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*Of what is past,
or passing, or to come*

Travelling in Time and Space
in Literature in English

Studies in Literature in English

Edited by Liliana Sikorska

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Editorial

Studies in Literature in English (SLIE) is a series published by Peter Lang Verlag which focuses on literature in English. "Literature in English" is a relatively new term coined recently to include both English literature in the traditional sense of the word and all the newly emerging literatures written and published in English whose authors may represent various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. New books and journals devoted specifically to this area and other related areas of research have begun to appear and regular annual or bi-annual conferences have also been organized. This series, as well as our yearly *Literature in English Symposium* (LIES) respond to this growing interest, the latter is organized by the Department of English Literature and Literary Linguistics, at the School of English, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland. Each year the symposium hosts an eminent contemporary writer and an eminent contemporary scholar; the topic of the conference is based on the presenter's literary interests. In previous years our guest speakers have been Leland Bardwell, Lindsay Clarke, Anthony Cronin, Paul Durcan, Anne Haverty, Kevin Lavin, Andrew Miller, Adam Thorpe, David Dabydeen and Pauline Melville while our plenary speakers included Professor Leszek Drong, Professor Jerzy Jarniewicz, Professor Wiesław Krajka, Professor Marta Wiszniowska and Professor Jerzy Limon among others.

This year's *Studies in Literature in English* contains selected papers delivered at LIES 2012, as well as papers written by scholars interested in the topic. Like the previous volumes, its title carries a quotation from a literary text, this one reads: "Of what is past, or passing, Or to come": Travelling in time and space in literature in English'. The lines quoted above are from W. B. Yeats' 'Sailing to Byzantium',¹ which are recalled by one of the characters in Marina Warner's novel *In a dark wood* (1977) and highlight the theme of the 2012 symposium. The 8th Literature in English Symposium (LIES 8) held at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (Poland) was devoted to the explorations of individual space and landscape of the mind through analyzing trauma and addressing psychological wounds; travels into fairy tales, oriental scenery (real and imaginary) as well as interrelationships between memory and fiction in non-fictional and fictional discourses. Our guest writer of LIES 2012 was Professor Marina Warner, a fiction writer, a professor of literature, theater and film. With her we travelled into the land of fairy tales, myth, and spiritual visions and met exemplary women such as the Virgin Mary and Joan of Arc or visionaries such as Maria Pia, a character from *In a dark wood*. For the first time, however, we

1 W. B. Yeats. 2001. "Sailing to Byzantium", in: *The major works* (Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Edward Larrissy.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 94-95.

publish not a scholarly paper but a radio play entitled “They make a desert (and call it peace)” which began as a short story written for the series *From Fact to Fiction* BBC Radio 4 (2010). The theme of the story related to conflict trauma and remembering ties quite nicely with the paper by our plenary speaker, Professor Cathy Caruth (Cornell University). With Professor Caruth we took a “voyage out” into trauma (and healing) narratives. *Studies in Literature in English* 5 maintains the usual organization and offers a short introduction to the work of the writer Marina Warner at the beginning and an interview with one of our friends, a writer, Lindsay Clarke concerning his recently published novel *The water theater* (2010) at the end of the volume. I hope that the present volume will provide a passage into notable literary works, even though, the idea of a journey is inherently connected with changing places and movement, but, through reading, we can traverse space and time, continents and cultures, whilst remaining static.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to express my profound gratefulness to Professor Katarzyna Dziubalska-Kołaczyk, Dean of the Faculty of English, Adam Mickiewicz University, who has always been supportive towards all my “literary extravaganza”. I would also like to thank Dr. Zdzisław Szymański, Dean of the Warsaw Faculty of University of Social Sciences for his moral but also financial support. My words of thanks are also to Dr. Katarzyna Bronk and Ms Marta Frątczak, whose efforts in correcting all the little details of the manuscript are highly appreciated. Last but not least, I would like to thank my husband and friend, Professor Jacek Fisiak, who has always been there for me when I need him most. The dedicatee of this volume knows how much I owe him and how much I appreciate his sound advice and assistance.

