

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 pleasure 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. Rác, *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 contemporary 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 monograph on dramatic monologue,² István D. Rác’s third book is about English poetry after 1945. He has chosen a title that bears more than one literary connotation. First, as he explains in his Preface (12), it evokes the title of its sister-book, Tamás Bényei’s *Az ártatlan 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 poetry, 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

working material and mother tongue of authors introduced in the book differ from the audience's host language, therefore the direct opposition of the title (*the other* vs. *our*) touches the problem of reception of non-native poetry. In the last decades, no overview about the whole of contemporary poetry of Great Britain has been published in Hungarian and by a Hungarian author.⁴ Would such a study be intriguing just for the limited group of professionals? Certainly not – although perhaps one of the central aims was to provide material for the students of English poetry courses. To go even further, the general, underlying, although not always well-advertised aim of those who *write* about poetry is to persuade the audience to *read* poetry, and a well-written study on the subject is the best preliminary step to entice future readers. Besides, an outline of contemporary English poetry may have the potential to influence the academic life in the subject, to draw attention to Hungarian translations, to revive or initiate the translation of certain poets.

The Hungarian subtitle of the book uses the phrase “English poetry,” which is certainly appropriate for briefly summarizing the study in Hungarian, but is obscure enough to require clarification. Therefore, a significant step is to mark the borders of the study and to define the target of the work. As István D. Rácz notes, there are many *poetries* written in the English language as a result of the special postcolonial positions, without

having one universal English poetry (28). He also states in the introduction that the poets of Great Britain (i.e. England, Wales and Scotland) are the protagonists in his book and that this choice is, of course, deliberate and arbitrary. He also explains that the exclusion of Irish poetry has a practical reason, because its numerous excellent authors would have doubled the size of the book (12). Hopefully, one may add, this decision inspires a Hungarian study of the multi-faceted Irish poetry somewhere in the future as well.⁵ The oeuvres of those poets whose main pieces had already been written before 1945, although they lived past that date, are left out as well.

The time-aware structure of the book follows a logical and rational order. It opens with a brief overview of the poetry in the first part of the 20th century and discusses the social and cultural context in the post-war era. The opening chapters clearly serve the interest of the reader, as the summary of post-1945 poetry would be rootless without briefly touching the most important figures and tendencies of the previous decades, which unquestionably do influence the coming years and coming literary streams. Peculiar characteristics of today's literary scene are also sketched with a few strokes, such as the popularity of poetry readings, the problems of institutionalization, and the role of anthologies.

After the opening chapters, the one-by-one enumeration of the chosen

poets (and occasionally groups of poets) builds the backbone for the study. The organization concentrates on presenting tendencies, transitions, influences, and oppositions that help the overall reception of such a wide topic. One of the greatest assets of the book is its micro-structure, the constant willingness to find (hidden) connections that gives the reader food for thought. As an experienced teacher, István D. Rácz often refers to the previously discussed poets and movements, mobilizing and building upon the already presented data and ideas. The text, as a result, is not difficult to follow and is appropriate for the interested, but less well-informed reader, while it does not lack in complexity and is able to satisfy the expert audience as well. For the former audience, the study may serve as a detailed guide through the last fifty years' poetry that might also arouse interest in further readings. The reader who approaches the text with more of an expert eye may be intrigued by the oscillating layers of interpretations, the transient problems of a now-forming canon, the parallels and opposites of underlying tendencies, and the list of secondary readings. The study of British poetry that is (not exclusively, but) the most often referred to throughout the book is Anthony Thwaite's *Poetry Today*. Thwaite, a critic and poet, is mainly associated with the Movement and Philip Larkin, and this book can be read as a representation of the mainstream view of contemporary British poetry.

Thwaite's study, however influential it may be, has been widely criticized because of this very approach: the dispute over the existence of several different British poetries (i. e. mainstream and non-canonized) even resulted in the birth of independent anthologies.⁶ This phenomenon could have also been touched upon while discussing the importance of anthologies in the first chapter.

