

Katherine Cockin (ed.) (2012) *The Literary North*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 288pp., £56.00 (hardback), ISBN 9780230367401.

If judged by their representations in literature, there has been, and continues to be, something troubling about northern English cities. In many literary accounts throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, cities in the North of England become places where social problems are spatially demarcated and ripe for expert intervention. If this has been the representational fate of the northern English city, Katharine Cockin's edited collection offers examples which confirm, critique and complicate such canonical renderings of northern urbanism. *The Literary North* includes chapters on poetry, drama and discussion of significant non-fiction sources, with an occasional focus on rural settings. The majority of contributions, however, concentrate on representations of urban life in novels, with analyses of important portraits of Hull, Leeds, Nottingham, towns in the Potteries, Salford, Teesside and Tyneside. The city of Manchester does not overwhelm the collection but does figure prominently, as may be expected, given its status as 'a synecdoche for industrialization' since the nineteenth century (1) and for which it has attracted moral censure for the attendant social ills. Through its fictional portrayals, the industrial city of Manchester became not only a site of social troubles but a troubling spatial form in itself. This is problematic, Josephine Guy argues in her contribution, because the variegated economy and progressive political and cultural movements of Victorian Manchester (and northern cities more generally) have become obscured because of the efficacy of social problem novels by writers such as Elizabeth Gaskell. Plural political histories of urban life have been muted through the persistence of Victorian tropes within literary portraits throughout the twentieth century.

Against this, Claire Warden's chapter on Ewan McColl's play, *Landscape with Chimneys* (1949), depicts the ambivalences the dramatist writes into his account of Salford and his recognition that, notwithstanding their problems, cities might also be the spatial settings for purposeful and progressive articulations of working class politics. 'Which Side Are You On?' is the song of class unity which comes at the play's finale, serving to identify Salford, and the northern city more generally, as a site of oppositional culture. What it stands in opposition to signals one of the animating themes throughout the collection: the relationship of the North to the South of England. As sympathetically drawn as Gaskell's portrait of Manchester was, for Guy it served to reassure a Southern readership of the failure of Manchester's middle classes to harness the factory system equitably rather than point to the systemic contradictions of industrial capitalism per se. There is a line of influence from Gaskell's social problem novels to the social realist documentary forms of the 1930s, especially George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). Orwell's text comes at the highpoint of an ethnographic moment and a strain of class tourism that Cockin identifies as colouring much writing about the North ever since. And the reproduction of cultural stereotypes was not just the consequence of Southern authors using northern English cities as diagnostic tools to explore wider social issues. Nick Bentley's chapter on the work of significant Northern writers in the late 1950s identifies nostalgic tendencies entrenching clichés of community life perceived to be under threat

from the emergent youth culture in these cities, most obviously in Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957).

The situation of the North as a place wherein loss is keenly experienced is a common theme for other authors. For example, Jo Gill's chapter offers a rich analysis of how Tony Harrison's choice of lyric conventions in *Continuous* (1981) works in a tensed way to act 'as an elegy not just for the self, the family and home but for a changing North' (159). In her chapter on landscapes in children's novels, Tess Cosslett argues that the North acts as a liminal geography, situating and shaping the development of characters into their adulthood. There are similar arguments about the role of landscape in other chapters about children's literature: Robert Lee's discusses writers, such as David Almond, who situate their stories amongst communities undergoing processes of cultural change; whilst Nolan Dalrymple analyses Robert Westall's work, in which the North-East of England and its children 'are always located at a point of tension between the traditions of the past and the frightening uncertainties of the future' (187). In Cosslett's reading, the North can be a place of danger in children's literature; but precisely so in order to serve a pedagogic function, revealing and then tempering the risks associated with the passage from one stage of the life-course into the next.

