

Status: Postprint (Author's version)

A MEMORY TRIP Partly in Tandem, Partly Quadrilical

SCENE: There are four interlocutors (Gordon Collier, Marc Delrez, Anne Fuchs, and Bénédicte Ledent), sitting together after their months -- indeed, years now -- of highly rewarding slog (sorry: change that to 'editorial work') preparing a suitably massive tome in honour of Geoffrey V. Davis. At times losing sight of the man himself when engaged in tidying up the intricacies of this or that essay on that subject or this author, at other times having his image reflected back at them by the appreciative passing comments of contributors, this quadrumvirate (doesn't Latin have a word that can embrace two women as well as two men?) has decided to pool the resources of memory to see if they can come up with something more substantial than a few 'enigma variations' on this solidly unchanging if protean figure. Memories being subjective and selective, their formulation can hardly jettison the experiencing self altogether -- which goes some way to explaining why comparatively subdued modesty alternates with unbridled egocentricity in the following. Let the conversation commence.

Gordon: How do we kick off here? Or, rather, when? You're clearly the *grande dame*, Anne; maybe —

Anne: — Thanks for drawing attention so subtly to my seniority, Gordon, but appearances can deceive, though I will have something to say about the when and where, and temporal precedence, a bit later on. You kick off, perhaps.

Gordon: Well, Geoff has been a stable and originary presence in my life, and in Rodopi's book series *Cross/Cultures* and *Matatu*; but where and when did it all begin? Picture a mild, warm, sunny June day in 1985, with a high blue sky for a Sistine ceiling. I am sitting, in the company of my customary solitary self, on the bottom-burnished wooden slats of a bench on the top deck of an excursion vessel chugging through the waters of West Berlin -- Havel, Wannsee, Glienicke Lanke -- the murmurous drowse of conference sessions thrust aside to make room for the primary reality of disengaged *plein-air* rubbernecking. I have escaped from the confines of the Eighth Conference on Commonwealth Language and Literature, "North-South Tensions in the Commonwealth" being held, under the auspices of the Freie Universität, at Schloss Glienicke, a palatial heap on generous parkland. A stocky, ruddy-faced, long-haired young man sitting opposite me leans amiably and amicably across, and we engage in conversation; I notice, with pleasure, that he has a touch of Lancashire in his accent. Because he is a stranger to me, but clearly a participant in this conference run by our eccentric, sibylline, already legend-enshrouded hostess, Edith Mettke, I am unguarded in my pronouncements. It seems clear to me from what this young man says that this is the first such conference he has attended, which fact encourages me to (figuratively speaking) reach down my superior index finger to touch his, infusing him with the life-breath of ill-digested facts about the history of 'our' New Literatures in English organization, to which I have belonged since its inception in 1977. Subsequent to the boat-trip, I must have spent some more time together with Geoffrey V. Davis (I had surreptitiously checked the conference programme; the onomastic resonance of that middle initial would emerge only much later), but I also recall something that I never cease to observe with envious irritation: in any larger gathering of people, there was little hope of having Geoff all to myself; he is a nuclear element in his own social quantum system -- wherever he goes, he attracts the particles of other people effortlessly, creating an atmosphere of conversational good-will.

What, for me, was magnetic about that first meeting, and what has kept the iron filings of my otherwise vacillating self inclined towards Geoff ever since, was his straight-shooting honesty and openness. Having, as a comparatively early-generation New Zealander, inherited a long legacy of suspicious prejudice about patrician airs, I felt and still feel that I could trust him. Thinking myself, at the time, to be the possessor of deeper truths about 'Commonwealth literature', I chose to think him infectiously innocent, but I learned quickly that one judges Geoff thus at one's peril. I know of nobody who wears his wide learning so lightly (another 'Northern' trait), and with such good humour. His enthusiasms (for German *Exilliteratur* -- which charmed me, as I had studied German at university; for classical music -- though his investment in opera was beyond me) have always been conveyed as a sharing of his pleasure, as dispatches from the front, never as covert one-upmanship.

Status: Postprint (Author's version)

