

Honouring Geoff Davis

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Abstract: A brief account of how Geoff Davis came to found the highly successful Cross/Cultures series published by Rodopi together with Hena Maes-Jelinek and Gordon Collier. His active participation in the journal *Matatu* is also remembered.

Keywords: Geoff Davis, Cross/Cultures series, *Matatu*

I've been working with Geoff at Rodopi's since 2005, when I became the editor-in-charge of the series Cross/Cultures and *Matatu*. I was really looking forward to working with the editors of these series, not only because at Rodopi's the editorial meetings at Hena Maes' lovely apartment in Liège were famous for their lively discussions and lovely lunches.

I've asked Fred van der Zee, Rodopi's publisher until our move to Brill publishers in Leiden, how Geoff became a member of the Rodopi family. Fred remembers that his first contact with Geoff started with a publication proposal from him and Hena which eventually became the very first Cross/Cultures volume in 1990 – *Crisis and Creativity in the New Literatures in English*. At that time, Fred was not familiar with this new field of research so he called Theo D'haen for advice; and Theo assured him that Geoff and Hena were two excellent and highly reputed scholars and that the field they were working in was new, refreshing and of the highest importance. So Fred called Geoff, Dr Davis as he called him at the time, expecting a very reserved Englishman on the phone, which obviously was not the case, and he explained to him that he would like to publish the book, but had no series for it, so no backing-up academic board, so would Dr Davis consider creating such a new series for Rodopi, with a board of his choice. Geoff promised to think about this.

History tells now that when the text was camera-ready and ready to be sent to Amsterdam, Geoff and Gordon Collier, who had planned to go by car to an important conference in Canterbury, said that they would pass by in Amsterdam and hand over the manuscript directly. In Amsterdam the three gentleman went for a coffee and a lunch, Fred popped the question of the series again, Geoff was saying yes nor no, but Gordon stated that this would be a great opportunity for all and that they would form the board, together with Hena as the authority in the field. And so it happened.

At the same time, at the end of the eighties, Fred met at the Frankfurter Buchmesse a young man, Holger Ehling, who told him he had created a journal on African literatures entitled *Matatu*, that six issues had appeared but that he wanted to hand it over to a real publisher. Here also Geoff played a big role as Fred consulted him about this project and later Geoff became a member of the board, together with Gordon Collier.

At Brill we are publishing this summer volumes 210, 211, 212 of the series Cross/Cultures, which all still date from Geoff's editorship; *Matatu*, which Brill has turned again into a journal, is publishing volume 50, the latest issue including an obituary for Geoff. I mention these numbers to show the amount of work that has been done by him and his co-editors in almost thirty years, and to honour and to thank him. We miss him dearly. For me personally, I will continue to miss him at postcolonial conferences, where Geoff always joined me at my booth, taking his seat behind the table so that the booth became a meeting point for colleagues and friends. I remember a conference in Oviedo where Geoff and Russell McDougall had an enthusiastic discussion about all the books they still wanted to write, starting their sentences with "I also want to write a book about" and then numerous subjects were mentioned. This was very inspiring. I also owe to Geoff my one and only visit to the Metropolitan Opera in New York, during the MLA convention in 2018. He was sitting somewhere down from my perspective, I had found a seat on the balcony. Did you actually know that he was a big opera and classical music lover who was not afraid of Bela Bartok and the like? It was thanks to this love that on a Saturday in 2012, Ingrid succeeded in travelling with him to Liège supposedly to go to a concert, but in reality to go to a gathering of friends and colleagues who had published a Festschrift, in two volumes, in honour of him. One bears the subtitle "a worldly scholar", a perfect name for him and an example for other, newer generations, as for Geoff, working in postcolonialism was not just an academic affair, but a personal and political engagement which enquired a lot of travelling, dealing with people, communicating across borders. But this is also what he loved to do.

I'm grateful to have known Geoff Davis and been part, a little bit, of his worldly scholarly travels.

Bionote:

Christa Stevens received her PhD in French literature from Amsterdam University. She has been teaching Literature and French at several universities in the Netherlands and is working now as an editor of Literature and Cultural Studies at Brill, the Netherlands.