



“The current unbroken/ the circuits kept open’: Connecting Cultures and the Commonwealth”

The 16th Triennial ACLALS Conference, St. Lucia, West Indies, August 5 –9, 2013

In “Sometimes in the Middle of the Story,” a poem that revisits the perilous event of the Middle Passage, the eminent Walcott scholar, Edward Baugh, gives primacy to the connecting currents of the “ocean” as a central motif. While the sea is viewed as an archive of history as Nobel Laureate and St. Lucian poet, Derek Walcott has argued, Baugh mobilizes this metaphor to both recognize the traumatic beginning of the colonial encounter in the Caribbean and the rich “refashioning of futures” of cultural connections that the Middle Passage engendered. No doubt the colonial encounter of slavery and indentureship in the Caribbean could have led to cultural enclosures, but in Baugh’s view, “the paths of ocean” represent connecting currents between and beyond the cultures of Africa, Asia, Europe and the Indigenous Caribbean. The sea, in particular, the Atlantic Ocean, was a site of treacherous travel and trade, yet that very sea is a source “connecting us still”.

Not all colonial encounters carry with them the violence of such ruptures; but whether we had traumatic or benign beginnings, we wonder what future consequently has been imagined for these and other Commonwealth lands? What global zones of power and influence haunt the seemingly ecumenical and liberal discourses of cultural exchange? What cultural connections and disconnections have emerged over time? Whose cultural currents are unbroken: whose cultural circuits have been kept open? What is the currency of indigenous language and linguistic legacies? In the commingling of cultures in the postcolonial circuits of exchange, what is the relationship between indigenous and outside cultures? Is the implicit comparative critical lens fostered in early postcolonial theory still viable? What do these connecting comparisons obscure or reveal? What is the relationship between economic currencies and cultural circuits? What are the historical and critical currents that mark postcolonial and commonwealth studies at this time? What connections are there between different genders, sexualities and ecologies? How valuable is the more recent deployment of concepts of desire, intimacy and affect to postcolonial and Commonwealth studies? What useful connections can be made between such disciplinary paradigms as globalization, diaspora and cultural studies to Commonwealth and postcolonial literature and language studies? In general, how might literary and language studies help us to understand the value of cultural connections and disconnections throughout the Commonwealth?

The 16th Triennial ACLALS Conference invites scholars working in a variety of media (literature, linguistics, film, the visual and musical arts and popular culture) to present papers on the theme, “The current unbroken/ the circuits kept open’: Connecting Cultures and the Commonwealth,” on the questions raised above, and on a range of topics including those listed below:

Historical and cultural currents in the Commonwealth

The common wealth of nations

Identity, currency and the practices of cultural consumption

Currents in language studies

The currency of cultures and/or Cultural Studies

Linguistic circuits and circuits of identity or cultural exchange

Cultural circuits and economic currency

The Currency of trade and travel

Circuits of violence/brokenness/trauma and cultural discourse

Discursive cultural circuits on gender and sexuality

Middle Passages and stories in the middle

The Black Atlantic and the Commonwealth

Connections/disconnections throughout the Commonwealth

Circling definitions: Commonwealth? Postcolonial? Postnational?

Waves of critical, cultural or linguistic practice

Short-circuiting genre: literary experimentation?

Island currents, global changes: conversations across the Commonwealth

Imagining Commonwealth futures

DEADLINE: Abstracts of maximum 300 words for papers of 20 minutes duration, and maximum 400 words for three-paper panels (with the names of the panelists) which engage with these and other relevant questions along with a short bio not exceeding 100 words should be submitted to ACLALSCONFERENCE2013@gmail.com by 15 December 2012