Just in case any of you are tempted to put the record straight at this point -- I have intimated that I misjudged Geoff's 'Commonwealth literature' experience in a solipsistic, semi-autistic, Bishop Berkeley and the cat and the Eye of God sort of way: because Berlin was the first time I met Geoff, and because he looked so endearingly wet behind the ears, and because I had been Comm.-litting since the mid-1970s, I assumed that Berlin was his baptism of fire. (I also put him as much younger than I was, when, I eventually discovered, I am older than him by barely two months.) There are two revelations that put me well off-beam. One is the tiny irony that I presented no paper at Berlin but Geoff did, and an accomplished, seasoned traveller's one at that (and I hadn't even attended that session).¹ The other -- and it was some time before I realized this: Geoff was a consummate global player on at least two fronts quite some time before Berlin. A fascinating detail -- and the briskly detailed memoir by Hamish Walker and Michael Senior attests amply to this -- is the fact that his very earliest writings, 1979-82, were some eight reports on his experiences in the People's Republic of China. Memento traces of his trips to China are all over his apartment. A Northern boy (Southport schooling) and an Oxford scholarship student, he took his undergraduate degrees in French and German (he is also fluent in Russian, which helps with *Boris Godunov*). and his doctorate, taken at Aachen, was on Arnold Zweig.² Academically, then, first base for Geoff was as a Germanist, but of a very special breed, those who combine 'exile literature' with 'East German' literature.³ Not only that, but he was a consummate cosmopolitan, travelling far further afield than I had dared do.⁴ A red thread clearly runs through his research in German literature, and that is the question of liminality and marginalization, and the surmounting of this condition. And this red thread, or Hansel's breadcrumbs, can be traced further, into Geoff's loyal and authoritative engagement with the apartheid literature of South Africa, which follows closely on his 'Germanist' publications -- his earliest articles on German topics date from the early 1980s, as do those on South Africa.⁵ An early and much-appreciated high point of these foundational years of Geoff's critical production is the two volumes he brought out with Michael Senior, *South Africa: The Privileged and the Dispossessed* (1983-85). Geoff has a very special, scarcely describable gait -- you would know it was him approaching you even at dusk and at two hundred metres distance. It must come from all the amazing leg-work he and Michael put into that book, which I would be tempted to call a precocious achievement, were it not for the fact that all of the fruits of his research, up to the present, are based on this kind of wide-ranging, omnivorous, and panoptical thoroughness.

Bénédicte: Your first memory of Geoff is concrete and discrete but, paradoxically, fuzzy around the edges. For my part, it's difficult to remember exactly when I first met Geoff. All I know for sure is that in my mind he is, in one way or another, so inextricably linked with my professional life that it seems I have somehow always known him. Looking back, however, I think that the first time I came across Geoff was in Cambridge in the late 1980s, probably during the 1987 Michaelmas term, at one of the 'International English Literature Seminars' that Tim Cribb was holding every second Friday evening at Pembroke College. At the time, postcolonial literatures did not enjoy the widespread success they now have -- at least not in Cambridge -- and these seminars were a cosy affair, with just a small group of enthusiastic participants listening to speakers including Wilson Harris, Ben Okri, and scholars from around the world. If I'm not mistaken, the first of these meetings that Geoff attended during a research stint at the famous university was a discussion of the South African Guy Butler's narrative poem *Pilgrimage to Dias Cross* led by the redoubtable Shakespeare and Renaissance drama scholar, Professor Muriel Bradbrook. I don't think I got much of a chance to actually speak to Geoff on that particular occasion, but

¹ The title was "Life on the Black Side of the Fence: Forced Removals and the Migrant Labour System in Recent Black South African Literature." It was published in *Tensions between North and South*, edited by Edith Mettke (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1990): 73-91, though the five-year gap between paper and publication of the proceedings must have been too much for Geoff to bear, and it also came out in another, more thematically relevant critical collection a year earlier -- *Current Themes in Contemporary South African Literature*, edited by the redoubtable Lehmann & Reckwitz (Essen: Blaue Eule, 1989): 125-56. This is the only occasion I know of where Geoff has betrayed any signs of crafty opportunism and overt auto-cannibalism.

² See Zweig's own celestial lucubrations in the present volume, as mediated by Debby Vietor-Englander. The doctorate emerged as his first book, *Arnold Zweig in der DDR: Entstehung und Bearbeitung der Romane "Die Feuerpause", "Das Eis bricht" und "Traum ist teuer"* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1977), which was followed by his co-edition (with David Midgley and Heino Müller -- the former of whom wrote a Zweig monograph that Geoff reviewed earlier in *German Life and Letters*, 1984) of the 1987 Cambridge International Arnold Zweig Symposium (1988).

³ For me uncanny, if for others banal: in the early 1970s, before being kindly disabused of my hobby by Michael Hamburger over coffee, I was obsessively translating Christa Wolf, Johannes Bobrowski, Volker Braun, Rainer Kunze, and Peter Huchel. So Geoff and I were both looking across the border, if from different angles.

⁴ He gave papers at conferences on East German and émigré literature in St. Louis, Missouri (1980), Houston (1980), Dundee (1983), New Hampshire (1982, 1984, and 1986), Cambridge (1987), and New Orleans (1987). And that's just for starters.

⁵ His first-ever 'postcolonial' article was related to his first and continuing area of active interest, South Africa, "Kapstadt: Glanz und Elend dicht beisammen," *Aachener Nachrichten* (14 March 1981). Two interviews with South African writers were published in 1982 (with Gladys Thomas and Matsemela Manaka). One article is a kind of crossover with his interest in East German culture: "'Erkennt Ihr, warum wir Euch lieben?': The GDR and the States of Southern Africa in the 1980s," in *The GDR in the Eighties*, ed. Ian Wallace (Dundee, 1984): 45-70. This essay came out of the Dundee conference, where Geoff will have consolidated his friendship with the Germanist Ian Wallace, which became a creative partnership and a co-presence in different series published by Rodopi.

Status: Postprint (Author's version)

I knew from the start who he was, for Hena – Geoff's life-long friend, who was also my doctoral supervisor -- had already spoken highly of him to me.

