



## **ESSE-8: LONDON 2006**

**29 August – 2 September 2006**

### **S45. Projections of Paradise in Migrant Literature**

**Tuesday 29 August: 4.30-6.30pm**

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As Cees Nooteboom's recent resumption of the Miltonian idea of a forbidden Garden of Eden shows, the quest for other worlds as places of felicity and fulfilment and as retreats from worldly hells continues to fascinate writers irrespective of their cultural backgrounds. Contemporary and earlier literature of displacement provides one such area of investigation as it routinely idealizes another place and dramatizes either the process of uprooting and relocation or that of returning as a ritual passage to paradise. This seminar aims at examining the reasons for this enduring fascination, the anthropological beliefs underlying it, the representation of paradisiacal dream lands in writing, and the influence of other arts in the construction of such visions.

### **Glimpses of Paradise: Hope in Stories of Migration by M.G. Vassanji, Cyril Dabydeen and Janette Turner Hospital**

Helga Ramsey-Kurz (University of Innsbruck)

The migrant's presence in one place is always an absence from another. To capture this ambivalence, narratives of migration must oscillate between different locations. This paper is interested in the ways in which other-worlds either left or never reached by the migrant are discursively fenced off, as it were, against the remaining part of the tale of travelling to sustain not only a sense of movement beyond the suggested moments of arrival but also the hope by which this movement has been prompted. I will focus on three short stories describing three different stages in the drama of migration: "Leaving" by M. G. Vassanji, "Mammita's Garden Cove" by Cyril Dabydeen, and "After Long Absence" by Janette Turner Hospital.

### **"I feel the land": Contradictions of Place in Rudy Wiebe's Mennonite Novels**

Janne Korkka (University of Turku)

Rudy Wiebe, an important Western Canadian writer, is best known for his explorations into the history and peoples of the Canadian Prairies. He emphasizes the importance of the land and the requirements it sets for fiction, and his obsession seems to lie in questioning the structures used to make and interpret the history of the land, its past, its

people and their representations. I will concentrate on the Mennonite relation to place in *The Blue Mountains of China* and *Sweeter than All the World*, two episodic novels that both present a variety of narrators in diverse historical and geographical settings.

**Eden, Fall, Redemption: Water and the Recreation of Paradise in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient***

Ursula Kluwick (University of Vienna)

*The English Patient* can be read in terms of the dynamics of the creation of paradise, expulsion from this temporary repose and eventual redemption. My primary interest concerns the symbolic significance of water in the novel. While water emerges as sacred and nourishing in the construction of paradise, its damaging power becomes apparent in the shattering of paradise, when water becomes violent. Water dries up towards the end of the novel, and it is superseded by fire. Yet the last action of the novel prevents the spilling of water through the renewed connection between two characters, hence suggesting possible redemption.

**In Quest for Eden: Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide***

Evelyne Hanquart-Turner (University of Paris 12)

If the very title of Ghosh's novel seems to put forward the claims and demands of elemental nature, the story it tells stages the diverse attempts of humanity to struggle against or meet such demands. An ecological reading of the novel, provided for instance by John Skinner in 2005, gives an illuminating understanding of the issues Ghosh has been trying to tackle since *The Glass Palace*.

The novel can also be understood in a much more traditional way, as a modern reworking of the central themes of Genesis, with Man taking hold and taking stock of the world in which he is to live, as a modern version of the quest for the primeval garden of Eden, a quest which is definitely thwarted in our contemporary world. The triangular polarity of places in which the characters are made to live, and between which they are made to choose in order to survive, is particularly symbolical. From the corrupt, violent, materialistic world of today seen at its most pitiless in the strained circumstances of the 'tide country' of East Bengal, a land's end in itself, to the utopian settlement of the relocated poor, and to the water world of the dolphins and its jungle where if "the tiger [does not quite] lies with the lamb" at least man and animal communicate and help each other, Pryia Roy, the Americanised Indian and Kanai Dutt, the fastidious Delhi businessman, both moulded by modernity, have many choices to make.

If the "model" settlement was an idealistic vision of what proves to be an unattainable future, the wilderness of the delta evokes a pre-lapsarian state in which the Edenic couple, Pryia and Fokir, can forget the rest of the world. But both the utopian vision of an egalitarian and peaceful future, and the longing for a return to untouched primeval Eden are threatened and destroyed by the grasping, mindless violence of contemporary politics and bureaucracy as well as by the hungry, mindless violence of the Tide.

**"She's all states, and all princes I": Projections of Paradise in Michael Ondaatje's "The Cinnamon Peeler"**

Ulla Ratheiser (University of Innsbruck)

Against the backdrop of Sri Lanka's importance as cinnamon producing country, Michael Ondaatje's love poem "The Cinnamon Peeler" can be read as projected return to (the cinnamon) paradise, symbolised in the female body. The poet, of Sri Lankan origin, writes into the sensual/sexual exploration of the body of the beloved the idea of an imagined conquest of his lost dream land. This very particular conquest of paradise in "The Cinnamon Peeler" shall be analysed in the course of this paper and juxtaposed with Sri Lanka's colonial history as well as with that of the colonised female body.

### **The Darkside of Paradise: Octave Mannoni Confronting the Traumatic**

Hélène Thomas (University of Paris 13)

At the time of the bloody decolonization of Madagascar, the French anthropologist Octave Mannoni returned to Paris. Having conducted research into the dead and the cult of the dead in Madagascar, Mannoni now began to write *The Psychology of Colonisation* (1950), which was quickly translated into English under the title *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*. This anthropological and psychological analysis of the twin and linked figures of the European Master and the African Native was vehemently opposed by contemporary thinkers such as Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon for its ethnocentric assumption of an "hypothetical or supposed dependency complex of the (de)-colonized". The purpose of my paper is to look at the "dangerous" zone of the subject's breakdown, which leads Octave Manning to the other side of paradise, perhaps [back to] the hell he encountered during the massacre of more than 10000 Malagasies, for a long time hidden from the French collective memory and the official history of decolonization.

### **Kashmir by way of London, Bombay and Grenada: Projections of Paradise in Salman Rushdie**

Geetha Ganapathy-Doré (University of Paris 13)

During colonial times, passages to overseas tropical possessions were considered as pathways to hell by the British. No wonder a generation of migrant postcolonial writers idealized England's green and pleasant land as their dreamland. Though England, especially the city of London, held Rushdie in its thrall, he has had to contend with the predicament of all migrants who, like Satan in the Christian conception or Trishanku in the Hindu conception, feel stuck in the in-between space between heaven and earth. The publication of *The Satanic Verses* and the fatwa that followed it made Rushdie engage in a quest for imaginary homelands. Thus Sultan Boabdil's Al Hambra becomes a palimpsest of the Bombay of his childhood in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. However, in his last novel, *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), Rushdie goes back to Kashmir, the land of his ancestors, to reclaim a part of what the Mughal emperors believed to be paradise on earth. Rushdie's representation of the bygone ways of Kashmiriyat is closer to the Muslim conception of paradise (a perfumed garden with cool fountains and beautiful *houris* offering grapes). The stark violence of terrorism and the shameless international intrigue interspersed in the narrative serve only to highlight the tragedy of cultural misunderstanding. This paper will also explore the intertextual links between Rushdie's novel and Director Vidhu Vinod Chopra's 2000 film *Mission Kashmir*, as regards landscape, dance forms and intercommunal peace in Kashmir.

