

Educated Barbarism*

Neil Rhodes, *Shakespeare and the Origins of English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; paperback 2007)

It is hard to imagine an academic supervisor who would be happy to see the title of Neil Rhodes's recent book on a proposal for a doctoral dissertation. *Shakespeare and the Origins of English* has far too many instabilities and double meanings: as Rhodes himself explains, "Shakespeare" refers to the Elizabethan writer and also to the super-canonical product of scholarship that still "lives on" in the twenty-first century. Similarly, "English" is the vernacular that rose to literary prominence (after a protracted competition with Latin) in Shakespeare's own lifetime, but it is also convenient shorthand for "English Studies." So, the title seems to say, the book may be about several things: it may be about how Shakespeare's writings were influenced, or even made possible, by the rise of the vernacular in Renaissance England, or by his Humanist education (but did he really study "English"?), or, conversely, about how English Studies shaped, or have been shaped by, Shakespeare. The ambiguity between definiteness and plurality in "*the Origins*," together with the Janus-faced "*and*," complicate matters even further, result-

ing in a title that promises teleology, but has the immediate effect of disorientation – a perfect choice if not for a dissertation (luckily, Rhodes is already Professor at St. Andrews), then for a book that has something to say about all four questions mentioned above. *Shakespeare and the Origins of English*, as its author succinctly puts it, presents "some sort of history, though one of a rather unlinear kind" (190).

In the introduction, Rhodes calls his method historical, but one that operates "with some degree of synchronicity and anachronicity" (4). As a result, readers might approach the book in various ways: they might immerse themselves in a cultural history of Tudor rhetorical education, or read it for its acute analyses of some major Shakespeare plays (*Hamlet*, *Love's Labour Lost*, *Measure for Measure*, *Titus Andronicus* and *The Tempest* receive sustained attention), or for its running argument about how English Studies might be re-conceived in the present, based on an awareness of its past, or even for its illuminating odd connections between Shakespeare and, say, Tony Harrison, "that modern barbarian" (83). There is, of course, considerable danger in writing a book of this kind, but Rhodes is as capable of tightening his logic and getting his priorities straight as of allowing himself to digress or to make an aside. The result is a readable book that wears its learning as lightly as possible; one that can be masterial or tentative or even provocative, as occasion requires. In all this, it has

The views expressed in the book reviews do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editors of *The AnaChronisT*.

more than a touch of the essay about it – that most un-classical of Renaissance genres – and perhaps not by accident. Rhodes has called one of his previous books, *The Power of Eloquence and English Renaissance Literature*, a “long essay”: a tentative attempt at synthesis without any pretensions to exhaustiveness.¹ Even more wide-ranging than its predecessor, *Shakespeare and the Origins of English* shares this general stance, as well as a certain circular movement of argumentation, which likes to revisit themes and to let evidence slowly accumulate, until a more complex understanding of a question can be reached.

Rhodes’s previous work is relevant because it has the subject of the present book virtually carved out in it. *The Power of Eloquence* was mainly concerned with classical and Renaissance ideas of eloquence as an instrument of power (with a discussion of Tudor educational programmes and the “coming of age” of the English language), and provided extensive interpretations of works by Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson. Which means that in that book Shakespeare was conspicuous through his absence, and a “parsimonious coda” (65) devoted to Jonson’s relationship to Shakespeare even suggested “that he stands apart from the development described in the main argument” (viii). *Shakespeare and the Origins of English* fills the space opened up here, and it might even be fulfilling a promise made in the earlier book’s coda, which was

entitled “Afterword and Foreword.” In other words, it is a supplement, and as such, it dutifully goes beyond what might have been expected, based on the earlier book, while it also retains vital connections with it. At one point in *Eloquence*, for instance, Rhodes quoted a memorable line from Emrys Jones’s *The Origins of Shakespeare*: “without Erasmus, no Shakespeare.”² As the present title indicates, *Shakespeare and the Origins of English* takes Jones’s position and turns it around: the book demonstrates not only how Shakespeare’s Humanist education had a formative influence on his works, but also how his schooling provided him with resources for writing in English, as opposed to Latin, and how some of the educational practices he must have encountered in a Tudor grammar school fed into the later discipline of English Studies, partly through the very works he went on to write.

The last bit of this sequence is by far the most unconventional, and it yields the most illuminating type of connections established in the book. Proposing links between Tudor school practices and more or less well-known tenets of later Shakespeare criticism, Rhodes crosses a divide rarely crossed by scholars – between Renaissance studies and the study of Shakespeare’s reception – while he also manages to keep things properly distinct. Shakespeare, of course, did not study English, but his schooling included, among other things, the practice of double translation, which

Rhodes links to the figure of *hendiadys*, so characteristic of Shakespeare's rhetoric, and, more generally, to the "double voice" critics have discovered in his plays. The fullest example of how Rhodes can establish hitherto unsuspected continuities is to be found in Chapter Three, where he tackles a characteristic feature of Shakespeare's so-called problem plays: something that has been described as the "dramatic construction of moral ambiguity" or "perspectivalism" (88) – Shakespeare's propensity for seeing things from opposing points of view. Rhodes links this to the Tudor school assignment of writing speeches "*in utramque partem*, on both sides of the question" (90), which had its roots in classical *controversiae* and compositional exercises known as the *progymnasmata*. These exercises, Rhodes suggests, provided opportunities for both Renaissance schoolboys and writers to explore and test power relations in a rhetorical and legal context; therefore they might be used to put into perspective more recent claims about the radical or subversive nature of Shakespeare's dramaturgy.

"Doubleness" also plays a prominent part in the next chapter, where Rhodes explores Shakespeare's ambivalent response to the classical tradition by reconstructing the cultural competition between Latin and English in the second half of the sixteenth century – a process through which the formerly "barbarous" vernacular emerged as an exceptionally well-suited vehicle for literary expres-

sion, and began to be celebrated as a civilizing (and colonizing) force. Rhodes clarifies the ideological and poetic implications of blank verse in this context, and takes up Doctor Johnson's eighteenth-century insight about the heterogeneous – "hybrid" – nature of Shakespeare's tragedies. Analysing *Titus Andronicus*, a play rife with dislocation, which he takes to be "actually about hybridity" (140), Rhodes shows how Shakespeare both absorbed and rejected classical authority – a stance that is "reflected in double translation, double voice, and even double authorship" (148). Shakespeare's drama, in these terms, is a "strong hybrid," one that "could be described equally as neoclassical and neo-Gothic, an educated barbarism" (142). Based on this view, Rhodes argues (in opposition to Stephen Greenblatt) that even in *The Tempest*, Shakespeare exhibits a sense of kinship with the expressive "barbarism" of Caliban, as much as with the civilising power of Prospero. The Renaissance author whom Rhodes finds closest to this version of Shakespeare is neither Marlowe, nor Jonson, but the exuberant Thomas Nashe (in whose work he has a long-standing scholarly interest).³ Blending classical rhetoric with the fluency of vernacular speech patterns and a sense of cultural relativism, their *oeuvre*, for Rhodes, exemplifies "the creative abuse" of a classical education.

While these interventions in Shakespeare criticism are both provocative and well-argued, the book has another,

more controversial line of argument, which links aspects of Elizabethan education to a range of present-day developments affecting English Studies. While far from proposing “an unbroken continuity between early modern rhetoric and modern or post-modern English” (189), Rhodes highlights “a range of literary and educational activities from the early sixteenth to the late eighteenth centuries in order to point out their similarities (as well as dissimilarities) with many of our own concerns” (190). Some of these analogies are more strategic than productive, aimed at presenting Renaissance cultural phenomena in a fresh and supposedly more interesting light. So rhetoric is figured as a Renaissance form of “media studies,” while educational practices in Tudor grammar schools foster “transferable skills” and endorse “creative writing.” These analogies are proposed in order to put current issues in perspective and to enable reflection on them; however, few of them are pursued in any depth. To put it simply, Rhodes is not that interested in phenomena like current “media studies,” at least not in this book. At the same time, he does want to reassure “traditionalists” in English Departments that what might appear to them as a contamination or disruption of their discipline (the encroachment of media studies on “English,” or the introduction of creative writing courses), has in fact deep connections with its more distant past. As he argues: “The notion that there was once a core subject which is

now hopelessly splintered and diversified depends upon an artificially late date for the origins of English and a narrow formulation of what the subject comprises” (190).

“Theory” is also discussed at the beginning of the book, as something that had ushered in the transformation of English Studies from the 1970s onwards; but Rhodes’s reading of Derrida on “articulation” is far too general and simplified to vie with his sophisticated account of the vagaries of “articulation” and “expression” in Renaissance texts.⁴ While clearly not a devotee of Derrida’s theory, Rhodes still uncovers a number of potential connections between deconstruction and Renaissance writing, even if he does not pursue them to their logical conclusions. One connection he does pursue (although in a slightly uneasy tone) is the notion that *Hamlet* can be taken as a deconstruction of the revenge play (31), and, as it seems, of a whole range of concepts entrenched in Renaissance rhetoric. The play therefore “represents the first crisis in English Studies”: “Although the subject had not yet been invented, the crisis, as Derrida might have said, was always already inscribed within it” (32). This intrusion of Derridean language into the texture of the book is momentary and very tentative, but in the final chapter Rhodes returns to the matter of theory more in his own vein by demonstrating how an earlier “intrusion” of French theory had been vital to the formation of English Studies. In this unusual account of the

discipline's past, the works of Ramus and the French *belles lettres* tradition play a prominent role, as well as do those Scottish universities that adapted them in the later eighteenth century – so, as Rhodes argues, “*pace* complaints from traditionalists that English was suddenly infected by new ideas from Paris in the late 1960s, it was effectively created by new ideas from Paris” (191).

