

## BOOK REVIEW

BEDNARCZYK, Adam, KUBAREK Magdalena, SZATKOWSKI Maciej (eds.). *Borders and Beyond: Orient-Occident Crossings in Literature*. Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun, Vernon Press, 2018. p. 262, ISBN: 978-1-62273-383-5

In contemporary society, although a Eurocentric view is rather outdated borders between cultures are being created again by the extremist rhetoric used by nationalists and fundamentalist religious opinion in many different countries in the world. The need to communicate seems therefore to be essential. This is the reason why the subject of this monograph was chosen. The publication presents cross-cultural communication in literature, including Western influences on Oriental literature, and Oriental inspiration in the works of Western authors. The common factor of the editors that connects texts representing diverse and distant cultures is created by an assumption regarding migration and mutual permeation of elements within the field of literary tradition perceived as Western and Oriental. There has been frequent discussion about the use of the terms Orient and Occidental in scholarly studies in recent years, concerning to what extent these words carry colonialist or post colonialist connotations and whether it is better to avoid them. The editors in their preface acknowledge these problems of definition but on the other hand, given that the range of countries and territories is so broad, they resolved to retain these terms. Among the collected articles, there are analyses and interpretations some of which are characterised by an interdisciplinary approach. Some of the studies included refer to colonialism and post colonialism, which are a topic difficult to avoid in any project devoted to Oriental studies but they do not constitute a dominant discourse.

The publication consists of five parts. The **first part**, *Limitations and Borderlands in Oriental Poetry* (46), consists of three chapters. The first chapter entitled Crossing Borders in the Opposite Direction. An Influence of Western Elements in Contemporary Chinese Poetry by Daniela Zhang Cziráková analyses Western elements in the poetry of four Chinese poets, Chen Dongdong, Song Lin, Tang Xiaodu and Zhao Si, who offer a wide-range of cross-cultural connections: some of them lived in Europe for several years, some of them take their inspiration from travelling, or they link elements of different cultural influences in their poetry in a very new and creative way. “Some of their poems bear stronger features of the West, visible in the use of Western localities, such as the *Powązki Cemetery* in Poland in the poem *Rose Garden* by Zhao Si, the *Boulogne Forest* in the poem *In the Boulogne Forest* by Song Lin.” (37). The combining of Western and Eastern influences is a typical feature of contemporary Chinese poetry.

Boundaries mentioned here are not restricted to literature alone; they include social and ethical aspects. In **the second part**, *Literary Boundaries — Ethical Limitations: Classical Literatures of the Orient*, the borderlines of morality are questioned in the

anthology of poetry from pre-Islamic times called the Mu'allaqa, in the study by Zane Šteinmane. The author looks closely at the poems included in the anthology, most probably collected at about the 8th century by the collector Ḥammād ar-Rāwī, which are considered to be the most highly praised poems of the time. The Ethos and Ethics of the Mu'allaqa is explored here.

In *Poetic Souvenirs: The Meaning of Ise Monogatari in Sōkyū's Miyako no Tsuto* by Adam Bednarczyk the author presents ancient Japanese travel literature, focusing on *Miyako no Tsuto* (Souvenir for the Capital, c. 1352) written by the priest Sōkyū, especially the most important one, Ise Monogatari (Tales of Ise). Unlike most scholars who treat the text mainly as travel writing, this study concentrates on the poems found in the text. "Miyako no Tsuto is one of the first poetic diaries that describe the Michinoku (Ōshū) province, contemporary the Tōhoku region. Numerous references and allusions to various works from ancient and medieval Japanese but also to Chinese literature show that Sōkyū was an educated and skilful poet." (80) The author reminds us that Sōkyū believed that poetry could help people to attain a state of enlightenment, which was why he composed the poems in many famous places during his travels. Borders and boundaries could be understood in many different ways. **The third part** *Orient-Occident Historical and Social Borders in Literature* questions the borders in various ways. A study by Magdalena Kubarek *Between Literature and Ideology. Ad-da'wa Al-Islāmiyya in the novels by Naḡīb Al-Kaylānī* discusses ad-da'wa, which is in the Arab world the equivalent of the term "propaganda" relating to the spread of the faith, expounding the truth and setting a good example. It is defined as: "invitation, prayer, persuasion, mission" (100) in Arabic dictionaries, in the works of Naḡīb al-Kaylānī, who is considered the father or pioneer of the Islamic novel, and the role of literature in the service of ideology.