Anne: Geoff was born two roads away from where I now have a flat back in my home town in the Midlands. From 1944 to 1951 I travelled daily on my school bus past the nursing home where his mother had given birth to him. This perhaps explains why meeting him for the first time at a conference in the South of France⁶ was like meeting up with an old friend; it may be that many people have this impression with Geoff, who, though far from naive, *a-priori* treats everyone as an equal and worthy of both his confidence and his confidences.

After a short, militant, but highly incongruous march with others down the Promenade des Anglais in Nice, advocating a renewed boycott by the French of South African Outspan oranges, we agreed to keep in touch. Our next meeting, also in 1988, was in Grenoble at the house of Jacques and Neela Alvarez-Péreyre, where Geoff arrived with a strange and tragic East German friend called Tommie (but that's another tale) in tow. We talked and talked for a long weekend, about communism (my husband, Michel, who belonged to the French P.C., was present), about the Berlin Wall, about Israel, but mainly about South Africa. Both Geoff and I were committed not only to the 'literature of commitment' but also to the anti-apartheid movement. Strangely enough we had both left early research interests concerned with Germany and the Second World War (I had written my Doctorat d'Université dissertation on "Theatre in Paris during the German occupation" and Geoff, of course, had been working on German exile literature) for South Africa. With Alvarez-Péreyre we outlined a huge project dealing with the whole of South African literature. Needless to say, the project in question never even reached the stage of a book proposal, but for me (and I hope for Geoff) that weekend turned out to be an important stepping-stone in life.

The immediate consequence was all in my favour; a neophyte compared with Jacques Alvarez-Péreyre, who had numerous translations and publications to his credit, including *The Poetry of Commitment in South Africa*, and, equally, compared with Geoff, who, as Gordon states, had already published his book for schools on South Africa with Michael Senior, I had just written a book I was trying to get published. In his incredibly generous way, Geoff devoted much time and thought to this problem and eventually persuaded Rick Takvorian, whom Geoff knew in his capacity as artistic director of the Ludwig Forum in Aachen, and who had been entrusted as general editor with a series of volumes on contemporary theatre by Harwood, to take me on.⁷ This is important, in that, through these initial contacts of ours, in particular with Robert Robertson (Harwood's London agent), Geoff subsequently brought out two more volumes on South Africa with Harwood.

Marc: Fortunately, there is such a thing as fictional truth. Of all four participants in this quadrangular conversation I am the youngest, which is perhaps why I tend to be the least focused on retrieving the actual facts of the past. My perception of Geoff consists essentially of intuitive impressions -- sensory snapshots, as it were - - which have etched in my mind the indelible and unmistakable signature of his unassuming personality. Geoff is so *clear*. No repressed rancour there, no hidden agenda, no manipulative obliquities... Let us put it like this: not even his most gracious compliments can be construed as flattery. No matter how consistently supportive he tends to be. His belief in people, perhaps an offshoot of his ingrained humanism, certainly pollinates and propagates in a cascade of unimagined consequence. There is a puzzle here, to do with the persuasiveness of a man who invariably expresses his views with absolute modesty. Yes, it is a paradox, surely, that the overt acknowledgement of his normality should create the conditions in which so many achievements of daunting magnitude may begin to be contemplated. Many a conference, many a book, owes its existence to Geoff's unassuming presence, which constitutes a facet of his incredible enthusiasm. Indeed, such benevolence, such a capacity for *warming* to others, can only be grounded in a form of genuine humility. Thus Geoff possesses the ultimate qualities of the literary critic: a brand of unpretentiousness that borders on negative capability, coupled with an insatiable curiosity fed by good-will and respect for the intention of the text -- to the point that one could overlook the underlying erudition and intelligence....

⁶ This conference was held in 1988 at Nice (where my husband and I were teaching) and organized by Jacqueline Bardolph under the aegis of EACLALS. The proceedings were edited by Jacqueline and published as *Short Fiction in the New Literatures in English* (Nice: Faculté des Lettres, Université de Nice-Sophia Antipolis, 1989). Gordon notes that, thanks to Geoff's many friends in France, Cross/Cultures was not far away: in 1997, Jacqueline convened another short-fiction conference at Nice, the proceedings of which were published as a memorial volume, edited by Jacqueline but redacted after her death by André Viola (also no longer with us) and Jean-Pierre Durix under the title *Telling Stories: Postcolonial Short Fiction in English* (Cross/Cultures 47; Amsterdam & Atlanta GA : Rodopi, 2001).

⁷ Harwood is an academic publisher, in the 1980s part of Gordon & Breach, later to become Taylor & Francis, and today taken over by Routledge. Harwood published the first edition of my book *Playing the Market*, on Johannesburg's Market Theatre, in 1990 (with the encouragement of Michel and Geoff, a revised edition appeared in the Cross/Cultures series in 2002).

