

king the radical indeterminacy posed by the unlikely cross between ventriloquism and transvestism, Harvey offers a theoretical paradigm and a critical methodology that requires refinement, but that should prove foundational for future feminist and Renaissance studies.

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WORKS CITED

- Foucault, Michel. *Foucault Reader*. Ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon, 1984.  
 Jardine, Alice. *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985.

Albert Gerard. *Contexts of African Literature*. Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 1990. pp. 169. \$35.00.

Divided into four parts (thirteen chapters), this book is an argument for both a comparative approach to the study of African literature and for the use of Africa as a case study of the various phenomena that accompany the passage of a people or continent from orality to written literature. The methods are therefore those of the literary historian. Using Latin within European literary history as a point of departure and in comparison with the advent and roles of European languages within the African context (Parts I and II), the book extracts the general law that creative writing is at first élitist then progresses to concern itself with the problems and conditions of the majority in its own languages. Thus, despite the apparent official ascendancy of European languages in Africa, there still existed fifty African languages in the 1980s.

This awareness makes it imperative to adjust the boundaries and methods of comparative literary studies as well as to re-examine traditional notions such as Commonwealth and national literatures. Henceforth the criterion of linguistic unity can no longer be tenable in defining these notions. What is national may at once be polyethnic and multilingual. The book further posits that an adequate African literary history must include vernacular literatures, some of which, such as Ethiopic languages and the Arabic scripts, preceded Roman script in Africa.

Part III is a practical application of the theories advanced earlier, providing case studies of three "national literatures"—Ghana, East Africa, and South Africa. The literary history of Ghana, for example, includes not only works written in English but the "various ethnic groups' oral art . . . all creative writings in the Ghanaian vernaculars, as well as the country's anglophone output" (82). The last section discusses the ways tradition has affected modern writing in sub-Saharan Africa, concluding that the former has shown great resilience in the face of the onslaught of Western forms.

The merits of Gerard's book lie first in the interesting parallels he finds between the roles and fortunes of Latin in the Western world and

those of the Western languages in Africa. Secondly, he advocates that the rightful place be accorded to African languages in the discipline of Comparative Literature. Finally and more importantly, he unearths limitless possibilities for the comparatist scholar interested in African vernacular literature and such areas as bibliographical and biographical information, the study of literary intermediaries or "*la mésologie*," archival research, and comparative studies of vernacular and European literatures. These vistas constitute an enrichment of Comparative Literature as an academic discipline as well as a development of literary knowledge through the discovery of unexpected connections.

The author leaves the African scholar with many thought-provoking questions, for example, how and why does an African writer choose a language in which to write? To what extent do literary traditions of the past influence present writing? To discuss African literature effectively, not only must the critic be armed with literary critical tools but he or she must achieve knowledge of African society. In other words, the criticism of African literature implies a contextual approach, "a modicum of anthropological and historical information" (163). However, it is evident that Gerard's knowledge of African contexts (social, cultural, linguistic) is very limited, as he himself confesses his ignorance and his need to rely amply on secondary sources. The result is that discussions in this area are scanty, sketchy, and generalized when compared to information given on European literature.

Another difficulty is the lack of relevance of some of Gerard's assertions on the position of African languages in francophone Africa; events occurring since the time of Gerard's writing have rendered his assertions irrelevant. Such is to be expected when some chapters were published as articles more than 20 years ago. Since then much water has passed under the bridge.

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Timothy Weiss. *On the Margins: The Art of Exile in V. S. Naipaul*. Amherst, MA: U of Massachusetts P, 1992. pp. ix, 276. \$30.00.

Since the early 1970s there have been at least eighteen book-length studies devoted to V. S. Naipaul's writing, published at a pace that exceeds even Naipaul's own prolific output. Recently, as the pile of primary and secondary works has grown higher, the general or introductory reading has given way to several important works with more specific mandates. Selwyn Cudjoe's *V. S. Naipaul: A Materialist Reading* (1988) does an admirable job of articulating ideological and historical contexts, while John Thieme's *The Web of Tradition: Uses of Allusion in V. S. Naipaul's Fiction* (1987) is a thorough and often surprising account of the author's cosmopolitan cultural references, from Hinduism to calypso to Hollywood *film noir*. Dolly Zulakha Hassan provides a valuable source book of West Indian responses to Naipaul's