

A Word from the Editor

”In the beginning was the Word“¹ is the opening line of the fourth gospel in *The Bible*. The key word of the following lines is ELLE, the acronym standing for the name of our international conference - English Language and Literatures in English, a project fathered by Professor Liviu Cotrău in 2011 and reared, under his insightful guidance, by the English teaching staff at the Partium Christian University. ELLE has reached the age of three and, as it has grown up and become a tradition, is now ready to take wings and enter a joint partnership with an academic institution from abroad. The core of the ELLE project, language and literature, may be provisionally defined as words produced in different ways and found in different forms. Words have been the subject and the object of discussion at the third edition of ELLE conference hosted by our university, a high quality forum of substantial scholarly debate where experienced and young researchers disseminated and shared their latest output. An outstanding event of this edition was the visit paid by the famous award-winning novelist, biographer and academic, Christopher Bigsby, who had encouraging words for our university. His visit was made possible with the support provided by the British Council for the organization of the ELLE 2013 conference.

In the current volume, ELLE Proceedings 2013, one may notice the diverse nature of scholarly activity our colleagues have embarked on as well as the latest trends in carrying out research in English studies. Language studies, literary studies and cultural studies are the *litterati*'s constant preoccupations but the methods and the sources of research have of late changed dramatically. The tedious and time-consuming visits paid to classic libraries and bookshops have been replaced by online book buying and electronic library registration. More than that, traditional research activities such as page flipping, reading and “smelling” printed books and journals, taking notes and handwriting have been taken over by digital research activities such as “next page clicking” or page sliding, hypertext reading, quotation inserting and touch typing. Therefore, philology is currently relying more and more on technology-assisted research, online databases, e-books referencing, etc. However, these are merely tools meant to aid the scholarly enterprise and they have not reduced the quality of scholarly enterprise nor have they hindered the researchers from carrying out and expounding their latest work.

The volume is divided into three sections - Language Studies, Literary Studies and Miscellaneous. Language studies encompass almost everything from basic literacy and language learning to phonetics, phonology, applied linguistics, semantics, discourse analysis, etc. Four papers fall into some of these categories. At the outset of the Language studies section, we encounter Ágoston Tóth's well-structured study on computational linguistics in which, by employing a consistent variety of databases and corpora, he skillfully measures the word similarity between English

¹ John 1:1. *The Bible. New International Version*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

and Hungarian. Relying on the theoretical framework devised by renowned scholars in the field such as H. Rubenstein, J. B. Goodenough, G. A. Miller and W. G. Charles, Tóth manages to present his findings on the subjective human word similarity after making outstanding experiments. In the second paper, context and register are the concepts tracked down by Andrea Csillag, who embarks on a trilingual comparative study of English, Hungarian and Russian colloquial expressions connoting morality and immorality. After chartering colloquial expressions in the three languages as practical variations of the morality/immorality binary, Csillag concludes that at the core of the denotation of these expressions lies the Christian moral reasoning all the three cultures rely on.

Bent on studying language learning as a neurological process, Granville W. Pillar focuses on the *input-intake* transformation which he calls “a change from unintelligible noise into a meaningful subset” as the very essence of second language acquisition. The novelty is the importance he gives to the non-verbal component of communication as a key issue in language learning. Moreover, his well-grounded conclusion is that “multi-channel exposure” is paramount in turning the *input* into *intake* in second language learning. The fourth paper of this section is Csaba Csides’s paper, an in-depth study in English phonology focusing on the sonority of the English consonants. He analyses the previous approaches regarding the taxonomy of consonant clusters and proposes a “new typology for English biconsonantal clusters (CCs)”, inviting linguists to reconsider their stand in the field.

Literary criticism implies not only reading and analyzing the written text but also interpreting, reinterpreting and evaluating it from different standpoints. The Literary studies section forms the bulk of this volume and this once again proves how prolific the scholars in the field are. They dare reinterpret from different theoretical positions such ground-breaking authors as the pioneer of utopian literature, Thomas More, the evergreen Charles Dickens, the narrator of the American south, William Faulkner, the Bloomsbury Group leader, Virginia Woolf or contemporary writers like Louise Erdrich, Margaret Atwood, Paul Auster, Gary Shteyngart, J. M. Coetzee, Doris Lessing and Amitav Ghosh. Thus, the section is inaugurated by Csaba Maczelka’s comparative study of the paratexts accompanying Thomas More’s *Utopia*. In a detailed and well-informed analysis, the author manages to disambiguate the apparent difficulty of reading More’s *Utopia*, placing the stress on understanding the paratexts prior to grasping the text in itself. Moreover, he moderates the light “conflict between Genette’s concept of authorial control, and Smith and Wilson’s claim about the paratext’s power to influence the reader.”

