

REVIEWS

Maureen Duffy: *England. The Making of the Myth*. From Stonehenge to Albert Square. London: Fourth Estate 2001, 274 p.

Not only a prolific poet and novelist of renown, every now and then Maureen Duffy also turns her hand to biography or, as is the case this time, to history. But on closer inspection, Duffy's new book *England. The Making of the Myth* shows a dense network of links to her recent fiction. Duffy's concern as a novelist with identity and how it is shaped and defined by one's personal history and its wider background, has in her novels of the 90s developed into a concern with European identity. The first novel of the decade, *Illuminations* (1991), tells the story of seventh-century Northumbrian nuns setting up a convent in Saxony, and while the tale is a beautiful piece of fiction, it comes from a profound study of European medieval history and the interconnectedness of the then Christian world. The European connection seems again to be the underlying motive for and motif of *Restitution* (1998), Duffy's last novel of the decade and immediate predecessor of *England. Restitution* has a very poignant story to tell, of European lives, and more importantly for Duffy Continental and English lives, with their roots and fates inextricably interwoven. In a curious way, the two novels more or less mark the start and the end of the time span covered by Duffy's history book, whose thesis stands out as England in Europe.

Maureen Duffy writes the long and exciting story of England with deep insight and involvement as well as aloof detachment. This somewhat paradoxical attitude enables her to trace and often deflate or even collapse some strands of the myth of England while endorsing others. She ascribes the beginning of the myth of England to Venerable Bede of Jarrow, and the irony of the now despised Geordie thus being geographically nearest to 'true' English, as it were, is not lost on her. The proud Britannia appropriated for the myth of England in the imperial 'Rule Britannia' or the present New Labour 'Cool Britannia' comes from a much earlier age, a name first found in a Greek source from about 200 B.C. and pertaining to a different people who inhabited the land long before the undignified, 'higglédy-piggledy' arrival of the English. Starting from the very dawn of the history of the British Isles, Duffy deconstructs the various elements that make up the myth of England, showing how uncomfortably many of them take their place in it—notably considering the enmity to the 'Celtic fringe' and how "English identity had first developed in opposition to the British." She goes on to claim that there is no ethnic reality to the myth of England, with William the Conqueror, "a Frenchified Viking ... ruling his polyglot, multiethnic state." Although this is on the whole only a brief outline of English history, Duffy brings in a great deal of detail, often poignant, wry or ironic, some of it rarely mentioned in other sources. She offers an interesting speculation on the audience of Layamon's *Brut* and how the long, sophisticated poem may have helped to save the English language from extinction. The part played by women, including educated Englishwomen, in nurturing the native language in that crucial period forms the backbone of Duffy's argument. She then examines and undermines the myth of Magna Carta and the first Parliament and debates the ambiguity of the generally hostile reaction to more radical attempts to implement the English myth of freedom. While the plunder of the Hundred Year's War was le-

gitimized by the myth of England, its workings also furthered the process by which Richard III was maligned by historians. The myth of England thrived in the Tudor century, reinvented by Elizabeth, who, with her Tudor Welsh ancestry, identified herself with England, and reinforced by Shakespeare, whose patriotic rhetoric and strong rhythm "quickens the collective English heart-beat." But it is the Tudors' and Shakespeare's myth of 'this sceptered isle' that Duffy sees as the root of English isolationism, the wish "to go it alone." Furthermore, under the Stuarts, the firmly established myth of proud England shifts somewhat towards the myth of embattled Protestant England reflected in Guy Fawkes Day and, more significantly, in Orange marches in Northern Ireland to this day. As Protestantism becomes increasingly part of the myth, the distance between England and the mainly Catholic Continent widens. The events of the Civil War pose a problem for the myth, which negotiates and absorbs the twists and turns of the support for the warring sides to emerge into the era of English expansion further away from Europe. Duffy says that the English are still "dogged by the myth of [their] empire" and debates how, paradoxically, the Empire also added to the sense of the freeborn Englishman. Similarly, she deflates the 19th-century myth of the English as a quiet and respectable people by clustering images of not so quiet and respectable life in 18th-century London. With facts and figures she undermines the myth of England as a great manufacturing nation and bursts the bubble of the myth of fairness and kindness to the weak by presenting child labour records and unemployment figures. The Great War and its aftermath changed the traditional concepts of Englishness and the general disillusion allowed the myth of Harry of England's bowmen to fall into disuse only to be revived by the Second World War. Duffy's hugely enjoyable chapter on women's issues argues that until Victorian times, the Englishwoman was probably freer than her Continental counterparts, Abbess Hilda of Whitby being Duffy's favourite medieval example and Shakespeare's temperamental women another powerful proof. The myth of the Englishwoman as the traditional tame and frigid English Rose is a more recent image, but one that in Duffy's account still lingers on. This is partly due to the typically English matter of class and language, which Duffy treats candidly, ending her comments on the latter with the regretful observation that its richness seems to have dwindled to the ubiquitous 'Fuck'. She is equally scathing about the continuing English isolationism, which she compares to a sulking child in the playground if it cannot get it its way. Here Duffy comes full circle with the thesis of her *England*: it was as part of Europe that England's history began and it is with Europe that, in Duffy's opinion, the future of England should lie and it is towards Europe that the important aspects of the myth should be directed. For Maureen Duffy does not eventually emerge as a detractor of the myth of England, far from it. After having examined the rise and fortunes of its individual facets, their uses and abuses, glory and failures, Duffy offers her own vision of how to cultivate the myth for the good of England. She wants a benign myth of fairness and tolerance that will encompass social justice, ecological concerns and respect "for the cultural rainforest of diversity that is the European ideal."

Milada Franková

Pamela B. Faber and Ricardo Mairal Usón: *Constructing a lexicon of English verbs*. Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1999, 335 p.

The aim of the book is impressively ambitious—to give an account of English verbs in a hierarchical framework which not only systematizes the meanings of verbs but also shows the interrelationships between semantics and syntax on the one hand, and the patterns of conceptualization in the human mind on the other.

The research is based on Martín Mingorance's Functional Lexematic Model, combining the Functional Grammar of Simon Dik and the lexematics of Eugene Coseriu.

The verbs are organized into sets of coherent classes sharing certain semantic, syntactic and pragmatic features. The information carried by each class is represented in its predicate schema, or the set of synsem regularities specific to the members of the class, integrating both paradigmatic

Maureen Duffy (Author). 3.8 out of 5 stars 5 ratings. See all formats and editions Hide other formats and editions. But she devotes so much energy to telling the story (Willy, Willy, Harry, Stee, divorced, beheaded, died) that relating it to the myth of the English gets rather lost. The myth could have been more clearly stated, and linked to various events and the way they're usually presented. She wavers, though, when she gets near the present day, and falls flat on her face when talking about how the English speak. Estuary (that spreading modern London accent) she thinks is an attempt to be "refined"! Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University. About | Contact Us. Previous | Up | Next. Title: [Duffy, Maureen. England: the making of the myth: from Stonehenge to Albert Square]. Duffy, Maureen. Date. 2001. Setting up reading intentions help you organise your course reading. It makes it easy to scan through your lists and keep track of progress. Here's an example of what they look like: Your reading intentions are also stored in your profile for future reference. How do I set a reading intention. To set a reading intention, click through to any list item, and look for the panel on the left hand side