

BOOK REVIEWS

Marta Wiszniowska-Majchrzyk, *Introducing Cultural Studies*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego, Warszawa 2012, pp. 168.

Culture is something already created by humans, something that every individual gradually gets to know during their lifetime, yet not necessarily understands. Reading (deciphering) meanings in culture presupposes an act of studying, and studying culture can take different forms. Studying culture is possible, legitimate and stimulating, especially when one is in possession of an educational and thought-provoking “guidebook” that leads the reader through the complexities of both culture and the discipline of cultural studies.

Learning about culture from the perspective of cultural studies might be a challenging, instructive and beneficial activity. Conceived as a collection of essays, Marta Wiszniowska-Majchrzyk’s study entitled *Introducing Cultural Studies* presents key concepts and theories concerning cultural studies. Arranged chronologically and thematically, the essays encompass the main stages in the development of the field of cultural studies. They provide extensive analysis and deep reflection on this “new discipline” that is “still trying to establish itself among other time-respected sciences,” as the author claims in her introduction to the book. Professor Wiszniowska-Majchrzyk skillfully combines the theoretical and informative material, offering a thoughtfully-designed collection of essays that help the reader to understand the burgeoning area of cultural studies. The book consists of a preface, seven culturally-oriented chapters and a conclusion, all including bibliographical references. The author puts emphasis on the British contribution to the field, focusing on the forefathers of cultural studies. Professor Wiszniowska-Majchrzyk demonstrates that the research horizons of cultural studies have been

masculinist from the outset. The names, which the author refers to, constitute a fellowship of such luminaries as Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin, Henry Cardinal Newman, Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams to name but a few, without whom the history and conceptualization of key concerns of cultural studies would have run otherwise.

Introducing Cultural Studies opens with Professor Wiszniowska-Majchrzyk's preface, in which the author not only explains her analytical choices, but also introduces the reader to the labyrinth of developments within cultural studies. In the first essay "To Define the Indefinable—Culture and Cultural Studies," the author dives into the subject, providing the theoretical framework for further analysis. In her attempt at clarifying the concept of culture, Wiszniowska-Majchrzyk turns to pivotal and pertinent definitions of culture, demonstrating in this way that the field of cultural studies has always been an ideological battlefield. The author mentions the input of Raymond Williams and his influence on the formation of the discipline. This chapter also poses some interesting questions about the current status of cultural studies, and highlights the ongoing debate about the relevance or irrelevance of this study field.

The second essay—"Matthew Arnold Then and Now"—is dedicated to a close analysis of Matthew Arnold's notion of culture. This nineteenth-century English writer remains important for cultural theorists. Arnold's ideas provide a frame of reference for contemporary thinkers, who continually borrow from his works, quote him and dispute his ideas. Wiszniowska-Majchrzyk examines Matthew Arnold's contribution to cultural studies and traces the continuing influence of Arnold and his followers on the field.

In the essay entitled "John Ruskin—between Cultural Artifacts, Civilization, Education and Society," Professor Wiszniowska-Majchrzyk draws attention to the work of the Victorian critic and intellectual, John Ruskin. He cannot be omitted in any discussion of the development of cultural studies. The didactic and moralistic tone of his writings did not obscure their educational power. Professor Wiszniowska-Majchrzyk emphasizes Ruskin's involvement in the nineteenth-century debates on culture and civilization, arguing that his aesthetic and social criticism still remains an inspiration for cultural theorists.

The next chapter, “Evolution of the Idea of a University: From Henry Cardinal Newman to the Present,” is devoted to shifts in attitudes towards university education that occurred in the mid-nineteenth century. Their importance was recognized by the leading intellectuals of the epoch and by the Church. John Henry Newman, a modern Catholic theologian, was both an educational theorist and practitioner, who paved the way for many reforms to improve the field of education. Professor Wiszniowska-Majchrzyk re-evaluates those aspects of Newman’s intellectual and literary achievements, which helped to transform British society and its educational system.

“Fifty Years of Richard Hoggart” is another compelling section of the book. It focuses on another foundational figure in cultural studies, whose name appears in the title of the essay. Preoccupied with cultural, societal and educational issues, concerning the English working-class in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Hoggart (the founder of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham) poured his groundbreaking observations into his landmark book *The Uses of Literacy* (1957). Professor Wiszniowska-Majchrzyk juxtaposes it with another seminal study by Hoggart, entitled *Mass Media in a Mass Society: Myth and Reality* (2005), to illustrate British society’s transition from a class-based to a classless society. She demonstrates why Hoggart, who analyzed this cultural shift, is now considered such a brilliant observer and chronicler of his own times.

The goal of the sixth essay “Multiculturalism—Interculturalism—Transculturalism—Culture wars—Clash of Civilizations” is to grasp current cultural changes described and discussed in the field of cultural studies. Professor Wiszniowska-Majchrzyk stresses the significance of culture(s) and its(their) role(s) in shaping the contours of our world. The author analyses the influence of political, social, ideological, racial, ethnical and gender factors, as well as the media, on culture. Reflecting on the usefulness of cultural concepts and monikers, the author highlights their volatility.

A re-reading of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* is the subject-matter of the last essay—“*The Tempest* or Interpretation on Request.” In order to show how Shakespeare’s cultural status has been reconstructed in the globalized, multicultural world, Professor Wiszniowska-Majchrzyk presents two tendencies in Shakespeare studies: the transnational and the postcolonial approach. Since the meaning of Shakespeare’s plays cannot be

treated as something stable and fixed, more and more innovative adaptations (discussed in the essay) of *The Tempest* relocate the play into different cultural contexts. After presenting illuminating examples of the play's adaptations and appropriations, Professor Wiszniowska-Majchrzyk concludes that *The Tempest* is "capable of recycling among various poetics, geographical and cultural settings, and yielding to successful interpretations."

Packed with illustrative examples, the book offers a rich survey of fascinating aspects of cultural studies, and shows the applicability of cultural studies' theories to diverse areas of life, hence opening the mind to intricate meanings of cultural issues. The collection of essays presents a detailed and valuable analysis of the importance of the forefathers of cultural studies and of the present achievements of cultural studies. The author provides a systematic and rich overview of a body of key foundational texts covering a wide range of major British thinkers, writers and critics from different epochs in cultural studies. This is perhaps the greatest asset of this study which does not treat cultural studies exclusively as a 20th century phenomenon—it offers an in-depth and incisive analysis of the earlier thinkers whose theoretical innovations laid the foundations for our present discussions of culture. The lucid and compelling prose style confirms the author's expertise and erudition in the field. Professor Wiszniowska-Majchrzyk's *Introducing Cultural Studies* seems indispensable for anyone who wishes to become familiar with the field of cultural studies and deepen their understanding of historical developments and contemporary cultural changes. I recommend the book not only to academics, but also to university students interested in familiarizing themselves with the expanding canon of cultural studies.

Monika Sosnowska