

# **Book Reviews**



**Ema Jelínková, ed.**  
***Scottish Women Writers of Hybrid Identity.***  
**Olomouc: Palacký University, Olomouc, 2014.**

It was in 1831 when Goethe finished his *magnum opus* with the mystic lines “Das Ewig-Weibliche/Zieht uns hinan.” Not even eighty years later, Gustav Mahler used the same words in his gigantic “Sinfonie der Tausend” (8. Sinfonie in Es-dur, 1910). Both works were finished at the end of their authors’ lives, and both authors considered them to be their most essential works.

“Das Ewig-Weibliche” would be an excellent motto for this collection of papers dealing with the issue of Scottish national, cultural, religious and gender identities, since the role of women underlies all the articles in the collection.

Not surprisingly, when discussing Scottish writing in the preface, Ema Jelínková, the editor of the volume and the author of one of the four papers contained in it, stresses the multi-layered nature of Scottish identity, with its inherent capacity for the conjunction of opposites; she finds this to be a traditional hallmark of stories written by such well-known authors as James Hogg and Robert Louis Stevenson. However, the reader does not have to worry about being plunged into another analysis of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*; the canonical works of the Scottish Renaissance serve as an imaginary scaffolding by means of which it is possible to investigate “a newly rediscovered Scottish tradition of ambivalence and hybridity among the women writers of Scotland” (9). We should look to the present, as well as to the future, through the rear-view mirror of the past; in this regard the authors of the papers in this collection more or less succeed.

In the opening essay, Markéta Gregorová sets out to (re)define Scottish women’s writing by analyzing the novels of Janice Galloway and A. L. Kennedy. Gregorová draws a parallel between Simone de Beauvoir’s thoughts, demonstrating how much the opposition between a man (considered as the Absolute) and a woman (being the Other) (33) is intertwined with the quest for national as well as personal identity. Even though it is a tightrope to walk, if we accept this premise we may enjoy a vivid yet distinguished text, offering us a sociological insight into Scottishness, especially the dark side of it. Here – and this is a comment that applies to all essays in this collection – Scotland is generally presented in a negative light, as if still dragging one foot through the foggy streets of the 19th century, with all its phantoms and ghosts. Is contemporary Scotland really haunted by its national past? Is it burdened with unsolved business and uncomfortable knowledge from the past, dipped in simulacra – “representations without originals, signs emptied of meanings” (16) as Gregorová phrases it? Is this simulacral hauntedness solely a Scottish issue, and not a post-modern and post-cultural one, resulting from a vanishing authenticity in the age of mass reproduction? Readers should find their own answers to these questions, probably after visiting Scotland itself; nevertheless, Gregorová’s essay might serve as an impetus to further thoughts.

The second chapter, whose author is Petr Anténe, explores the multiplicity of the dynamic field of Scottish women's fiction. In comparison to the first essay, the term *gothic* reflects a more complex semantic frame, offering more methods when interpreting novels by two contemporary women writers in Scotland – Emma Tennant and Alice Thompson. Anténe has decided to stress the socially engaged role of art, and he writes about the illusory, cryptic aspect of gothic writing, with its ambiguity and ambivalence, as disturbing reality in order to effect change; these novels are thus presented as “an efficient vehicle for dealing with gender issues at the turn of the century, as well as other social conflicts” (38). Seen from this perspective – without questioning the purpose of the artistic representation – the selected authors and their works prove to be a felicitous and apt choice; nevertheless, it is the first part of Anténe's essay, outlining in a very concise and organized way the tradition of Scottish gothic writing, that attracts one's attention most of all. The second part, a detailed analysis of contemporary novels focusing on gender issues, is rather descriptive in nature: instead of retelling the plots and stressing common features, the author could have focused on the differences between these contemporary novels and their forerunners of the 19th century; after all, it is the part of the paper where Anténe offers such a comparison that is most stimulating (e.g. a comparison between London and Scotland on page 49). The task of a literary critic is to open up more books and invite us to engage in further reading; this function is somewhat lacking in Anténe's chapter.

