

mended" in this volume (v). "I wish to recommend this book on Shakespeare," wrote István Géher in the Foreword, "to the inquisitive consciousness and alert conscience of both Hungarian and non-Hungarian readers." So do I. Yet I think many others would be interested in reading this book in Hungarian.

Gabriella Reuss

Note

1. The following excerpts serve as eminent illustrations: "Oh why can't you see what vast labyrinths / zigzag in our hearts with no directions / we look for the keys, for clues and for hints / staring into our own trembling reflections . . . // here we are standing in awe of the man / in front the greatness of Shakespeare William" (translated by Ágnes Lehóczky).

**"Only Connect!"
Zadie Smith Convenes
Critical Minds**

Tracey L. Walters (ed.), *Zadie Smith: Critical Essays* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008)

With intertextuality as a central concern in this exploration of the fiction of a contemporary, biracial, English-speaking and internationally acclaimed novelist, the idea of texts in interaction also asserts itself on the level of related critical discourses. The reader easily gets the impression that, while part of the book is about Zadie Smith, another, just as important part, is about recent devel-

opments in literary scholarship. Yet this additional function of the collection as a kind of postcolonial reader – with its heavy concentration on theory – does not mar the accessibility of the text, and one can only profit from simultaneously learning about Smith's writing, and about current insights in contemporary, especially post-colonially attuned, literary interpretation.

On account of this exuberance of critical slants (and a kind of copious, exuberating quality in the author's fiction itself), the division of the volume into two appears to be a little forced, a mere gesture to provide a larger structure. The first section promises postcolonial and postmodernist readings of the related novels, and the second announces a primary concern with racial identities. This separation not only omits consideration of the overlap between these broad categories but it also fails to designate – even on the condensed, metaphorical manner in which most titles anticipate certain contents – the actual subject matter of a few chapters. Thus, the fifth essay about *White Teeth* as a Caribbean novel could easily be shifted from the first section into the second, because while its focus is on a kind of reversed colonial process, it prioritizes the category of race and ethnicity. Conversely, the twelfth paper, the final paper, on the international marketing of the same novel might just as legitimately be treated in the preceding unit about postmodernism, because it is much less geared towards a discussion of race than

to such concepts as simulation and the global book trade.

But regardless of order, the complex and well-written essays themselves facilitate an in-depth understanding of Smith's fiction. In the first section, after the editor's introduction, Matthew Paproth discusses a meaningful, but problematic rift between the open, typically postmodernist multiplicity of ideology and the primarily modernist, form-oriented aesthetic concern that the reader confronts in the author's novels ("The Flipping Coin: The Modernist and Postmodernist Zadie Smith"). In a well-placed second chapter, Ulka Anjaria explores the tension between the kind of aesthetic excess that scholars often posit in postcolonial responses to Western, normative concepts of the beautiful, and the particular anti-aesthetic academic attitude that is associated with the fictional character Howard Belsey ("*On Beauty* and Being Postcolonial"). Whereas these essays associate postmodernism – among other cultural phenomena – with the act of rewriting, and they highlight intriguing parallels between Forster's *Howard's End* and Smith's third novel, Urszula Terentowicz-Fotyga shifts attention from this artistic gesture to examples of self-referentiality, simulation, exhaustion and pastiche in *The Autograph Man* ("The Impossible Self and the Poetics of the Urban Hyper-real"). Rewriting is once again a central concern in Maeve Tynan's paper, where the author, after concentrating on intertextuality and postcolonial self-

awareness in two separate phases, confirms a critically often-voiced connection between identity and representation ("'Only Connect': Intertextuality and Identity in Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*"). As mentioned before, Raphael Dalleo's essay contemplates the position of *White Teeth* in British literary tradition ("Colonization in Reverse: *White Teeth* as Caribbean Novel"), arguing for a historically unusual (because indeed reversed) cultural impact as exercised by Caribbeans on Londoners.

