
Birgit Neumann and Gabriele Rippl. 2020. *Verbal-Visual Configurations in Postcolonial Literature: Intermedial Aesthetics*. Routledge Research in Postcolonial Literatures. New York/London: Routledge, 281 pp., 6 figures, £ 120.00.

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Word and image relations have been on the forefront of academic scholarship for several years. Many creative writers have been making use of both the verbal and the visual in their narratives, and numerous studies have been published over the

last two decades detailing the intricacies in intermedial novels and short stories. Birgit Neumann and Gabriele Rippl have now taken an in-depth look at the field's relationship to postcolonial studies, identifying intermedial aesthetics as a central concept to the works of both established authors such as Salman Rushdie or Jamaica Kincaid and newer ones such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. In nuanced analyses of the respective writers' *oeuvre*, Neumann and Rippl are excavating visual and verbal power struggles in a postcolonial context. In this way, *Verbal-Visual Configurations in Postcolonial Literature* is a significant work because it provides interesting perspectives by re-evaluating traditional notions of art and literature. It serves as a profound exploration of intersections of the verbal and the visual in postcolonial writings.

The book's introduction focuses on "the art and power of seeing in postcolonial contexts", where the authors compellingly argue that "many contemporary novels register the discontinuous histories of postcolonial and diasporic subjects, foregrounding the passages, ruptures and networks of exchange that underlie their sense of (cultural and personal) identification" (2). Recent Anglophone novels increasingly concentrate on imagining visual practices "that forge connectivity and polycentric networks of aesthetic exchanges and transcultural linkages, while at the same time recognising difference and locality" (3). The narrative texts discussed in Neumann and Rippl's book do not, however, only discuss highbrow cultural phenomena but also negotiate examples in mass and social media. Transculturality is defined by the two scholars as covering narratives dealing with cross-cultural encounters (cf. 8).

Following the introduction, chapter two mainly concentrates on various theories of intermedial aesthetics, addressing concepts such as 'ekphrasis' and 'visuality'. It here already begins to draw a connection to postcolonial theory and verbal-visual engagements in that the authors aim to address how political and aesthetic questions are interconnected. Neumann and Rippl argue that bringing concepts of representation together with notions of presentation is useful for postcolonial studies because a large number of postcolonial texts make use of ekphrasis in order "to claim the presence, the 'hereness' of histories, peoples and geographies that are frequently relegated to the margins of western orders" (18). This chapter conceptualises the known intermedial terminology within a postcolonial context and therefore forms the basis for approaching the questions about how postcolonial writers make use of intermediality and to what purpose they do so.

The following nine chapters each focus on the analysis of a different postcolonial or transcultural text with all of the discussed texts making conspicuous use of intermedial aesthetics and therefore serving as examples of verbal-visual narratives without any claim of completeness of the corpus. Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* opens the discussion with its status as a novel that has many ref-

erences to visibility, ways of seeing and visual artefacts. The novel's examination of the past and its ekphrastic descriptions make it a prime example for exploring modes of power and identification as well as mapping processes in terms of a shifting geography (cf. 44) as well as the postcolonial gaze. Ondaatje's novel is essentially about "the barely visible" (58), a concept also central to David Dabydeen's *A Harlot's Progress*, which is the book discussed in chapter four. Dabydeen's novel provides Hogarth's characters with alternative lives so that they lose their stereotypical position as victims or criminals. Here, Neumann and Rippl address issues such as the subaltern's voice and vision, as well as eighteenth-century imagery and the difficulty of representing Black subjectivities.

Salman Rushdie's novels *Midnight's Children*, *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *The Enchantress of Florence* are next with negotiations of postcolonial identities through ekphrasis and its connection to ethics. Rushdie's novels uniquely confront western imagery with Indian visual culture, straddling "diverse cultures to enable more balanced visions of the past and possible futures" (83). The analysis of Derek Walcott's *Tiepolo's Hound* addresses the writer's focus on double visions as well as his use of repetition and difference as a literary tool. Neumann and Rippl argue that the ekphrastic descriptions in his poetry collection evoke Caribbean cultural hybridity, and it is particularly the boundary-crossing power of images that negotiates both transcultural locality and localised transculturality.

