

Editor's Notes

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The ten essays presented in this issue of the *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* address various topics and media applying a wide range of critical approaches, yet there is a recurring and highly topical concern with borders and border-crossing, as well as with diverse modes of intercultural and intermedial dialogues and negotiations. This is most conspicuous in the substantial thematic section—guest-edited by Balázs Venkovits—exploring Central and Eastern European immigration to Canada from historical, cultural, and literary perspectives; as well as in Lance Pettitt's cultural analysis focusing on the Border in Ireland, which has attracted global attention anew since the 2016 Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom. Yet, even if not necessarily in a physical, geographical sense, border-crossing informs in crucial ways the other four essays as well.

Metalepsis and ekphrasis are the central conceptual pillars of the first two essays—the former transgressive of boundaries by definition, the latter signifying a cross-over, a dynamic interaction between visual and verbal representations. Péter Csató's "Metaleptic Confessions: The Problematization of Fictional Truth in Paul Auster's *Invisible*" offers a highly illuminating, theoretically informed close reading of one of Auster's recent novels that has hitherto attracted relatively little critical attention. Locating *Invisible* in the context of Auster's decades-long exploration of "typical postmodernist *topoi*," Csató argues that the subtle way metalepsis is deployed as an organizing principle of the novel's narrative structure "moves beyond the classical postmodernist phase of textual experimentation, and serves as a means of raising questions of ethical and existential relevance." The essay cogently demonstrates how the novel's initial promise of a conventional autobiographical narrative consisting of the confessional recollections of past events is gradually dispelled by "a surreptitiously deployed

metaleptic structure [that] results in the ontological destabilization of the narrative, which in turn undermines the epistemic function (truth-telling) of the act of confession, so its ethical purpose (atonement, absolution) remains unfulfilled.” Apart from offering the joy of a sustained close reading, the essay also engages in a stimulating scholarly dialogue with Michael Riffaterre’s concept of “fictional truth” and recent theories of ontological metalepsis.

Imre Olivér Horváth’s essay, “‘He / looks into / his own eyes’: Thom Gunn’s Ekphrastic Poems,” continues in the critical mode of theoretically informed close reading, but the scope of inquiry is radically expanded, as it looks at Thom Gunn’s ekphrastic poems across the poet’s oeuvre spanning more than four decades. Taking its theoretical cue from Brian Glavey’s recent re-definition of the concept of ekphrasis in queer terms, Horváth argues that “Gunn’s ekphrastic work evolves in tandem with his gay identity development,” documenting “a process in which the power relations of words and images are renegotiated from volume to volume,” with Gunn “gradually abandon[ing] the masculinist desire to dominate images with words and aim[ing] for a more sympathetic and characteristically queer relationship between them.” The teleological arc of the essay is rendered nuanced by the sensitive and sophisticated contextualized close readings of eleven poems from six different volumes staging diverse modes of interaction between Gunn’s verbal art and the visual domains of painting, cinema, photography, and sculpture.

The next three essays focus on cultural representations pertaining to Northern Ireland, which, located on the island of Ireland, but politically belonging to the United Kingdom, is a border country in multiple (political, social, and cultural) senses. Since the 2016 Brexit referendum, significant global attention has been directed onto the region, focusing especially on how the United Kingdom’s leaving the European Union would impact the structures set out by the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, and on the issue of the Border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland—militarized before 1998, but having become almost

invisible since then—which Brexit has turned into the only land border between the United Kingdom and the European Union. Apart from the question of Brexit, and yet inescapably intertwined with it, Northern Ireland has also attracted significant academic attention recently, as the years between 2020 and 2022 mark the centenary of its fractured beginnings, 2019 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of a thirty-year-long violent conflict in the region, globally known as the Troubles, while 2018 saw the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the Belfast Agreement—all of which spur social and cultural retrospection with an eye on the future. The three essays presented here contribute to this vibrant ongoing scholarly polylogue.

It is from the double perspective of the centenary of the partition of Ireland and of a post-2016 context that Lance Pettitt discusses Eugene McCabe's border narratives in *Victims*, a three-part television series adapted by the author himself from his own "Fermanagh trilogy" of stories, and broadcast by RTÉ (the national broadcaster in the Republic of Ireland) in 1976. Furthering the current critical re-evaluation of McCabe's significance, Pettitt argues that McCabe's screen writing merits equal attention with his prose fiction and stage drama, and convincingly demonstrates how his narratives "offer a discomfiting expression of a lived borderlands culture that was largely ignored, dismissed, or disavowed by mainstream broadcasting in the 1970s in the Republic and Britain, albeit for different reasons." Informed by contemporary theories of screenwriting and relying on archival research in RTÉ, the analysis focuses on McCabe's screenplays and their interaction with the final broadcast and prose fiction versions, this way providing valuable insights into the institutional and political contexts of production as well as into RTÉ director Deirdre Friel's role in realizing the scripts for the screen. Thorough contextualization is complemented by a careful close reading of the dynamic interaction between four border tropes (badlands, bucolic, militarized barrier, and bad dream)—especially in the central, pivotal episode, *Heritage*—through which, Pettitt argues, the trilogy

expresses the experience of “borderliness” that McCabe himself lived in the 1970s and structured into his work.

