papers and will close with a reading by Gautam Malkani, author of *Londonstani*. The second day will consist of public performances, featuring: Gabriel Teodoros (US rapper of Ethiopian descent); *The Rebel Cell* (a hip-opera by Baba Brinkman and Dizraeli); and a screening of *Slingshot Hip Hop* (dir. Jackie Salloum) with director and artist in attendance for Q & A session. Invited speakers include: Paul Gilroy (LSE), Rupa Huq (Kingston), Nadia El Kholi (Cairo) and Angela McRobbie (Goldsmiths). For further enquiries, please contact Blake Brandes and Caroline Rooney at [globalyouthkent@gmail.com](mailto:globalyouthkent@gmail.com).

## The PSA Committees

The PSA has appointed a number of committees with the aim of diversifying our activities. If you are interested in getting involved with any of the committees, please contact the spokesperson (indicated by \* on the list)

### Constitution Committee

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Marta Vizcaya Echano

Lucienne Loh

Janet Wilson

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### PSA Postgraduate Committee

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Ole Birk Laursen

Bobby Flora-Bhambra

Laurence Randall

Nancy Roberts

Florian Stadler

\* Brian Rock [brian.rock@stir.ac.uk](mailto:brian.rock@stir.ac.uk)

### Publications Committee

Bobby Flora-Bhambra

Michelle Keown

Kath Kerr-Koch

Christine O'Dowd-Smyth

Laurence Randall

Jayne Poyner

Marika Preziuso

Asia Zgadzaj

\*Nancy Roberts [nancyr7@hotmail.com](mailto:nancyr7@hotmail.com)



*The PSA Executive Meeting at the Waterford Conference.*

**The next PSA executive meeting will take place on Saturday, 10 October 09 at 11am at SOAS. Room to be confirmed.**

**Constitution Committee:** At the AGM in Waterford, the PSA adopted a Working Constitution for a period of one year. This document is to be fully endorsed as the PSA Constitution one year from the Waterford AGM. Following that, the Constitution Committee will disband. Members are invited to provide feedback and comments, and make suggestions during the next year so that the working constitution can be amended if necessary. Any suggestions or proposed amendments should be directed to Patricia Krus at [patricia.krus@instituteofadvancedstudies.org.uk](mailto:patricia.krus@instituteofadvancedstudies.org.uk)

**PSA Affiliations Committee:** We are pleased to announce that the PSA's Working Group on Affiliations has now become the **PSA Affiliations Committee**, as per minutes of March meeting discussed at Waterford. Anshuman Mondal is the spokesperson, and Marta Vizcaya Echano, the PSA External Relations Officer, now becomes affiliated with the committee. Lucienne Loh has also joined the Committee.

**PSA Publications Committee:** The PSA publications committee and the Online Journal Committee have now merged into one. Nancy Roberts heads the new Committee as a spokesperson, and the plans for this year involve working to increase the PSA's profile in related publications and publishing events, plus beginning work on a new online journal for PSA members.

**PSA Conference Committee:** The Inaugural PSA Conference Committee has been disbanded on the successful completion of the Waterford Conference. The formation of the new PSA Conference Committee will be discussed at the next executive meeting on October 10th, 2009.

## CALL FOR ARTICLES : NEW DIRECTIONS IN POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES

The organisers of the Postcolonial Studies Association Inaugural Conference: 'Re-Imagining Identity: New Directions in Postcolonial Studies' are now pleased to invite submissions for an edited volume of articles. The Editors are accepting submissions from **conference speakers only**. Please note that **submission does not guarantee publication**. Submissions of **max 5000 words** (inclusive of endnotes), should be emailed in Word format to **ALL THREE EDITORS**:

Dr Christine O'Dowd-Smyth: [codowdsmyth@wit.ie](mailto:codowdsmyth@wit.ie)

Dr Gerri Kimber: [gerri@thekimbers.co.uk](mailto:gerri@thekimbers.co.uk)

Asia Zgadzaj: [jzgadzaj@hotmail.com](mailto:jzgadzaj@hotmail.com)

Please use 'Notes for Submissions: Style Guidelines' and 'Sample Format for Paper Submission', which are downloadable from the PSA webpage,

<http://www.postcolonialstudiesassociation.co.uk/id63.html>

when submitting your article for consideration.

**Deadline for submissions: 15 October 2009.**

**Remember to read through the style guidelines carefully. Any article submitted which does not conform to these guidelines will be rejected. Please do not hesitate to contact the editors if you have any queries regarding your submission.**





## Postcolonial Studies Association

### General enquiries :

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**All the photos in this issue were taken by Asia Zgadaj, unless otherwise stated.**

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The views and opinions published in this newsletter represent the views of individual authors rather than PSA policy, except where stated otherwise.

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**Newsletter Editors** Kaori Nagai & Lucienne Loh  
(e-mail: see above)

[For the current list of the PSA committee members, see p. 10]

## Call for Contributions: PSA Newsletter

The Editors invite your contributions to the newsletter. We welcome any materials related to postcolonial studies, especially conference reviews, book reviews, recent activities and any announcements. If you would like the details of your group, centre, or project included in the newsletter, please let us know. The next PSA newsletter will be out in October. The deadline for the next issue is **September 30** (if you are submitting after Sep 15, please drop us a line to let us know that your text is coming). We look forward to receiving your news and any comments, or suggestions for new sections or topics which you would like us to feature in the newsletter.



## PSA membership

*From Melanie Murray (Membership Secretary)*

The annual membership fees of the Postcolonial Studies Association remain at **£25** for individual and **£15** for unwaged (this fee may be waived where a case can be made to do so). There is a discount for EACLALS members. The benefits of joining the PSA are:

- ◆ **Regular e-mail bulletins**
- ◆ **Newsletters, three times a year**
- ◆ **Invitations to all meetings and colloquia**
- ◆ **Your research interests listed on the PSA Website**
- ◆ **Opportunity to join any of the PSA committees**
- ◆ **Discount on selected postcolonial publications**

Details are on the membership form, downloadable from the PSA website

<http://www.postcolonialstudiesassociation.co.uk>  
Please contact the membership secretary, Melanie Murray [e-mail: [mel.psa@btinternet.com](mailto:mel.psa@btinternet.com)] for enquiries.