The titles of the chapters indicate not only the name(s) of the poet(s), but a characteristic feature of their poetry too, which is discussed in detail throughout these parts. As a rule, all the chapters contain numerous poems, or parts of poems, choosing close reading as the central working method throughout the book. The study, as a result, encourages its audience to find the complete texts or other pieces from the author in question. István D. Rácz attempts to include Hungarian translations if possible, quite rarely, unfortunately, with the (possible) secondary aim to draw attention to the Hungarian translation scene. Another appealing characteristic of the book is that it never forgets the cultural and literary background of its reader. The occasional references to Hungarian authors, such as János Pilinszky, and Imre Kertész (210-11) besides Byron, Keats and other well-known English poets, help the Hungarian audience internalize the possible parallels.

The first poet introduced in the volume is John Betjeman, followed by

Philip Larkin, who is given the longest chapter in the book, and an independent piece about the *Movement*. Ted Hughes, Geoffrey Hill, Peter Porter and Peter Redgrove follow. After leaving behind the *Group*,⁷ the reader goes through Edwin Morgan and concrete poetry, Douglas Dunn and the Scottish tradition, to reach Roger McGough and the Liverpool poets. To Tony Harrison, Craig Raine, James Fenton, and Peter Reading are devoted separate chapters as well. The reason to list these first thirteen authors presented in the book is to compare their position to the last five poets in the last three chapters. It raises a serious and thought-provoking question concerning arrangement and macro-structure.

Fleur Adcock, and Carol Rumens, Carol Ann Duffy, and Wendy Cope, Thomas Gunn, and gay poetry share the last three chapters of the volume. The macro-structure of the book suggests – as their lifting out of the (roughly) chronological order and the placing prove – that women’s writing and gay poetry should be or are worth being presented as different entities from the previously discussed male poetry. Is the distinction really that obviously productive? As István D. Rácz develops, contemporary English literary criticism handles women’s writing as the product of a minority group (198) simply as a result of the deeper understanding of the influence of gender on literature. On the other hand, criticism, of course, has not

stated that “women’s writing” is an easily definable term. Just as a quick example, Claire Buck,⁸ the editor of the *Bloomsbury Guide to Women’s Literature*, severely called it an “unstable category” (xi). The question is not whether the peculiar position, background, possibilities of interpretation of today’s women writers should be discussed in detail, since the answer is a definite yes – and the reader of *A másik ország* is apparently satisfied in this sense. Rather, the question revolves around the suggestion that it may have been fruitful to integrate women poets, or the last chapter about the gay poet, Thomas Gunn (and the peculiar questions in relation to their work and “status”), *within* the already discussed male poetry, as it would have offered a more generic view of the subject, stressing the naturally heterogeneous characteristics of contemporary poetry in Great Britain. The last three chapters of the book can be seen as an attempt to lay emphasis on the inevitable topic of gender and/or minority in today’s culture and literature, but also strengthen a certain feel of artificial marginalization, despite women and gay poets’ integral roles in the whole of the literary scene. *Integrating* instead of *ghettoizing* seems to be a central tendency to follow in today’s studies in (contemporary) literature. As Tamás Bényei⁹ writes highly about Philip Tew’s monograph¹⁰ on the contemporary British novel: “he is careful throughout to avoid the pitfalls of what

he sees as critical ghettoizing, and gender, for instance, is practically absent as a key organizing notion” (359).

In the last pages of the study, the Afterword shows the reader new directions by listing the undiscussed characters of today’s poetry, like the *New Generation*, suggesting contemporary topics for independent literary monographs, such as postcolonial voices, children’s literature, or light verse.

The Afterword is followed by the lengthy and extensive list of primary and secondary literature (the latter is especially rich in materials from the 1990s, but may be completed with material published after 2000) that can be a good starting point for those who wish to investigate the topic further. For the Hungarian reader, though, the MLA style references—not only at the end, but throughout the text, especially in the case of the titles – the volumes in bold and the poems between quotation marks – may be somewhat unfamiliar or unusual.

