

Editor's Notes

Arts and humanities, in the face of increasing challenges over their worth and significance, when STEM seem to enjoy a priority, are still essential academic disciplines. In addition to their intrinsic value, arts and humanities do indeed embrace translatable social values and contribute to the social good as they help foster critical thinking and help us develop imperative skills to be able to assess and interpret the world around us. This issue of the *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* duly demonstrates this duty and responsibility of our profession and offers outstanding essays by Hungarian and international contributors from several fields of research including cultural, literary, media, and gender studies, critical gerontology, theatre and drama studies, as well as history.

The late Professor of Literature and Cultural Studies, Class of 1956 Professor of American Studies Emeritus of Williams College, Massachusetts Don Gifford was a legendary educator, a thorough researcher, and an uncompromising intellectual, who inspired generations of students and colleagues both in the USA and abroad. *HJEAS* is greatly honored to publish posthumously one of his essays, "The Destructive Potential of the Imagination," which inaugurates the essay section of the issue. Drawing on the theoretical, philosophical, and ontological considerations pertaining to the taxonomy and the nature of human imagination, his analysis, from an interdisciplinary perspective, probes the inherently inimical nature and the destructive potential of the human imagination in action. Written in the Reagan era, with Cold War tensions and the Iran hostage crisis still appalling Americans—and with the urge to reflect on the contemporary political climate—Gifford juxtaposes examples from literature, cultural history, politics, and diplomacy in a captivating study to demonstrate the ways destructive imagination, "impervious to rational argument," may often impair the capacity of our intelligence to clearly discern the implications and the ramifications of the perceivable world.

The second essay, Renáta Zsámbsa's "The Female Gentleman and the Myth of Englishness in the Detective Novels of Dorothy L. Sayers and Margery Allingham," reads renowned novels of Britain's Golden Age of detective fiction *Strong Poison* (1930), *Gaudy Night* (1935), and *Bushman's Honeymoon* (1937); and *Sweet Danger* (1933), *The Fashion in Shrouds* (1938), and *Traitor's Purse* (1941), respectively; with a focus on the intelligent, independent, modern, and successful female character, the detective's equal partner: the "female gentleman." While her feminist ambitions and modern

views make the female gentleman the embodiment of the New Woman, her value system, respect for the past and strong belief in and nostalgia for Victorian morals also “allow her to be part of the conservative myth of Englishness,” accommodating the past in the new forms of the present, and thus—as Zsámiba contends—she serves as a “bridge figure” who renegotiates old and new values, ideals of femininity and masculinity—not only helping “restore the detective to his masculine self,” but also recreating the stability of pre-war England.

Since 2017, when Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein’s scandal brought into light myriads of cases of sexual assault and harassment in the American media, entertainment, and political realms—prompting the onset of the #MeToo movement—unspoken and buried individual traumas have become acute subjects of insight and inquiry in TV and popular culture, among others. In the third essay of the issue, “Telling the Untellable: Trauma and Sexuality in *Big Little Lies*,” Zsófia O. Réti analyzes one such recent media success, the first season of the HBO mini-series *Big Little Lies*. She argues that while *Big Little Lies* cannot be regarded as a soap opera *per se*, with its innovative, creative techniques and representational modes it occasionally applies and “rewrites the genre-specific codes of this traditionally low-prestige TV genre” to alter the representation of sexuality and personal traumas. With the narrative elements of flashbacks, involuntary repetitions, the retrospective framework of a criminal investigation, prolonged narration, montage-like and non-linear temporality, and complex symbolism—as well as the recurrent telling and retelling—*Big Little Lies* may help “speak” of the unspeakable connecting “the individual and the collective levels of speakability” and transforming personal secrets, often shame, into a shared concern and responsibility.

