himself said about the letters of the novelist W. H. Hudson could be applied to *The Collected Letters* as well: “I was glad to have the man brought close to me” (CL8, 233). These volumes may offer less comprehensive information on Conrad’s life than a biography can provide, yet it seems to me that the sensitive medium of the letter is the best way to bring him closer to us.

**Balázs Csizmadia**

**Notes**

**Surviving Modernism**


What if a literary movement is so powerful that it wipes out all other possibilities while alive and leaves an unprecedented vacuum after its dispersal? Modernism devoured everything around it; incorporation indeed always stood in the very core of its nature. Criticism on modernism has been extensive and manifold, but what came after has had difficulty leaving the shadow cast by the modernist output. Admittedly, the present volume aims to give a new literary and historical context for a generation of writers whose work has been hard to characterize. In many ways what we have at hand is a comprehensive guidebook; as co-editors Marina MacKay and Lyndsey Stonebridge sum up: “This collection aims to restore some significance to a critically awkward phase of twentieth-century writing. Focusing on the years between the late 1930s (just after modernism) and the late 1960s (just before postmodernism), its contributors suggest what it meant for writers to work in the wake of modernism’s achievements” (1–2).

Although the title of the collection is *British Fiction After Modernism*, the co-editors also attempt to rethink mid-century British fiction: “When we say
that we are interested here in what happened to the novel "after" modernism, then, we do not quite mean "after" in an innocently chronological sense, but that many of these writers are so indebted to modernism that they have to be read in relation to it" (4). Right at the beginning of the introductory section the reader is left with little doubt that he is in for a surprise: besides the explicit focus on this unjustly neglected period, the question remains whether there really is anything that could survive the sweeping force of modernism. Perhaps the single most decisive literary trend of the twentieth-century will remain a constant reference point;
surely, "[t]hese writers knew there was no returning to a time before modernism" (8).

The list of contributors is rather impressive, and it invariably urges the reviewer to take a comprehensive approach and avoid the exclusion of any piece of writing that contributes to the present collection. Nonetheless, I have consciously taken the liberty of leaving the bigger mass of the essays out of consideration and focus on just a selected few. I have taken two essays, Steven Jacobi's and Andrzej Gasiorek's, as examples of the fascination with an individual literary figure, namely Angus Wilson and Graham Greene, respectively, and two other essays, Bernard Bergonzi's and John Mepham's, as examples of the concern with a single decade of British literature, namely the 1960s and the 1990s, respectively.

The importance of these two decades is also highlighted by the co-editors, while Greene and Wilson nicely fit in the line of established yet controversial authors of the time. Furthermore, it is also to be noted that the order of the essays in the volume does not correlate with the order of my reviewing them, for reasons of convenience in the argument. My selection is mainly an account of a personal appraisal of the chosen critical texts, which to my mind also sheds light on how the rest of the MacKay and Stonebridge volume manages to handle whatever came after modernism.

In Angus Wilson one may detect an almost erotic fascination with the English language, resurfacing mainly in the tense dichotomy of humour and seriousness. If there is anything that can be safely stated about Steven Jacobi's "Angus Wilson: No Laughing Matter and No Laughing Matter," it would be its smooth adaptation to Wilson's own style of writing while presenting "a writer who was celebrated for short stories and novels which blended wit, acute social observation and a love of the macabre" (121). What is there in Wilson is all there in Jacobi, too; a "habitually waspish, satirically denigrating wit," a "savage and direct" attitude towards our "fellow mortals" and an "intelligently persuasive deployment of pitiless humour" (121). On the same account, Jacobi avoids being falsely overheated by admiration towards Wilson but cannot, or rather will not
avoid paying homage to the author of
No Laughing Matter (1967) by crack-
ing up witty phrases fit for Wilson’s
magnitude. Perhaps one of the most
lucid examples of this would be the
closing sentence of Jacobi’s study on
Wilson: “A sense of humour is a serious
business, and not having one isn’t
funny” (130). In many ways it sounds
so appropriate that it could easily be-
come the single best catchphrase of
Wilson studies in general. Thus, while
reflecting upon Wilson’s double-edged
attitude towards laughter (fun versus
seriousness), Jacobi’s own writing is
packed with traces of humour and
irony all through. Indeed, the Jacobi
text has been born in the heritage of
that distinctive Wilsonian self-reflexive
criticism it has chosen for its subject
matter. Yet obviously in the halo of
Wilson’s satiric heritage, Jacobi never
fails to take himself seriously enough,
especially when gathering data from
the Wilson oeuvre. Although every-
thing in Jacobi’s universe revolves
around No Laughing Matter, he always
finds room to mention either “Wilson’s
short stories and early novels — The
Wrong Set and Other Stories (1949),
Such Darling Dodos and Other Stories
(1950), Hemlock and After (1952),
Anglo-Saxon Attitudes (1956), A Bit
Off the Map and Other Stories (1957)
and The Middle Age of Mrs Eliot
(1958),” or novels from the author’s
mature period, such as As if by Magic
(1973), where Wilson is finally willing
to undermine his own notorious defen-
sive humour (124). And Jacobi does all
the above with a Wilson-like linguistic
tour de force.

