

REVIEWS

Sabine Coelsch-Foisner, Hanna Wallinger, Gerhild Reisner, Editors

Daughters of Restlessness. Women's Literature at the End of the Millennium. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter 1998, 312 p.

The attractive title of this volume of 21 essays fulfils its promise, not only because it resonates so well with our restless times, but also because it is in tune with today's omnipresent call for plurality. The editors have gathered together a variety of voices and given space to a variety of perspectives, and although only women's literature is discussed, male voices are not excluded. In addition, the range is widened by a sense of the voices speaking in different tongues: the writers and the scholars come from various cultural and language backgrounds (and literally: besides English, some of the essays are written in German). As the voices criss-cross three continents (South and North America and Europe) disregarding national borders and cultural boundaries within them, the differences appear to be of less importance than the debate that encompasses them.

The editors conceptualise the restlessness of the end of this millennium as motion, as transformation in terms of modes of life and the understanding of identity. But as old boundaries collapse, there are always new ones to be negotiated. Literature, which now more significantly than ever includes writing by women, reflects the restlessness with its anxieties and hopes and at the same time provides the aesthetic and creative force which helps the process of transition along.

Sabine Coelsch-Foisner introduces the first section of the volume centred on the discourse of fantasy. Traditionally connected with gloomy visions or utopian dreams both of which give utterance to dissatisfaction with the state of society, here too the mode of fantasy is recognized as conveying a profound sense of restlessness, a clear desire for movement towards change. Coelsch-Foisner believes that, both textually and generically, fantasy denies fixities and that its fluidity of form resistant to narrow definitions is closely akin to postmodern writing. Notably the postmodern disruption of chronology and coherence and the liking for permutation and excess can easily accommodate the fantastic, reaching beyond time and space. Specific to women's writing, particularly as viewed by feminist criticism, are novel ways of deconstructing and subverting a cultural and literary tradition which is "not wholly theirs". In this exploration which involves concern with time, fragmentation, chaos, silences and exclusions, the fantastic mode lends itself as a potent tool. In the articles of this section, which analyse works of Carol Ann Duffy, Cristina Fernández Cubas, Marina Colasanti, Angela Carter and Ursula K. Le Guin, fantasy emerges from fairytale transformations, from indefiniteness and avoidance of closures, from orgiastic liberation of carnival, from endless mythical journeys and

postapocalyptic tales—from the uneasy margins between reality and the imaginary. The end-of-the-millennium preoccupation with (end)time and new departures is shown to permeate the circular, emotional narrative of Duffy's poems. Time in Duffy is the Bergsonian "time-as-experience" and however mean or vicious it appears, it gives guidance. In re-imagining the past through the flight of experience and the flight of language, "the past is the future waiting for dreams". The article on the Spanish writer Cristina Fernández Cubas highlights her representation of our postmodern condition by means of fragmented time and play with the instabilities of meaning and the perception of the possible and the fantastic. A different kind of fantasy—a dream of independence and racial integration projected into the figure of the Black Mother of the Brazilian Carnival—is presented in the light of Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque and ultimately perceived as a celebration of change and regeneration. The Brazilian context, social, political and ethical, comes under scrutiny in Marina Colasanti's feminist utopianism. It is argued that the primary motive of her tales of fantasy is to promote a dialogue between the traditional and challenging notions of the gendered self and culture. There are two perspectives on Angela Carter's writing. In one Carter is classified as a true "daughter of restlessness" in her aim to deconstruct and demythologise myths about women. The other focuses on the dialectic of hope and despair in her (post)apocalyptic novels, somewhat disconcertingly making the apocalypse sound desirable. Basically the same discourse underlies Le Guin's science-fiction, which is presented in the last essay of this section.

In the second chapter Hanna Wallinger has grouped together essays that tackle cultural restlessness: they are about margins and borderlands, about transcending boundaries and moving between worlds; about living inside and outside a cultural tradition, often both at the same time. Whatever the motives of having to negotiate between cultures, this also involves the time factor of shifting positions in an effort to preserve cultural traditions and accept alien cultures, eventually to cross the temporal border into the increasingly multicultural world of the next millennium. The authors of the essays included here approach the thematics from both inside and outside postcolonial criticism and both support and question postcolonial modes of inquiry in which the very concept of 'assimilation' is marked as suspect. Nevertheless, the outgoing message is clear: our future lies in crossing boundaries. This is with some hope reflected in what Thelma Shinn Richard terms "the meronymic novel", whose characters are poised between cultures (like their authors Toni Cade Bambara, Maxine Hong Kingston and Leslie Marmon Silko, who are of African American, Chinese American and Mexican Indian American origin) and whose concern is with the process of healing of the present dis-ease to be found in the placing of the self in a bigger, heterogeneous and more inclusive context. Although no such hope is traced in the following essay on Bebe Moore Campbell's detective novel, which condemns the continuing colour line in U.S. society, the fiction of the Chicana writer Sheila Ortiz Taylor endorses the positive tone. Here too, the healing power of creative writing comes again to the fore. Hers is shown to be the kind of prose that articulates multiplicities while avoiding the confrontation of dualism. The flux of ethnic, sexual and class identities mirrored by the elusive generic classification of Taylor's texts is linked with her positive vision of change. Timberlake Wertenbaker's plays, on the other hand, do not set much store by change. Rather, as is argued against New Historicist, cultural materialist and postcolonial critics and in defence of Wertenbaker,

