

Sibylle Erle and Morton D. Paley, editors. *The Reception of William Blake in Europe*. 2 vols. Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. 768. ISBN 9781472507457.

The reception of British and Irish authors in Anglophone contexts has been examined from various angles, thoroughly and comprehensively. However, such a “domestic” perspective is apparently insufficient as it cannot expand the authors’ significance beyond the confines of the English-speaking world. The reception of British and Irish authors in Europe was not regarded as a major academic area until the end of the twentieth century when an impressive research project was launched by Professor Elinor Shaffer. The project resulted in the publication of a series of books on the multifaceted reception of British and Irish writers in a wide variety of European contexts. The two-volume study entitled *The Reception of William Blake in Europe* is part of this commendable academic venture. The study comes at a time when relations between Britain and Continental Europe need to be re-assessed in view of the approaching economic and political changes, triggered by Brexit, that are likely to have numerous repercussions in culture as well.

Released in 2019 by Bloomsbury Academic and edited by Sibylle Erle and Morton D. Paley, the two volumes on Blake’s reception come as a *sui generis* “emanation” of the ongoing transnational dialogue that is part of today’s globalized world. The motifs of cross-cultural interaction, mutual understanding, and possible kinship between closer or more distant geographical, geopolitical, and socio-political contexts can be best explored and analysed through the prism of the reception of authors beyond the borders of nation states, across national and cultural divides. The chapters in the volumes focus on, but also read beyond, traditional national models and formulas of reception.

Blake is admittedly a “difficult” author, and the contributors to the two volumes must be complimented on the remarkable breadth and depth of their scholarship in outlining the distinctive tendencies in the reception history of his work in their respective countries. The major strength of the book, however, does not lie in presenting readers with well-informed and exhaustive research based on the retrieval of little-known facts, but in articulating and recounting, in intriguing ways, through the mouths of various “speakers,” a wide range of stories about Blake as a fascinating literary and cultural figure that has successfully evaded stereotypical labels and conventional definitions.

The scholars, whose contributions are included in the two volumes, have explored Blake’s reception from various angles and have paid due attention to the wide range of cultural and political factors that have shaped it in different European contexts. The editors’ Introduction is followed by Morton D. Paley’s chapter on Blake editions and texts available to European audiences. The chapter that comes next focuses on Blake in Ireland, “the foreign country where Blake did not have to be translated” (Erle and Paley 14). Predictably, Edward Larrissy explores Blake’s impact on William Butler Yeats and James Joyce at considerable length. The former co-edited *The Works of William Blake, Poetic, Symbolic and Critical* and wrote two essays on him whereas Joyce gave a lecture on Blake in Trieste and, more importantly, “assimilated” him in his masterpiece *Ulysses*. From Blake’s reception in Ireland the collection moves to his reception in France, where, at first, his appreciation as a poet exceeded his evaluation as an artist, but subsequently he was rediscovered and gradually recognized as a gifted painter and engraver as well. From France the book “plots its way through the Romance languages” (Erle and Paley 14): in Belgium, more direct responses to Blake came within the context of fin-de-siècle culture, while in Italy he was received favourably mostly on account of his illustrations to Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy*. Then we are led into the context of the German-speaking countries (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland), the Netherlands, and the Nordic countries, and eventually, taken to eastern and south-eastern Europe.

For obvious reasons, Blake’s reception in Bulgaria is of particular interest to me. Like the receptions of other Anglophone writers, it was “belated,” and this, as the chapter’s authors Ludmilla Kostova and Lubomir Terziev have demonstrated, was due to historical factors. After an examination and diligent contextualization of some of those historical factors, Kostova and Terzieva focus on the reception of Blake’s *oeuvre* in Bulgaria from the second decade of the twentieth century (when the first translation of “London” was published) to the present. Their chapter is split into sections dedicated to specific historical periods (before the advent of state socialism, during state socialism, and after the fall of state

socialism). A lot of space is devoted to the translations of some of Blake's poems into Bulgarian. The authors dwell on both the aesthetic qualities of the translations and the ideological biases of the scholarship and criticism on Blake particularly under state socialism. What distinguishes the chapter on Blake's Bulgarian reception from most of the other chapters in the collection is the critical assessment of recent publications on the Internet as well as a commentary on the uses of Blake in secondary schools and academic education.

In closing, Kostova and Terziev remark that Blake's Bulgarian reception may seem rather modest at first glance: after all, no Bulgarian writer or artist has so far engaged with his work creatively. In addition, he is decidedly underrepresented in Bulgarian art criticism. However, a closer look reveals that representations of his life and work have been part of important Bulgarian intellectual projects.

In my own conclusion, I would like to add that the researchers whose texts are included in these volumes – those “mental travellers” across numerous languages and cultures – have indeed made a most valuable contribution to the field of reception studies by presenting a multiplicity of different perspectives on Blake's life and work. Their dedication and efforts to pick up and put together the particles of the author's “afterlife” into meaningful wholes and to invest his work with a new significance is sufficient testimony that Blake still “lives.”

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**Wiesław Krajka, editor. *Studies of Anglophone Literatures in Central Europe*.
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Studies of Anglophone Literatures in Central Europe is comprised of six chapters written by university teachers of literatures in English from Poland, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, and Ukraine. As the volume's editor states in his Introduction, the book is “an outgrowth” of an earlier conference panel on a similar topic (9). Research focusing on different aspects of the development of the interdisciplinary field of English Studies in non-Anglophone contexts is not a novelty: an ESSE-sponsored collection of essays entitled *European English Studies: Contributions Towards the History of a Discipline*, edited by Balz Engler and Renate Haas, came out in 2000, and was followed by a spate of other similar books. What distinguishes *Studies of Anglophone Literatures in Central Europe* from most of its predecessors is the contributors' attempt to shed light on latter-day changes in the teaching of Anglophone literatures against the background of their countries' common historical denominator: their past under communism. In fact, the six countries represented in the volume may be said to form a representative sample of the former Communist Bloc.

The volume's first chapter is by Jacek Wiśniewski of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Warsaw. It sketches the two-phase reform process that Polish academic institutions underwent between 1989 and 2016 and considers the development of teaching and research at sixteen state and several private universities in Poland. All of them offer programmes in Anglophone literary studies.