However overwhelmed by the “anxiety of influence,”² Victorian literature criticism has never ceased expanding. Apparently walking on a trodden path, Rudolf Nyári sheds light on a rather untouched upon issue in the Dickensian criticism – the subversion of the patriarchal discourse in *Dombey and Son* by the “nonexistent existence” of Florence Dombey, a displaced character who disrupts the natural order of the events. Victorian literature may obviously be equated with American

² Harold Bloom. *The Anxiety of Influence*. Routledge, 1973, p. 1.

literature in terms of the volume of criticism. Andreea Popescu's paper highlights the strivings of the protagonist in two stories written by Washington Irving to succeed and to "cross the limit to the otherworld" by resorting to the supernatural dimension. By blurring the line between reality and fantasy in a sort of initiation rite, Popescu argues, Irving manages to offer a clear picture of the American colonial behavior in limited situations. We are then invited by Teodor Mateoc to reconsider the issues of race and identity in William Faulkner's fiction and to observe the author's "profoundly humanistic vision" which transcends all sorts of barriers. He brings forth the American South's quest for community and the whiteness vs. blackness dialectics as narrated by the South's "most famous native son, William Faulkner."

Modernism and postmodernism are probably the most visited periods in literary criticism. Omnipresent in almost every English studies conference, Virginia Woolf's fiction has been once more brought into attention by Irina-Ana Drobot, who engages in a comparative study of Woolf's alleged first novel to a traditional novel as defined by the author in one of her essays. Mostly traditional in narrative technique and somewhat different in tone and characterization than her stream-of-consciousness narratives, Drobot argues, Woolf's early fiction foreshadows her later innovative fiction.

Postmodernist fiction has never ceased to be on top of the agenda in literary studies nowadays. The focus is on the carnivalesque, parody, metafiction, fragmentation and reader-response criticism. It is in this context that Janina Vesztergom illustrates the "multi-generic nature" of one of Julian Barnes' novels drawing on the theoretical principles of deconstruction. Vesztergom notes that the reader is challenged into a dual reading experience, that of "following and subverting the expectations"; hence the parodic nature of a metafictional novel.

In this line, Pál Hegyi enters the club of the relentless debate on the structure of the postmodern novel by focusing on Paul Auster's *Invisible*. Informed by the post-structuralist theorists such as Foucault, Barthes or Blanchot and employing the *mise-en-abyme* theory, Hegyi articulates his thesis postulating that the narrative structure of the novel is "represented with a zig-zagging route, where movement is not interpreted in terms of possible starting points or destinations, but with inevitable progression and regression *ad infinitum* all along the line." A second paper dedicated to Paul Auster is Borbála Bökös's comparative analysis of the intermedial correspondence, which she calls "intermedial flânerie," between art and life in an Austerian novel and a book written by the French conceptual artist, Sophie Calle. In her view, in these works, reality and art are constantly remediated "through the dialogism of the different media forms" while the authorial and narrative voices are unstable. On the same territory, Tania Peptan's paper focuses on "renegotiating ethics" in a postmodern play by Martin McDonagh. After overviewing the evolution of the "author-work-reader" triangular relationship from romanticism to postmodernism which ends up with the rupture between the author and the text, Peptan rekindles, in keeping with the current tendency, the ethical dimension of literature.

Postmodernism was associated by Fredric Jameson with the third phase of capitalism, that of multinational consumer capitalism as the new "cultural dominant" of a world driven by "utopian impulses."³ This theme has been explored by various postmodern writers, poets and playwrights. In this respect, Antonia Pâncotan revisits the postmodern dystopian micro-universe created by Peter Shaffer in his play *Shrivings* and, after disambiguating the terms of discussion such as *utopia*, *dystopia* and *heterotopia*, she reads this play as "a metaphor of creation and destruction." Mihaela Prioteasa approaches the symbolism in Margaret Atwood's fiction, placing an emphasis on apocalyptic images and myths. She insists on the author's intention to portray a "post-capitalist future "and a redeeming of the world through a "simultaneous plurality and the projection of our globalized present into humanity's self-perpetuating process of the given and the desired." Enikő Maior's paper presents the dystopian, Huxleyan universe narrated by Gary Shteyngart in one of his latest novels. In his quest for identity, Maior observes, the protagonist of the novel partially loses his identity (his Russianness) and turns into a secular "American of Jewish origins" living in a "posthuman"⁴, in Francis Fukuyama's term, media- and consume-dominated world. All the contemporary global realities are seen as stages of the gradual disappointment of the protagonist – the technology-dominated world, the world of ruthless businessmen and politicians, the (lack of) "reading habits of the young generation" and the content-free, emotion-free (but full of emoticons) social media.

