

## REVIEWS

**Kaylor, Michael Matthew:** *Secreted Desires: The Major Uranians: Hopkins, Pater and Wilde*. Brno: Masaryk University, 2006, 497 pp., ISBN 80–210–4126–9.

Michael Kaylor's book *Secreted Desires: The Major Uranians: Hopkins, Pater and Wilde* is a major contribution to Victorian scholarship, which has neglected the study of some of the most important literary figures in terms of the "Uranian approach" ever since Timothy d'Arch Smith's *Love in Earnest: Some Notes on the Lives and Writings of English "Uranian" Poets from 1889 to 1930* (1970). Kaylor argues that, as Gerard Manley Hopkins, Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde were educated at Eton and/or Oxford during the "Greats curriculum" based on Greek and Latin texts, they shared an appreciation for the Ancient world, where paederasty was a valued pedagogical instrument. Surrounded by the straight-laced morality of Victorian society, their paederastic desires became sublimated into their literary writings in the form of four strategies: "a stylistic complexity, a multi-faceted psychology, an uncanny audience-awareness, and a sense of daring and irony" (xxvii). Kaylor positions his work within the scope of not only literary but also social and cultural history. As he demarcates the distinctly paederastic features in Hopkins's, Pater's and Wilde's writings, Kaylor opposes critics such as Michel Foucault, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, David Halperin and Linda Dowling and claims that it is not anachronistic to think about "nameable masculine desire" before 1870. Kaylor is not concerned with homosexuality or homosocial behaviour like the above-mentioned critics but strictly with paederasty in the Greco-Roman sense and attempts to establish a "Uranian continuum", i.e. a *conscious* tradition stretching from Ancient Greece and Rome through the Renaissance and Victorian Eras to the contemporary fiction of Guy Davenport.

Kaylor points out that the most important figure that is open for not only present but also future "Uranian scholarship" is Gerard Manley Hopkins. Given the biographical material on Wilde and Pater, it is understandable that Kaylor argues for the paederastic inclination in their writings. However, the case of Gerard Manley Hopkins, as Kaylor approaches it in "'A Parcel of Underwear': Hopkins and Issues of Identity" (121–133), is much more precarious. Hopkins's life is full of unexplored areas that incite not only further research but also speculation. Following a strictly logical line of thought, these holes in the "Hopkinsian fabric" of biographical material yield an assumption that what was unsaid is supposed to stay hidden from the eyes of not only the public but also everybody else except Hopkins's own "selfbeing". Even though Kaylor is not the first scholar to focus on homoerotic imagery in Hopkins's poetry, he pursues his hypothesis about the paederastic desire not only by interpreting Hopkins's poetry but also by inspecting his "holey" biography, and this is exactly where Kaylor's work becomes (thought)provoking. He analyses Hopkins's "Dark Sonnets" and comes to the conclusion that the uncapitalized "he" and "him" in the poems do not refer to Christ but to Digby Mackworth Dolben, a dead young poet. Hopkins's inspiration for his poetry was not then Christian devotion but a paederastic desire and unrequited love for a nineteen-year-old boy.

Kaylor's assertion will definitely cause a stir in Christian, especially Roman Catholic, circles. Gerard Manley Hopkins, alongside John Henry, Cardinal Newman, has always been considered the core of the Roman Catholic "priestly" literary tradition in Britain. If either of these two figures'

literary motivations are deconstructed from spiritual enlightenment to carnal yearning, would it not meet resistance from the Roman Catholic camp of possible readers? The intersection of sexuality and Christianity has always posed serious problems, and Kaylor's claim that "Hopkins is defiantly challenging [...] traditional Church teaching on the immorality of homoerotic and paederastic acts" is very likely to pour petrol on a hotly debated issue linking celibacy, homosexuality and sexual abuse (128–9).

Christianity has always relied on the masculine/feminine binary being fulfilled in the ideal of happy marriage. When it comes to homosexuality, about the most tolerant approach found in Roman Catholic teachings views it as an ordeal from God that has to be resisted in the name of chastity and mastery of the will. This approach is, however, possible only when it comes to the laity. The clerical profession requires sexual asceticism – the absolute denial of the sin of the flesh – which results in the viewing of priests as asexual creatures who know very little about sexual pleasure. Orthodox Roman Catholic readers will thus condemn *any* sexual interpretation of Hopkins's life and poetry, no matter whether "only" homoerotic or paederastic. On the other hand, the traditional teachings of the Roman Catholic Church have recently been challenged by a growing number of progressive lay movements. These include, for example, increasing feminism among Catholic women who believe that the Church marginalizes female experience, protest against celibacy from those who believe that being "sexually fulfilled and spiritually daring" are not mutually exclusive, and the activism of gay and lesbian Catholics who demand that the Church acknowledge both their sexual orientation and spiritual experience. All these people would welcome an interpretation of Hopkins as a homosexual. However, the portrayal of Hopkins as a paederast – albeit only on the level of desire – who does not fantasize about equal partnership but about exploitative sexual acts is likely to meet with disgust yet again.

Moreover, Kaylor's portrayal of Hopkins as not only a priest but also a troubadour of homoerotic/paederastic love is very likely to evoke the many recent scandals involving Catholic priests accused of sexual abuse. Even more significantly, the fact that Hopkins was a Jesuit priest and the Jesuits have always formed the foundation of Catholic education provokes the assumption that Roman Catholicism is "rotten to the root", that its children were, and still are, brought up to appreciate paederastic love, and therefore encouraged to impose such "love" on their successors. Kaylor's interpretation of Hopkins thus runs the risk of stirring up enormous resistance to the idea of abandoning the priest-poet idyll, as well as the risk of being accused of reading too much into, and exaggerating the biographical holes in Hopkins's life.