Bernard Bergonzi’s condensed over-
view of a single year of British fiction
after modernism is rather exhaustive,
and perhaps not only in one way. The
argument moves along a single clear-
cut line with no, or little deviation from
its set course: even when Bergonzi talks
about novels and their writers before or
after 1960, he does so with a sole pur-
pose, namely to pave the way for his
Each road for Bergonzi leads to British
fiction in 1960 (the title of his study
bears witness to it: “The British Novel
in 1960”). He has the preconception in
mind that that year really was some-
thing of an annus mirabilis, similar to
1954, the year which saw the first nov-
els of Kingsley Amis (Lucky Jim), Wil-
liam Golding (Lord of the Flies) and
Iris Murdoch (Under the Net). And
when Bergonzi meticulously lists
names and titles in an alphabetical
order, his mentioning of the two years
‘on the same page’ finally becomes
clear. In fact, intentionally without
doubt, he launches his essay with an
impressive list of novels published in
1960: Kingsley Amis’s Take a Girl Like
You; Lynne Reid Banks’s The I-Shaped
Room; Stan Barstow’s A Kind of Love-
ing; Anthony Burgess’s The Right to an
Answer and The Doctor is Sick; Law-
rence Durrell’s Clea; David Lodge’s The
Picturegoers; Colin MacInnes’s Mr
Love and Justice; Anthony Powell’s

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Casanova's Chinese Restaurant; C.P. Snow's The Affair; Muriel Spark's The Bachelors and The Ballad of Peckham Rye; David Storey's This Sporting Life and Flight into Camden; and Raymond William's Border Country. These are the novels Bergonzini places under thorough examination, and in one single essay he succeeds in doing so with such enthusiasm and skill that their place within the British literary canon is ultimately rendered unquestionable. His persuasive force partly derives from the fact that he quite often uses the first person singular, for instance when he says, "[W]ith David Lodge's The Picturegoers we cross the river [Thames], to the southeastern suburbs where he — and I — grew up" (206). Bergonzini not only supplies first-hand information to the reader but also evokes a general sense of being there, being lucky enough to be part of it all: "I am old enough to remember the excitement they caused [Angus Wilson's collections of short stories The Wrong Set (1949) and Such Darling Dodos (1950)], and which I shared when I read these books soon after their publication" (204). Bergonzini also appears to have some additional information on the young Cambridge don called Lester Ince, a lesser character in C.P. Snow's The Affair: "Ince is evidently meant to be a version of Kingsley Amis — an identification that Snow himself indeed once confirmed to me" (205). In addition to its appealing clarity, the strength of Bergonzini's essay lies in its critical tone based on its author's personal experience and his willingness to voice justifiable literary stances. Bergonzini is not afraid, on the one hand, to claim that, although David Lodge's The Picturegoers "is ambitiously organised... parts of it are patently immature" and, on the other hand, to state that David Storey's This Sporting Life "is original and powerful, and I regard it as the best first novel in 1960" (210). Even with the extensive use of the first person singular, which of course is a mark of subjectivity carrying a good deal of value judgement, or perhaps especially because of that, the Bergonzini text is a delightful touch worth including in the present volume.