Postcolonialism and multiculturalism are other issues approached in the literary studies section. Over the past decades, awareness of the colonial as well as postcolonial aspects of English Studies has skyrocketed. At the same time, the acknowledgement of the fact that the main English-speaking countries have always been multicultural in many respects has increased. This has led to a great shift in the way the subjects of study are constructed and it is the literary territory where the postcolonial and multicultural agendas have significant effects. Of the four papers focusing on these matters, the one written by Georgiana Elena Dilă tackles the multicultural postmodern interaction which occurs in a Native American community as reflected by Louise Erdrich's debut novel. Her argument is the author's attempt to outline the necessity of "cross-cultural translation" in a world where the quest for identity and the individual vs. community dialectics is essential. In keeping with this, my paper focuses on the linguistic hybridity as the key theme in a recent novel written by the postcolonial Indian writer, Amitav Ghosh. My argument is the transformation, when placed in a new environment, of the different "interfigural characters" in Ghosh's first novel from the *Ibis* trilogy into a viable "imaginary community," despite their cultural and linguistic differences. Relying on the author's own sources which come to cure an unadvised reader from a potential "dizzying effect "of this multilingual saga and on the explanation of the multicultural language mix he embeds in the text, I provided some relevant examples.

³ Fredric Jameson. *Postmodernism-The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Duke University Press, 1991 p. 159.

⁴ Francis Fukuyama. *Our Posthuman Future. Consequences of our Biotechnology Evolution*. Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2002 (title page).

Last but not least, it is the postcolonial South African writing that closes the literary studies section of this volume in a kind of unforeseen tribute paid to the late anti-apartheid hero, “Madiba.”⁵ Thus, Otilia Veres interprets J. M. Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* as a colonial reenactment of the Oedipal myth. In an up-to-date study, she investigates the motif of “looking” which, by its “disfunctionality,” renders it as a “tragic, colonial story of one’s encounter with oneself” as well as the way the figures of Oedipus, the Sphinx and Tiresias “disguise” in the characters of Coetzee’s novel. Having taken the last train to glory just a couple of weeks before Nelson Mandela, the Nobel prize winner Doris Lessing is placed in the limelight by Yildiray Cevik’s paper which outlines the way the author presents the evils of colonialism and of a patriarchal society in the novel *The Grass is Singing*. Drawing on the theory of the discursive strategy of colonialism pioneered by Homi Bhabha, Cevik identifies the “perils” a colonized society fears such as “gender and sexuality, marriage, female corporeality, landscape,” etc. as seen through the characters’ eyes.

The last section of this volume contains four papers covering miscellaneous topics from cultural studies to religious criticism. Cultural studies present a radical challenge to the conventions within the humanities and enable the crossing of disciplinary borders. Nowadays most teaching resources contain a substantial amount of cross-cultural content. Judit Nagy and Mátyás Bánhegyi present the advantages of introducing a cross-disciplinary publication entitled *A Cultural Reader on Aboriginal Perspectives in Canada* as a valuable teaching resource material in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) curricula. They skillfully outline the theoretical background of this project and present the practical results of its usage in the classroom.

Media and multimedia adaptations of literary products occupy a front seat in cultural studies research. When asked whether they read a novel or saw any of its film adaptation, a significant number of people would definitely choose the latter option. So the reception of literature has gradually been “turning visual” lately. Cinematic terms such as cross-cutting, close-ups, middle shots, montage or voiceover are common vocabulary in film studies. Iulianna Borbély equates the narrative technique in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, an omniscient one, with the voiceover in the film version of the novel. She even favors the latter as having a better role in clarifying matters for the audience than the narrator does for the readership. The voiceover, which is, in Borbély’s view, a “non-diegetic discourse,” functions as a “fusion of character and narrator;” therefore the spectators have “direct access to the omniscient narrator’s insights into Elizabeth’s (the protagonist’s) thoughts.”

Another media adaptation is presented by Kulcsár Zsófia who comes with a fresh review of a film belonging to the so-called “chick flicks” genre, a type of motion picture which presents the urban space as an environment that reshapes one’s identity. She narrows the range and, after establishing her concepts such as “neo-feminism” or “post-feminism,” she highlights the negative effects of the urban

⁵ Nelson Mandela’s clan name. According to *Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory* website, “it is considered very polite to use someone’s clan name” (www.nelsonmandela.org/content/page/names).

environment on a modern “ambitious young woman” who finally changes her perspective and chooses “romance over her career.”

The quotation at the beginning of this foreword seems an unintended refraction of the theme of the final paper in this volume. This paper treats a fundamental subject matter- theology *versus* society. Péter Gaál-Szabó introduces an American theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, as a precursor of Martin Luther King’s nonviolent fight for freedom despite his initial outspoken criticism of the former. He demonstrates that Niebuhr’s theology and view on society based on various sources such as Augustine, Hobbes, Calvin and Marx were “formative for many subsequent thinkers and theologians, including Martin Luther King,” and “reflect the struggles of contemporary America.”

All in all, not as voluminous but equally qualitative as the previous editions, ELLE conference 2013 has met our expectations. We may unhesitatingly assert that an international encounter on the territory of English studies is worthwhile and fruitful. And this was possible with the effort taken by the contributors to this event as well as with the commitment of the conference organizers from Partium Christian University.

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