

DOMINIQUE MARÇAIS
MARK NIEMEYER
BERNARD VINCENT
CATHY WAEGNER
Editors

Literature on the Move

Comparing
Diasporic Ethnicities
in Europe
and the Americas

American Studies ★ A Monograph Series

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Literature on the Move

Literature on the Move: Comparing Diasporic Ethnicities in Europe and the Americas investigates the creativity emerging from the ruptures, unforeseen intersections, and new fusions of transmigration. The cultural bifocality of the essays by established scholars such as Wolfgang Binder, Karla Holloway, Elaine Kim, A. Robert Lee, Lisa Lowe, and Sterling Stuckey as well as new voices from around the globe provides insights into this creativity of a score of uprooted ethnicities. The chapters, including "Constructing the Ethnic", "Negotiating Identity", "Remembering and Forgetting in the Diaspora", "Performing Ethnicity", "Hybridizing the Ethnic Text", "Contesting Oppression and (Post)Colonialism", "Correcting Political Correctness", reflect concerns of ethnic studies in the twenty-first century. The reader of *Literature on the Move* is invited to join the quest for imagined spaces and multi-cultural consciousness in Europe, the Americas, and inbetween.

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*With admiration for her courage and achievement,
we respectfully dedicate this volume
to the memory of*

Barbara Christian

(1943 – 2000)

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Preface

Literature on the Move brings together a selection of the papers presented at the second MELUS Europe* conference, which took place at the University of Orléans, France, from 21 to 25 June 2000. In the shadow of figures as different as Joan of Arc, Voltaire, and the poet François Villon, the conference moved along and across the Loire from the city of Orléans to the university and to the château of Meung-sur-Loire, where a memorable banquet helped celebrate the gathering of about a hundred and fifty participants from twenty-five different countries. For four days these scholars discussed compelling issues raised by comparative studies of diasporic ethnicities in Europe and the Americas, investigating the creative ways in which cultural contacts lead to new identities, understandings, and visions. It was during this conference that MELUS Europe, founded just a few years earlier, officially changed its name to MESEA (Society for Multi-Ethnic Studies: Europe and the Americas) in order to reflect the comparative dimension of the association's focus, its inclusion of cultural and historical studies that go beyond exclusively literary concerns, as well as wider geographical borders.

Keynote speakers, all of whose papers appear in this collection, included well-known American and European scholars: Wolfgang Binder, Karla Holloway, A. Robert Lee, Lisa Lowe, and Sterling Stuckey. The conference was also honored by the participation of Dorothy Burton Skårdal, one of the pioneers of multicultural studies in Europe. Tragically, Barbara Christian, a leading specialist in African American studies, who had accepted to come to Orléans, died of cancer at her home in California on 25 June 2000, the closing day of the conference.

The articles in this collection have been organized into eight chapters mapping current concerns of ethnic studies. The first, "Constructing the Ethnic," includes essays focusing on concepts of ethnicity as social and, more specifically, literary constructs. As is the case with virtually all the articles in this collection, these studies focus on the interplay of cultural influences. Lisa Lowe shows how immigrant literatures can aid in the questioning of western concepts of modernity, while Angelika Köhler reads Native American and Chicana authors to investigate the female ethnic *Bildungsroman*. Michael Soto considers the cultural impact of the concept of bohemianism on American identity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and, indeed, America's influence on bohemianism.

The second chapter, "Negotiating Identity," includes essays by Rocío Davis and Bettina Hofmann, which analyze the unique perspective of children in literary texts dealing with the often traumatic encounters between

* European Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States

cultures. Heiner Bus investigates the deterritorialization of voluntary migrants, specifically Turkish German, which can result in a new sense of self and liberating mobility. In her consideration of Scandinavian American literature, Dorothy Burton Skårdal examines the concept of proto-ethnic literature and encourages scholars not to forget this important precursor to contemporary multicultural writings.

Five essays by Wolfgang Binder, Patrycja Kurjatto Renard, Barbara Seeber, Cathy Waegner and Heike Raphael-Hernandez in chapter three, "Remembering and Forgetting in the Diaspora," stress the importance of memory and remembrance in the preservation and mutations of cultural identities. Whereas most of these articles study literature as a privileged site of memory or refusal to remember, Cathy Waegner turns to cemeteries as material "texts" interacting with literary works in cultural discourse. The dynamic presence of the past in writing is illustrated in the other four articles in the contexts of Caribbean, U.S. Latino, African American, Chinese American, South Asian American and Native American cultures.