A másik ország focuses on the poetry of Great Britain after the Second World War till today. Written in Hungarian, for the special needs of the Hungarian reader, it fills a long-existing hole in the Hungarian scene of English studies. Although it handles problems such as “gender,” or “mainstream” in a somewhat disputable way, its colorful material and complex message do effectively draw attention to English poetry. On another level, the study may also be beneficial for the audience of today’s

Hungarian poetry, as it focuses on literary intersections, phenomena and tendencies that can be familiar to modern readers of any nationality. István D. Rácz suggests several ideas that can serve the base for further monographs. Hopefully, there are many more to come.

Veronika Vég

Notes

1. István D. Rácz, *A szép majdnem igaz: Philip Larkin költészete* (Debrecen: Kossuth, 1999).

2. István D. Rácz, *Költők és maszkok: Identításkereső versek az 1945 utáni brit költészetben* (Debrecen: Kossuth, 1996); reviewed by Zsolt Maróti in *The Ana-ChronisT* [4] 1998: 306–11.

3. Tamás Bényei, *Az ártatlan ország: Az angol regény 1945 után* (Debrecen: Kossuth, 2003).

4. The last monograph meeting the claim of being extensive was published in 1970; cf. László Báti and István Kristó-Nagy, eds., *Az angol irodalom a huszadik században* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1970).

5. The 2007 November issue of *Korunk* focuses on contemporary Irish literature; initiatives like this may bring a whole monograph closer to reality.

6. See for instance Richard Caddel and Peter Quartermain, eds., *Other: British and Irish Poetry since 1970* (Hanover, NH and London: UP of New England for Wesleyan UP, 1999). Its introduction states: “One purpose of this anthology is therefore to uncover what the forces surrounding *The Movement* and its successors have helped to bury.”

7. Peter Porter, Peter Redgrove, Alan Brownjohn, George MacBeth, and Ted Hughes are mentioned as members of *The*

Group, although Martin Bell (1918) was also a prominent, though older figure of the circle.

8. Claire Buck ed., *The Bloomsbury Guide to Women's Literature* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1992).

9. Tamás Bényei, "Texts, Theories, and Lives," *The AnaChronisT* 11 (2005) 359–368.

10. Philip Tew, *The Contemporary British Novel* (London: Continuum, 2004).

Is Variety the Spice of Postcolonial Criticism?

Anne Holden Rønning and Lene Johannessen (ed.), *Readings of the Particular: The Postcolonial in the Postnational* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007)

Rodopi publishers are well-known for their academic publications, which include more than sixty series; the volume under discussion here came out as the 89th of the 96 issues published so far in the "Cross/Culture – Readings in the Post/Colonial Literatures in English" series since its launch in 1990. The majority of these numerous volumes usually have a broad theme to explore, but occasionally individual authors (e.g.: Wole Soyinka, Wilson Harris etc.) or countries/regions (e.g.: India, the South Atlantic etc.) come under scrutiny.

As its title reveals, *Readings of the Particular* belongs to the former cate-

gory: the editors in their "Introduction" emphasize globalization and the concomitant transculturality as forces with a powerful impact on the postcolonial, whose present position they try to clarify with the help of the selected essays. "The process of transculturation and the focus on the particularities of the realities underlying various locations form the background for this volume of critical essays" (ix–x), describes the context in which scholars, though taking various perspectives, present their analyses. It is by combining the examination of globalization, a worldwide phenomenon, with observations of its local forms that the volume tries to strike a balance between the two competing tendencies of postcolonial criticism.¹ One of them is more cosmopolitan and fits a postnational approach, as it focuses on migrant writers and their fluid identities and hybridity, a phenomenon itself closely related to transculturality. However, the editors of the volume are very much aware of the fact that such an approach could be regarded as conflating issues and homogenizing cultures, and might thus come under attack, as did Homi Bhabha himself, whose work, especially *The Location of Culture*, theorizes about what happens in the contact zone to produce hybridity.² To counterbalance such possible universalization, the editors have made great efforts to include in their collection essays that examine cross-cultural exchanges in works produced in clearly identified