

## Literary Echoes from the Margins

[review of Milena Kaličanin and Soňa Šnircová, eds. *Representations of the Local in the Postmillennial Novel: New Voices from the Margins* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022)]

Milena Kaličanin and Soňa Šnircová, the editors of this interesting and highly inspiring collection of essays, open the discussion on postmillennial literature by pondering the characterization of the global novel and reflecting on the current state of scholarship concerning this form of literary production. Aware of the potential shortcomings of defining it as a specific literary genre, they instead point out the thematic relatedness of works of fiction usually subsumed under this category – the thematic concern with globalization in a wide range of its manifestations and consequences. While acknowledging the richness of the issues connected with globalization, they also maintain that it revitalizes “regionalism rooted in local identity.”<sup>1</sup> The dynamics between globalizing tendencies and regional and local concerns are the main focus of the volume. Each chapter provides a different take on these dynamics, both in its selection of literary works and in the theoretical perspective employed. It is to the editors’ credit that despite this variety, the volume retains a degree of thematic and theoretical coherence and represents a body of excellent scholarship, even if the rationale behind selecting such varied texts and approaches could have been briefly explained. While some chapters concentrate on the intersections of the local and the global, others expound on the potential of regionally grounded texts to address a global audience.

Centered on Emma Donoghue’s novel *Landing* (2007), the first chapter by Michaela Weiss revolves around the question of the sustainability (or lack thereof) of a nurturing relationship between lovers from diverse national, ethnic, and social backgrounds, which can develop primarily thanks to contemporary global communications technologies. Donoghue’s contemporary romance, as Weiss persuasively illustrates, is built on a complex set of opposites, with one protagonist deeply rooted in a small-town, slow-paced rural community, while the other enjoys the fast-paced world of global travel and metropolitan entertainment. The protagonists negotiate the tensions between placement and dislocation, cityscape and countryside, nature and culture. As Weiss concludes, while the protagonists could not be united in nature (as was often the case in earlier romances focusing on lovers from diverse backgrounds), the “connecting link turned out to be culture,” especially “the socially accepting multicultural urban environment.”<sup>2</sup> Weiss’s analysis thus documents how the romance formula can address complex issues of the globalized world and ensuing lifestyles.

The following chapter by Silvia Rosivalová Baučeková brings another brilliant literary analysis, addressing the tension between the global and the local by focusing on cuisines and private and public places of food consumption in Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* (2003), John Lanchester’s *Capital* (2012) and Zadie Smith’s *NW* (2012). According to Rosivalová Baučeková, although “migrants are

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1 Milena Kaličanin and Soňa Šnircová, eds., *Representations of the Local in the Postmillennial Novel: New Voices from the Margins* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022), 2.

2 Michaela Weiss, “Local Geographies, (Dis)Placement, and Global e-Romance in Emma Donoghue’s *Landing*,” in *Representations of the Local in the Postmillennial Novel: New Voices from the Margins*, ed. by Milena Kaličanin and Soňa Šnircová (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022), 22.

often constructed as global people”<sup>3</sup> associated with deterritorialization and displacement, they also need to create new localities. She argues that foodscapes can be highly instrumental in the process. Foodscapes “play a crucial role in identity construction and in the creation of a sense of locality,”<sup>4</sup> but their role is more ambiguous as the catering industry is also a frequent employer of immigrants. Rosivalová Baučeková shows how the selected novels address food (and its production and consumption) as intertwined with ethnicities, memory, placement and placelessness, survival strategies, complying with or subverting gender expectations, etc. The novels thus attest not only to the significance of migration in contemporary Britain but also to the fact that food and food spaces represent a powerful means of creating a sense of belonging.

After a somewhat broad introduction concerning the history of the British regional novel, the third chapter by Elena Tuzlaeva centers on Julia Darling’s book *The Taxi Driver’s Daughter* (2003). Tuzlaeva analyzes the novel’s multilayered depiction of Newcastle’s landscape, including its geography, history, class stratification, social climate, and local dialects, highlighting its complex treatment of regional identity.