Rhodes's habit of making everything sound topical – calling the revenge play a Renaissance “action movie” (38), or rhetoricians “spin doctors” (97) – can be slightly off-putting, as a number of reviewers have complained.⁵ Their reaction is close to the annoyance of a student who is weary of a teacher's efforts to make the subject seem “relevant” because she is interested anyway. But the book's analogies are not all like that. For instance, the discussion of Renaissance compositional techniques in the light of computer technology yields many insights – this is an area Rhodes has been working on intensely in recent years.⁶ Carefully weighing differences as well as similarities, he is able to show how versions of the Renaissance “database,” that is, the commonplace book and the printed anthology, influenced writing and reading practices – after they had pushed aside earlier technologies of storage and retrieval, such as the manuscript anthology and the memory theatre. Rhodes then demonstrates how Shakespeare's writings, themselves “a dizzying *hypertextual* world of multiple verbal links and commentary on com-

mentary” (165),⁷ were anthologised and “commonplacéd” from the 1590s onwards in volumes that can be regarded as the antecedents of the school textbook. This makes one realize that such notorious 18th-century compilations as the *Elegant Extracts*, or the *Beauties of Shakespeare* – so often criticised by their Romantic readers – were in fact closer to Shakespeare's own rhetorical context than their later detractors, who tended to prize a play's organic unity (at least in theory) above the detachable textual unit.

Rhodes's discussion ends at the threshold of Romanticism, when, in the second half of the eighteenth century, Shakespeare was recast as “the dramatist of the passions” (212) in the writings of William Richardson and Lord Kames, among others. In a gesture that might be suggestive of a next book, he remarks that the tradition he has been tracing does not stop there: “The story of the Romantic reception of Shakespeare . . . is well known, but the present discussion provides other leads into that culturally transforming phenomenon” (225). Taking a look at some well-known passages by Coleridge with that suggestion in mind, one finds much to corroborate the general point. In Chapter 15 of the *Biographia Literaria*, for instance, discussing Shakespeare's poetic genius, Coleridge quotes a sentence that also appears briefly in Rhodes's discussion of the commonplace method: “*Inopem me copia fecit*,” “plenty has made me poor” – a quotation from a

passage in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* where Narcissus, enamoured with his own reflection, is about to commit suicide.⁸ It is tempting to take this Ovidian moment as expressive of a typically Romantic attitude to Shakespeare: the critic looks into Shakespeare's mirror, and sees himself. Or, conversely, trying to see himself, he finds Shakespeare instead (Coleridge surely had a "smack of Hamlet," after all). Narcissus's despair might even be linked to the Romantics' sense of their own "poverty" in the face of Shakespeare's "plenty." While these suggestions are all perfectly in line with well-worn ideas about the "Romantic Shakespeare," the context that Rhodes has so meticulously established might also make one alert to the rhetorical groundwork of Coleridge's passage, which might then lead to slightly different emphases.

Coleridge in the *Biographia* passage is not only quoting a Latin *locus communis*, but does so in order to give his readers a sense of Shakespeare's *copia*, or plenty, when looking around for examples of how poetic imagery "moulds and colours itself to the circumstances, passion, or character, present and foremost in the mind" (190). Now, *copia* is a key concept of Erasmian rhetoric, which, as Rhodes has shown through various examples, informed both Shakespeare's works and their reception, while "circumstances," "passion," and "character" are all technical terms in eighteenth-century rhetoric, based on Quintilian's discussions of how language can move

its listeners.⁹ These terms were also used in various 18th-century descendants of the anthology which often listed passages from Shakespeare's plays according to the different passions they illustrated (Rhodes remarks that Burgh's *Art of Speaking*, for instance, contains a "comprehensive table of the passions, where they have the status of topics or commonplaces," 187). So, when Coleridge adds that "the reader's own memory will refer him" to the "unrivalled instances of this excellence" (190) in Shakespeare's plays, one might suspect that, while speaking of an interiorized corpus, Coleridge is also informed by the long tradition of the anthology and its later descendants, as reconstructed in Rhodes's rich and suggestive book. Romantic readers, it may be argued, did not invent their own Shakespeare from scratch – sometimes they worked with the memory of an already "commonplacéd" author, whose "excellence" at drawing various passions and characters had been helpfully catalogued by earlier critics and anthologists. While an inquiry into these issues clearly falls outside the scope of the book, it is probably safe to suggest that *Shakespeare and the Origins of English* will keep provoking and inspiring not only Renaissance scholars, but all kinds of students of all kinds of "Englishes."

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Notes

*The writing of this review was funded by the EEA and Norway Grants, through the Magyary Zoltán Postdoctoral Fellowship.

1. Rhodes, *The Power of Eloquence and English Renaissance Literature* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. viii.

2. Emrys Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), p. 13. Quoted in Rhodes, *The Power of Eloquence*, p. 51.

3. Nashe is linked to Shakespeare in Rhodes's book *Elizabethan Grotesque* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980).

4. Juliet Fleming in her review essay has criticised Rhodes for misreading Derrida; see "An Apology for Reading," *Modern Philology* 104.2 (November 2006) 229–38.

5. See for instance Ralph Berry in the *Contemporary Review*, 286/1671 (April 2005) 245–6; Russ McDonald in the *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 57/3 (Fall 2006), 351–4; John Lee in *Modern Language Review* 101/3 (July 2006) 822–4.

6. See *The Renaissance Computer: Knowledge Technology in the First Age of Print*, ed. Rhodes and Sawdy (London: Routledge, 2000), or a brilliant recent article on how Marshall McLuhan's doctoral dissertation on Thomas Nashe fed into his later and more well-known writings: "On Speech, Print, and New Media: Thomas Nashe and Marshall McLuhan," in *Oral Tradition* 24.2 (October 2009). Cf. Rhodes, "Mapping Shakespeare's Contexts: Doing Things With Databases," in Andrew Murphy ed., *A Concise Companion to Shakespeare and the Text* (Blackwell, 2007), 204–220.

7. Rhodes uses this phrase to describe *The Sonnets*, but it seems expressive of his general view of Shakespeare's textual universe.

8. S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. Nigel Leask (London: J. M. Dent & Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle, 1997), p. 190.

9. Klaus Dockhorn has discussed the comparable sequence of "passions, characters, incidents" as well as the concept of "circumstances" in Wordsworth's writings in the

context of classical rhetoric in "Wordsworth and the Rhetorical Tradition in England" (1944), trans. Heidi I. Saur-Stull, in Don H. Bialostosky and Lawrence C. Needham ed., *Rhetorical Traditions and British Romantic Literature* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1995), 265–280, p. 270.

Keats Posthumously Personalized

Stanley Plumly, *Posthumous Keats: A Personal Biography* (New York & London: W. W. Norton, 2008)

"A Man's Life of any worth is a continual allegory – and very few eyes can see the Mystery of his life," wrote Keats to his brother George in the spring of 1819.¹ Stanley Plumly's magnificent book, pursuing the mystery of how the poet's immortality is achieved, is perhaps more respectful of what Keats worded as the figurative aspect of one's life than any other biography. The essays, though rich in suggestions, admit again and again the need to be able to remain in uncertainties about how much we can know. Plumly's speculations about the importance and rich ambiguities of the images of mist and veiling in Keats's poetry are brilliant in this respect. Commenting on passages from *Endymion*, *The Fall of Hyperion*, "To Autumn," and the letters, Plumly writes that air is the medium of transformation and disappearance for Keats, the means of "erasure, chameleon

adaptation, anonymity, mystery, spirit, the veil, the mist, himself absorbed” (302). Yet it entails the promise of something transformed – a life mysteriously preserved, veiled and to be revealed, in the words of the poems.

Posthumous Keats reconfigures traditional biographies (such as, for instance, the famous Keats biographies of the 1960s written by Walter Jackson Bate, Aileen Ward, and Robert Gittings) by leaving behind the need for narrative and linearity. Plumly is pursuing “connections and crossovers,” thus the chapters move around key ideas in a circular and essayistic fashion, often using an emblematic scene or image as central (15). This yields an occasionally anecdotal, but highly insightful and truly elegantly written book: a personal biography, which reveals its author as a keen and thorough researcher as well as a poet endowed with a Keats-like sympathetic imagination.

The central idea Plumly’s book sets out to investigate is how the immortality of Keats’s poetry is necessarily bound up with his mortality, his tragic early death – a biographical fact that has all too often been emphasized, yet, Plumly claims, cannot be neglected. The immortality of Keats’s poetry and fame is achieved against all odds and, to use Severn’s great phrase, in spite of the “intellectual lottery” of the afterlife (361). Plumly follows the ups and downs of this afterlife from the moment Keats died and was buried in the

little Protestant Cemetery surrounded by green pastures with grazing sheep. He discusses the friends’ disputes about a more proper monument and epitaph, the planned and postponed memoirs and biographies, the idealizing images of the abundant posthumous portraits, the fate of the Keats house in Rome and of the letters written to Fanny Brawne. All of the commemorating gestures of the friends and admirers tend to the immortality of the poet’s fame; yet nothing can bring about “the fragile, lucky, deferred thing that immortality is” more than the words of the poems, “scraps of words written in fire” (362–4).

Plumly’s nice metaphor of words written in fire hopes to explain their survival. Yet, as he notes, not only Keats’s name but also his reputation looked as though written on water in the decades-long shadowy aftermath of his death. At the worst, John Taylor, his publisher and benefactor, sold the copyright to the poems and unpublished manuscripts in 1845 for almost nothing. By this time Keats’s work was effectively out of print in England. As for a written account of the poet’s life, which was so absent during those decades, all the members of the Keats circle planned to write their biographies, memoirs, or monographs, including, among others, George Keats, the early mentor Leigh Hunt, the friend and surrogate brother Charles Brown, and Joseph Severn, who was the only witness to Keats’s last months. Their

quarrels show that each of the potential biographers claimed to know the real Keats, while, as Plumly poignantly remarks, none of the friends was a direct and complete witness to Keats's entire life, his maturation, and his growth as a poet. Although each of them left at least notes and fragmentary comments behind, as well as letters and other memorabilia, in reality they all had to die (except for Severn) before Keats's work in context with his death, and with due narrative perspective and insight, could be addressed. As is probably true in most cases of biographies, an impartial – and in time removed – outsider is needed to collect and arrange the various sources. Richard Monckton Milnes will become that collector and “arbiter of value” - his *Life and Letters of Keats* published in 1848. Ironically, he will also become the biographer of the Keats circle, underscoring the fact that our knowledge of Keats relies so much on his letters to the friends and, in turn, on their views, however fragmentary they are.