Drawing on an impressive body of archival research on primary sources available at the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security and Intelligence Service and the Hungarian National Archives in “Eugene Havas and an Early Attempt at Personal Diplomacy to Normalize US-Hungarian Relations, 1960-1964,” István Pál offers insight into some new aspects of the history of American-Hungarian bilateral relations. Following the defeat of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence, to break out of the country’s diplomatic isolation—a consequence of the subsequent political changes—the Hungarian government sought to build a more favorable relationship with the Western powers, among them the United States of America. To this effect, the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Intelligence Service

engaged Hungarian expatriates as “semi-assets to establish channels of communication with the American political elite and thus, via personal diplomacy, foster better relations between the two countries.” Pál’s analysis offers an intriguing case study of the activities of the American economist and journalist of Hungarian descent Eugene Havas and reveals whether his efforts could contribute to political change—the period of normalization between 1969 and 1978.

HJEAS is greatly indebted to Professor Mária Kurdi, long-time contributing editor and multiple-time author of *HJEAS*’s essays and reviews, for recruiting and guest-editing the five essays of the special section *Negotiating Aging and Ageism in English-Speaking Fiction and Theatre*. Informed by the theoretical assumptions of age studies, a relatively recent yet increasingly important academic field of inquiry, the contributions in the special section study age, aging, and ageism from various perspectives and shed light on—and at the same time renegotiate—the individual and collective perceptions of the passing of time and the subsequent, often pervasive, prejudices toward aging.

Angelika Reichmann in “‘No country, this, for old men’: A View of the Aging Artist through Intertexts in J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*” offers an intertextual reading of the work to present—through the age-related anxieties of protagonist David Lurie and through intertextual references to modernist works of W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, and Fyodor Dostoevsky—novel interpretation(s) for “the disgrace of aging in Coetzee’s text.” Noémi Albert’s analysis in “‘Life Is a Terminal Illness’: The War against Time and Aging in David Mitchell’s *The Bone Clocks*” probes questions of time, mortality, and immortality and demonstrates why Mitchell’s novel—the life story of the main character Holly Skyes intertwined with a fantastic subplot of two warring organizations of quasi-immortals and a narrative of climate change inevitably leading to “Endarkenment”—reads as an “intricate statement about aging.”

Besides contemporary British and postcolonial fiction, three essays in the section focus on American and Irish drama. Réka M. Cristian’s engaging essay “Aging and Death in Edward Albee’s *The Sandbox* and Tennessee Williams’s *The Milktrain Doesn’t Stop Here Anymore*” deals with the representation of the elderly in the plays and their perception of aging and death with a view to the “ways in which these characters challenge mainstream cultural constructions of aging” and how they negotiate their “agewise” identity. In “Old Age and Aging: Presence and Absence in the Plays of Brian Friel,” Giovanna Tallone examines how the Irish playwright

addresses the issues of aging with special focus on Friel's stagecraft, varied dramatic choices, as well as the "manipulation of mimetic and diegetic space." The special section concludes with Ambika Singh's essay "No Country for Old Men': A Poignant Portrayal of Aging and Ageism in Arthur Miller's *Mr. Peters' Connections*," which examines Miller's late play from the perspective of critical gerontology to illuminate the vulnerability, meaninglessness, and disillusionment often experienced by the elderly.

As a thematic follow-up to the special section on aging, *HJEAS* is pleased to publish a review essay by Erika Mihálycsa, "Petits pas. Nulle part. Obstinément': Writing Finitude, Writing On," on the last volume of Samuel Beckett's letters written between 1966 and 1989, a collection of correspondence evincing the feeling of "endingness"—a "long farewell," in which "the existential stakes (and heroics) of writing *on* . . . become abundantly evident." Beckett's letters, as Mihálycsa conclusively claims, "articulate, and perform, finitude—of lived time, of individual and cultural memory, of the body, of being, of language—under the forms of mortality and deficiency, of being-short-of-world" This essay is the last in Mihálycsa's extensive analysis of Beckett's letters in *HJEAS* (2009.2, 2014.2, and 2016.2).

The review section embraces eight insightful reviews offering their critical commentaries on recent publications, which cover a wide range of topics including aging in Irish writing, science fiction and mass culture, twenty-first-century Frankenfictions, Katherine Mansfield and magazine culture, new directions in diaspora studies, imperial race medicine, the issue of writing the self in the long eighteenth century, as well as the philosophy of Iris Murdoch and contemporary cinema.

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