Jan Horáček, in his contribution dealing with women writers from diverse ethnic origins, reveals a better understanding of this task. His study is a celebration of cultural diversity: it covers the experience of black writers of African origin (Jackie Kay, Maud Sulter), the Muslim, Indian, South-East Asian immigrant experience (Leila Aboulela, Leela Soma, Raman Mundair, Chiew-Siah Tei), as well as the very post-modern experience of a writer of mixed ethnic heritage (Catherine Czerkawska). Although it seems that the number of authors presented here is too large for one chapter to adequately cover, Horáček's approach is very disciplined and balanced. The reader will especially appreciate the almost dialectical method by means of which the difficult topic of cultural diversity and hybridity is discussed: the variety of perspectives (e.g. in the quest for identity by Mundair and Czerkawska) helps us to realize how important it is not to approach issues, particularly cultural ones, only from the single point of view of a dominating subject. Not surprisingly, Horáček concludes his paper with the rather clichéd statement that “Scottishness does not stand for a specific type of identity but identities,” having become “an umbrella for a plurality of voices and ethnic influences” (91); nevertheless, these words do deserve respect, as the author supports them with a thoughtful analysis.

Finally, in the last part, Ema Jelínková recalls the recurring motif of “Caledonian antisyzygy.” The fact that this idea (defined as the conjunction of opposites that permeates Scottish life and culture) is mentioned throughout all the book's chapters is logical, and to some extent it helps to conjoin four diverse texts, written by four authors. On the other hand, however, it leads to overlaps and redundant repetitions (e.g. passages dealing with Calvinism on pages 39 and 93). However, Jelínková's contribution is indisputable, as she raises readers' awareness of Scottish contemporary women writers by introducing Muriel Spark and Kate Atkinson. This is the shortest chapter in the book, yet it commands the reader's attention; one example is the concluding paragraph where Jelínková describes

the positions of all Anglo-Scots and Scoto-English with a reference to Donne's twin compasses: "distant and distinct but still marking out the same territory; separate, yet undeniably yoked together" (99). It is a pity that her text is spoilt by several typographical faults, which detracts from an otherwise stimulating study.

To conclude: this concise collection consisting of four balanced contributions achieves its task of raising awareness of feminist literary theory and taking into account a variety of minorities while discussing Scottish contemporary literary life and the country's literary heritage. Even though there are occasionally somewhat clichéd opinions which could have been considered in a more thoughtful way (are women *victimized* by means of the cult of youth and beauty, and is the patriarchal society to be blamed for this?), it is an apt prolegomenon to Scottish literature as well as to Scottish studies, and it represents a good point of departure for further research; this time maybe addressing Goethe's view of the "eternal feminine." After all, Celtic culture, being close to this view, still forms an essential part of Scottishness.

*Michal Kleprlík*  
*University of Pardubice*

### **Petr Chalupský**

***A Horror and a Beauty: The World of Peter Ackroyd's London Novels*  
Praha: Karolinum Press, 2016**

*A Horror and a Beauty* explores Peter Ackroyd's presentation of London in both his fiction and non-fiction. The different facets of the city portrayed in Ackroyd's works, and the diversity and richness of experience of its inhabitants, are idiosyncratic constructs full of charm and power; they are also as diverse as they are interrelated. London is a city in continuous imaginative development, and overflowing with creativity and experience. Time is perpetual, past and present are virtually indistinguishable, and good and evil exist side by side. Surprisingly, these qualities have been largely overlooked in Ackroyd's works. Chalupský aims to redress the balance. Novels and history meet in Ackroyd's fiction, restoring what its creator calls the "poetry of history" (15).

Chalupský's study is divided into six chapters: "Ackroyd's London, Past and Present", "Uncanny London", "Felonious London", "Psychographic and Antiquarian London", "Theatrical London" and "Literary London". Chapter one introduces Ackroyd's ideas about the capital city, his understanding of history and historical writing, and the theoretical principles of his urban chronotype. While Chalupský would be the first to acknowledge that Ackroyd's London defies any systematic categorization, chapters 2–6 nonetheless discuss the most prominent features of his works separately; at the same time, however, Chalupský emphasises that they are interconnected and together form what Ackroyd describes as "spiritual truth". As Chalupský demonstrates, Ackroyd does not aspire to precise or correct reconstructions of historical events; rather, his goal is to provide thought-provoking

and evocative accounts of London's past and present. The capital is "a literary city of unrelenting imaginary vision" (22).