Status: Postprint (Author's version)

It is relevant that -- in fictional memory -- his first words to me were spoken in apology. In retrospect, this seems astonishing, since he had after all done me the favour of including, in his *Crisis and Creativity* volume, a most juvenile article of mine (but a misprint had sneaked into the title during the editing process). As this was a book of proceedings originating in the 1988 Aachen-Liège conference, which Geoff co-organized with my then doctoral supervisor, Hena Maes-Jelinek (and, as you said, your own, Béné), it follows that I must have caught sight of him lazing in the sunshine, at coffee-break time, on the lawns of the *château* at Colonster. Little did I know at the time that I would later be enlisted in the team (together with Geoff himself, Peter Marsden, and Béné) responsible for the organization of a replay of that memorable *Ur*-script. This collaboration, which eventuated in the GNEL/ASNEL Conference held in Aachen and Liège in May-June 2000, was to lay the foundations for multiple professional friendships and for a series of further projects similarly triggered by Geoff's optimistic yearning for those academic crops which he saw stored up in the dark cracks of future time. I do not wish here to beautify the picture by suggesting that our behind-the-scenes preparatory meetings consisted of anything else but sheer hard work all round, but it is the case that Geoff's geniality, along with Pete's valiant wit, served to allay any doubts we lesser Liège colleagues might have entertained about the soundness of our common venture. It must be remembered that the 2000 conference was a cross-border affair, which generated its own difficulties -- such as having to smuggle in, inside a big diplomatic-looking Mercedes, Jamaican poets who did not have a visa for Belgium —

Gordon: — Déjà vu! That also happened at the 1988 conference; I sat in the front passenger's seat, and my idol Eddie Brathwaite, from Barbados, sat with saturnine mien in the back, solicitously attended to by Christine Pagnoulle.

Marc: Like the 1988 one, the 2000 venue turned out to be rather grand, with its 330 delegates and no fewer than thirty invited creative writers from all five continents! A pattern was set here, with Geoff brimming with ideas and enthusiasm and desire to invite all the most impoverished writers of the world, and the rest of the team anxiously rehearsing budgetary availabilities. As Béné, who subsequently officiated as the purse-bearer of EACLALS and then ACLALS for over a decade, and also Ingrid ('The Wife'), will probably confirm, Geoff qualifies for the title of official, card-carrying treasurer's nightmare.

Bénédicte: You can say that again!

Gordon: Apropos money, his enthusiasms will make him bolt like an exhilarated pony in the direction of ever-new challenges, even when penniless and stuck in some current task.

These ever-new challenges... I recall two conferences, the chronology of which puts us in tandem: the one you mentioned first, Marc -- the 11th Commonwealth Literature conference (1988), "Crisis and Conflict in the New Literatures in English" convened by Geoff and by Hena Maes-Jelinek at Liège -- and the 12th (1989), "Them and Us: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on the New Literatures in English" convened by me at Giessen. Just look at that Aachen-Liège conference, a nightmare of logistics, and calculate how little time had elapsed between what I took to be his mid-1985 initiation into the mysteries of The Organization and the mid-1988 venue. The latter was a large affair but (okay, this is a pissing contest) not so large as my Giessen conference of the following year, in a much smaller, single location, wellnigh unrepeatable, one might think. Or, at least, re-stageable only with some diffidence. The 1988 Aachen-Liège occasion yielded at least three volumes of selected conference proceedings. One volume was entitled *Crisis and Conflict: Essays on Southern African Literature* (Essen: Die Blaue Eule, 1990), and was edited by Geoff. The other two -- and Marc has adverted to these -- were *Crisis and Creativity in the New Literatures in English*, edited by Geoff and Hena Maes-Jelinek, and *Crisis and Creativity in the New Literatures in English: Canada*, edited by Geoff alone. The latter two books appeared as volumes 1 and 2 of a new book series called "Cross/Cultures: Readings in the Post/Colonial Literatures in English" under the imprint of Editions Rodopi (Amsterdam and Atlanta GA, now Amsterdam and New York). My own hands-on involvement in Cross/Cultures started only with volumes 5 and 6, the latter of which, *US/THEM: Translation, Transcription and Identity in Post-Colonial Literary Cultures* (1992), was the outcome of the above-mentioned 12th conference. But if I look at the masthead of volume 1, I see that the series co-editors are Gordon Collier (Giessen), Hena Maes-Jelinek (Liège), and Geoffrey Davis (Aachen). It makes sense, in terms of the Aachen-Liège conference, for Geoff and Hena to be on the editorial board, but I have no clear recollection of how I got to be there. Much the same applies in the case of *Matatu*, which is a predominantly Africa-oriented journal, and where it was only logical that its Africanist founding editor, Holger Ehling, should have two Africanists, Geoff and Frank Schulze-Engler, as his co-editors, and where it was less logical to include me, from volume 12 onwards, as Caribbean editor. The main thing is: Geoff was always there, and I moved up

Status: Postprint (Author's version)

profitably through the ranks in his generous wake.⁸

It was at the 12th conference in Giessen that a New Literatures Association was formally instituted. With a few early exceptions, selected proceedings from further conferences (the venues for which were agreed on at annual general meetings) have appeared in the Cross/Cultures series under the sub-series title "ASNEL Papers." I mentioned that the ambitious 1988 Aachen-Liège conference seemed unique, unrepeatably. But we have also collectively intimated the grip on Geoff of his recklessly generous enthusiasm. Behold the three volumes of ASNEL Papers 8, 9.1, and 9.2, co-edited by Geoff -- these were the belated outcome of that massive, astounding repeat performance at the same bicephalous venue of Aachen and Liège, "Towards a Transcultural Future: Literature and Society in a 'Post'-Colonial World" (2000). By the time (2005) the proceedings of the first conference finally made their way down the birth canal into the light of print, Geoff was co-editing either with his fellow *genius loci* at Aachen, Pete Marsden, or with you, Béné, and you, Marc, two of Hena Maes-Jelinek's acolytes at Liège and now professors there in her stead and her tradition.

