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“Écritures féminines et dialogues critiques : Subjectivité, genre et ironie”, Françoise Lionnet, [b.m.] 2012 : [recenzja]

Romanica Silesiana 10, 418-421

2015

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

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Françoise Lionnet, *“Écritures féminines et dialogues critiques. Subjectivité, genre et ironie/Writing Women and Critical Dialogues. Subjectivity, Gender and Irony,”* L’Atelier d’écriture, La Pelouse, Trou d’Eau Douce, Île Maurice, 2012, 315 p., ISBN 99903-36-68-7

In the introduction to her collection of essays, Françoise Lionnet evokes *le métissage* as “at the same time the main theme and a method of analysis and critical requirement” (13) in her approach to the literature of the multi-language island of Mauritius. She assumes that a literary work constitutes a “mirror of ink” which reflects subjectivity (15) and that the *métissage* she is primarily interested in entails discussion of such subjects as hybridity, creolization, *mondialisation*, and cosmopolitanism (17). The literary analyses included in the volume involve such critical approaches as gender studies, subaltern studies, Marxism, and also attempts to further define *littérature-monde* and develop Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of minor literatures. Lionnet claims that in order to interpret the work of female Mauritian writers it does not suffice to see it in the light of broadly understood postcolonial studies, but specific texts call for the use of more specialized critical instruments. She is very much successful in performing those critical analyses and making any reader unfamiliar with Mauritian literature aware of its complexity and aesthetic quality.

Chapter 1 “Gender and Representation in Poetry” commences with the issue of objectification of women in contemporary culture, only to develop it toward the metaphorical representations of an island, here the island of Mauritius, as a woman in Aimé Césaire’s work and in Malcolm de Chazal’s and Édouard Maunick’s poetry. The poems in question are criticized for being very much situated within the Mauritian bourgeois culture and thus presenting woman as less than a human. Césaire anthropomorphizes the island as a static female body, which is highly misogynist, and places women in the group of subalterns along

with the colonized, the insane, and children. Lionnet compares woman and an island and the result is that both stand for peace, an island feeds its inhabitants like a mother and her presence is taken for granted, and neither woman nor an island have a voice of their own, which makes racism similar to sexism in more ways than it could be expected.

Chapter 2 "Anamnèse et utopie: *À l'autre bout de moi* de Marie-Thérèse Humbert" starts with considerations on the relation between islands as imaginary space for utopias and relates it to Humbert's work, who deconstructs the utopias of Western imagination which refer both to women and tropical islands. Humbert's novel is read in a poststructuralist manner against Derrida's, Deleuze's, and finally Nietzsche's theories. Diversity in this fiction consists in the two main characters being Métis women of different religious backgrounds, Anne and Nadège, whose very names read together may be interpreted as word-play on "anamnèse." Autobiographic elements of the plot contribute to the effect of self-portrait, whose elements are depersonalization, absence, and lack.

"Narration and the City: Ananda Devi's *Rue la Poudrière*" which is the title of Chapter 3, commences with the link between Humbert's novel, where Mauritius is presented as a road to be walked, and Devi's novel, where a road poses dangers, but also facilitates discoveries. The setting is Port Louis, which as a city may be related to two modes of describing femininity: as "unrestrained sexuality" and "deviant femininity" (91). Both cities and women can be represented in this way, hence it is possible for women to be linked to a narrative of the urban fall. Paule, Devi's female narrator, relates the experience of Port Louis as both a site of possibility and an inferno, which provokes mourning and melancholia. The universal dimension of the text is suggested by the book's outer appearance, which may be related more to postcolonial urban Africa by a reader unfamiliar with Mauritian context. The text, written from the outside of Mauritian literary tradition, takes the reader on a journey due to Paule's self-reflexive comments.