One of the strengths of *Posthumous Keats* is that it reconstructs points of view and offers historical insight through the gathering of actual material sources. The well-chosen initial chapter, for instance, follows the history of the portraiture of Keats and gives incisive comments about the numerous portraits, engravings, busts, and copies of these that wish to resurrect Keats's face and presence after his death. Plumly finds that most of them have a

“palpable design” for the viewer: they make Keats either into an overly sensitive, effeminate poet, the victim of unfavorable reviews, or an ideal handsome poet “no mere mortal harm can come to” (43). An imposed a staged image of what a poet should look like also appears; such is the case with Severn's official portrait of the contemplative young poet seated by a window, with Shakespeare's portrait hanging above his head. Most of the portraits seem to lack any knowledge of the real Keats and, masking their uncertainty about his reputation, draw the myth instead. Plumly convincingly argues that only a few of them convey the living presence of the poet: Brown's pencil sketch of Keats's face from the summer of 1819, the poet's profile on Haydon's wall painting “Christ's entry into Jerusalem,” and the deathbed drawing by Severn. These are mostly sketches, drawn spontaneously, but therefore capture better the exceptional intensity of the living Keats. It is a pity that no illustrations accompany Plumly's commentary; the reader has to resort either to other sources or to the small reproductions of the most important portraits at the chapter headings.

With *Posthumous Keats* we gain a fellow poet's insight, rich in sympathetic identification with the young Keats, and bold in its leaps to connect biographical facts to their larger significances for Keats's poetry. One of the bold leaps is when Plumly writes that the intense creativity of Keats's living

year stems from having nursed Tom and witnessed his death: “he becomes that central quality of imagination we call inspiration, a grief figure that again and again needs to be addressed, reinvoked, reconciled . . . as an enlarging emblem, a motivating measure, a rich resource of loss to which – to paraphrase Wordsworth – the poet repairs as to a fountain” (114). Tom’s death will become transformative, but, as Plumly suggests, it will also signal for Keats that the slow process of death by increments – a fact about the lingering condition of consumption – has begun for him as well.

The essayistic biography is interspersed with brief but perceptive and beautifully written commentaries on the poems. In a masterly reading of the “overbrimmed” descriptions of the ode “To Autumn” and “Ode to a Nightingale” Plumly makes the important claim that the moments of immense richness still to be enjoyed as if suspended and extended beyond their proper bounds are some of the most characteristic moments of Keats’s poetry. In Keats’s poems it is difficult to choose between the falling dusk and the fallen day as “the richest moment of lost time” (344). Moreover, Plumly notes that the modernity of Keats’s poetry lies in its ability to re-write the lyric poem as an independent entity outside the self. The odes and the best passages of the Hyperion poems emphasize a necessary distance between the poem and the poet: the sublimity of

the poem becomes “something other than the ‘egotistical sublime’ of the poet” (353).

Keats hoped to be “among the English poets,” but as his life was wearing away, he gave up that hope, regardless of the greatness of the poetry he had already written. If “posthumous” can mean life after the death of the promise, Plumly speculates, we might date the start of Keats’s posthumous existence well before the letter to Charles Brown in November 1820, in which he writes about his “habitual feeling of my real life having past” (*Letters*, p. 398). His posthumous life might have begun after the last great lines of the *The Fall of Hyperion* and the last ode, written in the autumn of 1819. For Plumly the ode “To Autumn” is therefore emblematic: the slow process of wearing away, he writes, begins with this poem of farewells and suspended endings, where the poet completely disappears into the poem. Yet, if mortality is the most important subject of Keats’s mature poetry, its promise is the eternity of art: “If poetry – Keats is saying – is finally about the flesh vanishing, disappearing, turning cold . . . it is also, in its afterlife, about the word as spirit, aspirant on the air, invisible, articulate, available” (347).

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Note

1. All parenthesized references to the letters are to this edition: Robert Gittings ed., *Letters of John Keats* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 218.

All the World's a Cage

Veronika Schandl, *Socialist Shakespeare Productions in Kádár-regime Hungary: Shakespeare Behind the Iron Curtain* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2009)

Veronika Schandl's *Socialist Shakespeare Productions in Kádár-regime Hungary* was published at the end of 2008 by Edwin Mellen Press in English, a fact which immediately poses the question, "Is that of any interest for foreigners?" But in fact many more questions are triggered: is it not the business of the Hungarians? Is it not material which concerns solely the history and cultural history of Hungarians? Is it not a volume that should have been written in Hungarian for the sake of the Hungarian reading public?

Poet, translator and Shakespeare scholar István Géher asks the same in the Foreword of the volume, hence the quotation marks above. He also attempts an answer. "It should be," Géher replies. He adds, "in the post-modern world of relativity the 'doublespeak' and 'the reading between the lines' cannot be dismissed as mere provincial peculiarity" (ii). I agree: our students' generation meets only a faded memory or even less than that – a lack of record and of summary – about the theatre life of the era characterized by the unreliability of words and the swampy fields of doublespeak. We all hope these belong to the past. However, the post-socialist present

often seems equally swampy an area. Surviving characters assuming active parts on the stage of Kádár-regime theatre life often are influenced by present day politics which may affect their work retrospectively. From a more distant perspective, for the sake of our students' generation(s), it is vital that the history of Kádár-regime (1956–1989) theatre be recorded.

Such a record assumes at least three things to be successful or worth mentioning: unearthing of state documents with significant knowledge of history, unceasing work with performance details and a relatively objective or at least emotionally uninvolved bird's eye view of the narrator. I found all these in Veronika Schandl's book, and I will approach them exactly from these angles in the following pages.

* * *

The author is the daughter of a set designer, to whom the book is dedicated. From this fact could follow that the book, under the same title, would turn out to be either a sorrowful lament over creative minds ruined and talented lives wasted, or a political pamphlet burdened with a disproportionate load of political history. Either would have been a pity and would not be equal to the task. To the great relief of the reader this book is not a pathetic monument, either historical or personal. What makes it valuable, both as a reading and as a useful basic entry on a university reading list, is the colourful and sensitive picture she presents. Here the word

colourful refers to both the subject and the presentation of the work. The trap of false over-generalizations she easily avoids: by digging out a quantity of detail that itself earns respect, she manages to paint a tableau of each examined performance of the period. These, then, create the overall feeling which we often have when watching the busy crowds in action in one of the large oil paintings by Pieter Breughel the Elder. Interesting and perhaps even amusing in their minute details, the descriptions of each performance add up to a vast tableau of various and colourful groups of characters and scenes, inviting browsing and research.

Nonetheless, the latent fears, spies, double agents, denunciations and forced silences cannot be, and luckily are not, dismissed. Their representation is not reduced to a mere register of offences suffered by theatre intellectuals during the Kádár-regime. The book has no lament over missed past opportunities. Although opportunities all receive due mention and description, lament is left for the reader. And it is done well this way: the tone of the narrator is that of the attentive theatre historian, who is enthusiastic about the subject, its each and every detail. At this point a usual laudatory sentence would fit here: "Her well-documented tiny mosaic pieces are the result of persistent research executed on an impressive scale." Which translates, as all researchers know, into an awful lot of work. The balanced narration of this book appears to be objec-

tive enough to suggest that the author's person was a contemporary of Socialism. However, Veronika Schandl (currently lecturer at Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Hungary) is much younger than that, which triggers ambiguous consequences. Thus she could have had first-hand information neither of the mechanisms, nor the machinations of Party-controlled Socialist culture. Also, her not being a contemporary could aid her in the assumption of a nearly omniscient and practically impartial bird's eye view.

Historiography always requires backing one's argument with facts and first-hand sources. In the historiography of an era through theatre performances, through perhaps the most ephemeral of subjects, details may mean much more than merely supporting some argument. Details here mean a great variety of contemporary sources, and they are generously provided so that the reader may see more of the entire picture than the actual focus of the theatre historian. Undoubtedly we would never see the entire picture; this is a puzzle which will never be complete. We must always remember, as the author's critical remarks also remind us, that no theatre criticism can ever be reliable, especially not when written in a dictatorship. Schandl's book offers a surprisingly round picture of the chosen performances firstly because of the high number of sources, and secondly because of her deep knowledge of these sources. They range from the reports

and speeches at the first Soviet Writers' Congress by Zhdanov and Gorky (principal and obligatory directions for Hungarian artists as well), through Hungarian state security archives, to pieces of theatre criticism in both well-known national papers like *Népszabadság* [Liberty of the People] and some impossible factory papers like *Kazán* [Boiler], paper of the smelters. It seems credibility and the truth of the overall picture, no matter how complicated it may be (think of the twisted story of the *Hamlet* directed by Gábor Bódy, who was both an agent reporting to the police and a subject for other agents to report on, cf. 45–65), matters more than anything to the author. The flexibility of her understanding of the complexity and the delicacy of certain political and personal situations in which Shakespeare was produced (see also the twists in the career of the great survivor chameleon actor Tamás Major, pp. 169–187) allows her a deeper understanding of the productions. A prerequisite for this is handling these sources with the necessary and often different distance. Due to Schandl's research, anyone who is to write the stage history of yet another Shakespearean play on Hungarian Socialist stages may rely on the sources she has unearthed as well as on her masterly executed historical background (never too little, never too much – even for foreigners.). Also, in her Breughel-like detailed tableau readers will find their favourite scene, best documented for

their interest, which will enable them to draw their own conclusions.

All in all, a part on the historical and political back(or fore?)ground was an inherent necessity. Chapter 1 comprises the basic knowledge of cultural and political history for Hungarians and non-Hungarians equally: from those who have never been to Hungary, to Hungarians who were the audiences of those productions, to Hungarians who are too young to have lived in the era also known as 'Goulash communism,' and to anyone interested in the colourful impression of cultural life in a complicatedly and inscrutably softened version of Central-East-European Communist dictatorship and the self-suppressing atmosphere in the most cheerful of Soviet barracks.

* * *

This book is a careful compilation of performance criticism. First, of *Hamlets* and later, as the political atmosphere triggered, of problem plays. Veronika Schandl examined no less than 27 performances and their critical and political reception. In addition to the cast lists she also included a Chronology of the performances in the Appendices (A and B) – all very practical for a Hungarian reader and researcher. Again, is that of any interest to foreigners? Was it worth translating into English all those theatre criticisms published in some Socialist self- and peer-censored newspapers, remotely but strictly and unpredictably controlled by the omnipotent Party guru György Aczél?