In his essay entitled "Varieties of Modernism, Varieties of Incomprehension: Patrick Hamilton and Elizabeth Bowen," John Mepham embarks on exploring the immediate heritage of what is most widely considered as the heyday of modernism, namely the 1920s. Mepham points out that "[a]fter a decade of uncompromisingly experimental modernist fiction in the 1920s," the upcoming years saw some writers who still can be found in the halo of modernist findings and who still "employed and explored experimental fictional tendencies" (59). That high modernism left its fingerprint on literary achievements to come is a statement not at all surprising or novel; but Mepham goes even further by claiming that "post-1930s' fiction broke not only with nine-
teenth-century traditions but also with the conventions developed in the period of avant-garde modernism, for example in the works of Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf" (59). His approach is double-edged: while accepting the apparent and undisputed force of modernism (Mepham is cautious enough to avoid futile disputes with devoted believers in perhaps the most decisive literary movement of the twentieth century), he sets out to do justice to British fiction born in a period overshadowed by modernism. And indeed, with the use of a conservative English fit for a retired university professor, Mepham’s achievement is more than remarkable: a revitalisation of the neglected. His choice to focus on the periphery is a rather bold approach, even if not unheard before; but it is especially justifiable in the heritage of modernism and is deeply rooted in a soil unimaginable without the modernists. In actual fact, Mepham happily admits the grandiosity of such geniuses as Joyce and Woolf; what he refuses to accept is that life ceased to exist after them. As an example, probably the most interesting element in Mepham’s whole argument is formulated around the entangled concepts of; as he calls them, *intersubjectivity* and *inner subjectivity*. According to Mepham, in the writings of Patrick Hamilton and Elizabeth Bowen characters linger in interactions “in the social context within which the personal goings on take place” (*intersubjectivity*); whereas in the modernists like Joyce and Woolf “the major technical innovations ... centre on the rendering of what is going on in characters’ minds when they speak, on their inner worlds, on their stream of consciousness (a notoriously elusive concept)” (*inner subjectivity*) (60). Furthermore, and opposing David Lodge, Mepham doubts that modernism was “uninterested in talk - after all there is hardly a scene in *Ulysses*, in *Mrs Dalloway* or *To the Lighthouse*, or in the stories of Katherine Mansfield, that is not the setting for a conversation” (60). One may safely say that with a fair devotion and a sense of propriety Mepham manages to paint an attractive retrospective panorama of the literary landscape after modernism, which consists of – despite Mepham’s indication in the title of his essay – not just varieties of modernism.