The North is a particular kind of psycho-geography, with Cosslett suggesting that the northern landscape might become a kind of 'wise parent or guide, sending support and help, but not interfering' (211). This is an intriguing idea, prompting a consideration of the role of the Northern Pennines in W.H. Auden's writing. Tony Sharpe's astute contribution identifies these mountains as 'parabolic landscapes' (110) and moral bases for Auden's work. This does not connote the easy moralizing short-hand that, for example, Manchester became through Victorian literature; rather, it provides Auden with a morally ambiguous landscape which 'was capable of changing in respect to the imaginative, emotional and even theological uses he made of it' (109). The collection concludes with Cockin's readings of contemporary northern fiction which, alongside Lynne Pearce's review of recent literary portrayals of Moss Side, plays with the realist conventions instrumental to monochromatic space-myths of the northern cities as sites purely of social problems. Instead literary approaches adopting the tactics and techniques of magic realism and cyberpunk open up northern landscapes to possible re-appropriation and re-enchantment.

As Neal Alexander's review of this collection suggests (2013), a wider geographical span would have brought a fuller understanding of northernness. The collection has its roots in a 2006 conference at the University of Hull, and so the school of writers (such as Paul Farley, Michael Symmons Roberts and Jean Sprackland) addressing northern settings in recent landscape writing does not figure here. Nonetheless, this collection gathers a range of excellent contributions that, in different ways, offer a re-balancing of our default recall of northern writing. Saliently, then, there is a greater emphasis on Arnold Bennett's Potteries (through chapters by Ann Heilmann and Ruth Robbins) than Charles Dickens's Coketown; a focus on representations of the North through voices close to the locality (whether those reviewed by Jan Hewitt in her history of fiction in the late Victorian press in the North East, or the treatments of Hull by Philip Larkin, Douglas Dunn and Peter Didsbury in Sean O'Brien's chapter); and a welcome consideration of children's literature in

three chapters. As a result, *The Literary North* will act as a benchmark by which to judge future collections on the pluralities of northernness and their literary geographies.

Work Cited

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Neal Alexander and James Moran (eds) (2013) *Regional Modernisms*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 248pp., £70.00 (hardback), ISBN 9780748669301.

'Where did Modernism happen?' ask Neal Alexander and James Moran in their introduction to this collection, and the answer, revealed across ten illuminating chapters, is unexpectedly wide-ranging. This study of modernist writing in the Britain and Ireland brings together many well-known figures, as well as some unfamiliar names, whilst reassessing how 'modernism' is defined in terms, firstly, of place, but also of identity, politics, ideology, aesthetics, technique and time period. As Alexander and Moran explain, opening up the metropolitan borders of modernism also means stretching the sometimes strict and arbitrary chronological boundaries that place modernism between the turn of the twentieth century and the Second World War.

Clear definition of the potentially politicised terminology associated with 'region' is crucial to this even-handed survey of work that occurred in, originated from or addressed, locales lying outside the supposed centres of literary production. Terms like 'region', 'regionalism', 'transnational' and 'glocalisation' (the latter two appropriated from the language of global finance, but appearing increasingly in literary studies) are adopted and interrogated over the course of the book; thus this is a study that not only uses 'region' to investigate 'modernism', but uses modernism as a unifying theme with which to explore the notion of the region.

Several of the essays develop new critical models for thinking about regional modernisms. David James writes about Storm Jameson and Sylvia Townsend Warner, beginning with Jameson's account of taking a commercial flight: an 'aerial perspective' over Europe which contrasts with the localised and detailed focus elsewhere in her work. James's chapter, 'Capturing the Scale of Fiction at Mid-Century', thus constructs a filmic model, indebted to other new technologies, for understanding how post-1939 modernist writers developed forms to deal with the global-local concerns associated with the growing internationalism of a war-damaged world. His essay is followed by Dominic Head's chapter on Leo Walmsley, which argues, firstly, for a controlled admission of writers into the modernist canon. Head suggests that if some recourse to the aesthetic and intellectual standards of modernism is not made, the reputation of good rural regional writing could be jeopardised by the literary shortcomings of some of its more aesthetically and politically