The answer is yes. These sources, outdated both in sense and style, embody a part of the Hungarian national past as well as of the very particular ways of communication in a Socialist satellite country. The late nineties and the early two-noughts are the period of setting things right in these countries, in this case by the remembrance and the description of Socialist years on the stage.

While providing the reader with a seemingly omniscient bird's eye view of the era and its theatres, the author never seems to appear. Nonetheless, Veronika Schandl's approach to Shakespearean performances and performance criticisms are sensibly ever present in the background. She managed to achieve the proportionate balance between the articulation of the narrator of past performances and that of her own opinion as a Shakespeare scholar. The result is not forgiving sympathy towards bad or didactic productions popular at the time, neither is it a flaming political flare against the Soviet regime. Her interpretations all point in one direction, towards Shakespeare's continuous position and presence in Kádárist Hungary.

* * *

Shakespeare, whose appropriation had been so significant for non-English, and particularly Central European countries in the nineteenth century, seems to guarantee the transfer of continuity of (high) culture from one regime to the other. Schandl's book is built upon the widely known and accepted fact that even the Socialist dictatorship wanted to

appropriate the once capitalist entrepreneur Bard only to demonstrate its cultural strength, creativity and rule over intellectuals. Marxist Shakespeare was "praised for his critical treatment of the social ills in early modern society, in which his aim was not only to criticize the bourgeoisie, but to affirm the positive nature of human progress and firm optimistic belief in the future to come. . . . The same way that Shakespearean plots were seen to parallel Socialist narratives, Shakespearean characters were viewed as early predecessors of the new Socialist hero, an active fighter for justice who never accepted compromises. . ." (13). Hence just as a play holds mirror up to human nature so does the actual Shakespeare-cult to particular society in a particular period. The examination of an actual Shakespeare cult is thus definitely worthwhile. Thence Schandl's book must be placed alongside the accounts of other Shakespeare appropriations in the Eastern bloc (e.g., *Shakespeare on the German Stage – The Twentieth Century* by Wilhelm Hortmann (1998), *On Page and Stage: Shakespeare in Polish and World Culture* ed. by Krystyna Kujawinska Courtney, *Redefining Shakespeare – Literary Theory and Theater Practice in the German Democratic Republic* by Lawrence J Gunther and Andrew McLean (1998), etc).

The way Veronika Schandl found a gap among these writings and ventured to fill it in was writing about the presence of Hungarianized Socialist Shakespe-

peare: she reveals and points out the apparent ambiguities embedded in what she calls “the theatricality of everyday life” (9). Her book is an account of the sometimes desperate efforts of Kádár-regime theatre-makers to respond to or hint at topical public discourses. “The aim of the work is not, primarily, to reconstruct these productions of the Kádár-regime, although it wishes to delineate the major theatrical trends of the era. Rather through contemporary reviews, articles and essays, as well as current historical data available about the theatrical structure and the cultural-political establishment of Communist Hungary, this study aims to examine the dialogues that connected theatres to the political everyday lives of Kádárist citizens” (14).

Regarding the overall picture, it was a sensible idea not to insist on the performance history of a single play, as well as to not analyse more than four. The suppressed and hesitating hero in *Hamlet*, and the relativity in the worlds of the problem plays, seemed best to represent the changes in the political climate. The era/history dictated: *Hamlet* was produced eight times, while *Measure for Measure* eight times, *Troilus and Cressida* five times and *All's Well* thrice, serving as the key texts that best suited the Kádár Era. The numbers show that *Hamlet* “remained a constant favourite” (along with the comedies). The author examines both the time pattern of all these productions related to Hungarian politics (certainly no *Hamlets* in the

fifties after 1952; the first after the 1956 revolution was in 1963) and also, casts them against the backdrop of foreign theatrical influences either on the page or on the stage: those of Brecht, Peter Brook, Jan Kott, Grotowsky. She draws the picture of Hungarian productions from several aspects (which then all unite in the “theatricalities of everyday life”). Not only does she consider them from the aspect of their uses of the text, their modes of interpretation with respect to artistic influence, but also from their modes of existence. Mainstream, avant-garde and amateur theatres received different amounts of attention in their being monitored by State Intelligence. Although each chapter deals with either a play (the problem plays, Chapters 5–8) or a period (*Hamlets*, Chapters 2–4), the author manages to sketch the individual careers of several directors who moved from one kind of theatre to another, from one level of being monitored to another. Very importantly, she traces back the reasons for Paál’s and Ruszt’s tragic rise and fall, victims of “doublespeak” and “reading between the lines.”

* * *

“What distinguishes the Hungarian Shakespeare repertoire from other Eastern European countries,” writes Veronika Schandl – and she is a pioneer in noticing this- is the “unparalleled popularity of the problem plays in the theatrical canon of the 1970s and 1980s” (100). She goes on to explain: “The standards of living much higher than

average for the eastern Bloc, spread the illusory sense of freedom in the everyday lives of citizens. At the same time . . . the regime still did not tolerate overt opposition.” As Schandl explains, “directors in Hungary repeatedly saw a powerful tool [in Shakespearean problem comedies] to reflect on their lives, the perverse coexistence of good and bad in their political reality. Their shows became mainstream cultural events, ushering in a new Hungarian theatrical idiom, a changed concept of how Shakespeare should be performed” (100–101).

No more fairy-tale productions of *All's Well* (like Várkonyi's direction in 1961), much rather as parables of self-delusion, no more “uplifting” and “optimistic tragedies.” Young directors came, and “all exhibited a more grotesque, at times even absurd, approach in their directions” (106). The *Troilus and Cressidas* in the 1970s and 1980s touched upon the “insanity of the Cold War and the segregation of public and private spheres,” showed individuals who “carried on with their lives *within* the system, even after realizing its absurdity” (147). While explaining these processes the author simultaneously refers to achievements by academics: a direction of *Troilus* by university professor György Székely on the regime that never gives in; György Endre Szőnyi's essay emphasizing the darkly grotesque, even absurd undertones, which referred to the intellectual crisis as theatre; theatre criticism and the influence of Shakes-

peare scholarship must be considered in union. By the end of the Kádár-regime it was the *Measure for Measures*, Schandl reveals, that shed light upon a fundamental element of the regime. The consolidation of Kádárism, the hope of a new era at the price of a compromise, is demonstrated in *Measure* productions. Of Paál's 1985 *Veszprém* direction she wrote, “Isabella's defiant silence [in rejection of the Duke] did receive an extra, thoroughly political connotation through the cultural, political and social surroundings of contemporary Hungary, a culture highly sensitive to forced silences, doublespeak and the interpretative technique of ‘reading between the lines’ ” (160). However, I found it important that Veronika Schandl points out the fact that “the allowance of ‘doublespeak’ was an essential part of the Faustian deal artists made with those in power. The ‘doublespeak’ of the stage lured people into the false sense of freedom controlled by the companies themselves, most by means of self-censure. . . . The theatre created an almost pathological audience-actor relationship in which the former awaited subversion and the latter was all too willing to provide it” (175).

* * *

To both illustrate and demonstrate the operation of ‘doublespeak,’ Veronika Schandl turned to a poem by Géza Bereményi, sung by Tamás Cseh in the early 1980s, *The Song of Wiley William*.¹ What she found in it was inspiration, emblematic, even iconic lines for

Hungarian readers, perfect metaphors of/about the era for foreigners, and an imprint of the Hungarian Shakespeare cult (“in this picturesque country show me a man, / who could compete with Shakespeare William”). A perfect example of the practice of ‘doublespeak’ and ‘reading between the lines.’

Quite fortunately, she recognized the weight of the song as well as its potential metaphoric significance within the book and had a young poetess, now a University of East Anglia PhD graduate, Ágnes Lehóczky, translate it. With or without prejudices about the feasibility of such a translation, foreigners and Hungarians will find it witty, sensitive, easy to sing, and all in all, surprisingly good. The poem on the fifth page not only contributes to the atmosphere of the age as a longish motto, but also serves as a governing principle and a structuring force in the book: its lines reappear in the metaphoric and also allegorical chapter titles, adding a special Eastern Bloc flavour to the production analyses. Moreover, they present the reader with a first-hand experience of reading between the lines. Both the stage history of *Hamlet* and that of the problem plays perfectly suit Bereményi’s lines (no wonder, as Bereményi himself authored an adaptation of the play entitled *Halmi or the Prodigal Son*, also examined by Schandl). Let me quote some of them: “‘The world’s back is curved’: Shakespeare in Socialist Hungary” (Chapter 1), “‘To cover dark secrets he acted a fool’: *Hamlet* on Hungarian stages between

1952–1977” (Chapter 2), or “‘Which grave as you see, is our stage prop today’: *Hamlet* on Hungarian stages between 1981–1983” (Chapter 3), or, “‘What vast labyrinths zigzag in our hearts’: *Troilus and Cressida* in Late Socialist Hungary” (Chapter 7) and “‘We look for the keys, for clues and for hints’: *Measure for Measure* in late Socialist Hungary” (Chapter 8), etc. Nonetheless, as generations grow up reading this (which I hope will happen), clauses of this kind in the body text – “especially after Stalin’s death” (14) – will need more and more annotation to be added in the next edition; here I only missed the date, yet for the sake of young Hungarians and foreigners a review of such perspective could be vital.

The dialogue of this text, at which the author aimed, works in both directions: between Hungarian theatres and everyday reality and also between Hungarian and foreign theatrical trends. “By the rule of the theater which converts all past modes into stage presence, our past becomes our present. The mockery of our cultural past, in turn, not only casts a dubious light on ancient heroic times but also on the centuries of European cultural development, an idea which could also threaten the logic of Marxist teleological historical ideology. Equating the caricature of the past with the present at the same time also allows for analogies between onstage and offstage reality. . .” (134).

The mosaic is quite full, the “chippings of our scattered mirrors / are

mended" in this volume (v). "I wish to recommend this book on Shakespeare," wrote István Géher in the Foreword, "to the inquisitive consciousness and alert conscience of both Hungarian and non-Hungarian readers." So do I. Yet I think many others would be interested in reading this book in Hungarian.

