

## Introduction: 'Identity, Gender, Politics'

(Kathryn Jones, Joanne Sayner & Margaret Topping)

An increasing postmodern distrust of narratives of sameness has, in recent years, heightened the prominence of questions of difference and identity. A recognition of the historical rootedness of all cultural production has caused us to look more closely at discourses of difference and sameness. Through a consideration of inherent power relations we can see whether, and how, narratives are embroiled in hierarchies of liberation or oppression. The theme of 'writing difference' unites our five articles, which take Creole, German, Catalan, English, French, Iranian and American literature as their focus. The complexity of identities reconfigured by gender, ethnicity and sexuality, and their expression in writing, provides the basis for three of the following articles. Maria Àngels Francés, Odile Ferly and Teresa Ludden show how questions of marginalisation and alterity have a truly international dimension. A theme of gendered resistance to hegemonic cultural norms is present in each of these discussions; a resistance which is negotiated through language and the very act of writing. Two of the articles, by Ian Wallace and Odile Ferly, are also concerned with investigating contrasting constructions of linguistic difference and intercultural exchange. With its celebratory vision of intercultural exchange, Negin Tahvildary's discussion provides an alternative to the often problematic constructions of difference explored in the preceding articles, for its comparative analysis of European and Iranian poets offers an implicit challenge to the binary opposition of West and East, Self and Other, which lies at the heart of the Orientalist discourse described by Edward Said.

In her article 'Writing Cultural and Gender Difference: Sylviane Telchid's *Throvia de la Dominique*', Odile Ferly considers the literary movement of Créolité. This arose in the French Caribbean in the late 1980s and is characterised by the use of a French heavily influenced by the Creole language. Ferly examines how the linguistic project of Guadeloupean writer Sylviane Telchid has many similarities to those of the créolistes in its elaboration of a border language that recreates the rhythm and imagery of Creole, while remaining accessible to non-Creole speakers. She considers how Telchid succeeds in gendering her text, thereby challenging the sexist assumptions of many of her male counterparts – in particular the leaders of the créolité movement – that men are the main producers of culture in the French Caribbean.

Maria Àngels Francés' article 'An Appeal for Sisterhood: A Comparison of Toni Morrison's *Sula* and Montserrat Roig's *L'hora violeta*' pursues the theme of sameness in difference, reflecting on gendered similarities within the works of Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973) and Montserrat Roig's *L'hora violeta* (1980). While refuting any essentialist notion of womanhood and stressing the historicity of their texts, Francés advocates an examination of resemblances based on the depiction of maternal legacy, community and female relationships. Francés focuses on thematic connections in the models of womanhood proposed by the texts, claiming that the narratives are characterised by female protagonists who attempt to create a space for themselves from within constrictive social traditions. Notwithstanding structural and contextual

differences between the texts, Francés shows how Roig and Morrison's narratives are pervaded by oppression founded in both gender and cultural difference.

Teresa Ludden highlights what she sees as a concern in Anne Duden's early prose work, particularly *Übergang* (1982), with marginal perspectives and spaces which have been left out of cultural norms. Using concepts of difference informed by Nietzsche and Irigaray, in her article *Writing Differences: Bodies and Modes of Relationality in Works by Anne Duden*, Ludden examines what she perceives to be Duden's interest in that which cannot be subsumed under fixed concepts and an attempt to write the specificities of different sorts of selves and bodies. She shows how these selves and bodies cannot adequately be understood by reference to a concept of a universal and unified transcendental subject. Ludden focuses particularly on Duden's textual strategies for writing these differences, for example her recourse to painting to invent a different language and her use of figures and images which 'embody' or symbolise difference, which are imitations of that which cannot be heard in Western culture but is nevertheless present.

Ian Wallace begins his article 'Stefan Heym's *Hostages* (1942): Writing and Adapting a Bestseller', by drawing attention to the linguistic difficulties faced by an author writing in a second language. His comparative analysis reveals a series of significant changes between *Hostages*, Heym's first novel written in English and published in the USA, and *Der Fall Glasenapp*, its self-translation which appeared in the GDR in 1958. Wallace contends that such changes demonstrate the importance of the cultural and historical context of publication to the complex processes of adaptation and rewriting. A further comparison with the 1943 Hollywood film version of *Hostages* reinforces Wallace's view that literary and filmic translations always involve strategies of intercultural transfer, of cultural interaction and negotiation.

In her article 'Poetry and the Sensitive World: A Comparative Perspective on the Poetic Course of Arthur Rimbaud, William Blake and Sohrab Sepehry', Negin Tahvildary explores how, despite the seemingly polarized cultural and religious backgrounds of Blake and Rimbaud on the one hand, and the Iranian poet, Sepehry, on the other, there are conjunction points at which the imaginary universes of all three overlap to create an 'alchemical fraternity' in favour of poetry. By exploring the poets' imagery, their handling of myth and the natural elements, and their recourse to other forms of aesthetic communication such as music, painting and the equally expressive language of silence, Tahvildary reveals how all three have created a 'pure poetry' born of a synthesis of the realistic representation of nature and imaginary spectacle. Her article further provides a striking illustration of the productive aesthetic cross-fertilization which links East and West. Echoing the arguments put forward by critics of Edward Said such as John McKenzie in his *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: MUP, 1995), Tahvildary's article highlights a syncretic perspective in both philosophy and aesthetics: Rimbaud and Blake are shown to have been influenced by Eastern philosophy and myth, just as the work of Sepehry, a poet of universal culture, bears the traces of the two Westerners' poetic vision.

The theme of this year's group of papers is 'Diversity', with papers forthcoming on Italian film, the Spanish Civil War, American theatre in Catalonia, German counter-culture and literary and cultural memories. We would like to thank those who participated in the 2000-2002 seminar series from which this *New Readings* volume is drawn, in particular those who gave such stimulating papers. The research group 'Histories, Memories and Fictions' constitutes the seed bed from which such a collaborative venture is possible and we equally extend our thanks to our colleagues. We especially would like to thank Prof Helmut Peitsch, one of the members of the group who has moved on to pastures new. His love of European literature and enthusiasm for critical debate in widely-ranging fields have been instrumental to the success of the group. We dedicate this volume of *New Readings* to him.