The second section of the collection begins with a both refreshing and informative addition to the so-far discussed points of intertextual connection. While the presence of *Howard's End* in *On Beauty* is well-known and meant to be immediately perceived, Zora Neale Hurston's writings, Susan Alice Fischer demonstrates, provide a subtle, less obvious but significant context for characterization for the British novelist ("Gimme Shelter": Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*). Afterwards, Tracey L. Walters continues to explore Smith's accomplishments, as well as weaknesses, in the field of character portrayal, and investigates the possible cultural roots of the novelist's tendency to create somewhat lifeless female figures ("Still Mammies and Hos: Stereotypical Images of Black Women"). Next, scholars Sharon Raynor and Lexi Stucky read the lesser-known short story "Hanwell in Hell" ("From the Dispossessed to the Decolonized"; "Red and Yellow, Black and White: Color-Blindness as Disillusionment") and modify, as a result, the

general reader's perception of Smith's literary merits as so exclusively vested in her celebrated debut novel. Furthermore, in the first of these two pieces the short story is compared (if perhaps not closely enough) to Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, which, after one's growing a bit weary of references to Forster, is insightful and stimulating. The last chapter by Katarzyna Jakubiak offers an analysis of the multifarious manners in which *White Teeth* is commodified; yet the author skillfully combines this perspective with an intrinsic, textual interest in Smith's novel ("The International Marketing of *White Teeth*").

What may strike the reader as absent from this informative volume (in addition to better typesetting and space between initials in such names as E. M. Forster) is any discussion of *On Beauty* as an academic novel. Albeit the contributors do touch upon campus politics in their comments about the character Howard Belsey and his daughter Zora, this occurs in other, indirectly related contexts only. This default is regrettable because the novel is a remarkable exemplar of this genre featuring a variety of concerns about propriety, tenure and publishing. In a hilarious episode it even raises the question of what it really takes to survive a predictably very long departmental meeting. As in the works of Amis, Lodge or Bradbury, the narrative point is not limited to the exposure of personal grievances and private fantasies as fueling public interaction in a given place of employment, but it ex-

tends to complex analogies between the secluded, in a sense elitist field of a college and further, broader terrains of politics and sociality.

Another, quiet complaint concerns gender. As might be expected from any such publication, the essays are frequently punctuated by various observations about sexuality yet, atypically, there is only one section (out of twelve chapters) exploring this issue exclusively, and even this oscillates between analyzing the literary representation of gender in Smith's fiction, and taking the novelist to task for failing to create more complex, less stereotypical women characters. This, of course, is not to say that criticism of this kind should dominate the volume. But perhaps a better balanced relation between the predominantly postcolonial orientation of the interpretations and the various, somewhat dispersed discussions of Smith's representation of gender identity could have secured a better understanding of this oeuvre. And, to note a specific, related omission, very little is written about the male gender. While the huge, symbolically so over-determined bosom of Kiki in *On Beauty* creates numerous, if somewhat entangled, directions for feminist scholarship, the gender attitude of husband Howard remains strangely uninterpreted (even if the entire plot of this specific story is launched by a marital-sexual crisis, and even if, as noted before, editor Walters observes that the novelist is generally more competent at representing males than females).

To conclude, the volume adequately responds to many of the theoretical challenges that Zadie Smith's fiction has so far generated. It launches a dialogue, and the emerging, valuable exercises in scholarship in one collection assign yet another dimension to the moral and aesthetic imperative that Smith shares with Forster: "Only connect!"

Tamás Juhász

Commentators, Editors, Publishers, and Other Readers

Philip Goldstein & James L. Machor (ed.), *New Directions in American Reception Study* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2008)

The problem with reception studies is that there is nothing to read. As one cannot extract a reading from a reader's brain to subject it to scrutiny under a microscope, there appears to be no way but to rely on some kind of output on the readers' part when investigating what has traditionally been conceived of as the opposite of production: reception. However trivial and banal this statement may appear, it has far-reaching theoretical and practical consequences, as shown by the essays in the 2008 collection *New Directions in American Reception Study*, which stemmed from a conference held at the University of Delaware three years before. In fact, the

collection can be read as explorations of various strategies aimed at circumventing this problem.

As in the case of many books presenting novel directions in literary and cultural studies,¹ the introduction to this collection also heralds its subject as one that will finally be able to unify such age-old binaries as the historical as opposed to the rhetorical, to accommodate critical approaches of the 21st century, and, thus, serve as a new centre not only to the now-fragmented field of literary, but also to the wider area of cultural studies. But when I read that the arch-enemy of reception studies – criticism which clings to the possibility of a fixed, authoritative meaning – "the traditional essentialist method has restricted literary study and repeatedly produced impasses," and that reception study is the one that "opens literary study to its twenty-first-century constituents" (xxv), I could not help but think of the criticism of Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author," suggesting that Barthes had had to construct a dummy Author-God in order to be able to denounce what had, arguably, never been there.²

The editors divided the 19 essays in the anthology into five groups according to their subject matter. The collection starts with more theoretical writings, and continues with the most extensive group, analyses which are embedded in more traditional literary criticism. These are followed by three essays which are concerned with the "ordinary" reader or print culture from a historical perspec-