Gabriella Reuss

Note

1. The following excerpts serve as eminent illustrations: "Oh why can't you see what vast labyrinths / zigzag in our hearts with no directions / we look for the keys, for clues and for hints / staring into our own trembling reflections . . . // here we are standing in awe of the man / in front the greatness of Shakespeare William" (translated by Ágnes Lehóczky).

**"Only Connect!"
Zadie Smith Convenes
Critical Minds**

Tracey L. Walters (ed.), *Zadie Smith: Critical Essays* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008)

With intertextuality as a central concern in this exploration of the fiction of a contemporary, biracial, English-speaking and internationally acclaimed novelist, the idea of texts in interaction also asserts itself on the level of related critical discourses. The reader easily gets the impression that, while part of the book is about Zadie Smith, another, just as important part, is about recent devel-

opments in literary scholarship. Yet this additional function of the collection as a kind of postcolonial reader – with its heavy concentration on theory – does not mar the accessibility of the text, and one can only profit from simultaneously learning about Smith's writing, and about current insights in contemporary, especially post-colonially attuned, literary interpretation.

On account of this exuberance of critical slants (and a kind of copious, exuberating quality in the author's fiction itself), the division of the volume into two appears to be a little forced, a mere gesture to provide a larger structure. The first section promises postcolonial and postmodernist readings of the related novels, and the second announces a primary concern with racial identities. This separation not only omits consideration of the overlap between these broad categories but it also fails to designate – even on the condensed, metaphorical manner in which most titles anticipate certain contents – the actual subject matter of a few chapters. Thus, the fifth essay about *White Teeth* as a Caribbean novel could easily be shifted from the first section into the second, because while its focus is on a kind of reversed colonial process, it prioritizes the category of race and ethnicity. Conversely, the twelfth paper, the final paper, on the international marketing of the same novel might just as legitimately be treated in the preceding unit about postmodernism, because it is much less geared towards a discussion of race than

to such concepts as simulation and the global book trade.

But regardless of order, the complex and well-written essays themselves facilitate an in-depth understanding of Smith's fiction. In the first section, after the editor's introduction, Matthew Paproth discusses a meaningful, but problematic rift between the open, typically postmodernist multiplicity of ideology and the primarily modernist, form-oriented aesthetic concern that the reader confronts in the author's novels ("The Flipping Coin: The Modernist and Postmodernist Zadie Smith"). In a well-placed second chapter, Ulka Anjaria explores the tension between the kind of aesthetic excess that scholars often posit in postcolonial responses to Western, normative concepts of the beautiful, and the particular anti-aesthetic academic attitude that is associated with the fictional character Howard Belsey ("*On Beauty* and Being Postcolonial"). Whereas these essays associate postmodernism – among other cultural phenomena – with the act of rewriting, and they highlight intriguing parallels between Forster's *Howard's End* and Smith's third novel, Urszula Terentowicz-Fotyga shifts attention from this artistic gesture to examples of self-referentiality, simulation, exhaustion and pastiche in *The Autograph Man* ("The Impossible Self and the Poetics of the Urban Hyper-real"). Rewriting is once again a central concern in Maeve Tynan's paper, where the author, after concentrating on intertextuality and postcolonial self-

awareness in two separate phases, confirms a critically often-voiced connection between identity and representation ("'Only Connect': Intertextuality and Identity in Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*"). As mentioned before, Raphael Dalleo's essay contemplates the position of *White Teeth* in British literary tradition ("Colonization in Reverse: *White Teeth* as Caribbean Novel"), arguing for a historically unusual (because indeed reversed) cultural impact as exercised by Caribbeans on Londoners.

The second section of the collection begins with a both refreshing and informative addition to the so-far discussed points of intertextual connection. While the presence of *Howard's End* in *On Beauty* is well-known and meant to be immediately perceived, Zora Neale Hurston's writings, Susan Alice Fischer demonstrates, provide a subtle, less obvious but significant context for characterization for the British novelist ("Gimme Shelter": Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*). Afterwards, Tracey L. Walters continues to explore Smith's accomplishments, as well as weaknesses, in the field of character portrayal, and investigates the possible cultural roots of the novelist's tendency to create somewhat lifeless female figures ("Still Mammies and Hos: Stereotypical Images of Black Women"). Next, scholars Sharon Raynor and Lexi Stucky read the lesser-known short story "Hanwell in Hell" ("From the Dispossessed to the Decolonized"; "Red and Yellow, Black and White: Color-Blindness as Disillusionment") and modify, as a result, the

general reader's perception of Smith's literary merits as so exclusively vested in her celebrated debut novel. Furthermore, in the first of these two pieces the short story is compared (if perhaps not closely enough) to Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, which, after one's growing a bit weary of references to Forster, is insightful and stimulating. The last chapter by Katarzyna Jakubiak offers an analysis of the multifarious manners in which *White Teeth* is commodified; yet the author skillfully combines this perspective with an intrinsic, textual interest in Smith's novel ("The International Marketing of *White Teeth*").

What may strike the reader as absent from this informative volume (in addition to better typesetting and space between initials in such names as E. M. Forster) is any discussion of *On Beauty* as an academic novel. Albeit the contributors do touch upon campus politics in their comments about the character Howard Belsey and his daughter Zora, this occurs in other, indirectly related contexts only. This default is regrettable because the novel is a remarkable exemplar of this genre featuring a variety of concerns about propriety, tenure and publishing. In a hilarious episode it even raises the question of what it really takes to survive a predictably very long departmental meeting. As in the works of Amis, Lodge or Bradbury, the narrative point is not limited to the exposure of personal grievances and private fantasies as fueling public interaction in a given place of employment, but it ex-

tends to complex analogies between the secluded, in a sense elitist field of a college and further, broader terrains of politics and sociality.

Another, quiet complaint concerns gender. As might be expected from any such publication, the essays are frequently punctuated by various observations about sexuality yet, atypically, there is only one section (out of twelve chapters) exploring this issue exclusively, and even this oscillates between analyzing the literary representation of gender in Smith's fiction, and taking the novelist to task for failing to create more complex, less stereotypical women characters. This, of course, is not to say that criticism of this kind should dominate the volume. But perhaps a better balanced relation between the predominantly postcolonial orientation of the interpretations and the various, somewhat dispersed discussions of Smith's representation of gender identity could have secured a better understanding of this oeuvre. And, to note a specific, related omission, very little is written about the male gender. While the huge, symbolically so over-determined bosom of Kiki in *On Beauty* creates numerous, if somewhat entangled, directions for feminist scholarship, the gender attitude of husband Howard remains strangely uninterpreted (even if the entire plot of this specific story is launched by a marital-sexual crisis, and even if, as noted before, editor Walters observes that the novelist is generally more competent at representing males than females).

To conclude, the volume adequately responds to many of the theoretical challenges that Zadie Smith's fiction has so far generated. It launches a dialogue, and the emerging, valuable exercises in scholarship in one collection assign yet another dimension to the moral and aesthetic imperative that Smith shares with Forster: "Only connect!"

Tamás Juhász

Commentators, Editors, Publishers, and Other Readers

Philip Goldstein & James L. Machor (ed.), *New Directions in American Reception Study* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2008)

The problem with reception studies is that there is nothing to read. As one cannot extract a reading from a reader's brain to subject it to scrutiny under a microscope, there appears to be no way but to rely on some kind of output on the readers' part when investigating what has traditionally been conceived of as the opposite of production: reception. However trivial and banal this statement may appear, it has far-reaching theoretical and practical consequences, as shown by the essays in the 2008 collection *New Directions in American Reception Study*, which stemmed from a conference held at the University of Delaware three years before. In fact, the

collection can be read as explorations of various strategies aimed at circumventing this problem.

As in the case of many books presenting novel directions in literary and cultural studies,¹ the introduction to this collection also heralds its subject as one that will finally be able to unify such age-old binaries as the historical as opposed to the rhetorical, to accommodate critical approaches of the 21st century, and, thus, serve as a new centre not only to the now-fragmented field of literary, but also to the wider area of cultural studies. But when I read that the arch-enemy of reception studies – criticism which clings to the possibility of a fixed, authoritative meaning – "the traditional essentialist method has restricted literary study and repeatedly produced impasses," and that reception study is the one that "opens literary study to its twenty-first-century constituents" (xxv), I could not help but think of the criticism of Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author," suggesting that Barthes had had to construct a dummy Author-God in order to be able to denounce what had, arguably, never been there.²

The editors divided the 19 essays in the anthology into five groups according to their subject matter. The collection starts with more theoretical writings, and continues with the most extensive group, analyses which are embedded in more traditional literary criticism. These are followed by three essays which are concerned with the "ordinary" reader or print culture from a historical perspec-

tive, and three more analysing the latest branches of media: film, TV, and Internet fandom. The two essays in the fifth group are in dialogue with the preceding ones, and serve as postscripts to the anthology. Toby Miller's aptly titled "The Reception Deception," I felt, could have actually served as a more intriguing introduction to the whole collection.

The present introduction also has its special merits. It surveys the history of reception study, from being part of the investigation of authors' development guided by contemporaneous feedback to reacting against the "affective fallacy" of New Criticism, with as diverse views on the relationship between text and reader as those of David Bleich, Wolfgang Iser, Hans Robert Jauss, or Stanley Fish. It also provides summaries of all articles separately, which must, I feel, be greeted by anyone not familiar with the latest achievements in reception studies. As the essays lack abstracts, however, I think the summaries could have been even more useful if they had been prefaced to the essays directly.

Despite some irregularities in the index (a handy and welcome feature in any anthology) and occasional typographical errors, the book offers an invaluable insight into the latest achievements and concerns in reception study – and, as I shall argue, in a realm even wider than that.

Disregarding somewhat the categories set up by the editors let me proceed by investigating common strategies of the essays which deal with the problem of

the inherent inaccessibility of reception and reading in the strict sense. As we shall see, many of these approaches point toward a stage in reception and cultural studies which may have been passed, but is certainly ahead of us: the blurring of the distinction between reception and production.

