

Editor's Notes

The current issue of the *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* opens with an *in memoriam* Tom Murphy, the globally acclaimed Irish playwright, written by HJEAS's long-time contributing editor, Csilla Bertha, one of the most discerning commentators on Murphy's dramatic art. Bertha's *in memoriam* is not only an affecting tribute, but also an inspiring overview, a highly informative mapping of the main and recurring concerns of Murphy's experimental, innovative, and multifaceted "theatre of the possible." The ensuing essays offer a rich tapestry of topics explored in a wide variety of media: intertextuality in film, identity performances enacted in fiction, the representation of nature, and reproduction in poetry, brought to a close by a thematic section exploring the aesthetic concept of the sublime in theory and practice.

Angelika Reichmann's essay "Stephen Daldry's *The Reader* in Chekhov's *Mirror*" approaches British director Stephen Daldry and scriptwriter David Hare's 2008 film adaptation of Bernard Schlink's novel, *Der Vorleser* (1995), "a major turn in Holocaust literature," from a refreshingly new perspective. Highlighting briefly the heated critical, mostly ethical, debates surrounding Schlink's novel, as well as how the film's critical reception has been ineluctably affected by them, Reichmann opens up a new interpretative pathway by treating the film as an independent visual artwork, considering Schlink's narrative only as one of its proliferating intertexts, and choosing to concentrate on another, Chekhov's short story, "The Lady with the Little Dog." Elegantly welding theory and close reading, Reichmann's analysis convincingly demonstrates how "The Lady with the Little Dog"—featuring in a sequence of "invented scenes," inspired by a passing reference to Chekhov in Schlink's novel—functions as a metanarrative in the film, a *mise en abyme* of the protagonists' ambiguous story and troubled self-reflection, which, in turn, reflects the complexities and dilemmas of representing the trauma of the Holocaust in art.

The issue of troubled self-reflection is also a key concern in Eszter Ureczky's "The Doctor's Anatomy: The Androgynous Performance of Gender and (Neo-)Victorian Sexual Politics in Patricia Duncker's *James Miranda Barry*." Ureczky's theoretically sophisticated essay offers a novel interpretative approach to Duncker's 1999 postmodern, neo-Victorian, feminist fictional biography of the legendary Victorian military surgeon, James Miranda Barry—rumored to be a hermaphrodite—by contextualizing it within the recent tendency in contemporary British fiction she identifies as "medico-historical metafiction." Applying a cultural studies perspective—

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creating an interplay between the medical conceptualization of hermaphroditism and the literary representational tradition of androgyny—the argument highlights how, by retelling a Victorian narrative that foregrounds gender identity as performance, Duncker’s text “addresses current, twenty-first century biopolitical questions about the cultural inscription of gender roles and bodily normality.”

Gender-inflected identity performances remain in the focus in Malou Kürpick’s “The Cultural and Intersectional Politics of Nomadism in Zadie Smith’s *Swing Time*,” even though the identity performances enacted in Smith’s most recent novel to date—portraying the experience of two female protagonists belonging to the second-generation British-Jamaican diaspora in London—highlight gender as inescapably intersecting with the identity categories of race and class. The originality of the essay lies not only in the fact that it offers one of the first discussions of *Swing Time*, published in 2016, but also in the way it makes use of Rosi Braidotti’s feminist theory of nomadism, which has already featured in previous criticism on the author. Exploring the complex relationship between intersectional difference and individual agency in Smith’s text through the double theoretical lens of Braidotti’s nomadic performative model of identity and Kimberlé Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality, Kürpick convincingly argues that the text “does not simply bear out Braidotti’s theory, but rather interrogates it, especially its insufficient attention to the diverse and disempowering effects resulting from certain intersections of what Braidotti calls ‘variables,’ or ‘axes of differentiation,’ such as class, race, gender, ethnicity, age, and disability.”