Bénédicte: This combination of crystal-clear data and fuzziness is getting to be a habit with you, Gordon. But with this synergy of place and time, conferences and publishing outcomes, there is clearly a Germany/Belgium connection fairly firmly in place.

That Geoff is good company but also a bon vivant was further confirmed for me, after the Pembroke College meeting that I mentioned earlier, when more occasions for collaboration presented themselves. The first of these was that second Aachen-Liège conference under the auspices of ASNEL/GNEL, which I was involved in co-organizing along with Geoff, Marc, and Peter Marsden. Working with this team proved to be extremely gratifying -- on both the human and the scholarly/logistical level -- even if the management of a congress with more than three hundred participants and several dozen writers proved, as Marc has already suggested, to be an occasional source of anxiety, particularly under Geoff's visionary and at times unrealistically generous leadership. However, his wildest ideas, for example the staging of Wilson Harris's *Jonestown* in a German museum, came off to everybody's satisfaction and the three edited collections of essays that followed this gigantic conference owe much to his creative determination.

But what about the 'French connection', Anne? I'm interested in hearing how that developed further.

Anne: It's typically less French than South African. In 1991 we set off together for Johannesburg, where we stayed with my friends Malcolm Purkey and Pippa Stein, and in three mad weeks we met, interviewed, and commissioned articles from the numerous contributors to the forthcoming *Theatre and Change in South Africa* volume.⁹ I still have visions of Geoff resolutely eating his picnic lunch at the bottom of a mountain while I travelled up in a ski-lift to eat mine with Stephen Gray at the top, and pleading with him not to go so fast as he strode ahead through down-town Jo'burg. But on the whole he was a delight to work with and his charm and natural friendliness worked wonders in putting our interviewees at ease.

By this stage in his life, all kinds of other things were happening: he had just met Ingrid, future wife for Geoff and future friend for the Fuchs family; with others, as Gordon recounts, he had founded and was increasingly involved in Rodopi's Cross/Cultures series; and then there was Matsemela Manaka, who tended to arrive either in Aachen or in Nice and announce in a piteous tone: "Geoff" -- or "Anne," depending on the destination arrived at -- "I'm at the railway station." "So what?" we may have thought occasionally, but in fact always rushed in a state of high excitement to pick up our South African playwright, musician, and artist friend. Geoff edited, once more for Harwood, *Beyond the Echoes of Soweto*, a compilation of Matsemela's plays and other work.¹⁰ Matsemela took part in the session on South African theatre that Geoff and I organized at an MLA conference in Chicago,¹¹ and, incidentally, I think it was here that we met Marcia Blumberg for the first time. Among other artists represented in Geoff's spacious eyrie flat (that those of us around the eighty mark have some difficulty in attaining these days), Matsemela has pride of place, and it was his work, of course, that appeared on the front cover of what the Germans and French call Geoff's '*Habilitation*'.

⁸ He was co-editor of *Matafu* from its very first issue in 1987, the first six issues being published under Holger Ehling's imprint (Gottingen, then Frankfurt), before the series was taken up by Rodopi in 1990.

⁹ *Theatre and Change in South Africa*, ed. Geoffrey V. Davis & Anne Fuchs (Contemporary Theatre Studies; Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1996).

¹⁰ Matsemela Manaka, *Beyond the Echoes of Soweto: Five Plays*, ed. Geoffrey V. Davis (Contemporary Theatre Studies; Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1997).

¹¹ Modern Language Association (MLA) Annual Convention, Chicago, 27-30 December 1990.

Status: Postprint (Author's version)

Bénédicte: You mentioned that Chicago conference, Anne, and Geoff's close international friendships, all of which prompts me to think further, and a bit closer to home, about my contacts with Geoff. In the weeks, months, and years that followed that first Cambridge meeting, I got to cross Geoff's path more and more often, notably at the Jubilee Conference on Commonwealth Poetry, held at the Commonwealth Institute in London in November 1987, then at the Aachen-Liège conference that he co-organized with Hena in June 1988 and where I gave my very first paper, which, like Marc's, was later to be edited by the same team and appear in the first volume of the *Cross/Cultures* series.¹² To the budding researcher that I was then, Geoff came across on all these occasions as a very accessible person who, in spite of his already impressive scholarship, was most willing to listen to and encourage his younger colleagues.