The first strategy might be described as one that focuses on the output of "expert" readers, who occupy themselves with writing reading(s). These studies often cite published reviews or scholarly analyses as indices to reception, and frequently dwell on the disparity of interpretative communities separated either by time or culture. James L. Machor investigates the antebellum reception of Herman Melville's short stories, and concludes that interpretative assumptions regarding the reliability of the narrator appear to have been considerably different from those of our day. Steven Mailloux's account is, in effect, reading reading reading-reading, as the bulk of his essay reviews reactions to Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, in which Nafisi highlighted the nature of reading texts originating from an alien culture, and, in Hannah Arendt's footsteps, wished that the reading would change her students' thinking. Philip Goldstein contrasts reading practices that are also separated temporally. Focusing on possible readings of Richard Wright's *Native Son*, he attributes the change from seeing the text as a naturalist protest novel, to regarding Bigger Thomas's fate as an existential struggle that ends in liberation, to "the changing status of the

naturalist and modernist movements and the emergence of black aesthetics" (120); then, surprisingly, he also suggests that it might be due to the evolving beliefs of the author himself. Going on to provide an outline of a brief history of literary criticism, the text (as Miller's and Goldstein's essays) suddenly erupts in a politically charged description of the present state of affairs, in which Goldstein sees "the modern university and the giant corporate media" (repeated twice, 130, 131) as the ultimate foe (Machor, "The American Reception of Melville's Short Fiction in the 1850s"; Mailloux, "Judging and Hoping: Rhetorical Effects of Reading about Reading"; Goldstein, "Richard Wright's *Native Son*: From Naturalist Protest to Modernist Liberation and Beyond").

The remaining three essays in this group, interestingly, all seem to revolve around the concepts of authenticity and realism as separate from contrasting strategies of "expert" reading. Modernism and the literature of the women's liberation movement alike appear to have been ridiculed by early reviews which accused them of being insincere, untrue, and inauthentic (Leonard Diepeveen, "Learning from Philistines: Suspicion, Refusing to Read, and the Rise of Dubious Modernism"; Charlotte Templin, "Discourses in Dialogue: The Reception of Alix Kates Shulman's *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen*"). Critics and reviewers levelled the same accusations against Daniel Lewis James, who adopted the *nom de plume* Danny Santiago and authored a "deceptively"

authentic Chicano novel, when his true identity as a white writer was revealed. Interestingly, both Marcial González, who reviews James's fate in his "Reception and Authenticity: Danny Santiago's *Famous All over Town*," and Templin, who investigates the reception of first generation feminist literature via Alix Kates Shulman's novel, fail to ask whether it was not the texts themselves, but preconceptions about the authors that were responsible for the apparent authenticity or its opposite which was sensed by early readers.

Researchers, however, might want to consider less scholarly or "expert" readers who do not (did not) regularly convert their readings into written accounts. In the case of readers still alive, there is the possibility of asking them to do so by conducting interviews or handing out questionnaires. This is the practice of Tony Bennett, who tests the post-Marxist theory of Pierre Bourdieu on class-based taste profiles on the data of actual sociological research. Unsurprisingly, he finds that statistical variations outweigh the vague tendency of higher classes to choose so-called high legitimacy cultural products. This finding problematizes Bourdieu's notion of the unity of class habitus, but it is a remark saved till the end of the essay that discredits Bourdieu altogether, who, in 1984, suggested that "nothing is more alien to working-class women than the typically bourgeois idea of making each object in the home the occasion for an aesthetic choice" (qtd. in Bennett, "Habitus Clivé: Aesthetics and

Politics in the Work of Pierre Bourdieu” 77). Kenneth Roemer also makes use of the results of his research among present-day readers, but his interest lies in discovering how they react to an allegedly outdated utopia, Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*. His suggestion that the people who found it the easiest to relate to the text were the ones with experience of crossing cultures or of poverty provides an important insight into the interaction between reading and the personalities of readers (“Placing Readers at the Forefront of Nowhere: Reception Studies and Utopian Literature”).

But what happens when one sets out to investigate the reception of “ordinary” readers who are no longer available for questioning? Such an analysis would usually turn to alternative sources following what Toby Miller termed an “archival” method (361). The “Archives” investigated might range from preserved fan mail, which provide the source for Amy L. Blair’s account of the baffling success of Sinclair Lewis’s *Main Street* among middlebrow readers, itself a novel satirizing middlebrow culture, to David Paul Nord’s relation of the workings of the Bureau of Accuracy and Fair Play of the *New York World*, which dealt with newspaper readers’ complaints. This latter essay might strike one as more a historical account than a paper belonging to reception studies, like Bennett’s work, which, I believe, might find itself more at home in sociology. Problems inherent in this kind of approach already manifest themselves

in Nord’s account, where all the readers he considers turn out to be professional writers, journalists, or editors (Blair, “Main Street Reading *Main Street*”; Nord, “Accuracy or Fair Play? Complaining about the Newspaper in Early Twentieth-Century New York”).

This is also true of Barbara Hochman’s essay entitled “Sentiment without Tears: *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as History in the 1890s,” in which she regards paratextual elements and illustrations in later editions of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel as indices to supposed or prescribed reading practices. Here, editors and illustrators are considered representative readers. Ellen Gruber Garvey does make a step toward finding the “ordinary” reader in history in her “The Power of Recirculation: Scrapbooks and the Reception of the Nineteenth-Century Press,” as she focuses on scrapbooks containing newspaper clippings made during the Civil War. The three scrapbook-makers she scrutinizes, however, turn out to be as expert readers and writers as possible, with a suffragist newspaper columnist, a women’s rights pioneer lecturer, and a publicly active abolitionist.

What is common in all these essays – as they lack any other kind of sources concerning the readers – is the tendency to regard production as a form of reception. It is not only the selections of clippings or complaints which are read as readings; but actions traditionally regarded as production (illustration) or rewriting (editing) have also come under the umbrella of reception and indices to

reading strategies. The need for this inclusion is understandable. But one might be tempted to think that all one has to do is to pair this argument with Barthes, according to whom there is no writing but re-writing: “the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original,” to arrive at the conclusion that everything is, in fact, reading.³

This line of argument also surfaces in a non-historical context. Small talk is considered reception when Andrea Press and Camille Johnson-Yale analyse political conversation in a hair salon prompted by television shows in what might be called an ethnic, feminist, multimethod media reception study (“Political Talk and the Flow of Ambient Television: Women Watching *Oprah* in an African American Hair Salon”). Possibly because of the small number of cases considered, however, their conclusions, as are Hochman’s and Garvey’s, are somewhat weakened by speculations and self-contradictory elements in the sources.

One might also follow the opposite strategy to get around the problem of reading as something that might not be readily accessible. Just as it is possible to consider production reception, others appear to base their arguments on the idea that any kind of reception directly entails production, which has prompted mostly theoretical essays in this anthology. This train of thought seeks to *activate* the audience or the reader, turning it from a passive receptor into an active organizer, selector, and modifier of discourse.

Patrocínio Schweickart offers a development over Jürgen Habermas’s theory of communicative action by complementing production as a communicative action with reading as a communicative action. Calling attention to the active role of readers / listeners in any communication, Schweickart shows that the symmetry among speakers envisaged by Habermas in an ideal setting of the creation of validity is, in fact, dependent upon an inherent asymmetry between speaker and listener, which Schweickart interprets via Nel Noddings’s notion of care (“Understanding an Other: Reading as a Receptive Form of Communicative Action”). In a less theoretical account, however, the notion of the active audience immediately gets problematized. Rhiannon Bury, when considering discussions of a scene of dubious interpretation in one of the episodes of a TV series in her “Textual Poaching or Gamekeeping? A Comparative Study of Two *Six Feet Under* Internet Fan Forums,” sets out to determine whether fans engage in deliberate misreadings of the “text,” or are more interested in unearthing supposed authorial meaning. While she found that both intratextual and extratextual strategies were used to discover the “true” meaning, contributors to fan forums most often respected “the boundary between thoughtful speculation based on a close reading of the text and wild speculation based on personal whim” (303). In other words, actual readers were found less “active” than expected by many of the theoretical considerations.

It is in Jack Bratich's essay entitled "Activating the Multitude: Audience Powers and Cultural Studies" that the so-called *active audience moment* gets the most extensive consideration. Focusing on the audience from an ontological point of view, Bratich suggests that early audience research tried to come to terms with "audience powers" not via the binary active / passive, but via the active / reactive. This coming-to-terms was done, in Bratich's term, by *splitting* audience power into media and audience. This split is described using Antonio Negri's concepts constituent and constituted powers. "Constituent power is the immense pool of desire and action, the *res gestae* of subjective forces, that is the motor of history." Constituted power, on the other hand, "is the name given to forms and arrangements that constituent forces take" (35). Bratich argues that the audience has been wrongly constru(ct)ed as a merely reactive force by reversing the relationship between the two powers, and considering constituent power – the site of creative forces – wrongly, the result of constituted ones.

The re-reversal that would restore the "original" and desired state of affairs may remind one of Jacques Derrida's post-structuralist reversal of the order of speech and writing in order to point beyond logocentrism; just as the very notion of the constituent power manifesting itself in constituted ones is reminiscent of Derrida's *différance* "producing" differences. This *différance*, as it

"precedes" all semantic structures, cannot be talked about. And, it seems, neither can constituent power. For it is precisely at the point where Bratich considers the consequences of analysing the active audience moment, using Negri's terms, that his language becomes fragmented and performative as opposed to cohesive and argumentative. But the parallels with Derrida do not end here. Derrida, when discoursing on *différance*, refers to *protowriting*; Bratich, when scrutinizing the constituent power, to *prestructure*. Moreover, both *split* (as *rupture*) and *moment* (as *event*) are there around Derrida's notion of *decentering*, which might be conceived of as both an event in history and something that has not yet been attained.⁴ Both propositions, as we shall see, are true for Bratich's *active audience moment*.

For after showing that the encoding / decoding model of communication and the very concept of the audience are the results of the split and the reversing of constituent and constituted powers, Bratich goes on to consider why active audience studies met with such hostility in academia. According to Bratich, active audience study ended up in a *cul-de-sac* because it became politicized when, following Marxist tenets, audience power was equated with consumer power, and production and reception were analysed in terms of commodification and consumption, which re-generated the very same split witnessed above: "constituent powers could

operate only via the constituted power of the consumer" (43). But there is a way out of this cul-de-sac: by turning, finally, merely reactive audiences into genuinely active ones.