The heterogeneity of London and the richness of human experience to which it gives rise have as their primary origins occult practices, subversive acts, criminal activities, questionable scientific experiments, dynamic change and spiritual renewal – all essential ingredients in London's literary character. Ackroyd's works, fictional as well as non-fictional, are outside the domains of mainstream cultural production and social conventions. Chalupský's chronotope provides a useful tool with which to illustrate and critique the complexity and controversial nature of Ackroyd's view of the capital city.

Chapter three, "Felonious London", is particularly fascinating – and very topical, as it focuses on London's relationship with crime, reflecting on the nature of one of our most popular genres today, detective fiction. The city's populous streets, run-down areas, and hidden nooks and crannies make London a primary setting for detective writers. Ackroyd recognizes this. It is no coincidence that he is a fan of Charles Dickens, and particularly of *Oliver Twist*, *Barnaby Rudge*, *Little Dorrit* and *Bleak House*. Crime narratives are an important feature of Ackroyd's works as they "combine his interest in history and literature with his fascination with the recurrent pattern of crimes and other forms of violence in London, especially the possible ways in which these discourses can intertwine" (117–8).

Chalupský's discussion of Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor*, *Dan Leno* and the *Limehouse Golem* and *Chatteron* are particularly intriguing because these works constitute parodies of classical detective narratives in which the detective is incompetent. Instead, it is the reader, argues Chalupský, who becomes the investigator. The chapter goes on to discuss Ackroyd's *The Clerkenwell Tales*, *The Casebook of Victor Frankenstein* and *Three Brothers*. The story of the crime, the detection process and their fictional representations, argues Chalupský, are "some of the most significant constituents of the polyphony of voices and narratives that forms the very essence of Ackroyd's discursive and intertextual London" (154). London is inherently theatrical and uncanny in its blend of past and present, its felonious tendencies and its population's radical and indeed subversive strategies for survival.

While the overwhelming tone of Chalupský's study is positive, as he identifies the important contributions of Ackroyd's works to our understanding of London past and present, at the same time he is not uncritical of Ackroyd's achievements. His discussion in chapter six of *Three Brothers*, for example, also includes the observation that, while the novel is gripping, "it does not offer much that is new and original" (273) as a consequence of its focus on its author's own scholarly and literary works. Indeed, the chapter ends on a decidedly negative note: "the absence of other than a self-referencing literary framework or a historical dimension means that *Three Brothers* lacks a great deal of the vividness and imaginative playfulness of its predecessors" (274).

*A Horror and a Beauty* is scholarly in style and content; at the same time, it is highly readable, entertaining and intellectually challenging. The detailed footnotes and copious bibliography bear witness to Chalupský's immense knowledge and understanding of his subject. They are also a valuable aid to the reader. Chalupský has also made excellent use of interviews with Ackroyd, all of which are readily accessible on the internet and listed at the end of the study. *A Horror and a Beauty* is a valuable resource not only to scholars

of Ackroyd but also to all interested in the development and presentation of London in literature.

Jane Ekstam  
Østfold University College, Norway

**Jozef Pecina**

*The Representation of War in Nineteenth-Century American Novels*  
Univerzita sv. Cyrila a Metoda v Trnave: Trnava, 2015

War is a phenomenon which is represented in many fields, both physical and abstract, and it has been a part of mankind since the earliest beginnings of time. The descriptions of its charms and horrors can be found in literature of various nations and eras. We acknowledge the validity of Pecina's remark on how fascinating and important the topic of war is; however, not everybody would enjoy a journey to a battlefield. On the other hand, what many readers would definitely enjoy is being introduced to the development of nineteenth-century American war-themed novels and a discussion of their battlefield realism through the eyes of selected authors.