I remember the same generosity in the years that followed when, several times during the writing of my doctoral dissertation, Geoff sent me copies of difficult-to-find articles. It was only in 1996, when we were elected onto the board of EACLALS with Hena, who became the chair of the association, that I was given an opportunity to collaborate with him more concretely. I have a memory of long but always fruitful board meetings in Liège during which I acted as a kind of buffer between Hena's down-to-earth manner and Geoff's more idealistic approach to all the matters that we had to decide upon. During the three years of that most rewarding partnership, I got to know Geoff better, not only his bigheartedness but also his insatiable intellectual curiosity and enthusiasm for all things artistic, whether literature, music, drama or film. Geoff is still one of the few people I know who regularly crosses one or several European borders just to go to a play, an opera or a concert, be it in Brussels, Amsterdam or London. No wonder he is also a tireless academic globetrotter, who has attended countless conferences on all five continents. I remember meeting him at such venues as Jamaica in 1992, Zimbabwe in 1999, and Canada in 2007 and listening to his always passionate appreciation of the country that he was visiting as well of the keynotes and papers that he had heard.

Gordon: The "spacious eyrie flat" that you mentioned, Anne, and that all of us know well -- it prompts other fond memories. My personal library is insanely larger than his (okay, this is a pissing contest again), but I had more delight in grazing his groaning bookshelves at Johanniterstrasse 13 than in any bookstore. There was always some discovery -- something arcane and valuable that I hadn't known about, or books that I myself also possessed that made us kindred souls, or items I didn't have and was tempted to steal. Our reading, I found, was voracious and catholic and sometimes off the wall, though not so much as Geoff's flat, part of which once collapsed from the weight of all those tomes.

Whenever I got him on the phone (and this has been corroborated by other members of my family), his voice would sound weary, worn down by the incredible burden of the multifarious tasks he took upon himself, and by -- to me, a cautious stay-at-home soul -- endless bank-account-devouring trips to all parts of the globe. But this wasn't weariness, and never complaint, for Geoff, although he has an acute sense of justice, has never been a self-absorbed whinger (to use an Australasianism for a chronically dissatisfied Englishman in the colonies). He gets the job done. Not only does he do this, but the essays he writes are always spot-on, modest, yet deep in their implications.

The red thread of liminality and dispossession, and indeed globality, can be traced yet further, as we see his energies bundled for a further leap into the beyond, this time shortly after Berlin, when, in 1986, he attended the Triennial Conference of the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies at the National University of Singapore. This seems to have been his second 'Commonwealth' conference. In the same year, on a Faculty Enrichment Grant, he had already made a research trip to Canada; there was a second trip in 1989. Thus, as far as 'Commonwealth' travel is concerned, too, Geoff was a global player early in the game. Even before this (and Berlin) he is 'everywhere'. His first non-South African piece of 'postcolonial' writing on a specific region dates from 1985 (a report on the British Australian Studies Conference at Warwick for ACOLIT). His earliest Canada pieces, in 1986-88, are brief reports, his first article on Canada being a handbook survey (1991) on history as reflected in Canadian literature. Both the Australian and the Canadian material evince an awareness of the liminal condition, as does his sole essay on a New Zealand topic (also 1991), which focuses on ethnic otherness.¹³ For all Geoff's continuing 'on the ground' investment in the literature and culture of South

¹² *Crisis and Creativity in the New Literatures in English*, ed. Geoffrey V. Davis & Hena Maes-Jelinek (*Cross/Cultures* 1; Amsterdam & Atlanta GA: Rodopi, 1990).

¹³ See "'Real Historical Fiction': Kanadische Geschichte im Spiegel der englisch-sprachigen Literatur Kanadas," in the handbook *Kanada: Gesellschaft -- Landeskunde -- Literatur*, ed. Geoff Davis & Axel Wieger (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1991): 201-18, and "Other Halves: Geschichtsbewusstsein und ethnische Problematik im zeitgenössischen neuseeländischen Film," in *Neuseeland im pazifischen Raum*, a collection of Aachen talks edited with Werner Kreisel, Jürgen Jansen & Peter H. Marsden (Aachen, 1992): 271-94.

Status: Postprint (Author's version)

Africa, Canada, Australia, and latterly black Britain, the twin apotheosis (to dare an oxymoron) of his commitment to honouring liminal but postcolonially central themes must surely be the symposium on Aboriginal Australia he mounted together with Dieter Riemenschneider at Dusseldorf in 1993,¹⁴ and the ambitious ongoing series of Chotro conferences on India's scheduled peoples and the world's Indigenes.¹⁵

Apart from our joint editorial work on *Cross/Cultures* and *Matatu*, an experimental joint conference presentation on Australian film,¹⁶ and a gloriously adventurous journey we took together to Canada, I have been an admiring bystander at the expanding circles of Geoff's involvement in national and international organizations, including the running of the German Association GNEL/ASNEL, the European EACLALS, and the worldwide ACLALS. Like the Aachen-Liège conferences, some of these presidencies have been repeat performances -- these organizations know the best man when they see him. But I don't know how he does it all.