Focusing on three novels by Cormac McCarthy, Zuzana Buráková brings to the foreground the theme of nomadism in the following chapter. Claiming that McCormac’s fiction represents an ideal source for the literary representation of the tensions between the global and the local, she then characterizes his depiction of the figure of the nomad. Further, she distinguishes between pastoral nomadism, which is usually connected to “freedom of movement and travel,” and forced nomadism, related to collective homelessness, the post-work world, and the (dystopian) world without a center.<sup>5</sup> Her insightful and theoretically well-grounded analysis, employing, among others, Nicolas Bourriaud’s notion of altermodernism, sheds light on McCormac’s innovative literary approach to nomadism, concluding that his novels “disrupt the topos of the road as a heroic and linear quest and dismantle the codes of national identities in a globalized world.”<sup>6</sup>

The fifth chapter by Vladislava Gordić Petković is dedicated to the contemporary Serbian novel, providing an insightful comparison of motifs, themes and styles as well as placing the selected works within a broader literary context. For example, she makes interesting parallels between the dystopian worlds of alternate history in Mirjana Novaković’s undeservedly overlooked novel *Johann’s 501* (2005) and Philip K. Dick’s *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), to which the former seems to pay tribute,<sup>7</sup> or between Alexander Illić’s novel *PR* (2014) and Brett Easton Ellis’s *Less Than Zero* (1985), which share the theme of the emptiness and repetitiveness of a life spent in a cubicle of a corporate and a “deadpan narrative voice.”<sup>8</sup> She also focuses on issues of immigration,

3 Silvia Rosivalová Baučeková, “On the Margins of the Centre: Immigrant Foodscapes in Three Novels of London,” in *Representations of the Local in the Postmillennial Novel: New Voices from the Margins*, ed. by Milena Kaličanin and Soňa Šnircová (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022), 24.

4 Rosivalová Baučeková, “On the Margins of the Centre,” 25.

5 Buráková, “Cormac McCarthy’s Nomads,” 74.

6 Buráková, “Cormac McCarthy’s Nomads,” 79.

7 Vladislava Gordić Petković, “Linguistic Invention and Political Satire in the Contemporary Serbian Novel: A Comparative Perspective,” in *Representations of the Local in the Postmillennial Novel: New Voices from the Margins*, ed. by Milena Kaličanin and Soňa Šnircová (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022), 86.

8 Petković, “Linguistic Invention,” 95.

diaspora, cyberspace, and digital communications, evoking Marc Augé's non-place, a concept that also echoes in the volume's first chapter.<sup>9</sup>

In the following chapter, diaspora becomes the central focus as Igor Maver analyzes the diasporic novels of Jewish-Hungarian, naturalized Australian writer Andrew Riemer. Maver shows how the writer's "schizoid identity"<sup>10</sup> of suppressed Central European past and adopted Australian identity informs Riemer's autobiographical writing, as well as his fiction. He argues that the themes and concerns of diasporic literature make it a highly significant form of writing in today's global world.

In the seventh chapter, Karzan Aziz Mahmood focuses on the tension between the center and margins by analyzing Ahmed Saadawi's novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013). To him, Saadawi's novel foregrounds the marginalized voices of Iraqis in the aftermath of the Iraq War. Mahmood further argues that Saadawi's appropriation de-centers and deterritorializes Mary Shelley's original text by moving its setting away from the European center to Bagdad, a capital "which has long been considered a marginal part of the world."<sup>11</sup>

The collection closes with a chapter written by Rudolf Sárdi discussing the fiction of Witi Ihimaera, the first Maori writer to receive international acclaim. Sárdi maintains that Ihimaera has been instrumental in raising awareness about Maori culture beyond New Zealand, which he achieved by employing European literary devices<sup>12</sup> and, even more so, by making the local concerns resonate globally, i.e., by presenting them as universally significant. In the selected novel, those are mainly heteronormativity, the non/acceptance of sexual minorities within traditionalist cultures, and the general question of identity and self-identification, which Sárdi persuasively analyzes.

The volume can fully be recommended to both scholars and graduate students as a set of expertly written essays contributing to the growing scholarship on contemporary fiction in the context of globalization.

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9 Weiss, "Local Geographies," 17.

10 Igor Maver, "Andrew Riemer's Diasporic Novels between Central Europe and Australia," in *Representations of the Local in the Postmillennial Novel: New Voices from the Margins*, ed. by Milena Kaličanin and Soňa Šnircová (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022), 99.

11 Karzan Aziz Mahmood, "Authentic Marginal Voices of Iraq: Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* Compared with Shelley's *Frankenstein*," in *Representations of the Local in the Postmillennial Novel: New Voices from the Margins*, ed. by Milena Kaličanin and Soňa Šnircová (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022), 86.

12 Rudolf Sárdi, "Witi Ihimaera's 'Brave New World': Visibility and Recognition in The Uncle's Story," in *Representations of the Local in the Postmillennial Novel: New Voices from the Margins*, ed. by Milena Kaličanin and Soňa Šnircová (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022), 135.