because humankind has changed little over the centuries, great canonical works of the past can always speak to audiences of different times and places, thus crossing temporal and cultural boundaries. The postcolonial mode is embraced by Maryse Condé in her critique of white male dominance as experienced by her young black female Guadelupian heroine. It is shown, however, that Condé's Cixousean feminine novel attempts to be neither feminist nor exclusive, but universal, and her subversion through laughter makes a plea for harmony of the entire human race. Cross-cultural influences are celebrated by both the author of the next essay (Kent Bales) and his writer (Bharati Mukherjee), a native of India living in the U.S., and both of them put to test some of the assumptions of postcolonial critical theories. Conversely, postcolonial and feminist critical approaches combined seem to offer solutions to the Afro-Caribbean British-born playwright Winsome Pinnock, who, as is pointed out, does not offer to the western spectator "a docile body open to recolonization but ... a self-inscribing body open to reciprocal practices of transculturation".

In the last section of the book the debate revolves around identity and self of the "restless daughters", which the editor Gerhild Reisner sets within the framework of cultural translation between Latin American and Anglo-American women writing and (feminist) criticism, mainly in terms of cultural differences resulting from their different socio-economic, political and institutional backgrounds. She claims that whether an author positions herself as a witness of the times, as standing before the mirror or as a discursive subject of her text, it is the quest for the self, often re-writing the traditional icons of the female, that brings together the otherwise diverse writers discussed here. They include Helena Parente Cunha, Márcia Denser, Eloi Calage, Doris Lessing, Clarice Lispector, Margaret Forster, Nélide Pinon, Ana Maria Miranda and Isabel Allende. According to Cunha, a Brazilian writer and scholar, the emerging tendency for women (writers) at the end of the twentieth century is towards self-integration as they bridge over the gulf between traditional codes and their desire for independence as well as the separation between male and female. This hopeful development is also confirmed by Maria Angélica Lopes, who believes that contemporary Brazilian women writers have achieved a significant step towards equality with male writers by being no longer marginalized for representing the erotic in their writing. The related themes of the family and motherhood take the focus of several essays. Doris Lessing's scepticism about the institution of the family emerges from a Jungian reading of her 1989 novel *The Fifth Child*. More pointedly so from a feminist perspective, women are shown to be the victims of the patriarchal family pattern in the work of the Brazilian novelist Lya Luft. But both in Luft and in the innovative feminine prose of Clarice Lispector there appears to be a healthy shift away from the claustrophobic private towards the more open public. On the British scene, Margaret Forster's voice, albeit feminist, on the whole upholds the role of the family and while motherhood is demythologised by her, it is not disparaged. The volume is fittingly concluded with an overview of several Latin American women writers in an article which advocates a "paradigm of dialogism", of a "coexistence of the mutually exclusive" in imaginary writing which may well be seen as women's contribution to contemporary literary production.

All this makes exciting reading. What is more, the editors have contrived to avoid the postmodern anything-goes trap in which the much wanted dialogue may turn into a self-

sufficient monologue. By pitting often contradictory perspectives against one another, they have created a dialogue that is much concerned with our present sense of fragmentation, difference and fluidity of time and space. Nevertheless, one cannot but agree with the view that "diversity is not in itself a virtue" (p. 199) and however much we may celebrate it, there is an undercurrent of a longing for the unity of mutual understanding which *Daughters of Restlessness* has unmistakably captured.

Milada Franková

Josef Vachek: *Prolegomena k dějinám Pražské školy jazykovědné* (Prolegomena to the History of the Prague School of Linguistics), Nakladatelství H&H, 1999, 135 p.

The ninetieth anniversary of Josef Vachek's birth (born 1st March 1909 in Prague, died 31st March 1996 in Prague) is commemorated by a modest, tiny booklet which is his last manuscript.

In this "non-memoir" presentation, as it is labelled by Oldřich Leška, the author of the review attached to the text of Vachek's book, Vachek gives not only a lucid, succinct description of the origin, development and reputation of the Prague School, but also an evaluation of the state of the art of Czech linguistics from the viewpoint of the development of functionalist and structuralist conceptions, intertwined with the latest trends, against the background of the dramatic development of linguistic research in the 1930s and 1940s.

Within the temporal framework delimited by the overcoming of Neo-grammarians' atomism and postulating the "conception of language as a functionally and structurally regarded systemic entity" (the quotation is taken from the book under discussion, p.10) Vachek presents an individually experienced, yet highly factual account of the atmosphere of the times which gave birth to the unparalleled international scope of the community under the name **The Prague Linguistic Circle** (Circle Linguistique de Prague).

The team spirit of the "classical period" has enriched 20th century linguistics in a very distinctive way, ranking Prague among the most influential and most inspiring world centres of linguistic research. The strong influence of the Prague conception came to the fore especially at the First International Linguistic Congress in the Hague in 1928, the First International Congress of Slavists in Prague in 1929 and the Second International Congress of Linguists in Geneva in 1931.

The label "**École de Prague**" first appeared before the First International Congress of Phonetic Sciences, which took place in Amsterdam in 1932. In his book, Vachek gives a very apt justification for the novelty and force of the Prague conception. On the one hand, it was based on the interface of two approaches to linguistic problems, those of synchrony and diachrony, on the other hand it was marked by the complementarity of two distinctly different trends within the Prague Linguistic Circle, namely

- (1) the **Trubetzkoy-Jakobsonian** trend, emphasizing structure
- (2) the **Mathesius Havránekian** trend, emphasizing function.

The former trend traced the general features of the system, the latter concentrated on internal relationships within the system.