

**Mihaela Irimia and Andreea Paris (eds.).** *Literature and the Long Modernity.* Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft 176. New York/Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014, 399 pp., € 86.00.

This volume is the result of the “Literature and the Long Modernity International Interdisciplinary Conference” held at the University of Bucharest in November 2011, the third symposium in the context of a three-year project on *The Cultural Institution of Literature from Early to Late Modernity in British Culture* run by the University’s Centre of Excellence for the Study of Cultural Identity (CESIC). In her fairly brief but wide-ranging introduction, “Why the Long Modernity”, Mihaela Irimia formulates the following guiding questions for the volume: “What is modernity? Where can we place its beginning? How long is/has been its course? Has it been unfolding smoothly, or has it known overflows, stops and hindrances? Is it still going on?” (8) Over some 400 pages, 24 contributions largely arranged chronologically then explore “the various phases of modernity as well as the theoretical-conceptual agenda” behind it (12).

Any review of a collection of essays naturally risks being unfair, either by singling out for detailed discussion some contributions at the expense of others just as deserving of extended appraisal, or by merely mentioning all contributions without doing justice to any. However, I have rarely found it so difficult in reviewing a collection to adhere to restrictions of length by refraining from discussing many contributions at greater length.

In an excellent combination of case study and conceptual work appropriately placed at the opening of the volume, C. W. R. D. Moseley in “Forging the Key of Remembrance: Books, Cultures and Memory” uses Geoffrey of Monmouth, Chaucer and Shakespeare to engage with questions of appropriation, cultural uses of literary mythmaking, canon formation, history and historicity and, ultimately, with the way in which ‘older’ texts can function as occasions for cultural self-examinations in the present. Mădălina Nicolaescu’s “Mediating between East and West in Nineteenth-Century Romanian Translations of Shakespeare” provides a fascinating contextual discussion that semanticizes what are partly minimal shifts of emphasis in translation, arguing, for instance, that P. P. Carp’s 1868 translation of *Othello* “tends to deconstruct the dichotomy between East and West, the Orient/the Levant and Venice, while at the same time projecting this dichotomy as a construction that entraps Othello” (42). In keeping with a recurring concern to show how current issues might be historicized, Stefan Herbrechter’s “Shakespeare – Early, Late or Posthumanist: The Case of *Hamlet*” concisely argues that some of the current notions of blurring lines between ‘human’ and ‘non-human’ are foreshadowed in *Hamlet*. A final contribution on Shakespearean lineages into the present is Małgorzata Grzegorzewska’s ““Pictures like a sum-

mer's cloud': The Phenomenology of the Visual in William Shakespeare's Plays and on the Stage of the Contemporary Theatre", while Petruța Năiduț's "Spectres of the Old World in the New" in a discussion of genre and rhetoric in travel accounts of the 'New World' in the 1590s compellingly shows how these texts, in attempting to render the unfamiliar, resort to familiar generic and visual strategies. In a fascinating essay on "The Laws of Piracy: Pirates as Messengers of Modernity in Thomas Heywood's *Fortune by Land and Sea*", Christoph Ehland reads Heywood's *Fortunes by Land and Sea* as exploring the connection between mobility and modernity, arguing that "[at] the end of *Fortune by Land and Sea* [...] the echo of the pirates' death reveals them as messengers of a modern order that will only be established centuries after their execution" (99).

Opening a sequence of three essays (largely) on what might be called the 'very long eighteenth-century', contributions that very nicely resonate with each other, Herbert Grabes in "The Five Radical Modernizations of Long Modernity" engages with the discontinuities in the process of modernization and convincingly argues that, in addition to the Renaissance, the later eighteenth century, modernism and the more contentious case of post-modernism, at least in Britain the later 17th century must also be seen as such a phase of more dramatic change. In "Modernity Then and Now", Pat Rogers continues this line of inquiry by taking a conceptual history approach: Exploring uses of terms and concepts around the issue of 'modernity' in the period from 1660–1760, Rogers provides an interesting take on familiar questions by historicizing them. He concludes an erudite and insightful essay by arguing that "[t]he enormous condescension of posterity allows us to suppose that [pre-enlightenment thinkers] did not qualify for full historic modernity, because they had not yet come to a Kantian sense of what the concept implied. In reality, this period – like the Enlightenment itself – marked just one stage in the long march of modernity, a journey beset by sudden jolts, arbitrary changes of direction, and contradictory purposes" (130). Finally, Francis O'Gorman's "An Alternative to Whig Modernity: An Analysis of Britain in the Long Eighteenth Century" argues for the (relative) coherence of the period from the Glorious Revolution to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century as opposed to the period roughly beginning with the accession of Queen Victoria, suggesting that – in contrast to the "Whig view" – the period was most importantly marked by a sequence of "regular breakdowns of authority of the most profound character" (136).

Clifford Siskin's "Literary History in the Long Modernity", taking its cues from post-Darwinian evolutionary theory, combines a look at the institutional history of 'English Literary History', an insightful assessment of the transformation of History as a discipline in the Romantic period and an acute look at some of the challenges to present-day Departments of English. The other contribution on, loosely speaking, the Romantic period is Shobhana Battacharji's somewhat impressionistic

essay on “Modernity during the Long Romanticism: The Case of Byron”, which assembles (with a few rather obvious dating errors) a range of quotations on ‘the modern’, ‘modernism’, ‘modernity’ and ‘Romanticism’ since the Romantic period to assess Byron’s ‘modernity’ and his afterlife in popular culture.