Bénédicte: Those organizations -- oh those organizations! There was more event organization in the decade following Aachen-Liège No. 2, notably after Geoff was elected chair of EACLALS in 2002 and chair of ACLALS in 2007. Marc and I joined him on the board of both associations and in the course of this alliance of several years we were involved more or less directly in the running of several international conferences, in Malta (2005), Venice (2008), Windsor (Cumberland Lodge) (2010), and Cyprus (2010). All of these undertakings meant holding numerous meetings, mostly in Liège or in Aachen, in that book-lined top-floor flat in Johanniterstrasse, during which we tried to stick to our agendas but also discussed literature over food and drinks -- thereby indulging at one go Geoff's voracious appetite for books and for good cheer. As Geoff's recent re-election as the head of EACLALS confirms, he is the ideal person to run such an association. Well-organized, dynamic, and now free of teaching duties, he also shows an uncommon devotion to the Commonwealth -- taken here in its institutional sense, of course, but also in the more literal meaning of general good.¹⁷ Geoff has indeed worked relentlessly for the benefit of the community of postcolonial scholars. His selflessness should be a model for the upcoming generation of academics, who all too often tend to get involved only when personal advancement is at stake.

Anne: That selflessness is even reflected in the subject of the bulk of his own writing, from his early collaboration with Michael Senior to his magnum opus, *Voices of Justice and Reason*, which sums up admirably not only Geoff's corpus on South Africa but, perhaps even more so, the voice of the man himself, always just and reasonable (in his writing at least!).¹⁸ Never alarmed by my own family's more robust style, he has spent many intellectually stimulating short holidays with us (before Michel's death in 2005) in Nice, Aachen, England, and the Cévennes. If Geoff is often the life and soul of the party, he has also the surprising faculty of becoming completely still, quiet, and invisible, which is what I have experienced when watching plays, listening to music or even doing interviewing with him. This perhaps is due to his amazing powers of concentration on the subject in hand. His whole-hearted enthusiasm for Commonwealth literature was, right up to his retirement and indeed after, appreciated by his students (a group of whom he regularly escorted both to South Africa and for a week in Wales every year) to an extent that I only realized when I met those he had brought to Mandelieu in 1995 for the conference on New Francophone and Anglophone Theatre. We met at conferences -- New Delhi, Paris, London, and Manchester; Aachen, Berlin, Bad Boll, and Tübingen. In Tübingen, I came across Bruce King, who, like Geoff himself, had, for a semester, been an associate professor in France. When he asked what I was doing at that moment, I told him about my increasing enthusiasm for black-British theatre, and he suggested I might like to publish a book on the subject. Who better to help me, I thought, than Geoff. So there we were, embarked on a new project together. Meanwhile, Michel had developed a cancer and it became more and more difficult for me to leave him for long. As we slowed our pace, Geoff, of course, turned up trumps and even found us a new

¹⁴ *Aratjara: Aboriginal Culture and Literature in Australia*, ed. Dieter Riemenschneider & Geoffrey V. Davis (Cross/Cultures 28; Amsterdam & Atlanta GA: Rodopi, 1997).

¹⁵ *Indigeneity: Culture and Representation*, ed. G.N. Devy, Geoffrey V. Davis & K.K. Chakravarty (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2009).

¹⁶ Geoff and I gave a paper together, at a symposium on Australian studies held at Oberjoch in October 1990, which became "Die ikonographie der Landschaft im australischen Film," in *Mensch und Natur in Australien*, ed. Gerhard Stilz (Bern: Peter Lang, 1991): 197-221, revised and translated as "The Iconography of Landscape in Australian Film," *Australian and New Zealand Studies in Canada* 6 (Fall 1991): 27-41. Another joint venture was our long interview with the Australian poet Geoff Goodfellow, published in *Kunapipi* 14.3 (1992): 27-48.

¹⁷ One example of Geoff's 'interconnections': he was an official guest of the Republic of Zimbabwe in 1991, edited, together with Mbongeni Malaba, *Zimbabwean Transitions: Essays on Zimbabwean Literature in English, Ndebele and Shona* (Matatu 34; Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2007), and currently shuttles between Aachen and London to advise on a government commission on culture and Zimbabwe-UK relations.

¹⁸ Geoffrey V. Davis, *Voices of Justice and Reason: Apartheid and Beyond in South African Literature* (Cross/Cultures 61; Amsterdam & New York, 2003).

Status: Postprint (Author's version)

publisher through Marc Maufort and his theatre series with Peter Lang.¹⁹

The last couple of interviews for *Staging New Britain* Geoff had to conduct alone. As his reputation grew, he became busier and busier, but found time to fly to Nice for our fortieth wedding anniversary, to say goodbye to Michel in hospital, and for his funeral. The point of telling this is to emphasize that, although Geoff may appear to be a “worldly scholar” in the sense that Edward Said uses the term, or even in the sense of “a socialite gentleman scholar” used here in the memoir of Michael Senior and Hamish Walker, he is not ‘worldly’ in a materialistic way. Gordon mentioned Chotro earlier. Geoff and Ganesh Devy organized with tremendous energy and efficiency the first Chotro symposium in 2006. It was a whirl of colours and vibrancy celebrating the representatives of the indigenous peoples -- from American Indians to Australian Aborigines -- who took part. Geoff, Alistair Niven and his wife, myself and my daughter, Shirley Chew and a few others navigated between exciting conference papers, performances, bouts of tourism, and our impoverished student residence with its hard pallets to sleep on (while others were cavorting in the grand hotels of New Delhi). He is committed to literature of many hues and genres, even more so both to his family and inner circle of friends and to the oppressed and subordinated peoples worldwide.

