

***Az angol irodalom története. VI: Az 1930-as évektől napjainkig. Első rész* [The history of English literature. VI: From the 1930s to the present. Part 1], edited by Tamás Bényei, Kijárat, Budapest, 2024.**

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**V**olume 6 of the *History of English Literature* seeks to achieve the same objective as its predecessors: to provide a comprehensive overview of the literature of the British Isles in a manner that is accessible and engaging for both professional scholars and general readers. In attempting to appeal to this diverse audience, the success of the volume is evident, as each chapter has been authored by scholars from both Hungary and abroad. Volume 6 is, like its predecessors, the bright yellow-shaded fruit of collaborative efforts of relatively distant yet intellectually connected minds. From the University of Debrecen, Péter Szaffkó, István D. Rácz, and Ágnes Balajthy contributed chapters to the volume. At the same time, Ákos Farkas and Zsolt Czígányik from Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, as well as Attila Dósa from the University of Miskolc also played an important part in endearing the volume to the hearts of its future readers.

The key question is whether this volume can meet the previously mentioned objective – specifically, whether it can be both enjoyable and academically rigorous at the same time. To promptly address this question, I will first explore the ways in which the volume balances the needs of the two different groups of readers.

The visual aesthetics of the cover has proven effective in appealing to both lay and professional readers. The illustrations created by Csilla Kőszeghy vary in form across each volume of the series, presenting a single image that encapsulates the mood, perspective, or style representative of the respective era – even before the reader engages with the texts. The figure of the milkman featured on the cover of volume 6 alludes to the “everyday existence viewed as heroism” (317), as articulated

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by Tamás Bényei in his chapter “Blitz-irodalom” [*Blitz* literature]. The illustration functions as an introductory gesture, reaching out to the reader.

As one opens the volume – following the neatly arranged table of contents – the reader encounters the preface authored by Tamás Bényei, which precisely contours the book’s thematic boundaries. The volume, as all the other counterparts in the series, does not envision “portrait-like presentations of complete works”, but an exploration of “parallel and interacting phenomena” (11), characteristic of the era and themes addressed by the title.

The first phenomenon examined in the book is the “continuing mythologisation” (13) of the 1930s, with particular emphasis on the poetry of W. H. Auden. A notable strength of this volume is that it does not offer the reader with a simple “summary” of literary history; rather it provides a broader perspective by integrating the cultural and political contexts of the period, enabling both enjoyable and meaningful reading experience.

A prominent example of the volume’s strength is Bényei’s chapter “Az angol regény neme: Jane Austen és a kánon” [The gender of the English novel: Jane Austen and the canon]. This chapter investigates the frequent associations of the genre of the novel with the label ‘feminine’, and analyses the particular forms of female self-expression in the societal roles imposed on women and in their domestic circumstances. Furthermore, the chapter also investigates how these dynamics contributed to the emergence of new (sub)genres, such as the etiquette novel and the domestic novel.

Due to the length of the volume, it is not feasible to scrutinise every chapter within the scope of this review. Therefore, I will highlight the sections of the book that stand out as unique in the context of Hungarian literary studies or those that could be particularly insightful for a wider audience. One chapter that truly merits recognition is Zsolt Czigányik’s “Utópiák után, utópiák ellen. A disztópia a modern angol irodalomban” [After Utopias, against utopias: Dystopia in modern English literature]. In addition to its examination of the “Orwell industry” (354) triggered by *1984*, and its discussion of *A Clockwork Orange* as another key text in the dystopian genre, the chapter also provides invaluable commentary on lesser-known works, such as *The Wanting Seed* also by Anthony Burgess and *The City and the City* by China Miéville.

Another significant feature of the volume relates more to its structure than its content. In extensive literary works like this *History of English Literature*, it can be difficult to navigate between the scattered references to authors and their works due

to the extensive range and variety of information presented. To mitigate potential confusion, the volume includes a detailed index of subjects and names. Furthermore, alongside the usual references and footnotes, the volume contains numerous cross-references that direct the reader to related sections and earlier occurrences of ideas, either within the current volume or in other volumes of the series, thus enhancing the reader's orientation within and across the periods.

Overall, it can be concluded that volume 6 of *The History of English Literature* fulfils its mission. Through its elegant yet accessible language, as well as with quotations from the literary works discussed, it predominantly engages the reader on an emotional level. However, this does not mean that the balance referred to earlier is disrupted. The volume's well-organised structure and its detailed examination of each literary period underscore the scholarly quality of the work. The value of a volume lies not solely in what it achieves, but in the opportunities it offers to its readers. This book – whether approached from the perspective of a general reader or of a scholar – allows readers to engage with the key developments in the history of English literature from both perspectives. As Tamás Bényei observes in his analysis of Graham Greene's world, literature is “metafizikai értelemben valóságosabb a hétköznapi életnél, és ekként módot ad az emberi természet tisztább, igazabb megnyilvánulására” [metaphysically more real than everyday life, and, as such, offers a purer, truer manifestation of human nature] (45).

Translated by *Renáta Bainé Tóth*