Boundaries between fiction and historical reality are the topic of the study *The Boundaries of Historical Accuracy: Contemporary Re-reading of Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children* by Olivier Harenda. The analysis includes Rushdie's description of the Partition of India in the novel, comparing *Midnight's Children* to the Lost Generation, and it examines Rushdie's accusations against India through the historical figure of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. "In contrast to novels about the Partition of India, Salman Rushdie does not explore the motifs of fighting for one's rights, trauma, and violence, but he centres his focus on the figure of an individual who metaphorically stands for India." (p. 115) The aim of the analysis is to show that a contemporary re-reading of *Midnight's Children* differs from its initial reception in India and in the Western world.

The fourth part *Crossing Borders in Travel: Journey in Oriental Literature and Inspired by Orient* presents very typical examples of crossing borders. Tomasz Ewertowski in 'The Great Wall of China in Polish and Serbian Travel Writing (from the 18th until the Middle of the 20th Century)' presents different description of the Great Wall from the point of view of the Serbian travellers Sava Vladislavić, who was very probably the first Serbian traveller who visited China, and Milan Jovanović, who represented liberal and humanistic ideas, and criticised European imperialism. The author then turns his attention to the Polish traveller Przeclaw Smolik, who came to China as a refugee after the October Revolution in Russia. A different description of

the Great Wall was written by the well-known Polish architect Stefan Bryła who visited a different section of the Great Wall near Beijing. Mentions of the Great Wall are found in the works of Milutin Velimirović, Paweł Sapieha, Roman Fajans, Miodrag Rajčević, but also in the writings of the poet and editor Aleksander Janta-Polczyński.

A very different image of the Orient can be found in a study by Małgorzata Sokółowicz *Crossing the Borders of Decency. Gustave Flaubert, Maxime Du Camp and their Oriental Journey*. In her article the author introduces the common image of the Middle East, which used to be a perfect destination for travellers seeking to satisfy their erotic fantasies. "For a long time, it has been believed that the Orient is synonymous with eroticism and love passion. Sexually, women are treated in the same way as men and have the same access to pleasure." (pp. 185–186). Gustave Flaubert's travel text in French was different from the writings of other travellers. He claimed openly that the function of the Oriental world was to satisfy the sensual needs of a European traveller. Flaubert was fascinated by Egypt and he wrote about his erotic experiences in brothels and baths in a way which was quite unusual during that period in Europe. One of his boldest texts published posthumously and censored until 1910, described homoerotic sex between two young men. However, his boldness is close to caricature.

**The fifth part** entitled *Multidimensionality of Cultural, Social and Emotional Borders in Oriental Literature* presents very specific personal universes. In the article by Milica Obrenović *The World of Haruki Murakami – a Hidden World of Ourselves* the author takes a closer look at the iconic Japanese writer Haruki Murakami, analysing his books, in which the heroes, strong personalities outside the mainstream, suffer from alienation, living their personal lives in their own universes. "In that kind of world there live Murakami's characters, in the modern, depersonalised society in which they lose themselves. People stand next to each other, in the crowd, but they do not seem to form a whole. They do not manage to make contact. We could say that they are lonely individuals in the crowd." (204) However, love, as the most important motif, exists very strongly in Murakami's novels. Readers of Murakami's novels, coming from different culture and living in different surroundings, do not feel the barrier while looking at his characters. No matter whether they are male or female, it is very easy to identify with them. The author concentrates her attention mostly on how Murakami's characters are built, their feelings and universal values. She ignores the existence of the imaginary worlds and the boundaries between reality and the unreal cities or worlds that often appear in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, *Sputnik Sweetheart*, and other novels. Instead of that, the author focuses on Murakami's presentation of the position of an individual in a society, the alienation of the individual, and his approach to beauty.

In this collection of articles we find analyses and interpretations many of which are characterised by an interdisciplinary approach, of both a diachronic and synchronic character. *Borders and Beyond: Orient-Occident Crossings in Literature* presents a unique opportunity to introduce us to the multiple understanding of crossing borders in literature, not only the borders between East and West, but also individual, moral, social and cultural borders, which is a more and more urgent task in a world changing because of migration.

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