The next two essays concentrate on theatre and drama in Northern Ireland since the watershed 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, which aimed to enable Northern Irish society to cross over—in the words of Seamus Heaney’s *The Cure at Troy*, frequently quoted during the peace process in the 1990s—to “the far side of revenge.” Notwithstanding its unquestionable positive social and political impacts, the Agreement has been critiqued on diverse grounds in the past two decades, and the euphoria surrounding it has largely dissipated as a result of subsequent developments. Taking as a starting point the 2018 anniversary issue of the Belfast-edited cultural and literary journal, *Irish Pages*, in which poets, scholars, politicians and journalists reflect not only on the hopes generated by the Agreement but also on the ensuing frustrations and disappointments, and a prevailing sense of uncertainty and confusion with respect to the future, long-time Contributing Editor of *HJEAS*, Mária Kurdi explores how contemporary playwrights from Northern Ireland have relied on teenage characters “to throw light on the precarity of the post-Troubles environment.” Locating her analysis in the rapidly growing scholarly field focusing on literary constructions of childhood and teenhood, Kurdi offers acute contextualized close readings of three plays from three different decades of the post-Agreement period—Gary Mitchell’s *Trust* (1999), Lucy Caldwell’s *Leaves* (2007), and Owen McCafferty’s *Quietly* (2012)—that dramatize in different ways how the disabling legacies of the Northern Irish conflict negatively impact teenagers’ identity development and how middle-aged characters are still haunted by traumatic memories from their most formative years: *Trust* by focusing on “the persistent afterlife of sectarian hostilities” and paramilitarism; *Quietly* by staging a scene of remembering in order to forget—a shared attempt beyond the tribe to transform traumatic teenage memories from negative motivation into acknowledgment—which, however, remains haunted by a sense of sectarian hostilities being transferred to a new

segment of society, immigrants; and *Leaves* by highlighting teenage suicide, occurring with alarming frequency in post-Agreement Northern Ireland, irrespective of gender, class, or religion.

Lucy Caldwell's drama is explored further in Zsuzsa Csikai's essay, but the focus shifts from Caldwell's debut *Leaves* to her most recent play, an adaptation of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* (2016). As Csikai argues and convincingly demonstrates, Caldwell's radical rewriting of the Russian play, relocating the action into 1990s Belfast—the hopeful five years preceding the Belfast Agreement—stages not only an intercultural and intertextual dialogue with Chekhov, but also a temporal dialogue between the cultural-political context of its setting and the post-Agreement context of its writing, “allowing its audience in 2016 a complex, retrospective, re-evaluative view of the achievements of the peace process from the vantage point of the early twenty-first century.” Embedding the analysis of “the most recent Irish Chekhov version” in the broader context of Irish and Northern Irish rewritings of the Russian author's dramatic works, the essay also provides valuable insights into how Chekhov has functioned as a medium of collective, cultural self-reflection in Ireland since the beginning of the twentieth century and highlights important antecedents for Caldwell's treatment of *Three Sisters* as a drama adequate to the predicament of Northern Irish society. Through a Chekhovian lens, Csikai further claims, Caldwell does not only cast a retrospective, re-evaluative glance on the Troubles and the peace process from alternative perspectives, but also offers alternative narratives, like that of immigrant experience in twenty-first-century globalized Northern Ireland, as yet a seldom-told story.

Immigrant experience, more particularly, Central and Eastern European immigrants' experience in Canada occupies center stage in the five essays of the substantial thematic section, guest edited by Balázs Venkovits, which will be extended into a *HJEAS Books* volume to be published in 2023. Headed by an informative, lucid introduction, the section proceeds

chronologically with the first two essays dealing with the first wave of Central and Eastern European immigration to Canada between the 1880s and the First World War, and the next three focusing on the reception, experience, and contribution to Canadian culture of Hungarian people given asylum by Canada after the 1956 Revolution—over 37,000 people in total. The first two essays radically challenge dominant historical interpretations of two short-lived communal projects in the Canadian rural West: Eric Wilkinson re-frames the history of Jewish agricultural colonies established in Western Canada in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in terms of success rather than failure, while Peter Bush re-writes the history of the Independent Greek Church in Canada—emerging in the wake of the arrival of the first immigrants from the territory of today’s Ukraine—in terms of mutual needs and mutual benefits, emphasizing the agency of the Ukrainian immigrant intelligentsia, rather than a tool of assimilation imposed on Ukrainian immigrants by Canadian Presbyterians. Sheena Trimble’s historical analysis revisiting Canada’s response to the 1956 refugee crisis from a novel, gendered perspective, also highlights the agency of immigrants, in this case, the agency of Hungarian women refugees, along with challenging stereotypical representations of 1950s Canadian women as being exclusively associated with domesticity. Two further engaging essays explore how Hungarian immigrants arriving in Canada after the 1956 Revolution contributed to Canadian culture, more particularly, literature and music: Mária Palla analyzes artist-academic Maria Gottlieb’s semi-fictional narrative—an account of a life journey starting in Hungary and continuing in Canada, also functioning as a transgenerational memoir and a testimony of a child survivor of the Holocaust—with a crucial intermedial dimension; while Victor Kennedy and his colleagues examine the music of Gábor Hegedűs, whose satirical songs, written under the stage name B.B. Gábor in the 1980s, provide a heterotopic critique of both East and West, relying on the devices of irony, parody, and transborder intertextuality.

The review section contains six reviews calling attention to new publications on a wide

range of topics including women's mythmaking in Irish theatre, monsters and monstrosity explored from an alternative philosophical rather than a Cultural Studies perspective; early modern popular culture and theatre through the lens of the cultural cipher of the "hobby-horse"; Shakespeare's *King Lear* in its contemporary rhetorical and political context; Medbh McGuckian's oeuvre read as political poetry; and Marianne Moore's performance of democracy through becoming a celebrity.

As the editor of the present issue, I wish to thank all the blind peer reviewers, editor-in-chief Donald E. Morse, and all the other members of the *HJEAS* editorial board for their invaluable professional help, especially review editor Gabriella Moise and copy editor Mariann Buday, who have been instrumental in bringing out this issue. I would like to doubly thank Balázs Venkovits, both for his work as technical editor and for his much-appreciated work as the guest editor of the thematic section.

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