American literature of the nineteenth century provides readers with an interesting view of how war was perceived by different authors. Beginning with the Romantic treatment of war in the works of James Fenimore Cooper and John Neal, Pecina acquaints us with several key facts which determined and defined war-themed novels of those times. Whether it is Cooper's *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground* or Neal's *Seventy-Six*, published in 1821 and 1823 respectively, we find out that at the dawn of war-themed American novels the texts offer readers very few detailed descriptions of battle itself. There is almost no place for emotions, and the overall view of war is rather omniscient. The author suggests an explanation of this by describing Cooper's novel as "full of thrilling chases and valiant soldiers, among which there was no place for fear" (15). Contrary to *The Spy*, John Neal's novel emphasizes the emotions of the characters to a previously unheard-of extent. War-themed novels of nineteenth-century American literature perceived war as something rather glorious – an endeavour of heroism and patriotism.

The second part of the book introduces us to a different point of view. The author presents John William De Forest's work *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty* (1867), a partly autobiographical novel which contains descriptions of war based more on personal experience. Instead of glory, we are given realistic and brutal battle scenes where there is no place for metaphors or sentiment. The language suddenly becomes direct and simple, often enhanced by swear words and blasphemies. War is not what it used to be – it is much more real thanks to the visual images and sensory details. De Forest removes the veil of mystery from the topic. This is the reason why he is described by many scholars as "a pioneer of realism in American literature" (33).

It seems, however, that some authors were unwilling to treat war as something dirty and horrific. In the third part of the book we learn more about the literature of the South, in which historical romances and writers such as Sir Walter Scott remained the dominant sources of inspiration. John Esten Cooke's *Mohun, or the Last Days of Lee and his Paladins* (1869), serves as an example of this, and confirms Pecina's idea of Southern writing being a kind of celebration of the beauty of the South, chivalry and nostalgia.

Nonetheless, as literature undergoes certain changes, so do writers and their works. The next part of the book presents the interesting notion of trauma felt by particular authors – including Mark Twain, Henry Adams and William Dean Howells. This feeling of guilt and incompleteness is probably, according to Pecina, rooted in the authors' lack of war experience, which causes a certain kind of pain, "no less serious than physical wounds suffered by real soldiers on Civil War battlefields" (68). If this part of the book had been slightly richer in facts and provided some more thought-provoking information about the selected writers, it would have served as a good turning-point.

The final part delivers the climax of the entire book. It introduces us to Stephen Crane and his novel *The Red Badge of Courage*, a work which at the time of its publication, in 1893, caused a small earthquake among Crane's contemporaries and literary critics. Though he had no previous experience of wars or battlefields, Crane achieved huge success, and it still remains a mystery how such a young writer (aged only twenty-two when the book was published) managed to deliver such a complex and "experienced" novel on war and battlefields.

Although there are almost no references to the Civil War in Crane's novel (such as geographical names or the events surrounding the abolition of slavery), the reader is given a picture of this conflict, though it is one without any heroic posturing. War once again becomes noisy through speech and shouting, and it comes alive thanks to Crane's frequent use of personification. One of the main themes of the novel is fear, an emotion that was so strongly suppressed in the early stage of the development of war-themed novels. Crane's work focuses on the psychology of soldiers, and the description of combat scenes is very realistic. These are features which are also typical of De Forest.

The author concludes that "John William De Forest was a pioneer of realism in writing about war, but Crane is the first American author who depicted war in its most brutal essence with no romantic subplots" (107).

With source material like *The Face of Battle* (1976) by John Keegan or *Acts of War* (1989) by Richard Holmes, along with many other resources, this book has plenty to offer. Even readers who might not be interested in the themes of war and battles to such an extent will find some important facts about various authors and the development of the war-themed American novel. *The Representation of War* might serve as an inspiring source of information which may lead readers to visit libraries and read selected novels – out of curiosity or to learn more about a phenomenon which, though sometimes glorified, reminds us of the dark side of mankind.

*Matúš Horváth*  
*Constantine the Philosopher University, Nitra*