"Performing Ethnicity," chapter four, points to the reality that cultural identities are in perpetual flux. Rachel Lee investigates the complex world of racial encounters between Asian Americans and African Americans, which involves crossings of racial styles and stereotypes. The travel narratives of Harriet Martineau and William Wells Brown provide John Ernest with examples of what he calls the "fugitive tourist," a more overt and self-conscious case of an encounter with the other. Ted Merwin offers a comparison of the concept of masculinity in Jewish and African American identities as presented in literal performances on the New York stage.

Chapter five, "Hybridizing the Ethnic Text," emphasizes the many ways in which cultural encounters produce new forms and new spaces of ethnic development. Sterling Stuckey shows how African and slave cultures have influenced both white and black writers and artists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whereas Pirjo Ahokas focuses on images of hybridization in the construction of female identities in African American and Native American fiction. Samir Dayal examines the complex idea of universalism in evaluating the Walker/Parmar project on female genital mutilation in Africa. The inevitable necessity of the migrant's creation of a new diasporic consciousness, or "third home," is explored by Anastasia Stefanidou in the canons of two poets, one of them Greek American.

"Locating the Spaces Inbetween," chapter six, is also concerned with hybrids, but here the emphasis is more on the problem of finding one's place in a culturally diverse society, nonetheless dominated by white values. Elaine Kim explores the characterization of blacks in Asian American literature and the search of Asian Americans for a cultural niche within an America traditionally focused on black-white polarity. William Dow sees Jean Toomer's *Cane* as having incorporated some of the modernist techniques of portraiture pioneered by Sherwood Anderson in *Winesburg*,

Ohio in order to create a new aesthetic field for black expression. Finally, Iping Liang takes the examples of Ana Castillo, Toni Morrison and Leslie Marmon Silko to analyze the trope of the border in narratives that attempt to define a space in which hybrid identities can be asserted.

Chapter seven, "Contesting Oppression and (Post)Colonialism," brings a more overtly political dimension to the consideration of cultural confrontation. Laurie Robertson-Lorant shows how reading Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* can shed light on one of the canonical texts of American literature, *Moby-Dick*, especially in the questioning of typical western attitudes to outsiders. Exploring forced sexual encounters under slavery as presented in nineteenth-century texts, Arlene R. Keizer analyzes how these encounters helped shape sexuality in both black and white cultures. Irina Novikova uses Japanese American and Latvian American texts to analyze the traumas of internment and forced displacement during wartime as gender-specific experiences. Pradyumna Chauhan's article on Claude McKay and Salman Rushdie emphasizes the similar responses to the complexities of the (post)colonial condition in two seemingly very different authors.

The final chapter, "Correcting Political Correctness," questions some of the past and prevailing notions in ethnic discussion. A. Robert Lee challenges the frequently stereotypical minority group identities and militancies present in much multi-ethnic writing in an attempt to move beyond overly simplistic definitions. The difficulties of evaluating the objectivity of the Depression-period studies of the Southern rural poor is highlighted by Stephen Fender, who compares the research of the Federal Writers' Project to that of Fisk University, including a consideration of early forms of political correctness.

This chapter and the volume ends on a polemical note with Karla Holloway's clarion call for literary critics and theorists to extend Barbara Christian's seminal essay, "The Race for Theory" (1986). If Barbara Christian argued for a more liberated critical response to African American literature, Holloway recommends an explicit exchange of critical concerns among interpretive communities. *Literature on the Move*, which deals with a multitude of ethnicities and critical schools, could be read as one attempt to meet Holloway's challenge to do justice to the "complicated hybrid racial locations" of our time. In fact, this collection goes beyond her specific suggestion to use African American literature and interpretive theories as a mode of access to white literatures. *Literature on the Move: Comparing Diasporic Ethnicities in Europe and the Americas* points to ways in which imaginative and critical writings of all ethnicities can aid in their mutual interpretation as well as in the (re-)interpretation of canonical texts.