

■ DELINEATING LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE: RECOUNTING CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

Marija Knežević and Aleksandra Nikčević-Batričević (eds.), *Recounting Cultural Encounters*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009, 205

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

In recent years, the issue of cultural encounters has been explored in its manifold aspects. Linguists, philologists, psychologists and anthropologists have joined in the heated and intense debate. The present book tries to resolve some of these issues while approaching the subject from an interdisciplinary point of view, and thus it pertains to an unusually wide field of linguistic, literary and cultural studies. Authors have made an attempt to formulate certain general principles which may be found applicable to the analysis in the context of cultural encounters. Pointing out that contributions in the book “highlight some of the wide ranging ways in which the issues of culture and identity can be approached in a literary text” while “focusing on the ways in which cultural encounters have been changing both the world and its reflection in the literature” the editors stress that “the beginning of the twenty first century is an appropriate time to repay careful attention to these issues” (p. 1). Aiming at “[u]nderstanding how our perception of the Other changed with the concept of the world we inhabit” the editors, Marija Knežević and Aleksandra Nikčević-Batričević emphasise both “[t]he rising importance of fostering cultural pluralism and global understanding” (p. 1). Having based their research on extensive, far-reaching and widespread readings in academia, such as deconstruction, post-colonialism, post-modernism, new historicism, and narratology, the contributors in this book carry on by addressing the metaphor of travel as one of the strongest metaphors for the evolution of the mankind. Relevant to these various assorted and diversified approaches the contributors’ arguments go in favour of the interdisciplinary treatment of language and literature.

The book opens with the introduction written by Marija Knežević and Aleksandra Nikčević-Batričević, where they sketch out the content of the book and concisely state objectives of certain authors and their respective methodologies. The book contains

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the Acknowledgments (p. vii), and a list of contributors (p. 195-199) and it ends with an index (p. 201-205). The rest of the book is organised into thirteen chapters. But, it seems to me that, irrespective of these chapters, the book may be further broken into five parts, each of which will be described separately.

PART I – “WESTERN APPROACH TO THE BALKANS”

This part, consisting of four chapters, looks into the Western approach to the Balkans, predominantly focusing on the Anglo-American view of Montenegrin geographical, cultural and social space. It opens with Peter Preston’s paper entitled “Imagining Montenegro: From Tennyson to James Bond” (p. 9-30), which introduces four authors describing Montenegro: Rebecca West, Joyce Cary, and Jan and Cora Gordon, and concludes with the appearance of a “Montenegro of the mind” in *Casino Royale*, the recent James Bond film. In her paper, entitled “Montenegro as the Scene of Some Strange War Images in Joyce Cary’s *Memoir of the Bobotes*” (p. 31-48), Biljana Đorić-Francuski analyses Cary’s atypical and unusual response to the First Balkan War. Another original contribution is provided by Dr. Bojka Đukanović who explores the Montenegrin experience described by Henry Rushton Fairclough, a former USA commissioner to the Balkans, in her paper, entitled “A Stay in Montenegro – An American Impression” (p. 49-61). Pointing out the fact that Fairclough’s autobiography *Warming Both Hands* is “one of the most interesting books depicting the desperate situation, in which the Montenegrins found themselves in the aftermath of the World War I”, Dr. Đukanović further analyses the reminiscences of this author anchoring her investigation in the interdisciplinary context. In her paper, entitled “A Soul that Remembers Can Never Be Lost – Tragic Cultural Encounters in Albahari’s *Götz and Meyer*” (p. 63-78) Dr. Vesna Lopičić asserts that the concept of cultural encounters is primarily read in a predominantly positive context nowadays, although the connotations of creative exchange and constructive interactions may usually be considered inevitable. Her paper “[i]ntends to remind of perhaps the most tragic cultural encounter of the 20th century, the Holocaust, as rendered in Albahari’s novel *Götz and Meyer*” while pointing out that David Albahari creates “[a] longer story in the same vein to tackle a very delicate cultural and historical moment: the extermination of Belgrade Jews in WW2” (p. 63). In addition to this, her paper examines the literary depiction of the tragic encounters from our recent history – the Jewish population in Belgrade, on one side, and the German soldiers ordered to drive the truck to the gas chamber, on the other – thus representing two conflicting cultures meeting in the course of the Second World War. Suffice it to say that David Albahari’s intention certainly is to emphasise the moral significance of the memory of this tragic episode, which simultaneously had both lasting and cultural consequences. Vesna Lopičić rightly concludes that “[t]he Holocaust of WW2, even in its local manifestation at the Fairgrounds camp in Belgrade, is a tragic cultural encounter” and that for Albahari “[i]t proves the meaninglessness of history which must not be disregarded” (p. 77).