Graham Greene, too, comes after modernism. To Andrzej Gasiorek the place Greene took in British fiction becomes clearly identifiable only when one looks at him from the perspective of modernist writers such as Eliot, Joyce and Pound. Perhaps not surprisingly, what Gasiorek has to say about Greene would be meaningless without the great predecessors, who lived and worked in an era immediately after the First World War, Gasiorek follows in the safe line of those critics who hold “the Great War” responsible for the soaring of the modernist literary trend: “The First World War has long functioned as a convenient point of depar-
tute for discussion of what we now think of as the period of high modernism that immediately followed it” (17). Admittedly, without that devastating historical upheaval, Eliot’s The Waste Land, for instance, could never have been born. Having quickly sketched the decisive members, the timeline and the background of modernism, Gasiorek can now go on to render justice to Greene, who was not part of it all; as the title of his essay “Rendering Justice to the Visible World: History, Politics and National Identity in the Novels of Graham Greene” equally testifies, Gasiorek intends to do as much justice to Greene’s novels as to their author. Greene’s most apparent saving grace as to why he was never part of modernism is the simple fact that “Greene was just ten in 1914, and he came to maturity within the post-war milieu” (18). The most intriguing question that Gasiorek can ask as the next step of his argument is “[H]ow, then, does Greene position himself in relation to his immediate predecessors?” Since it was Greene’s own personal dilemma in the first place, which arguably kept him preoccupied throughout his life, the question is all too valid. Gasiorek acknowledges Greene reaching back a little further in literary history when he claims that “[I]n fine, he [Greene] chooses to skip a generation, bypassing figures such as Joyce, Lewis and Pound (although Eliot was important to him) so as to proclaim his affinity with writers such as James, Conrad and Ford” (19). That so far does not sound either surprising or new — since that is exactly how Greene himself would identify his own literary stance — but then Gasiorek becomes overtly critical by saying that “[b]y invoking them, Greene not only signals his allegiance to one kind of writing rather than another but also distances himself from direct competitors and aligns himself with the safely dead” (20). Nonetheless, this is Gasiorek at his most vicious. By regarding him as a lesser writer than the modernists, he is far from trying to decipher Greene in any way. On the contrary, Gasiorek holds the writer of The Heart of the Matter (1948), to mention just one of Greene’s most well-known novels, in great esteem. The most obvious way he can pay homage to Greene is by dissecting a selection of his novels: It’s a Battlefield (1934), where the author’s tone of scepticism peaks in describing a society splintering into fragments; England Made Me (1935), where the individual’s escape from the past and uncontrolled insertion into the selfish present has made him anachronistic; A Gun for Sale (1936), where the protagonist is a victim of “extreme poverty”; and Brighton Rock (1938) and The Ministry of Fear (1943), where “sentiments such as patriotism, duty and justice no longer seem credible” (26–27). And throughout his study Gasiorek never forgets to bear in mind and remind his readers too that his “Greene comes after modernism, after the great upheavals and experiments
that have now been so belauded and
canonized" (19).

As I have intended to suggest, every
piece of writing included in Marina
MacKay and Lyndsey Stonebridge’s
collection of essays on British fiction
after modernism is very much like a
soil sample taken from a distinctive
literary land, each helping the reader to
set up a definitive diagnosis of the
status of that land. Bit by bit these
samples support one another simply by
originating from the same time period,
and thus the individual pieces also add
up to a whole to be analysed. By doing
so these critical texts mimic the way
their subject matters, the actual novels
of the mid-century English literary
arena, line up neatly to form a unified
entity. The reader at the same time
(either by reading the novels or their
critical reviews) will remain the ultimate
benefactor, since the co-editor’s
collection eventually grants the pleas-
ure of sampling to him. Now what has
survived modernism and what has
survived of modernism is down to the
reader to decide; but that the present
volume does function as a kind of long
awaited literary compass is undeniable.

Krisztián Zsolt Bakó

Other Countries

István D. Rácz, A másik ország: Az angol
költészet 1945 után [The Other Country: English Poetry after 1945] (Debrecen:
Kossuth, 2006)

The problems of a critic who chooses to
write an extensive and comprehensive
survey of the last fifty years’ poetry are
completely different from the
difficulties of research in any period
prior to our own. His or her main task
is not only to rethink or relate to the
already existing list of well-known and
widely researched works of art, but to
freeze the running film of contempo-
rary poetry with a firm hand and to
sketch the main outlines of the scene
quickly, but precisely. Inevitably, the
choice of authors and texts in itself is
an interpretation of the present-day
literary scene, making the study even
more intriguing for the interested
reader.

After a book on Larkin1 and a mon-
ograph on dramatic monologue,2 István
D. Rácz’s third book is about English
poetry after 1945. He has chosen a title
that bears more than one literary con-
notation. First, as he explains in his
Preface (12), it evokes the title of its
sister-book, Tamás Bényei’s Az ártat-
lan ország [The innocent country],3
which is a study of the English novel in
the same period. Second, the phrase
The Other Country is borrowed from a
significant figure of contemporary po-
e try, Carol Ann Duffy, whose 1990
collection of poems was published
under the same title with the following
synopsis on the back cover: “Carol Ann
Duffy’s third collection takes us to the
other country—the places that we visit
in fantasy, memory and imagination.”
Besides, it is also obvious that the