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The heirlooms and burdens¹ of Marina Warner

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My story about Marina Warner (b.1946) began with the third edition of my *Short history of English literature* (2007) in which I was trying to include as many contemporary authors as possible. Not knowing her work, I wrote only a short note: “Marina Warner is a novelist and a critic. Among her most famous critical publications are *The myth and cult of the Virgin Mary* (1976), *Monuments and maidens* (1985). Her interest in fairy tales resulted in the collection of rewritten myth and fairy tales entitled *Mermaids in the basement* (1993). Her other works include *The lost father* (1988) and *Indigo* (1992)” (2007: 711). Since I, in my utter ignorance, did not know how important a writer and cultural historian she was, this very short and imprecise note migrated to the fourth edition of the *History*. I was, however, offered a chance to make amends in 2010. During a pre-conference lunch of that year our eminent guest David Dabydeen, himself a professor of literature, suggested that our next guest should be Marina Warner. I was overjoyed, even though I did not fully understand what he meant when he said “You should invite Marina Warner, she is very intellectual”. I understood his implication after researching the scholarly and literary output of Marina Warner. When the merry group of our departmental PhD students and myself started studying Warner’s work, we jointly declared that to write all this, teach creative writing and live, one should probably have to give up on sleeping altogether. Her productivity shows her superhuman power. What follows is a sketch of the figure of the novelist, mythographer, professor of literature and creative writing, with interest in medieval women, art history and cultural studies, a lover of films and fairy tales.

So let me, then, begin in a fairy tale mode. Once upon a time in a Kingdom Far Far Away, a young assistant was struggling in an unfamiliar territory of medieval studies, trying to write her post-doctoral dissertation. Writing, as we all know, is a solitary experience, and so not to become an utter recluse, she attended a seminar more or less connected with the topic of her dissertation, using the opportunity of a number of eminent specialists in the field that the “Faraway Kingdom” had on offer, including a world class Chaucerian, V.A. Kolve, who

1 The title has been borrowed from Marina Warner’s presentation “The past is prologue: Heirlooms, burdens, compass point” at Literature in English Symposium 2012.

offered a seminar on five medieval women writers. And it was during that seminar, when we studied Christine de Pizan's *The book of the city of ladies*, that I first encountered the name of Marina Warner. It was her introduction to Christine's text (published in 1982) that inspired the years of my later research. Her knowledge and the ways in which she saw the connections between the old and the new, the past and contemporary culture, have influenced the work of many younger scholars of our university.

One such connection is made through one of the most recognized works by Warner, namely *Indigo, or mapping the waters* (1992), which is frequently analyzed in reference to Shakespeare's *The tempest*. Sanders (2006) talks about the engagement with "the myth of Shakespeare" (2006: 51-52). Sanders praises Warner's use of fairy tales, most notably Mme d'Aulnoy's *Les contes des fées*, [1697-1698] (2006: 91). Incidentally, the fairy tales of Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy, Henriette-Julie de Murat, Charles Perrault and Francois-Timoléon de Choisy as well as Marie-Jeanne L'Héritier de Villandon were collected and edited by Warner in a volume entitled *Wonder tales. Six stories of enchantment* (1994). The fairy tale culturally conditioned discourse pervades *Indigo* in many different ways. Out of the creation of two sisters who are inevitably polarized as good and bad, sibling rivalry is brought out without reversing the obvious connotations of darkness and evil, fairness and goodness. Warner depicts the younger sister, Xanthe, the 'gilded one', as self-centered and avaricious, Miranda (yet another inscription from Shakespeare) is the dark one, good and selfless. "Through her [Warner's] intertextual weaving of the mermaids and sea-changes of Shakespeare's *The tempest* with those of fairy tales, Warner constructs a distinctly feminocentric narrative" (Sanders 2006: 92). The novel's magical site is a Caribbean island which is both painfully real (as it is invaded and subdued by the white man, the predecessor of the sister's father) and utterly magical under the spell of the Renaissance character of a Shakespearian witch, Sycorax, who in Warner's novel gains a voice, denied her by Shakespeare. The contemporary character Serafine Killibree, the sisters' nurse and weaver of stories, adds to the spell. She connects the Renaissance and contemporary motifs through her tale of a king and his beautiful daughter.

Warner's first novel *In a dark wood* (1977) is frequently linked to her work on the biography of *The Dragon Empress: The life and times of Tz'u-hsi, 1835-1908, Empress Dowager of China* (1972). The biography is a historical work, depicting China at the time of great changes. The novel likewise portrays China in the seventeenth century during the time of the first attempts of the Jesuits to Christianize it. While the biography of Tzu'hsi dramatized the conflict between past and present, tradition and modernity, the novel debates the impossibility of reconciling Christianity with Chinese culture. The present in the novel is also

