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Dr hab. Beata Zawadka  
Instytut Literatury i Nowych Mediów  
Uniwersytet Szczeciński  
Poland

**A Review of the Habilitation Book Entitled *An Author in the Making: Jim Grimsley's Journey from Manuscripts to Print*  
by dr Roman Truśnik**

Dr Roman Truśnik has submitted, as his habilitation treatise, the book entitled *An Author in the Making: Jim Grimsley's Journey from Manuscripts to Print*. Judging from the information on the first page of the submitted electronic copy ("Złin, 2020") and the fact that there is no imprint, the book has not been published yet. In its entity, the book has 181 pages and has been divided into ten chapters preceded by a short introduction and followed by an equally short conclusion, as well as the compact yet well-thought bibliography and the index. On the whole, dr Truśnik's treatise is an insightful and innovative study of the southern writer Jim Grimsley's creative powers in that it does not intend to "...offer another reading of...Grimsley's works but... explore[s] his work in the wider context of the institutions of American literature" (p. 164). My perception is that dr Truśnik has fulfilled his intention; what is more, I am greatly impressed by the solidity of his research as well as the simplicity with which he managed to recreate the meanders of the process of Grimsley's becoming a recognised southern writer.

The treatise concentrates on the examination of the field of the humanities that has been known as the southern studies. This is an extremely well developed segment of the American studies; the monographs which comprise the 'canon' of this research stream are indeed numerous – and each year there appear new publications, be it books or articles on the 'things southern'. Therefore, it is a real challenge for a contemporary South -watcher to grasp his/her studied questions in an interesting, from the point of view of both content

and methodology, way; a *sine qua non* of coming into existence as a significant critical voice in the public debate.

I believe that the approach to the southern literary studies which dr Truśnik has applied in order to conduct the research on the work of Jim Grimsley represents a new conceptional quality as regards the exploration of literature and, as such, constitutes an important contribution to the *status quo* of the literary research on the South. This is because analysing, in detail, the ups and (the prevailing) downs of the creative process behind Grimsley's work, dr Truśnik has gone beyond the narrative scheme which demands for habilitation books on literature to primarily explore 'products' of a writer's imagination. To go beyond a convention requires mindfulness, accuracy and courage, all of which dr Truśnik, I believe, can boast about. Yet, not only that; his analysis concerning a living writer, and, by extension, the material whose (prospective) public use must, for privacy reasons, be carefully considered, therefore also evidences dr Truśnik's own finesse and sensitivity both as a researcher and a human being. In effect, the 'three-dimensional image of the author, and... a sense of his journey into print" (p. 164) that dr Truśnik believes crops up as a result of his studying Jim Grimsley as a writer, applies as much to his research subject as, in my perception, it does to this candidate to the habilitation title.

The methodology that he uses to analyse the context of Grimsley's literary work is situated, as dr Truśnik himself claims (p.30), primarily within the biographical trend. However, applied to the content of Chapter 10 ("Literature of the Fantastic") and Chapter 2 "Jim Grimsley: An Overview", p.16 in particular), where he also discusses the theory of genres in its SF/Fantasy realisation as well as to the content of Chapter 11 ("Recent Years"), where Grimsley's autobiographical attempt (i.e. his memoir) is explored, the seemingly explicitly biographical method of analysing the writer eventually demonstrates as eclectic. This, in turn, makes dr Truśnik's book a doubly valuable piece of research as it, too, shows the flexibility of the seemingly well-established methodologies in the confrontation with the 'live' material.

The content of dr Truśnik's book's chapters (as I have already mentioned, there are ten of them) goes against the grain of the current state of research on Jim Grimsley as well. This is because, contrary to the traditional division of the Grimsley research into five



"research areas" (p. 19), namely the Gothic, abuse, violence, class, and gay context, dr Truśnik investigates the writer with respect to what he believes are the seven stages of his literary career. Accordingly, he starts from his "Creative Beginnings" (the university years spent under the tutelage of writer Doris Betts) and proceeds through the gloomy (for marked by the extensive rejections of his first writing attempts) "The Carolina Quarterly" period and the equally gloomy "*Winter Birds...*" phase only to come across his "Glückstreffer...", the German translator and publisher, Frank Heibert, who appreciated Grimsley's writing when no one else seemed prone to do so. The last three chapters: "The Algonquin Years", "Literature of the Fantastic", and "Recent Years" show Jim Grimsley as a mature, recognised, and fulfilled writer.

This chronological way of presenting the process of Grimsley's journey to becoming a writer at first does not seem very exploratory. Yet, this impression changes when we realise that the meticulous analysis of the writer's (public) life running parallel in the book to the equally detailed account of the functioning of the publishing business can be approached metaphorically as, too, an embodiment of the process of 'coming out' in the global world of the South itself. From this viewpoint, the book's concluding – and thusly open-ended – paragraph in which dr Truśnik sums up Jim Grimsley's career as an American Dream fulfilled (p. 166) virtually invites scholarly discussions.

On my part, dr Truśnik's conclusion has provoked the following questions: must the said 'coming out' always be tantamount to pinpointing the region in the mainstream terms? And if so, how else, except for, as the Author claims, "giving voice to disadvantaged groups" (p. 166)?, which evokes the 'victimised' image of the South, can the mainstream identification be advantageous for this region? For example, how is it metaphorically significant, for the 'mainstreamed' Dixie (except for "understanding ...forces at work...in literature ...generally hidden to readers... [p. 166]), that Jim Grimsley, her fulfilled son, "grant[ed] access to his documents" (p. 166) rather than allowed for researchers to passively continue vivisectioning the literary products of his work?

### Structure

*An Author in the Making...* boasts of a very clear structure whose logic the Author never explains, though. For this reason, the orchestration of the discussion of Jim Grimsley's writing process into ten chapters (instead of the traditional four or five) with the accompanying introduction and conclusion may at first seem too widely deployed. However, in the long run, it works owing to the fact that the book has a thoroughly-defined thesis and follows an iron, it seems, inner logic which, supported by the reminders and hints in the form of notes, additionally helps the reader easily move along its, informationally very complex, education. It is therefore the book's overall 'readability' that supports its above mentioned, extraordinary content-related value.

The book also has a neatly structured bibliography and a reliable index. As regards the bibliography, the presence in it of Wikipedia as a source has surprised me, though: even if dr Truśnik quotes Wikipedia not so much in the context of Grimsley but rather as regards the popular reception of this (non-)canonical author, the use of such a non-academic source should be explained.

### Language

Dr Truśnik's treatise has been meticulously prepared also as regards its technical side. I have found just a few minor errors such as articles (e.g. p. 159: "...by an former Andersen accountant..."; p. 158: "Boundaries came into play in case of "Wendy") or simple typographical mistakes (e.g. p. 79; "...which according Heibert).

### Summing Up

The book *An Author in the Making: Jim Grimsley's Journey from Manuscript to Print* by dr Roman Truśnik is a mature and inspiring academic study that significantly contributes to the field of literary and culture studies. Writing it, dr Truśnik demonstrated his technical efficiency, huge knowledge of his subject and the ability to translate his exploratory passion into a concrete effect. I am deeply convinced he has thusly fulfilled all the conditions necessary for being granted the title of habilitated doctor.