

## TAMÁS JUHÁSZ

**Kornélia HORVÁTH – Judit MUDRICZKI – Sarolta OSZTROLUCZKY (eds.):**  
*Diversity in Narration and Writing: The Novel*, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne,  
 Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022, 305 pp.

This recent collection of nineteen essays on the novel is best approached with a caveat in mind. Highlighting the idea of diversity, the title suggests, somewhat deceptively, that diverse forms (or other components) of the novel will be the main subject matter of the book. This, however, is not the case. While two chapters focus on fiction that must be a discovery (or rediscovery) for most readers in that one of them is modelled upon recent criminal cases (representing therefore the captivity novel subgenre, as discussed by Noémi Albert's "Like People in a Book") and the other was usually sidelined in critical approaches to its author's oeuvre (such as Sándor Márai's *The Blood of San Gennaro*, as discussed by Zoltán Kulcsár-Szabó in "Wonders of Telling – Telling Wonders"), most of the other essays cover famous, or at least quite well-known novels ranging from *Ulysses* through *The Grass is Singing* to Géza Ottlik's *School at the Frontier*. There seems to be no attempt to address the contemporary diversity of types of fiction, the myriad ways in which practicing novelists (even authors of so-called fan fiction) can approach this famously elastic literary form. In addition, the list of contributors is in a minor conflict with the idea of diversity. Except for a Canadian and a Russian author, everybody else is Hungarian.

Let it be added quickly that this fact does not signal any kind of uniformity in the contributors' scholarly endeavours. In fact, the heavily theoretical orientation of the individual chapters shows a delightful variety, including, but definitely not limited to, engagements with space studies (as in Yuliia Terentieva's commentary on David Lodge), the closely related concept of *flânerie* (as in Mihály Benda's reflections on the representation of Paris in modern Hungarian literature), narratology (as in Tibor Gintli's chapter on speed in storytelling, Gábor Kovács's on narrative parallelism and László Bengi's on descriptive strategies), intertextuality (as in Angelika Reichmann's essay on J. M. Coetzee), post-colonialism (as in Nóra Séllei's treatise on Doris Lessing), Northrop Frye's myth criticism (as in Sára Tóth's approach to Imre Kertész), psychoanalysis (as in János Szávai's discussion of dreams in modern fiction), Bakhtinian heteroglossia (as in András Kappanyos' study on Joyce), or the contemporary cult of the fantasy genre (as in Nikolett Sipos' reflections on *A Game of Thrones*). Diversity is then an appropriate word in the title, but its main reference (as the "Introduction" itself is compelled to explain) is the impressively wide range of interpretive methods that the authors apply rather than the examined corpus itself or the background of the contributors.

The book is relatively long, yet, given its scope and structure, I wish it was somewhat longer. Judit Mudriczki's impressive Introduction ("Diversity in Academic Discourses

on Novel Studies and Narrative Theory in and beyond Central Europe”) ushers in the main sections and individual chapters in a precise, conscientious manner, yet it shies away from the daunting task of addressing the key issues (as introductions to edited volumes generally do, or at least try to do) whose recurring presence justifies the presentation of all materials in one single volume. Also, a few chapters do not unpack all the academic potentials that they clearly carry. For example, Kornélia Horváth’s “Three Central European Writers on the Novel: Milan Kundera, Béla Hamvas, Géza Ottlik” offers an illuminating synopsis of the three writers’ views and beliefs about the novel as a genre, however, the unfolding historical and theoretical arguments are supported by the Central European context only to a limited degree. True, the chapter is about theory, but the emphatic choice of authors from the same cultural-geographical region calls for some clarification on how regionally-linguistically determined fiction and narrative theory in general are interrelated – this question remains throughout the volume. Yet another beneficial addition would have been the creation of an introductory section to open the three larger units, explaining key concepts, and contexts for, each (“Intermediality and Narrative Theory,” “Narrative Discourses in Classic and Contemporary English Fiction,” “Narrative Discourses and the Hungarian Legacy of Fiction”). Finally, the Index should be longer. For a serious academic work of three hundred pages and nineteen chapters, a mere one and a half pages of indexed names are unlikely to be adequate. And indeed, this index is of limited help for the reader. For example, it does not list Tom Wolfe (a primary subject matter in Sarolta Osztrólczyk’s “The Thicket of Memory”), Albert Camus (a key author in Dorottya Szávai’s “Figures of Absence”), Krisztina Tóth (a contemporary writer discussed in Edit Zsadányi’s “Hungarian Voices of the Subaltern”) or even Gustave Flaubert (a central figure in Mieke Bal’s brilliant opening chapter “From ‘Madame Bovary c’est moi’ to ‘Emma is Us’”).

And, at the same time, a concluding caveat for the reader could be not to make too much of the above complaints. The individual essays in the volume are very-well written, perceptive engagements with the critical problems that they identify at the outset. As a result, the collection carries significant academic value, and whoever is interested in the novel as a genre will find in it complex critical insights, fresh historical perspectives and possible starters for new conversations about the practice and theory of prose fiction. In addition, the (very minor) imperfections that the reviewer can spot in the book are in fact curiously reproducing those qualities of unfinishedness or provisionality that many critics and novelists (from Henry James through J. M. Coetzee to Ishmael Reed) associate with the genre (in fact, Kornélia Horváth’s already noted chapter on Géza Ottlik intriguingly details Ottlik’s notion of the novel as something fluid, something always “becoming”, 48). With its multiplicity of critical voices and the dignified editorial struggle to channel such heterogeneous materials into coherent units, *Diversity in Narration and Writing: The Novel* shows respect for, and a profound understanding of, its literary subject matter.