Shifting the focus from the medium of fiction to that of poetry, Boglárka Kiss’s essay, “Reproduction and the Female Body in Anne Sexton’s Poetry” continues the thematic focus on individual female experience in relation to social and cultural discourses, more particularly, discourses concerning the female body and its reproductive functions. Departing from the predominant interpretation of Sexton’s work as a paragon of “confessional poetry”—a narcissistic reflection of the author’s own life—Kiss’s elegantly-written essay is a major contribution to an emerging critical approach that highlights how Sexton’s poems “engage with the broader context of ideological and socio-political concerns of her age.” The essay demonstrates this by re-reading two poems, “In Celebration of My Uterus” and “The Abortion,” repeatedly cited as representative examples of the shockingly self-revelatory nature of Sexton’s work. Going against the habitual critical dissociation between Sexton’s formal expertise and her subject matter, Kiss’s close readings highlight how the formal and poetic devices are the very

means by which Sexton's poems interrogate, critique, and disrupt social and cultural discourses concerning the female body.

Wit Pietrzak's "Nature (as) Language in the Poetry of Seán Lysaght" offers another intriguing exploration in poetry. Noting at the start that the contemporary Irish poet, Seán Lysaght's work has been described as an instance of eco-poetry, Pietrzak cogently argues that Lysaght departs from Irish poets' tendency—from W. B. Yeats through Patrick Kavanagh, all the way to Seamus Heaney and Michael Longley—to offer culturally and politically-informed images of wildlife and landscape. Instead, he portrays the vast natural world as elusive of apprehension in language, or, rather, as "a vernacular beyond human speech." Pietrzak demonstrates this thesis by focusing on Lysaght's recurrent poetic evocations of birds against the backdrop of relevant poems by Heaney, Yeats, and Wordsworth, with which Lysaght's poems resonate, but from whose poetic visions they steer away. Lysaght's view of nature as its own embodied language, however, shows close affinities, as Pietrzak also points out, with the poetry of his contemporary, Moya Cannon.

Irish culture remains the partial focus in Wojciech Klepuszewski's "Drink and Alcohol Literature: Two Critical Perspectives," which highlights a curious ramification in critical studies pertaining to the representation of drink and drinking in literature. While critical studies and anthologies concentrating on the literature of the British Isles discuss drink and drinking as a literary theme and emphasize the convivial, jovial nature of its mode of representation, criticism focusing on the American literary scene tends to draw attention to the authors' alcohol-addiction, and how it affects—boosts or impedes—the creative process, with most studies approaching the question of alcoholic writers and their work from a medical vantage point, framing drinking alcohol as a pathology.

The thematic section, guest edited by Éva Antal, with the assistance of Zoltán Cora, allows a glimpse into an ongoing international scholarly polylogue concerning the mercurial aesthetic concept of the sublime. Arranged in a chronological order, the three essays presented here provide new perspectives on the genealogy of the concept from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century. Antal's lucid essay, "The Rhetoric of Sublime Astonishment in the Burkean and Blakean Readings of Milton," convincingly demonstrates how Edmund Burke's and William Blake's vastly different approaches show affinities with each other in that they are both heavily molded by their reading of the "sublime genius," John Milton. Antonella Braidà's engaging gender-sensitive explorations, "Nature, the Picturesque, and the Sublime in Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's Travel Narratives," highlight

how in Mary Shelley's travel narratives *in lieu* of the "egotistical sublime"—associated with Romantic male authors—the sublime reveals itself in its heterogeneity. Nataliya Novikova's "Sage, Hero, Ironist: Sublimity and Irony in Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* and *Lectures on Heroes*," in turn, maps how the prominent Victorian philosopher and historian's hero-worship, hinged on a sublime principle in his *Lectures*, is, if not entirely unhinged, at least destabilized in Carlyle's earlier, generically hybrid essay, *Sartor Resartus*, by irony.

The extended review section containing twelve reviews covers a wide variety of topics and approaches: two focus on the rapidly expanding and diversifying field of Modernism studies, two can be located within spatial studies, two highlight emerging, or relatively new fields, Afro-European studies and things studies, respectively, while two deal with the highly topical question of democracy and its pitfalls, in addition to its advantages. Further topics include multiculturalism in Canada and Australia, the dialectics between authorship and readership, neo-Victorian freakery, and the relationship between the concepts of the sublime and wonder, the last two closely resonating with concerns highlighted in the essay section.

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