Marc: Those organizations and associations that we have all been tirelessly circling around, with Geoff seemingly always piggy-in-the-middle... My own years, alongside Béné, on the boards of these associations, in which much of my time was devoted to the unrewarding tasks of fund-raising, red tape, and the penning of Newsletters for the members, were vindicated by the generosity and the progressive slant informing our policies under Geoff's gentle steering. At a time when postcolonial literary studies are fast becoming institutionalized in the academic West and are therefore at great risk of mutating into yet another bastion of economic privilege, Geoff has been able to keep alive the spirit of such pioneers as Anna Rutherford and Hena Maes-Jelinek, for whom the activity of criticism had always been less a career-making pursuit than a form of political commitment to the cause of redressing disparities -- be they discursive, cultural or, indeed, economic. In view of the meagre means at our disposal, our action was necessarily modest; but we were occasionally in a position to despatch books to places where they were lacking, or to dispense scholarships to impecunious scholars wishing to attend our conferences. In what was less a membership drive than an attempt to support postcolonial studies in Eastern Europe, we also funded a mini-EACLALS conference organized by Jaroslav Kušnir at the University of Prešov, Slovakia, in 2007. With hindsight, it looks embarrassingly as if our help consisted largely in offering our own services as plenary speakers... But what a lark! I shall never forget Geoff's comment, upon arrival, about the miraculous virtues of jet travel and its ability to extract one from the grooves of routine and mindless plodding. It is true that, in his company, even the experience of instant coffee at Košice Airport, with the kindly Norbert Platz, begins to smack of adventure - or should I say holiday?

My memories of Geoff become most real on those occasions when we were spurred into concrete action, as when Stella Borg Barthet requested the board's logistical assistance in the course of organizing her unforgettable 2005 Malta conference for EACLALS, and we became the overwhelmed recipients of her and her husband Victor's inspired hospitality; or, indeed, when we travelled to Cyprus to meet up with Stephanos Stephanides, in charge of organizing the 2010 ACLALS Triennial, whose guided introduction to the complexities of the island proved simultaneously lyrical and politicized. These journeys always reserved opportunities for Geoff and me to enter into a mood of more private confidence, which confirmed our trust in each other and the man's reserves of emotional depth, concealed behind the familiar façade of urbanity. I have sampled Geoff's many moods and modes -- not least, in a gloomy graveyard on the outskirts of Liège, the elegiac intensity of his grieving for the disappearance of his dear friend Hena. It is apt that our latest shared enterprise -- to date -- concerned the organization, in March 2010 under the auspices of ACLALS, of a moving tribute to Hena Maes-Jelinek, which was held in the most unlikely of environments (the ‘royal’ Cumberland Lodge, as Bénédicte has indicated). Not that Geoff would capitulate to melancholy, however.

Gordon: I note that, in 2008, the *Cross/Cultures* masthead still featured Hena, but as the ghostly memorial presence of a loved one. Along with her dear friend Anna Rutherford, Hena was part of my life and a guiding light to ethical pathways through Commonwealth and postcolonial literature from the mid-1970s onwards, and this must have been the case for Geoff, too. I would like to close my recollections -- far from a tell-all exposé, though any additional tidbits would be positive confirmation of Geoff's large soul, and not a trimming of it - by evoking the image of two boys ever eager to enjoy the company of the maternal *genius loci* of Liège. For no aspect of our co-editorial work on *Cross/Cultures* was so rewarding (both in terms of an always ineffable

¹⁹ *Staging New Britain: Aspects of Black and South Asian British Theatre Practice*, ed. Geoffrey V. Davis & Anne Fuchs (Dramaturgies: Texts, Cultures and Performances 19; New York: Peter Lang, 2006).

Status: Postprint (Author's version)

lunchtime repast and in terms of tough-minded discussion and decision-making) as those meetings in Liège. Of the many memories that Geoff and I share, our memory of Hena and her shaping presence is the deepest.

Bénédicte: Geoff's tremendous work as an editor is also to be seen in the light of his altruism. As co-editor of Rodopi's *Cross/Cultures* series with Hena and Gordon, he has secured and helped usher into print the work of many postcolonial critics, sometimes at the expense of his own personal production. It was an honour for me to join Geoff's and Gordon's team after the death of Hena, whose presence still accompanies our editorial meetings. What a blessing to be working with such committed, jolly good fellows.

Marc: It does feel odd to think that Geoff is even now pursuing his activities at the head of EACLALS, trying to reform the Commonwealth Foundation into an anti-globalization movement, showering books and scholarships on disenfranchised intellectuals in both hemispheres, and incidentally travelling around the globe, without Béné and myself. But then, it is a proven fact that not many people can compete with his tireless energy, as his new youthful team of collaborators, to whom I extend my very best wishes, will also find with their own mixture of disbelief and delight.

Anne: Oh heck (as someone often says)! Is it up to me to end this? Well, *Sala khale*, Geoff, and long may you, in the company of Ingrid, keep celebrating both literature and life.