Chapter 4 "Hunger Artists in the Global Economy: Lindsay Collen's *There is a Tide*" discusses the novel by an Anglophone and Creolophone writer and political activist as situated in the context of new consumerism, where food and clothing define one's identity. Once confronted with "conflicting signals about body shape, health, and food" (117), Mauritian women suffer alienation and disembodiment that result in psychosomatic reaction, mental disease, and eating disorders. The novel explores neocolonial exploitation and postcolonial trauma in the 1980s, but the analysis of them is gender-specific. Lionnet states that, paradoxically, anorexia makes survival possible as it allows one "to feel autonomous in the face of global capitalism" (132) and constitutes a performance of resistance.

Chapter 5 "Transcolonialismes: Échos et dissonances de Jane Austen à Marie-Thérèse Humbert et d'Emily Brontë à Maryse Condé" comments on recycling of texts and intertextuality in Condé's *La migration des cœurs*, which

is an Antillean rewriting of *Wuthering Heights*, and Humbert's *La montagne de Signaux*, a Mauritian rewriting of *Mansfield Park*. The two novels are transcultural, as they examine intercultural relations of texts, languages, sensitivities, and genres. In Condé's novel the characters from Brontë's text haunt the novelistic world, while the relation between Humbert's and Austen's novels is more speculative, as the Rouves may be a Mauritian equivalent of the Price family also due to the novel's epistolographic nature.

Chapter 6 "Littérature-monde, francophonie et ironie : modèles de violence et violence de modèles" examines *littérature-monde* as an effect of decentralizing the writing in French. The first "Mauritian" novel, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (1788) and George Sand's *Indiana* (1832) are instances of departing from the conventional ways of describing "exotic" nature as an image of vulnerability. Instead, its descriptions of nature tell a different story about Mauritius. Édouard Glissant's *La Lézarde* and Nathacha Appanah's *Le dernier frère* are texts that take this question further by transcending the code and the discourse that banalized the world of the tropics. These are the undoubted benefits of the process of *mondialisation*, which reconciles "francophonies" with universality. The same is practiced by Ananda Devi in her *Sari vert*.

Chapter 7 "Dire exactement: Remembering Interwoven Lives in 1940s Mauritius" discusses Nathacha Appanah's *Le dernier frère*, the novel about the internment of Central European Jews in a "camp," a colonial prison in the British Crown Colony of Mauritius. It was an awkward historical event, in which Appanah sets a fictitious story of friendship between an Indo-Mauritius boy and David Stein, a Czech-Jewish deportee. The text emphasizes the role of Mauritius as a refuge from "militarism and political discrimination" (206) during the Second World War and "the specificity of Jewish discrimination and what it shares with other forms of discrimination" (214).

Chapter 8, "'Cinq mètres d'ordre et de sagesse, cinq mètres de jungle soyeuse': Ananda Devi's Unfurling Art of Fiction" formulates the theory of Devi's narrative aesthetics by using the metaphor of a sari that she unfurls before the readers and "wraps it around the subjects of her books, their characters' bodies, and her growing corpus" (267). Lionnet stresses the ironies that Devi consistently uses and continues the analysis of them in Chapter 9 "'New World' Exiles and Ironists from Évariste Parny to Ananda Devi." She starts her interpretation with the poems of Susan Howe, a New Englander, and writes about the poetry of Évariste Parny and Devi, who according to her are "authors who share a similar postcolonial sensibility articulated in terms of resistance to conventional modes of either aesthetics or politics" (286). She analyses the work of the eighteenth-century tropicopolitan Parny as a "neglected Creole poetic voice" (287) and writes about Devi's use of irony and metaphor as instruments for inclusion of gender and oppression, which make the Indian Mauritian a representative of Creole cosmopolitanism.

The collection of essays carries out the promise that it gives at the beginning: it hails the creolization that is visible in Mauritian literature and shows particularities of the texts it interprets. Furthermore, it firmly grounds this literature against the background of *mondialisation* and cosmopolitanism, and employs a variety of theoretical approaches, including Marxism and gender studies, in order to bring forth what is the most valuable in these texts.

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