Next is an analysis of Jamaica Kincaid's novels *Lucy* and *See Now Then*. The study here looks at Kincaid's use of repetition and ekphrasis as well as seriality and photography. The writer's postcolonial aesthetics are frequently concerned with time and its connection to visibility in the form of photography. A similar strategy can be found in Anne Carson's *Autobiography in Red*. This novel in verse has a photographer protagonist who is keenly aware of the passing of time and interested in identity formation. Through her radical use (or disregard of) ekphrasis, Carson's aesthetics aim "to question a politics of dualisms that denigrates the other" (166).

NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* presents visual contact zones between 'African' and 'American' ekphrases. These transcultural spaces of comparison are what helps the novel's child protagonist Darling to make sense of the world and particularly of things that are foreign to her. Both traditional forms of media as well as mass media support western hegemony and, according to Neumann and Rippl, the novel negotiates cultural interrelations while also aiming at re-writing history in a postcolonial sense. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* shares certain similarities with Bulawayo's novel and therefore, quite fittingly, follows next. Portraying the defiance of African visual culture, *Half of a Yellow Sun* challenges notions of (western) high and (African) folk art and invites readers to "transcend the stasis of a singular, homological perspective" (200).

An analysis of Teju Cole's works *Every Day Is for the Thief* and *Open City* concludes the study. According to Neumann and Rippl, Cole considers African arts not as a means to create locality or empowerment, but instead they are "marked by absence and distance, hinting at both histories of dispossession and experiences of alienation" (201). Through the use of intermedial aesthetics, Cole sketches identification processes in an era of globalisation – including all its downsides like terrorism, corruption or political trauma.

One of the strengths of Neumann and Rippl's book is that it is a full-length study with a convincing perspective on word and image relations from a specific, i.e. postcolonial, angle. Critiquing viewpoints that strive to "replace western visual regimes with non-western ones" (243), Neumann and Rippl stress the "need for pluralised, affective and even conflicting modes of seeing as a means to overcoming epistemic injustices and of developing new visions of transcultural sociality" (243). While their study can, of course, only cover a certain number of narrative texts, the authors also do not forget other forms of media or other genres, providing an outlook on possible future points of study.

However, when the two scholars argue in their introduction that the writers covered in their book "up to now, [...] have been discussed almost exclusively in connection with colonialism, imperialism, individual, collective and national identity formation, ethnicity, race, ideology and post- and neo-colonialism as well as globalisation" (4) and not with an eye on their engagement with visual artefacts, I would like to draw attention to the existence of a number of publications from the last decade that deal with exactly this phenomenon and which, unfortunately, have not found their way into Neumann and Rippl's otherwise extensive bibliography. One might here mention Carmen Concilio and Maria Festa's 2017 edited volume *Word and Image in Literature and the Visual Arts* which has a fascinating article on Teju Cole's use of word and images. Another notable study would be Christine Schwanecke's *Intermedial Storytelling* (2012), which has chapters on Rushdie's use of photographic narration as well as on Penelope Lively's revisioning of the past through photographs. Or there is this reviewer's own modest monograph *Verbal Visuality* (2011), which discusses, among other texts by Anglophone writers, the use and various functions of the visual arts in Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*.

Yet, Neumann and Rippl's study is certainly the first full-length book on the topic, and with *Verbal-Visual Configurations in Postcolonial Literature* both authors have taken one more step to joining two fields of study that have previously been brought together, if not to the extent they deserve. *Verbal-Visual Configurations in Postcolonial Literature* therefore contributes and adds valuable insights to the literature previously published in both of these fields.

With their book, Neumann and Rippl have written a valuable monograph on the relation between intermedial aesthetics and postcolonial literature. *Verbal-*

Visual Configurations in Postcolonial Literature will serve as a great overview of the topic for scholars and advanced students alike. It is an insightful contribution to both the fields of word and image studies as well as postcolonial studies that pays close attention to cross-cultural relations and polycentric interactions discussing how they are portrayed through different intermedial forms.

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