

Book Review

Scottish Women Writers of Hybrid Identity

Ed. Ema Jelinková, Olomouc: Palacký University, 2014¹

The increased pressure of globalization on national cultures has resulted not only in the emergence of new types of literature such as the global novel but has also produced a counterforce—the rise of interest in local voices and regional literary traditions. The collection of essays edited by Ema Jelinková shows that regional literatures have not escaped the attention of central European scholars whose explorations of Anglophonic literatures have transcended the limits of the traditional English literary canon. The four essays, framed by an introduction and a conclusion, present the reader with an overview of the major trends in Scottish women's writing produced both in the context of high postmodernism and in the postmillennial cultural milieu.

In the first essay “The Horror of the Everyday: Janice Galloway and A. L. Kennedy” Markéta Gregorová presents a study of Janice Galloway's and A. L. Kennedy's shared interest in such topics as “gender inequality, socioeconomic exploitation or global and domestic violence”. As Gregorová notes, the authors' employment of Gothic and fantasy writing has resulted in the creation of a new type of gothic heroine that combines traditional gothic concerns (haunting and emotional instability) with everyday problems of working class life. Referring to a representative sample of Galloway's and Kennedy's narratives (novels and short stories), the essay presents an overview of major gothic elements, literal and figurative phantoms, spectres, ghosts, the motif of the violation of the female body, or motifs of metamorphosis and duality, that these authors employ to address contemporary issues: the continuous oppression of women trapped in patriarchy, the unchanging position of the female body as an object of male violence and self-afflicted wounds that indicate a “perverted revolt” against the dominant female beauty ideal, or other troubling aspects of female identity such as paradoxical feelings of guilt for the male abuse of power. Although this concern with the ambiguous position of women in contemporary Scottish society creates a major motif in their works, Gregorová observes, both Galloway and Kennedy “refrain from compromising their art by propaganda; instead, they prefer to show their characters in the process of trying to find their place in the world while honestly admitting that they do not have all the answers”.

Petr Anténe's essay “Women Crossing Borders – The Gothic and the Fantastic” discusses Emma Tennant's and Alice Thomson's works to explore, similarly to Gregorová, the Gothic mode in Scottish women's literature that “has proved an efficient vehicle for dealing with gender issues at the turn of the century”. Focusing on Tennant's female versions of James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of the Justified Sinner* and R. L. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Anténe maps the author's appropriations of the Gothic classics. The doppelgänger motif acquires in *The Bad Sister* (1978) and *Two Women of London: The Strange Case of Ms Jekyll and Mrs Hyde* (1989) feminist twists that range from the incorporation of radical feminist ideology into the Hoggian story of sibling rivalry to the relating of a female Jekyll/Hyde transformation to an oppressive patriarchal politics of beauty. Anténe takes Alice Thomson's *Justine* (1996) as a further illustration of feminist responses to male literary tradition; this time represented by de Sade's novels, and draws a conclusion that “the novel repeats Tennant's criticism of the male gaze and the commodification of the female image”. In addition, Tennant's and Thomson's novels share dangerous female characters and

thus subvert the male predator/female victim binary that informed traditional Gothic narratives. Continuing the overview with the novels in which Thomson combines a ghost story formula with philosophical/religious frames of reference (*Pharos*, 2002), and with pre-war historical events (*The Falconer*, 2008) or combines the focus on the writing process and unethical practices in contemporary publishing market with the doppelgänger motif (*Burnt Island*, 2013), Anténe illustrates that these works also “draw on the Scottish literary tradition, especially the concept of the Caledonian antisyzygy”.

In the essay “Cultural Diversity and Hybridity in Contemporary Scottish Women’s Writing” Jan Horáček takes the main topic of the collection into a different area, Scottish literature written by women with diverse ethnic roots. Discussing the works of Jackie Kay, Maud Sulter, Leila Aboulela, Leela Soma, Raman Mundair, Chiew-Siah Tei and Catherina Czerkawska, he presents some of the major Scottish authors involved in the process of redefining of Scottish identity. Horáček presents these authors as the voices of contemporary multicultural Scotland whose hybrid identities have had a decisive influence on their explorations of “cultural diversity from an exciting new perspective”. Horáček’s mapping of the major issues in a representative selection of works shows that the recurring themes include racial inequality, interracial marriages, criticism of traditional stereotypes, cultural displacement and immigrants’ confusion and struggle to understand the specifics of a foreign culture. What these works also share is the idea of the fluidity of identity and the need to develop intercultural dialogue. Although Horáček’s discussion of the last author stands somewhat apart since Catherina Czerkawska does not deal with cultural diversity, his decision to include her work into his essay is acceptable, even praiseworthy. Czerkawska’s concern with ecological identity reveals that contemporary Scottish women’s literature transcends the boundaries of gender and ethnic politics and points at new pressing problems of postmillennial society.

In the last essay “Anglo-Scottish and Scoto-English Prose by Female Writers” Ema Jelinková returns to the exploration of contemporary Scottish authors (Muriel Spark, Emma Tennant, and Kate Atkinson) in the context of “Scottish legacy of antisyzygy”. Jelinková reads Muriel Spark as “a true acolyte of antisyzygy” who has blurred the categories of good and evil and offers *Symposium* (1990) as an illustration of Spark’s major source of inspiration, Scottish ballads. Relating Spark’s version of the “vile woman” from the Scottish Border Ballads to the Stevensonian Jekyll/Hyde motif, Jelinková finds the same motif also in Spark’s vision of authorship, claiming that Spark “holds an oxymoronic vision of the status of the writer, whose efforts are derived from God the Creator, and the Devil, the liar and usurper”. Jelinková’s discussion of the next Scoto-English author, Emma Tennant, echoes Anténe’s concern with Tennant’s revisions of male classics, especially the feminist version of Hogg’s novel, *The Bad Sister*. She particularly notes that the feminist agenda of the novel depends on the Gothic subject matter such as “taboos, violence and the nature of evil and paranoia”, appropriated for the revisionist purposes that include the rewriting of the traditionally victimized Gothic heroine as both victim and predator. Finally, Kate Atkinson’s *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* (1995) is treated as an example of Atkinson’s novels that “typically embrace trauma as a paradoxical means of survival”. Jelinková draws attention to Atkinson’s ways of combining a highly experimental style that “delights in postmodern elusiveness” with the story about a quest for identity that, among other things, addresses the patriarchal bias of traditional narratives, such as fairy tales.

As a whole the four essays present an interesting collection of trends, concerns and revivals of local literary traditions that dominate Scottish women’s literature. Although some of the discussed issues would have profited from deeper explorations, in general the collection

presents a useful study source for students of Scottish and/or regional studies courses and for scholars who are in need of a concise overview of Scottish female author's approaches to the still popular topic of hybrid identity.

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