

Resumé

The volume follows up the previous *Britské spisovatelky na konci tisíciletí* (British Women Writers at the End of the Millennium, 1999) with more essays on writers most of whom began to write or attracted greater attention in the eighties and are still active at the turn of the twenty-first century. The temporal shift in the new title is not invested with any particular importance in terms of critical evaluation although the turn of the millennium no doubt means an attractive milestone with a myth-making potential. Every turn of a century was and has remained surrounded with speculations about expectations and abrupt changes which however are more strongly felt in the rhetoric than in reality. We are therefore better advised to wait and ask the next generation to judge what changes in the literary production of the turn of the millenium have manifested themselves. Nevertheless, periodicity in literature should be seen, and recently rightfully has been seen, as a deceptive concept. Classification of writers by period narrows down their work according to the parameters superimposed on the given time span as characteristic attributes. On the other hand, this kind of undoubtedly useful generalisation about certain features of a period on the basis of the contemporary thought against the background of historic events and development has its justification and value. The climate of the times is never without its influence on the literary production in all its aspects, whether by inspiring the thematics or prompting the formal features of structure and language.

All this and in the same measure also concerns our time even though, in the spirit of postmodernity, there is a tendency to break up or even destroy conventions of all kinds, including literary conventions. And although the paradox may be viewed as a typical feature of the last few decades, it can hardly be asserted that the breaking of conventions is something new or possibly an invention of our times. In spite of that, we can probably rightfully claim that the celebration of multiplicity may be considered one of the most important concepts participating in the construction of the framework of the postmodern period, which does not show any signs of drawing to an end with the arrival of the third millennium.

It is from the vantage point of celebrating multiplicity, albeit keeping in mind the shared matrix of the spirit of the times, that the ten selected writers are viewed. Similarly as in the case of the first volume, the choice of writers does not follow any

specific parameters or generalising aims, but rather tries to foreground their differences although a shared classification as “women writers at the turn of the millennium“ offers itself.

Since the beginning of her writing, Maureen Duffy has been interested in the problem of identity. A shift in emphasis from sexual identity to considerations of national and European identity has mainly come to the fore in her novels of the nineties, in keeping with her overall view of English history as she formulates it in her non-fiction book *England: the Making of the Myth* (2001). Helen Dunmore directs her literary gaze into the human psyche where she seems to find murky niches and dark shadows whose sway over the domain is not easy to break away from. Wars, cruelty and violent deaths form either the backdrop or the subtext of these probes into the minds of her novel characters. Jane Gardam, too, gives her solipsistic heroines a very sensitive view of the world. But in perfect harmony with their quaint portraits, she gives her prose a quiet voice and subtly humorous tone even where her characters encounter the seemy sides to our present reality and universal humanity. On the contrary, the most characteristic and striking feature of the novels and short stories of A.L. Kennedy can be seen in the crudely profane language of both her heroes and heroines reflecting the permanent psychological drama of their being. In addition to this strongly distinctive voice, the fragmentary form of Kennedy's prose with insertions of the stream of consciousness of interior monologues as another element of a text already splintered in time, ranks A.L. Kennedy among the eloquent figures of the new generation of British writers at the turn of the millennium. Trying to sum up Hilary Mantel's widely disparate novels is an oxymoron. It is not merely her wide thematic and temporal range, which after all is not so unusual as an ever growing majority of contemporary writers sometimes try to bridge the gap between past and present in some form or other. Besides that Mantel's prose works also conspicuously differ from one another in their concerns and form in the sense that each one of them could represent a specific subgenre even though they never significantly step out of their realistic frame. Michèle Roberts adopts a determined feminist stance supported by the thematics of all of her novels to date, complete with the ideas and images that inhabit them. The language of her prose has a marked poetic quality and serves the author as a tool to lavish an intense and loving gaze on the everyday reality of things that surround and fill the women's world. On the other hand Barbara Trapido feels the need of her characters to juggle reality and whatever life brings their way. She carries this out in her realistic novels by means of a comic vision, but in such a way that the playful lightness of her language does not preclude serious ideas and weighty themes. The novels and short stories of Rose Tremain invariably unfold rather extraordinary stories of somewhat strange protagonists, always in pursuit of no less strange dreams. Across her novels, Tremain portrays desire

in the shape of a life-long dream as a universal human trait, essentially admirable, albeit potentially dangerous. Tremain's dreaming heroes and heroines come from various periods and countries and their verissimilitude is a measure of the creative talent of their author. Marina Warner's involvement in the ideas of postmodernity becomes evident both in her themes and the manner that shapes them. The themes of exile and colonisation are recreated from the point of view of postcolonial critical theory on the one hand and on the other within the context of constant retelling of myths, fairy tales and human stories. The traditionally understood sense of intertextuality, or permeation of written texts, outgrows its definition and results in her hands in postmodern hypertextuality, linking a multiplicity of texts of various forms and registers. The experimental prose of Jeanette Winterson first and foremost represents writing itself as ecstasis. Its rewarding themes, which at the same time serve the author as flexible tools of experimentation, are love, sex and sexuality and, furthermore, the no less wide-ranging concept of time, all-pervading, elusive and eternal.