PART II – “THE POWER OF LANGUAGE OVER IDENTITY”

The first paper within this part is written by Dr. Biljana Čubrović. In her methodologically functional study, entitled “Twisting Cultural Stereotypes: Identifying Nations Linguistically” (p. 79-87), Dr. Čubrović explores certain cultural stereotypes of the British and Serbs as presented in Vesna Goldsworthy’s *Chernobyl Strawberries* (first published in English in 2005). Dr. Čubrović points out that “[d]ue to her language background and extensive life experience in Britain as her newly acquired country, Goldsworthy describes this country as well as Serbia through an interesting looking glass” (p. 79). Employing the analysis of linguistic means for culture depiction, the author of this study concludes that “English is undoubtedly considered to be a true international language of today, and that may be the reason for Goldsworthy’s choice of the medium” (p. 80). Dr. Biljana Čubrović has successfully fused linguistic analysis together with the literary one, which resulted in one more than original paper within this book. Another paper within this thematic part is Nadežda Stojković’s work, entitled “To Translate or Not To Translate – To Enrich or To Impoverish Identity” (p. 89-112), in which the author thoroughly observes the ways in which Hoffman employs the theme of an individual facing a sudden change in her linguistic surrounding due to her emigration, while presenting language as a medium of personal and collective identity.

PART III – “AMERICAN SOIL AND CULTURE”

This part opens with Saša Simović’s paper, entitled “Transformations vs. Transformation” (p. 113-118) which introduces the ways in which Hawthorne’s romance contrasts two civilisations: the Eternal City of Rome, its tradition and experience, and Catholicism as opposing America’s youth, prosperity, ambition and Protestantism. Mirjana Daničić offers a powerful and important reminder of the history pertaining to African American women in her study, entitled “The New Cultural Politics: Encounters Between Race and Gender – Blackness and Feminism – in Toni Morrison’s Novels” (p. 119-128). Aiming at “[l]ooking for the theoretical framework for the issues of race and gender” Mirjana Daničić sets about exploring the “culture of difference” and has been drawn to this theory of “culture of difference” created by Cornel West, which “can be read as a manifesto for intellectuals working on behalf of the “culture of difference”” (p. 120). The main ideas of Mirjana Daničić, espoused in her study, argue for one specific literary theoretic approach, which has been promoted by the researcher herself.

PART IV – “THE COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BRITISH AND INDIANS”

This part of the book brings together three chapters. It opens with Soumen Mukherjee’s paper, entitled “The Cultural Perspective of Indian Society as Revealed in Arundhanti Roy’s *The God of Small Things*” (p. 129-138). This author pinpoints the sea change in the social, political, religious, economic and scientific fields, which India

is undergoing at the moment and which are aptly captured and highlighted in Roy's novel. Aleksandra Jovanović explores why and how the characters of Rushdie's novel travel in order to find the meaning of existence. This is sufficiently explained in her paper, entitled "The Quest for the Centre in Rushdie's Novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*" (p. 139-146). This part closes with Marija Knežević's paper, entitled "The Strange Meeting of Arthur and George in Julian Barne's *Arthur and George*" (p. 147-170) in which she explores several traditional genre narratives making thus specific literary analysis searching for the basis of a humanistic discourse.

PART V – "THE POSTMODERN ISSUES OF CLASHES AND INTERACTION BETWEEN POPULAR AND HIGH CULTURE"

This final part of the book begins with the paper, entitled "Sympathy for the Devil: Gurus and Shamans in Nineteen-Sixties Music and Literature" (p. 171-181) in which Victor Kennedy examines the appeal of the gurus and shamans in the songs of the sixties and how encounters with these characters have come to resemble fictional encounters with the devil. The final paper, entitled "Intertextuality and the Construction of Authorship in J. M. Coetzee's Nobel Lecture "He and His Man"" (p. 183-193), looks into undermining all traditional conventions of inaugural speeches, while tracing the metaphors provided by Coetzee to conceptualise the notions of author and authorship.

EVALUATION

The argumentation of the papers presented in this collection is strongly founded in recent literary studies and humanities in general. Each chapter contains authors' reasonable, logical and well-constructed conclusion. Not only are the actual global problems of abrupt cultural change and exchange observed, clarified and illustrated when introduced, but each chapter provides a well-balanced explanation referring to all these phenomena. Needless to say, on the whole, the overall value of the book is pretty high, although certain ideas might be further elaborated in some future explorations. Despite the fact that further broadening is a most welcome expectation, it seems that this book might be more than a good start.