What is interesting to see here is that while many of the essays in the anthology call for, or operate within a framework that presupposes, in one sense or another, the activation of the reader, Jack Bratich's account, via the interpretation of early audience research and the analysis of the backlash against active audience studies, portrays this activation as a thing of the past. The end of his essay, however, appears to call for the very same activation: the transition from reactive to active. Just as decentering, or the death of the Author, audience activation might be conceived of as belonging either to ontology or history or methodology, or to all of these at the same time.

The problematization of the concept of the active audience, as well as its dubious place in history, has not prevented scholars from merging the two opposite strategies outlined above, and from suggesting that production and reception should, in fact, be viewed as unified, equated, and capable of being studied with the very same tools. Janet Staiger, when she analyses Robert Aldrich's film adaptation of Mickey Spillane's spy novel as a reading in her "*Kiss Me Deadly: Cold War Threats from Spillane to Aldrich, New York to Los Angeles, and the Mafia to the H-Bomb*," explicitly states not only that "one of the slogans for media studies has been to

think of the media consumer as a producer" (279), but that she has been "exploring the application of the findings of media reception studies back to what is often seen as the other side of the producer-text-consumer equation" (280). Reading is taken to be writing; as writing (film adaptation) is now seen as a form of reading. But Staiger does not stop here: she meticulously considers the consequences of such an equation, and realizes that reception study still has to account for the inherent dissimilarity between producer and consumer in access to power and distribution, a dissimilarity that very much echoes Schweickart's usage of the notion of care. Perhaps even more importantly, Staiger points out a now glaring self-contradiction that has arisen out of the history of literary criticism: that while special attention is granted to the reader's frame of mind, its now equal, the author, has been rendered mute by critics as an unreliable source on his or her own writing-reading.

Janice Radway's "What's the Matter with Reception Study? Some Thoughts on the Disciplinary Origins, Conceptual Constraints, and Persistent Viability of a Paradigm," which is more an account of personal difficulties encountered during her research that would read zines and friendship networks as culture consumption, stands as an unsettling question mark at the end of the anthology. Radway, too, sees the authority of the critic preserved even as the focus has moved from reading to reading reading,

which statement also serves as a fundamental criticism against structuralism and cognitive poetics for upholding the status quo.

With the blurring of the borderline between production and reception, which, based on Bratich's account, might be called a poststructuralist or postmodern turn, practically nothing appears to be excluded from the scrutinizing gaze of reception studies as represented in this collection. From small talk to film adaptations, from illustrations to social networks, activities which have traditionally been classified as production are now analysed as reception of other artworks, media, or culture. And with readers and audiences activated, reception is no longer seen as passive decoding, but as an active contribution to discourse, in short, as production. But reception study has also extended itself by incorporating neighbouring realms of other disciplines. In line with the merging of literary and cultural (media) studies, a cursory glance over the background of the contributors to the present volume reveals the truly interdisciplinary nature of the field, interacting with, among others, sociology, media and communication studies. This expansion has indeed shown a way around the problem of reading readings, but this has not been without a price. With a concept of reception that now covers everything, reception study appears less and less separable from literary, media, or cultural studies in general.

Előd Pál Csirmaz

Notes

1. See, for example, Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (1975) (London: Routledge, 1997), and *Cognitive Poetics in Practice*, eds. Joanna Gavins and Gerard Steen (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).
2. See Seán Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1998), p. 26.
3. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," trans. S. Heath, in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (London: Longman, 1988), 167–172, p. 170.
4. Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," trans. Alan Bass, in *Critical Theory Since 1965*, ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Tallahassee: Florida State UP), 83–94.

yBa Shocks

Kieran Cashell, *Aftershock: The Ethics of Contemporary Transgressive Art* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2009)

Aftershock is a novel, unique and slightly provoking attempt to canonize yBa art through a thorough theoretical analysis of the works of six artists: Richard Billingham, Marc Quinn, Marcus Harvey, The Chapman Brothers, Tracy Emin and Damien Hirst. Kieran Cashell operates with theories emerging from post-structuralism (Foucault, Bataille, Kristeva, Mulvey), which she productively amalgamates with recent theories of transgression (Jenks, Julius)¹ in order

to justify her argument that *transgressive art* can be used as a framework to investigate yBa art practises. The novelty of Cashell's work is that the complex theoretical approach to yBa art which she proposes is still not widespread among scholars in the field.

There are several obvious reasons why these artists were not welcomed into the academic world. One is that yBa art is rooted precisely in the works' resistance to high-brow, academic theory. Julian Stallabrass, a well-known, Courtauld-based art historian, claims in *High art Lite* that the artistic stance of the yBa in general is a resistance to theory in two respects. On the one hand, these artists consider theory as redundant, overcome, something that is not worthy of consideration, so they do not simply resist theory as such, but ignore it, because it has ceased to play an influential role.² On the other hand – and here Stallabrass' scepticism about the whole yBa phenomenon abounds – these are not the kind of art works one can spend hours with since no intellectual demand is addressed to the viewer.

This negative view is precisely what Cashell challenges in her book: each chapter devoted to one of the six yBa artists shows that their works' resistance to theory can be seriously reconsidered. In fact each chapter exerts great effort to present a thorough analysis of the works, as well as to re-frame them and place them under the umbrella term: *transgressive art*. In doing so, she counterbalances the media generated preju-

ices and misunderstandings concerning the yBa as well as the unfavourable judgements of previous critics.³

Another problem with yBa artists is that their fame was heavily based on a media celebrity culture, including scandals and the branded bad girl or bad boy image. The phenomenon thus was interpreted as the "marriage of avant-garde shock and commodity consumption, people cannot help but know about" (Stallabrass, 4). The early accounts were also more about their personal and love relationships, the stories of their emergence into fame promoted by Saatchi (a former advertising expert who is now an uneasy mix of collector and dealer), the sky-high prices of their art, and their scandalous exhibitions like *Sensation*.⁴ As Betterton puts it: "the paradoxical status of recent art in Britain was the consequence of a realignment between new art and the sphere of cultural consumption, a shift that made it possible for it to be represented as 'subversive' and yet rapidly assimilated to the art market."⁵ The yBa was interpreted as a commercial success, based on such prominent galleries as Gagosian or White Cube. These galleries put emphasis on yBa's "professional" art, and on their "neo-Formalist return to a white cube situation" which "reintroduced a stylish aspect to their work for metropolitan audiences confronted by its explicitly commodified aesthetics."⁶

The emergence of different art practices from the 1990s might also have some role in the uneasiness about the

yBa phenomenon. Artists belonging to the so called “relational,” “participatory,” “site-specific” or “interventionalist” art emerging around the yBa generation could better circulate and were also better received on the international scene (e.g. Mark Dion, Pierre Huyge, Thai Rirkit Tiravanija, Jeremy Deller or the somewhat younger Phil Collins).⁷ These artists and their projects were more in tune with the learned approaches of high-brow theoretical (e.g. post-structuralist, feminist and post-colonialist, etc.) thought and partly countered the tendency of the commodification of the international art market and art fair culture. Claire Bishop, for instance, who writes excessively about contemporary art, hardly mentions yBa artists and if she does, then mainly as a point of contrast between yBa and “participatory” or “relational” art.⁸

The problematic point of Cashell’s argument is that (similarly to Bishop’s or Stallabrass’), it narrows down its scope of yBa art mainly to the debated, media-sensation-based and Saatchi-promoted group of Goldsmith artists. However, it is also important to note that the term yBa is problematic in itself: firstly, these artists and artworks have no common set of characteristics. Secondly, several artists who are categorised as yBa were not in the original group of the (in)famous Goldsmith student-based *Freeze*-exhibition (Rachel Whiteread or Yinka Shonibare) or included in *Sensation*, which boosted yBa into world fame (Douglas Gordon), nor

they are part of the media buzz around yBa. Some yBa artists’ art practices are much more in tune with “relational” art; these include such highly valued artists as Mona Hatoum, Liam Gillick, Tacita Dean. Liam Gillick is especially interesting in this respect, since he is the paradigmatic example (with Rirkit Tiravanija) of Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetic*.⁹

The controversies around yBa art are manifested also in the fact that some artists were positioned into the – debated but – somewhat elitist framework of the Venice biennials, and even into the high-brow Documenta representations. Tracy Emin, Rachel Whiteread and Chris Ofili represented the English pavilion in Venice, Mona Hatoum’s *Homebound* was exhibited at Documenta 11. The success of yBa, grounded by Saatchi promotion, was also furthered by Nicholas Serota – the director of the Tate(s) and one of the most influential art world characters in the UK.¹⁰ The Tate(s) have a considerable collection of yBa artists; the works are well represented among the (also debated) Tate Turner Prize winners and are constantly on display in various thematic shows not only at the Tate(s), but at other major art institutions in London, as well. It seems that their place is becoming established despite the frequent furies.¹¹

Cashell’s reinterpretation is thus to be placed within an affirmative canonizing framework of an institutional background. She aims to reevaluate yBa art in particular by overcoming preliminary biases against transgressive art in gen-

eral. In her opinion the problem with receiving this type of art was that transgressive art's uncompromising mission to interrogate conservative views and to subvert conventional moral beliefs might have become excessive, so much so that it was conceived as an art which "violates the remit of enlightened culture to the extent that it is impossible to engage with transgressive practices as art" (1). In her argument however this is the case only because transgressive art genuinely expanded the horizon of artistic practises by seeking to "invalidate the principles of institutional aesthetics" (4).

To justify her argument Cashell connects *aftershock* to *transgressiveness* and seeks to find the basis for resistance in "post-Kantian institutional aesthetics" and Greenbergian formalist theories (6). In order to ground the opposition of transgressive aesthetics and institutional principles, she contrasts the Kantian disinterestedness of the aesthetic judgement of the beautiful (7) on the one hand, with the unavoidable involvement of the viewer in (the often repulsive and disquieting) transgressive art on the other, which by its form and theme thwarts the possibility of detached contemplation and provokes an irresistible moral answer in the viewer judging the work.¹² In her view this counters Kantian disinterestedness and post-Kantian formal aesthetics. Although Cashell's approach simplifies Kantian aesthetics through Greenbergian formalism, the thesis seems to be a

very demanding and productive one for reconsidering yBa art.

