



REVIEW

Emma Jelínková (ed.): *Scottish Women Writers of Hybrid Identity*. Olomouc: Palacký University, 2014, ISBN 978-80-244-4399-7, 109 pp.

“Women Begin to Lead the Way in Scottish Literature” is the headline of an article that appeared in the Scottish broadsheet *The Herald* in 2013. It announces that yet another Scottish female writer won a prestigious book reward. It suggests that these women authors are at the moment “dominating the awards scene and review pages.” They are bringing a stream of fresh air into the conventionally male-dominated field of literature and are helping to redefine the fixed construction of writers’ gender and nationality. Therefore, their achievements have created a new territory that is open to investigations.

A year later Emma Jelínková, who is currently focusing on contemporary Scottish female writers as a part of an ongoing research project, and her team have published a volume entitled *Scottish Women Writers of Hybrid Identity*, taking on the uneasy task of exploring previously oft-overlooked Scottish women’s literature and depicting women authors as an essential part of the literary canon.

The volume consists of a preface, four essays, and an afterword. The authors describe “Scottish” identity in two ways. The first approach delineates this identity as a unique and isolated entity but one that is vibrant and rich. Its literature applies the Gothic genre in order to point out injustice within social systems concerning gender and race. The second approach to Scottish culture and literature proposes to examine Scottish identity through the lens of multiculturalism. This identity cannot be defined only through the geographical borders that distinguish it from other countries; any such definition must take into account multiple voices of various influences. Scotland has become a “melting pot” (Carruthers 2009: 3) where immigrants and their foreign experiences blend with the essence of native inhabitants. In their volume, Jelínková and the other contributors depict a contemporary Scottish literary tradition where women writers of different origins get a chance to voice their opinions.

In the preface, Jelínková depicts the expansion of women writers in Scotland and highlights the diversity of these authors as something worth exploring. She further states that the publication has the ambition of examining a “newly rediscovered Scottish tradition of ambivalence and hybridity among the women writers of Scotland”(9).

The volume opens with Markéta Gregorová’s chapter “The Horror of the Everyday: Janice Galloway and A.L. Kennedy,” which focuses on the writings of these two contemporary female authors in great detail. Using the theme of the contrasting nature of the “Caledonian Antisyzygy,” which Gregory Smith defines as “a union of opposites” (qtd. in Stirling 2008: 103), Gregorová explores the provoking functions of Gothic writing that serve as an effective tool for both Galloway and Kennedy to address sensitive issues of various oppressions and challenge questionable political agendas. Moreover, this genre also questions the female position within the patriarchy. Both authors apply Gothic elements in order to depict the unique experience of women authors whose presence

in their profession was frequently marginalised and reduced to being the “other.” The Gothic genre highlights polar dichotomies that are seen as the core of true “Scottishness.” By examining Galloway and Kennedy’s writing, Gregorová explores the uncanny techniques these authors use. The concept of the Freudian uncanny offers endless possibilities for exploring contrasts. It allows us to see everyday life as estranging, female bodies as both fragile and threatening, the blending of ambivalent emotions such as love and hate, and it underlines the very nature of terror that borders on with grotesqueness and amusement. Gregorová further provides readers with relevant and vivid examples from the works of Galloway and Kennedy that, though they do not always portray a specifically Scottish national identity, examine concepts of everyday life and humanity that are often twisted and schizophrenic, thus contributing to the revival of Scottish traditions in Gothic writing.

The second chapter, written by Petr Anténe, nicely follows what Gregorová foreshadowed in her essay. It builds on the topic of the schizophrenic identities that best represent the nature and culture of Scots who live their lives as a Scottish nation within the United Kingdom. This difficult condition involving a clash of identities manifests in Scottish writing in the frequent usage of the traditional Gothic figures of doppelgangers. Anténe analyses the application of doubles in the works of Emma Tennant and Alice Thompsons. First, he deals with Tennant and her feminist rewritings of canonical Scottish novels, namely James Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* and Robert Luis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Tennant rewrote these two books to highlight the negative impact of excessively emphasising the importance of beauty and youth in women’s lives. Tennant’s novels *The Bad Sister* and *Two Women of London: The Strange Case of Ms Jekyll and Mrs. Hyde* criticise the patriarchy and the objectification of women through the aggressive male gaze. Thompson also stresses these issues in her novel *Justine*. She highlights the dangers of seeing women as passive objects of art. Although all of the female characters in these novels are oppressed by the patriarchal society in which they live, they also have an agency of their own that often leads them into committing violent crimes. They can therefore no longer be seen only as victims, but must be recognised as powerful women taking fate into their own hands. In the final part of his essay, Anténe also introduces other themes in Thompson’s literature and emphasises the diversity of her work within the mosaic of the Scottish Gothic tradition.