ridden by other types of clashes. Gabriel Namier, a Jesuit priest, is editing the diaries and writing a biography of a Jesuit priest Andrew da Rocha. Namier is himself going through a crisis of faith. His brother Jerome Namier, the editor of a journal "The Albion Review", discovers that his journal was funded by the CIA, which means that the high critical standards and independence of the opinion were drastically compromised. Finding it difficult to deal not only with his loss of faith but also his homosexuality, Gabriel is sent on a mission to Italy to investigate the revelation of the Virgin Mary experienced by a young girl. Having found out that Maria Pia is an illegitimate child of the local priest, Gabriel refuses to acknowledge the validity of her visions. At the same time he realizes that there might be something he cannot comprehend on a spiritual rather than intellectual level. On a larger scale, the war in Vietnam is in the background of the story. The husband of his elder daughter, Francesca, is a journalist who leaves for Vietnam to be a war correspondent, while Teresa, Jerome's wife, an actress, is bragging about her main role in the new version of *South Pacific*. Gabriel is distracted and distraught by the fact that a personal letter written to the young musicologist he fancies was left lying about in his office. That makes him wander into the park where he is accosted by two youths who rob him and leave him lying on the ground. Unable to reach for his inhaler, Gabriel dies. His accidental and unnecessary death in a park carries mythical significance. According to Coupe¹, it is connected with Frazer's reading of the fertility myth, according to which when the god lacks vitality (and both brothers feel they have failed in life), the land dries and so the god must die to renew the land (2006: 21). The dark wood of the title is both Frazerian and mythical, evoking the sacred grove² and the fairy tales' magical but also dangerous and, as we could see, deadly forest. In the novel the renewal comes with the promise of Jerome and his younger daughter Paula to finish Gabriel's work on the Andrew da Rocha diaries.

As *In a dark wood*, *The skating party* (1982) also has myth and anthropology in its background. Here the main image is that of skaters who by custom skate on a river from town to a village, and there they are all invited to a party. The image of skaters almost immediately calls to mind Virginia Woolf's the image of Orlando and the skaters, right before his transformation into a woman. Warner's skaters become multidimensional semiotic signs, encapsulated in an image, which strikingly reminiscent of Pieter Breugel's "Landscape with Skat-

1 The work of Laurence Coupe (2006) about Marina Warner's work was brought to my attention by Dr. Katarzyna Bronk.

2 It is perhaps not coincidental that T.S. Eliot's essay on poetry and criticism are entitled *The sacred wood* (1960 [1920]).

ers" (1656). Warner uses the novel to show various ways in which we respond both to our immediate reality as well as art. The novel's main characters are Michael Lovage, a professor of anthropology, and Viola, his wife, an art historian and their son, Timothy (Timmo), an undergraduate as well a lover of Michael, Katy and a couple of figures from the university, including an older professor who dislikes the idea of women in academia. They are skating on the frozen morning of Epiphany, and their skating followed by the party is an occasion to reassess their views on life. Through Michael's research interests, the main intertext here is again Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, but through Viola's work, it is Gerard David's diptych entitled "The Judgment of Cambyzes" and the Frescoes of Cardinal Birbarotti. Viola's first reading of the above mentioned art pieces, is initially incorrect and only after some time, she uncovers the right meaning. The process of reading, then, demonstrates the deliberate and painful ways in which individual characters reach the truth about themselves and about others. It is through Viola's eyes that the reader is being given the insight into their past connected with Michael's work at Palau, and their witnessing the "scapegoating"³ of a young girl who was tried as a witch and sentenced to slow death by starvation. And even though Viola tries to feed her, the girl refuses to eat. While Michael remains a passive observer, the one who records and does not interfere, and also does not feel guilty, Viola takes the blame for their passivity and feels personally responsible for the girl's death. In their later life, the strange looking Katy with whom Michael is infatuated is the person who metaphorically bewitches him, and that is why he is so shocked to find her and his son in bed after the party. As Coupe notices, on a Christian feast, a pagan myth of Oedipus is reenacted to show them their own fractured family ties (2006: 41). The ties with one's past can never be entirely severed.

The past that is always infringing upon the character's future is also the subject matter of *The lost father* (1988), which begins with a poem by Czesław Miłosz "My faithful mother tongue". Set in a fictional Ninfania, which is strikingly reminiscent of southern Italy, and documents the turbulent 1920's of Benito Mussolini's ascent to power. In this novel Warner narrates a family's (hi)story marked by a fatal duel. The story is written in 1985 from the perspective of Anna, the daughter of Fantina who was the youngest of three sisters; Anna is one of many voices in the story, bringing out many, sometimes conflicting, answers to the puzzle of the accident in which a law student, Davide Pittagora, in order to defend the honor of his sister Rosalba, known as Rosa, duels with his friend, Tomasso Talvi. A bullet remains in Davide's brain, the physical reminder of the duel. In the turbulent times of the pre-war Italian fascism,

3 For more on the scapegoat, see Girard (1986) and Kearney (2009).