

## REVIEW

*American literature in Studia Anglica Posnaniensia 1968-2008. A selection of articles.* Janusz Semrau (ed.). Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2009. Pp. 333.

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The present collection valuably constitutes something of a chronicle of modern academic studies in American literature and culture in Poland. In its nominal design a commemorative chronicle of *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, it opens with an article published in the first issue of the journal, and continues the survey over the forty years of the journal's continuous publication. The book is also a tribute to the longest serving member of the editorial board of *SAP* for literature Professor Andrzej Kopcewicz (1934-2007), whose formative influence can be traced in the writings of many Polish Americanists, including those in the book under review. Professor Kopcewicz authored two articles presented in the collection, supervised the publication of all (but three, which are tributes to him) Americanist publications included previously in *SAP*, and, most importantly, supported, encouraged and stimulated intellectually many of the authors as teacher, colleague and friend, or as reviewer and supervisor of MA and PhD projects.

The volume consists of a preface, a selection of 23 articles (plus one interview), and is appended with a comprehensive bibliography of some 80 articles, essays and reviews relating to American studies published in *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* between 1968 and 2008 (on literature, culture as well as linguistics). The collection features important representatives of modern American studies in Poland and illustrates several characteristic tendencies in Polish critical writings on the United States literature and culture. Firstly, there can be seen a marked preference for formal criticism of poetry, especially during the Communist period. Thus, the first two articles (Andrzej Kopcewicz's "Poe's philosophy of composition" (1968), and Marta Sienicka's "William Carlos Williams and some younger poets" (1972)) focus on formal and aesthetic analysis, using the categories of the objective correlative, structural analogies between image and text (or similar correspondences between poetry and other arts), the spatial form, organic poetics, the image of dance/dancer, intertextual references, and projective verse. This approach became something of an enduring paradigm, adopted and developed further by several Polish academics in subsequent decades in various ways, e.g. by focusing on rhetoric, providing a philosophical foundation (phenomenology), or assuming an ethical or ideological position.

The paradigm is exemplified by such later articles as Jerzy Kutnik's "John Cage: Towards a poetics of interpenetration and non-obstruction" (1992) or Magdalena Zapędowska's "Spatial relationships in Emily Dickinson's poetry" (1999). This paradigm is discernible even in overtly hermeneutic essays on poetry, e.g., Joanna Durczak's "David Wagoner's poetry of instruction" (1992) or Paulina Ambroży-Lis' "'Your thorns are the best part of you': The female poet and the question of non-conformity in the poetry of Marianne Moore and Gertrude Stein" (2008).

Secondly, *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* published several contributions by scholars and critics from Western Europe and the United States, which fact reflects the general editorial policy of rejecting crude Marxist discussions of American literature. Evidently, academics from abroad were attracted by the peculiar opportunity of publishing in a Communist (read: exotic) country. One could also speculate that the foreign submissions played an important role in establishing cultural exchange between intellectuals on the opposite sides of the formidable Iron Curtain. Marshall Walker's contribution ("Robert Penn Warren, Audubon, and imagination") is a particularly notable example, given the well-known cross-cultural activities of the author (*The literature of the United States of America, Scottish literature since 1707, Dear Sibelius*). George Sebouhian's "Apocalyptic vision and the American character" (1980) was originally a lecture delivered at the Uniwersytet Śląski in 1977; it is an accessible cultural synthesis addressed to Polish readers, as is Stephen H. Goldman's "American science fiction of the twentieth century: Metaphors for American attitudes toward the future" (1981).

Thirdly, in the area of fiction, the volume reflects a continuing interest in studies of the American mind (following in the footsteps of the ground-breaking insights of R. W. B. Lewis or Perry Miller), a flexible approach to cultural hierarchy, and preference for intertextual analyses. Andrzej Kopcewicz's "The machine in Henry Adams, Frank R. Stockton, and Thomas Pynchon. A paradigmatic reading" (1995) is probably the finest example included in the book, since it combines mythopoetic critical approach with intertextuality and an astonishing selection of primary texts. Similarly, George Sebouhian's essay treats cultural hierarchy with an equal disregard, combining popular movies and factual texts with canonical ones, in an attempt to delineate the national mind or character. This approach is also used in Agnieszka Rzepa's "Neither in nor out: A lover of witches. Androgyny in American popular culture. A case study" (1999), which fuses Michael Jackson with Anne Rice's fiction, and in Marek Wilczyński's "From Edwards to Slosson: Typology, nature, and the New England domestic gothic" (2001). In the study of the narrative genre, intertextuality is another important interest illustrated by the selection presented in the volume: Khalil Husni's "Ishmael's leviathanic vision: A study in whiteness" (1981) traces Herman Melville's imagination back to George Cuvier, Wolfgang

Goethe, and Isaac Newton, Janusz Semrau's "Mapping it out. Abish, Proust, Mrs. Dip, and the Pueblo Indians" (1992) searches for surprising similarities in the spatial form of very distant texts, and K. Narayana Chandran's "'In memory only ...': Allusions to T. S. Eliot's poetry in Donald Barthelme's 'Great days'" (1995) is a study of formative influence. Several articles employ intertextuality as a modality of cultural continuity, sometimes operating in hidden, mysterious channels, through half-forgotten texts, and resurfacing unexpectedly like a phantom. Finally, the volume illustrates an early and continuing interest in postmodern theory in Polish studies of American fiction (e.g. John Cage, Walter Abish). Teresa Bałazy's "External mediation in Flannery O'Connor's *Wise blood*" (1977) is a reading based on René Girard, an approach which seems remarkably modern for the present author, and Marek Wilczyński's "Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown': An attempt at deconstruction" (1988) is one of the earliest Polish deconstructive attempts, especially in the study of 19<sup>th</sup>-century American fiction. Steven Carter's "A note on Robert Frost and Ernest Hemingway" (1997) is another early example, this time of using chaos theory in literary criticism. The most recent articles are examples of continuity and development of these approaches: Joseph Kuhn's "'Cold Pastoral': Irony and the eclogue in the poetry of the Southern Fugitives" (2008) applies Paul de Man's tropology and Walter Benjamin's study of allegory and melancholia, whereas Jørgen Veisland's "The stain and the sign. Poetics in Philip Roth's *The human stain*" (2008) explores logical paradoxes of subjectivity through Nietzsche, Kristeva and Derrida.

As a chronicle of American studies in *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, the volume reflects the editors' abiding interest in literary scholarship, even though the journal is predominately devoted to linguistics. The historical slant notwithstanding, the volume contains many topical articles (most date from the 1990s and five are quite recent). It also reflects the variety and continuity of critical approaches in Polish criticism of American literature. As such, the book may be useful in teaching, as an anthology of different theoretical approaches and their often brilliant individual applications. One can only hope that the next, 50<sup>th</sup> jubilee of American literature in *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* will be commemorated with an even more impressive volume.