On the other hand, history is far from fixed and is open to continual reinterpretation in terms of various topical or temporal contexts. As Kaylor notes, since the publication of Hopkins's *Facsimiles* (1989–91) it has become impossible to avoid the issue of Hopkins's eroticism and paederastic inclinations both in his poetry and in his life. Kaylor's Hopkins, whose identity is put under scrupulous inspection, is not a rigid historical and literary figure but possesses multiple identities. He is not only the traditional devotional priest-poet of the 19<sup>th</sup> century but also a Decadent whose erotic desire proved to be as important an inspiration for his poetry as his religion.

Gerard Manley Hopkins, however, is not the only Uranian that Kaylor deals with. Walter Pater, through his *Marius the Epicurean*, is presented in this study as an advocate of "paederastic pedagogy" understood as a heightened form of friendship which combines Platonism, paederasty and aesthetic instruction. To support this view Kaylor contrasts Pater with Oscar Wilde. First, he uses the case of Pater's unfavourable review of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to prove that Pater distanced himself from Wilde's lack of discretion and eccentric public behaviour. Second, Kaylor analyses one of Wilde's tales, "The Young King", in terms of paederastic instruction to young children, i.e. Wilde's own sons. Pater and Wilde are then examples of two "Uranian paths" – Pater stands for the elevated and refined "Uranian love" and Wilde represents the low and shallow path of "Priapic lust".

Michael Kaylor's *Secreted Desires* is a pioneering work that presents a corrective approach to Victorian literature. Kaylor does not shrink away from the challenge of exploring a topic which previous scholars treated only very cautiously or with evident embarrassment. The theoretical scope of the book is vast as it not only concentrates on literature but also reaches out into the fields of social

history and sexual psychology. The volume of meticulous research and the abundance of carefully-chosen visual material are equally impressive. *Secreted Desires* is unquestionably a major contribution to the long list of academic works published by Masaryk University.

*Martina Vránová*

**Michal Peprník:** *Topos lesa v americké literatuře* [The Topos of the Forest in American Literature]. Brno: Host, 2005. 252 pp., ISBN 80-7294-153-4.

The title of Michal Peprník's study suggests a comprehensive overview of the ways in which American authors have portrayed the theme of the forest. However, even a preliminary scan of the table of contents indicates a much narrower focus. The historical period covered is mostly early American literature and the only author discussed in any depth is James Fenimore Cooper. This limitation in scope is not a problem in itself, of course, but it may cause some disappointment to readers hoping for what the title promises. The brief introduction may also be somewhat misleading. Its witty style, unencumbered by jargon and multiple explanatory footnotes, will appeal to a broad range of readers. While occasional echoes of this style do recur in the following chapters, the text quickly becomes a scholarly analysis.

Peprník's book clearly targets Czech college students and may be quite helpful as a supplementary text in introductory courses on American literature. The frequent references linking certain elements in American and Czech cultures are Peprník's most valuable contributions. They draw the Czech reader into the discussion and they allow Peprník to make interesting observations on both cultures. For instance, in a chapter on the dark Puritan forest, Peprník contextualizes the contemporary violence between the Puritans and the indigenous population by reminding the reader that "zhruba v téže době na Prašné bráně viselo daleko více hlav a nebyly to hlavy 'krvežíznivých divochů'" [at about the same time many more bodies hung from the scaffolds in front of the Powder Tower in Prague and these were not bodies of 'blood-thirsty savages'] (53). Peprník's unorthodox references to Czech fairy-tales, often integrated into a rigorous academic definition of some abstract concept, are also refreshing and fitting. Perhaps most significantly, Peprník offers several unexpected, highly illuminating parallels between particular works of American and Czech literature. His comparison of Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" and Karel Jaromír Erben's "Polednice" is especially revealing (199). Therefore, even if in some passages Peprník's unique commentary is overshadowed by concise summaries of established interpretations of canonical texts, his specific version of a Czech perspective on American literature offers numerous bright moments of surprising and delightful cross-cultural insight.

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**Zdeněk Stříbrný:** *Proud času. Stati o Shakespeareovi* [The Flow of Time. Essays on Shakespeare], Praha: Karolinum 2005, 407 pp., ISBN 80-246-1018-3.

Conceived as a cross-section of the author's scholarly interests and achievement, the volume was planned to mark Professor Zdeněk Stříbrný's eightieth birthday and the almost sixty years of his academic career in English studies. When he embarked on it in the postwar 1940s, he had two generations of Czech specialists on English philology to lean on – the founding fathers of English studies in Czech universities, Vilém Mathesius, Bohumil Trnka, Otakar Vočadlo and Zdeněk Vančura – whose guidance he acknowledged and in whose tradition he continued. The reader learns about all this from the first, memoir-like chapter of *The Flow of Time*, which comprises almost a quarter of the book and affords intimate insights into the momentous events and landmarks of Professor Stříbrný's life and work. He describes his numerous opportunities to travel and undertake research in England and the US, which proved to be of crucial importance for him, particularly in his Shakespearean studies. On his visits to English and American universities and trips to conferences he encountered, and established friendships with scholars of resounding reputation, who influenced him