Here what is at stake is the impossibility of disengaging from the emotional and moral response the works provoke. Therefore, in her opinion, the effect is not aesthetic, but moral "which cannot be spirited away by creative ratiocination"; also because the works' formal aesthetic quality does not allow it – as was the case with Mappelthrope's or Serrano's photographs.¹³ Although she claims that transgressive art entails a "reflective moral response," which she identifies as "the ethical aftershock of the work" (12), in her view the emphasis falls on the moral-emotional engagement with the work, that is, on the impossibility to keep the (neutralizing) aesthetic distance. This is why yBa works pull towards a new type of experience which is primarily not aesthetic or which radically re-interprets once more what the so-often criticised Greenbergian aesthetics put forward.

Her claims are manifested clearly in each chapter devoted to an artist and furthered by diverse theories. The chapter on Tracy Emin Cashell operates with Foucault's interpretation of parrhesia (fearless speech).¹⁴ In Cashell's view Emin does risk herself through the fearless exposure of her traumas, as in the case with her *Everyone I have ever slept with 1963–1994* – at best mistakenly interpreted as a confrontation with female promiscuity (born in 1963, Emin constantly protests against this interpretation). Cashell claims that the work is a

complex network of metaphors and personal traumas: the empty interior of the protecting womblike, yet nomadic, temporary dwelling place and the 102 names sewn into it, which evoke often traumatic experiences from childhood on – ranging from the lost comfort of the womb shared with her twin brother through the comforting of a homeless to sexual abuse or to the traumatic loss of her own foetus – point towards the anxiety of abandonment and the feeling of emptiness. Moreover, in Cashell's view "Emin's entire aesthetic project developed out of an existentially significant confrontation with suicide," whereby Emin's art engages not only at shocking audiences but, in a very intricate and complex way, the very basic existentialist questions art can raise (134).

In the chapter on Richard Billingham, Cashell focuses primarily on the Britishness of yBa: she places Billingham's works into the socio-political and socio-cultural givens of the 1990s, marked by the emerging (international) influence of Britpop culture (with such brands as Oasis, Blur or Pulp equally coming from Goldsmith) as well as by John Major's absurd vision of a "classless society" or the later Blairian idea of the "opportunity society," as well as by the clash between the idea of "creative Britain" and the working-class experience. In Cashell's view Richard Billingham's *Ray a' Laugh* photograph series of his working-class family confronts the viewer with the hidden ideology of the controversial middle-class class-tourism approach to

working-class life (e. g. also that of Brit soap idealization). She claims that Billingham's work – due to the photographs' low quality – does not allow for a disinterested aesthetic stance; to the contrary: although his photos invite the viewer to adopt the attitude of the cultural tourist or the disengaged attitude of "orthodox aesthetics," they generate a "sense of shame." In her words, Billingham's work "intensifies moral and sensory queasiness by shocking and embarrassing us . . . for approaching his family and home with the repulsive attitude of the cultural tourist" (27). These photographs make the viewers "uncomfortably conscious of the fact, that . . . everybody hates a tourist" (26–27).¹⁵

The fact that social class or Britishness is also a critical point of Chris Townsend's approach to novel generation Brit art, *New Art from London*, or of the 2010 Saatchi exhibition of a newer generation Brit art entitled *Newspeak: The Complete Grammatology of Panic*, shows that Cashell's approach is not a unique one.¹⁶ The curator of *Newspeak*, Patricia Ellis, claims that it is an art which expresses the anxiety of the younger generations and reflects the "new social order of class homogenisation, consumerist gentrification and the phenomenon of instant success culture."¹⁷ The Orwellian newspeak in this interpretation becomes the recycling and mixing of phenomena: "[the artists] hand-make the virtual, cite history in fugue fervour and find the poetic and enduring in the cacophony of pop cul-

tural din" (Ellis, 4). On the other hand, in Townsend's account, new British art is much more about the questioning of Britishness from an outsider's point of view in a multicultural society, and the turning towards social questions of art instead of media buzz culture. Townsend's book takes a wider scope of the "creative Britain"-criticism approach and analyses several artworks which comment upon social questions as well as on the economic controversies of our everyday life. In both cases the turn towards newer generations and novel experiences become signposts of the shift in British art.¹⁸

The problematic or controversial chapters of Cashell's book are the ones on Harvey and The Chapman Brothers. The ethical implications of Harvey's *Myra*, or those of *Zygiotic Acceleration* or *Tragic Anatomies* by The Chapman Brothers, remain dubious even within the explanatory framework of the aftershock experience. She claims that in *Myra*'s case the victims' protests and the public outrage it raised are structural to the work's aftershock aesthetics, and highlights the "particular effectiveness of the painting" (84–85). Though the question remains whether the ethical problem which the portrait of serial killer Myra Hindly raises - because it is made of children's handprints and thereby evokes children's collaboration in the making - to use her phrase, is only "spirited away by creative ratiocination." The Chapman Brothers *Zygiotic Acceleration* and *Tragic Anatomies* are not

less problematic works: what also remains questionable is whether the oscillation between evoking sexual victimisation (pedophilia) – genital organs are grafted onto the faces of adolescent girl mannequins – and the shock of facing it explains the former by means of transgressiveness (88). The interesting part of the chapter from the aspect of theoretical reevaluation is the treatment of the *Disasters of War* (the Goya series), in which she points out that Goya is a reference point for yBa art practice of shock and transgression, as is the analysis of *Bad art for Bad People* series from the aspect of the "Bataille-Sadean heritage," which shows that, similarly to Sade's works, it is "part of a culturally significant vanguard of artistic expression" (99).

The last chapter deals with Damien Hirst, whose oeuvre is probably the most debated among the works of the yBa artists: he is not only attacked by animal rights groups for the immoral way he prepares dead insects and animal corpses to be presented as art, but also for the very commercial nature of his art projects - the effect of which is allegedly based on shock manipulation.¹⁹ Cashell, in her treatment of Hirst's works, does not resolve the ethical problem of the violation of animal rights; instead she places Hirst's works on an aesthetic plane: she approaches them in terms of Burke's sublime and concentrates on the feeling of terror evoked by art. Although she does not solely concentrate on Hirst's "Impossibility of Death in the

Mind of Someone Living,” in her view it is the most representative example for her interpretation of Burke’s sublime. In her opinion the shark is not simply a *memento mori*, but a sublime object which evokes the feeling of terror “that reaches down into the *id*” (179). In Cashell’s view, despite the dubious ethics of the work, it “should be considered paradigmatically sublime in the Burkean sense,” as the feeling of terror evoked is experienced in a safe environment which renders the possible harm innocuous.²⁰ To bring the concept of the sublime into the original claim of surpassing Greenbergian academic formal aesthetics through the beautiful is slightly confusing, but it well suits Cashell’s claim of the shock-aesthetics of transgressive art and provides a productive approach for Hirst’s reception.

Cashell’s book is a challenging attempt to reevaluate yBa art, and its theoretical framework might provoke and promote academic discussion; furthermore, it suggests that the yBa might take its place in the canon of art history, ironically enough when the Brit art scene has already moved on.

Tünde Varga

Notes

1. Anthony Julius, *Transgression: The Offences of Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002); Chris Jenks, *Transgression* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).
2. Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: The Fall and Rise of Young British Art* (London: Verso, 1999).
3. *Aftershock* came out simultaneously with *Lucky Kunst: The Rise and Fall of*

Young British Art – a complex, entertaining documentary-like account of the yBa-story from the perspective of insider friend, curator and critic (also the director of Hauser and Wirth, London) Gregory Muir, also with the intent of reevaluation. Cf. Gregory Muir, *Lucky Kunst: The Rise and Fall of Young British Art* (London: Aurum Press, 2009).

4. See, for instance, Rosie Millard, *The Tastemakers: U.K. Art Now* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001).
5. Rosemary Betterton, “Young British Art in the 1990s,” in D. Morley and K. Robins (ed.), *British Cultural Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 288.
6. James Gaywood, “yBa as Critique,” Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung (ed.), *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), p. 90.
7. The terminological categories are not clearcut. For attempts at categorisation see Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” *October* (2004), or Claire Doherty, “New Institutionalism and the Exhibition as Situation,” *Protection Reader* (Kunsthaus Graz, 2006).
8. Claire Bishop, “The Social Turn and its Discontents,” *Artforum* (February 2006).
9. Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Presses du réel, 2002).
10. See *Art Review Power 100 List*, 2009.
11. Every year there is a protest by a group of artists who call themselves Stuckists (referring to Emin’s opinion that their art is “stuck”) led by Billy Childish.
12. Cf. §6 or “The editor’s Preface,” to Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 7. On the correlation of the moral and the aesthetic, see Rodolph Gasché, “Interest in Disinterestedness,” *The Ideal of Form: Rethinking Kant’s Aesthetics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

13. See Lucy Lippard, "The Spirit and the Letter," *Art in America* 80 (1991) 238–45.

14. Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, ed. J. Pearson (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2001).

15. The lines are a reference to the Pulp song "Ordinary People."

16. Patricia Ellis, "The Complete Grammatology of Panic," *Newspeak: British Art Now from the Saatchi Gallery* (London: Booth-Clibborn, 2010); Chris Townsend, *New Art from London* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2006).

17. The catalogue text is designed to evoke Derridean *Grammatology* in its outline of crossed-out personal names, blurred with the Orwellian idea of the shrinking vocabulary of controlled society. Interestingly, the *Newspeak*-exhibition takes place in the ex-Soviet, ex-Leningrad St. Petersburg Hermitage (a symbolic place of art, power and cultural change) and only visits London in two parts.

18. One fascinating example is the Hungarian–British Tania Kovacs's questioning of the correlation between national borders and self-identity.

19. The European director of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals described Hirst as a "sadist" (*The Guardian*, 15 August 2003).

20. See Edmund Burke, Section VII. Of the Sublime. *A Philosophical Enquiry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 36, or Immanuel Kant, §28 of *The Critique of the Power of Judgement of Taste*, pp. 138–39.