In his essay “Cultural Diversity and Hybridity in Contemporary Scottish Women’s Writing,” Jan Horáček challenges the conventional isolated idea of “true Scottishness” by taking into consideration the themes of immigration and multiculturalism. Horáček focuses on female authors of different origins who contribute to Scottish literary tradition by offering a fresh and provocative perspective on the process of cultural blending. In the first part of this essay, Horáček introduces the new “cosmopolitan” approach to identity proposed by Jackie Key. In her novel *The Trumpet*, she suggests that gender is something subjective that people should construct for themselves. This approach rejects traditional theories about biologically predestined gender and racial features and presents the self as a fluid concept without boundaries. People are encouraged to invent their own identities regardless of their pre-born predispositions. Horáček progresses in his essay by examining Mauld Salder’s work which criticises racism and obstacles that women of African descent have been facing on a daily basis for centuries. She also suggests an escape from this vicious circle of being a victimised black mother by emphasising the ability to take pride in actions that are perceived as not only personal but also political and therefore can function as a tool of defiance against oppression. In the next part of this chapter, Horáček depicts an interesting contrast between two authors who focus on the immigrant experience in Scotland and difficulties brought by the integration of two very different cultures. While Liela Aboulela stresses the struggles of her heroine with the first-world mainstream culture and religion, Leela Soma’s female principal character embraces new possibilities that are offered to her in London and later on in Glasgow. Regardless of racial prejudices, Soma’s character uses her wits to openly fight back. The works of both Aboulela and Soma show a belief that the integration of different cultures is possible. Horáček then turns his attention to another female writer: Raman Mundair. Her contribution lies in incorporating humour into her works. This serves both to amuse and fight against racism and also highlights “the influence of Indian culture on Europe” (82). The topic of multiculturalism is further explored in Chiew-Siah

Tei's novel *Little Hut of Leaping Fishes*, which describes the blending of Chinese and Western culture. It celebrates the possibility of "gender and ethnic equality" (87). Horáček closes his chapter by introducing yet another approach to cultural and social disintegration that is caused by technological and scientific advancement. In her novel *The Physic Garden*, Catherine Czerkawska warns against the industrial progress that not only is changing geographical topography but also threatens humanity itself. Horáček then concludes this essay by claiming that Scottish identity can no longer be examined in isolation. By analysing the works of these contemporary female writers, Horáček places the value of Scottish literature in its multiculturalism.

Jelínková brings back the topic of plurality and the subversive nature of the Scottish "Caledonian Antisyzygy" in her essay "Anglo-Scottish and Scoto-English Prose by Female Writers." Jelínková claims that the condition of ambivalence helps women authors bring attention to their writing. Although they are often overlooked as a "minority in [an] already marginalized Scottish literary tradition" (94), this fact provides them with fuel to fight against these limitations. Jelínková then discusses Flora Alexander's term "Scoto-English writers" and redefines it. It originally referred to five female writers who moved out of Scotland. Jelínková, nevertheless believes that other writers also deserve to be included in this rank based on their ability to engage with the contrasting nature of traditional Scottish writing. Jelínková continues her essay by discussing the work of three "major border-crossing writers" (98): Muriel Spark, Emma Tennant, and Kate Atkinson. In her rather abrupt conclusion, Jelínková proposes that it is not really important whether female writers are labelled as Scoto-English or Anglo-Scots because they still share the same experience of ambivalence that is rooted in Scottish literature.

Markéta Gregorová closes the volume with her afterword entitled "Charting New Territories, Forging New Identities". She summarises the basic principles of Scottish literature that have already been outlined in the volume's other essays. The afterword discusses the common application of Gothic themes and the figure of doppelgangers in the Scottish writing tradition. Gregorová again stresses the suitable usage of this genre by female writers who use it to fight conventions. She then highlights the idea of contemporary Scottish hybridism that was previously examined by Horáček. Gregorová further mentions Muriel Spark as a border-crossing author of hybrid identity. In the final part of this afterword, she summarises her own essay focusing on the works of Kennedy and Galloway.

This modest volume offers its readers an intriguing introduction to the principle features of the Scottish literary tradition with a focus on female authors. These authors are labelled as hybrids because they come from different backgrounds; nevertheless, all of them are able to incorporate their own original and challenging ideas into Scottish writing. *Scottish Women Writers of Hybrid Identity* provides us with vivid examples from the writings of the most prominent Scottish female writers and Jelínková and her co-authors bring our attention to the important themes and motives that appear in these writers' works.

Despite these useful contributions, it is also necessary to note some of this publication's flaws. Although the first three essays offer a solid depiction of the major themes of Scottish writing with an emphasis on the venerable tradition of Gothic themes, the Caledonian Antisyzygy, and the new diversity of multicultural experience, the last essay and the afterword feel somewhat redundant. They merely summarise what had already been stated in the previous chapters, adding hardly anything new. For instance, Jelínková re-describes the story of Tennant's *The Bad Sister*, which had already been analysed at length in Anthéne's essay. In the volume's final chapter, Gregorová then provides readers with an overview of all of the preceding essays, which again feels somewhat unnecessary.

Despite these drawbacks, *Scottish Women Writers of Hybrid Identity* still manages to achieve its goal of exploring the ambivalence and hybridity of Scottish female writers and forces us to think about issues of multiculturalism within the Gothic Scottish atmosphere brilliantly depicted by marginalised female authors in their novels and short stories.

References

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