What follows is a sequence of highly illuminating essays in the more conceptual vein: In “Literature and the Long Search for Modernity: The Counter-Histories of Antoine Compagnon and William Marx”, Jürgen Pieters engages with two 21<sup>st</sup>-century accounts of ‘modernity’ in Compagnon’s and Marx’s notions of ‘l’anti-moderne’ and ‘arrière-garde’ respectively, while Laurent Milesi in “Speeds of (Post)Modernity”, an essay that is as wide-ranging and thought-provoking as it is speculative, discusses the notion of speed in (post-)modernist poetics and theory. Thomas Docherty in “Now, or to Tell the Truth, the Contemporary” in characteristically illuminating fashion marshals, *inter alia*, Robbe-Grillet, Benjamin, Hegel, Beckett, Augustine, Agamben, Rancière and Tony Judt on issues of confession, truth and contemporaneity to argue that current identity politics is ultimately self-defeating in that it “atomises the political will and its community” (237).

Adrian Oțoiu’s “In the Wake of Finnegans? Wordplay in Malcolm Lowry and Flann O’Brien: Modernism as a Punctual Dead End” compellingly reads Lowry in *Under the Volcano* on the one hand and O’Brien in *At Swim-Two Birds* (both fairly exactly contemporaneous with *Finnegans Wake* in their conception) and O’Brien’s later short fiction on the other hand as pointing in opposite directions, the former to “a dead end of modernism, suffocated by its excess of meaning”, the latter “ahead to the postmodern paradigm” in their “openness, flat characterization and eroding of identity” (258). After Hans-Peter Söder’s provocative “The Globe is Not Enough: In Defence of National Literature(s)”, Linda Hutcheon’s “Literature in the Long Modernity: Its Reception in the Digital Age” in a wonderfully thoughtful and agreeably un-panicked way assesses the profound impact of digitalization and especially of online customer reviews, blogs and other non-professional present-day reviewing practices on the business of reviewing and on literature generally.

Finally, a sequence of essays expands the regional scope: In contrast to what his title suggests, Alan Riach in “Scottish Literature and Anglo-American Modernity: What Makes It New?” comparatively discusses Scottish and Irish modernism (taking his cue from McDiarmid and Yeats), identifies the modernism of the 1920s and 1930s as the fourth one in a sequence of major phases of modernization in Scottish literary history since the 16<sup>th</sup> century – and suggestively ends by pointing to the 2014 referendum (in the future at the time the essay was written). For reasons of space, I cannot comment on these essays individually, but Eve Patten’s “Modernity and Nineteenth-Century Ireland: The Making of a ‘National Reader’”, Isabel Oliveira Martins’s “Marianne Baillie’s View of Portugal or British Female-

ness Abroad”, Michael Hutcheon’s “The Musical Modernism of Olivier Messiaen” and Ludmila Volná’s “Towards Indian Modernity and the Birth of Indian Writing in English: The Case of Rammohan Ray” each provide compelling readings of their material. Two essays on contemporary Romania conclude the volume: Though relatively far from the topic of ‘Literature and Modernity’, Bogdan Ștefănescu’s “Late (for) Modernity: Transition and the Traumatic Colonization of the Future of Postcommunist Cultures” yields fascinating insights: Drawing on theories of postcoloniality, trauma and temporality, Ștefănescu provocatively reads post-communist Romania as providing “interesting complications of modernity-as-colonization” (363) and argues that “colonization by the USSR was no more than a temporary suspension of an older and stronger form of the consensual [half-masochistic] colonization by the West” (364). Finally, Arleen Ionescu’s “Hauntologies of Post-Joycean Modernity in Romanian Literature: Adrian Oțoiu’s *Coaja lucrurilor sau Dansând cu jupuia* [*The Skin of the Matter or Dancing with the Flayed*]” continues the inquiry into the connection between [post-]communism and modernity by reading Oțoiu’s 1996 novel through, *inter alia*, Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx*, a reading that in many ways also nicely resonates with Oțoiu’s own essay earlier in the volume.

In a collection of this thematic and historical scope, and one resulting from a conference at that, one will hardly expect all essays equally closely to engage with the guiding questions formulated in the Introduction; however, a remarkable majority of essays do so very persuasively – and even the contributions that less neatly tie in with the rest of the volume with very few exceptions make for fascinating reading. What further unites the vast majority of these essays is a compelling combination of strong conceptual thought and illuminating discussion of specific texts, writers, periods or historical as well as present-day situations and issues. Moreover, many essays share an interest in the way in which, without being anachronistic or uncritically presentist, present-day concerns can be historicized by tracing how they are prefigured in past texts.

In summary, the strength of the volume lies not so much in its tight focus, but in its broad scope – and this is far more than a euphemism for ‘mixed bag’. The volume will be enormously rewarding to anyone interested in conceptual engagements with or case studies on various questions of literary and cultural modernity – and who isn’t?

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