

**Christian Gutleben and Vanessa Guignery, eds. “Nadine Gordimer, Jump and Other Stories: Parcours Critiques.”**

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Reviewed by Mathilde ROGEZ

The latest volume of the journal *Cynos*, edited by Christian Gutleben and Vanessa Guignery, tries, like other volumes in the collection, to strike a balance between offering new critical research on a major author and presenting approaches to a work on the syllabus for the French *Agrégation externe d’anglais* which can be more immediately useful to students, a fact one cannot help taking into account when reviewing this publication. Mostly based on presentations given at a conference organised at the École Normale Supérieure de Lyon in October 2018, it offers a coherent and fairly comprehensive reading of the work of one of the most famous white writers from South Africa.

The volume is divided into three parts: generic ambiguities, an aesthetic of fragmentation, and the issue of language and codes – although the editors point to other links between and possible groupings of the various essays composing the volume. Indeed, one cannot do away with the necessity for contextualisation, which is provided by three essays written respectively by Rita Barnard, Stephen Clingman, and Liliane Louvel, and to a lesser extent in the essay by Susan Barrett. They are bound to remain rather schematic in that respect. Borrowing from David Lodge, the first essay analyses how Gordimer responds to the demands of her time by using a form of realism which can actually be combined with rather than opposed to the allegorical mode. The essay then turns to brief illustrations with reference to “Once Upon a Time,” “Spoils,” and “Loot,” the first story in Gordimer’s next collection. Using Jameson, Barnard thus questions too optimistic a reading of the concluding story “Amnesty,” which Louvel situates back into its context: Gordimer’s stories were written at a time when the country was precariously poised on the cusp of major historical and political changes. The most compelling essay of all three, for both researchers and students, is probably Clingman’s, who revisits issues of space and spatiality which are crucial in South Africa. He focuses in particular on the notion of home, a space that is constantly impinged upon by the authorities, turned inside out and made part of the public space, thus tying in with its oxymoronic correlative, the homeland. The essay opposes Heidegger’s notion of “dwelling” to Levinas’s “home,” the latter involving a reciprocal acknowledgement of the other, which further allows Clingman to consider openings both in terms of space and of temporalities. His analysis spans not only most of the stories in the collection, but also several of Gordimer’s other works, with which they thus engage.

Theoretical contextualisation has already been given in the editors’ introduction which provides a selection of key guidelines for students and proves extremely helpful to readers not familiar with Gordimer’s work, while perhaps, from the point of view of the researcher, not questioning enough the position of the reader who is somehow always posited as western – and probably white. J.M. Coetzee’s insightful essays on Gordimer’s dual readership and the way in which she negotiated that double allegiance in her writings, particularly in *Jump* (as a transitional collection of stories), would prove a useful complement.

Those various theoretical threads are developed in particular in the essays by Fiona McCann and Nicolas Pierre Boileau which skilfully combine strong theoretical positions with careful close reading. The former successfully articulates postcolonial concepts (Bhabha's liminality) and considerations on the genre of the short story, while providing a close analysis of several stories ("Jump," "A Journey," and "Home") which nevertheless seamlessly weaves into it references to many other stories to shed light on the concepts of "liminality" and "home." The latter, a Lacanian reading of Gordimer's stories, proves similarly convincing by never losing sight of the text which is always analysed rigorously through a lens that is refreshingly different from those most commonly used when speaking about Gordimer. Less theoretical but extremely commendable to students preparing the *Agrégation* is Christian Gutleben's clever use of metonymy, or "thwarted metonymies," as a tool to read "Comrades" and "Keeping Fit" in particular, in an essay which again offers connections to other stories.

Language, its potential, failings, and limits are the focus of two interesting articles by Susan Barrett and Françoise Král which respectively tackle miscommunication and symptoms "of an unreconciled nation." According to Král, its wounds are lanced, if not healed, by Gordimer's use of the "performativity of language" (when "language indeed means what it says and makes people do what they say they are going to do," 101), with fiction thus setting the conditions for the possible creation of a nation. Yet it is a language which, as Barrett also argues in a more loosely written essay which however covers most key issues, still often remains unarticulated, with the body or silence acting as paradoxically more "decipherable" signs than verbal exchanges (151), in stories that are themselves often misleading. The reader thus has to hunt for meaning. If sound in its use of theoretical tools (Derrida, Foucault, Ginzburg) and textual analyses, the last article by Hubert Malfray – which compares the theme of the hunt with the reader's task in decoding Gordimer's stories – is however slightly less convincing for South African specialists, as it lacks familiarity with some major traditions in South African literature. Even though it tries to conclude on links between Gordimer and her South African peers, this is where the analysis does not create the strong links one finds in Clingman's essay, although Malfray justly brings attention back to generic issues. Michal Tal's article is not without interest either, but offers more of a typology: if it can be useful to students preparing for the *Agrégation*, it adds rather little to the study of Nadine Gordimer's work.

The editors thus deserve praise for convincingly including texts by the most renowned world specialists of Gordimer and some excellent articles by other French academics; yet the volume ultimately reveals, comparatively, the dearth of specialists of South African literature in France, as well as the relative and continuing disregard for South African literature in particular, and South African studies in general, in French academia. This translates in the essays collected in this volume into a sometimes excessive stress put on context. It could be interesting to focus more on how narrative choices could be analysed to read the short stories – when language for instance means also languages, and there are indeed many coming into dialogue in texts by South African authors (something only briefly alluded to by Barrett). The *Agrégation* is known to sometimes lead students to pursue doctoral studies in the field afterwards; yet it is to be hoped that such an interest will not limit itself to already well-researched authors like Gordimer, and will also focus on the many under-studied but remarkably gifted authors South Africa has to offer.