

Preface

FOCUS 2018: 20th Anniversary Issue

Focus: Papers in English Literary and Cultural Studies is a peer-reviewed biennial journal launched by the Department of English Literatures and Cultures at the University of Pécs, in 1998. The present volume is the 20th Anniversary Issue, edited by Csaba Maczelka, Andrew C. Rouse and Lívía Szélpál, of whom Andrew is an old hand having edited other issues of *Focus* from 2000 onwards, while Csaba and Lívía are relatively new to the field. Over the years most members of the department have had the chance to take part in the editorial work. Since the inception of the journal the contributors of essays and reviews have been established or aspiring scholars or PhD students from a broad range of universities in Hungary, Great Britain, The United States, Ireland, Austria, Germany, Crete, Croatia, Serbia, and elsewhere. The 2002 issue, focusing on Joyce, was reviewed in *Irish University Review*, the 2004 and 2006 issues on film/video and British Studies and American Studies respectively in the *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, the 2008 issue focusing on Anglophone and Hungarian literary and cultural encounters in *EPONA*, while the 2012 issue, devoted to Irish theatre from international perspectives, was reviewed in *Irish Theatre International*. So *Focus* has reason to celebrate: we have published a good number of substantial articles over the years, a thematically structured selection of which became included in the first, rather bulky “*Focus* book” under the title *Encounters, Intersections, Adaptations in Anglophone Literatures, Popular Culture, Theatre, and Film*, edited by Zsuzsa Csikai, Mónika Fodor, Gabriella Hartvig, Mária Kurdi and Gabriella Vöö in 2016.

Through its content, the anniversary issue the reader holds in hand reflects the general directions *Focus* has been following during the last two decades. The section on British culture and literature opens with David Atkinson’s essay “Women and the Ballad Trade in Eighteenth-Century England,” which offers a rich survey of the divergent roles women took in publishing and selling ballads at that time. As the author suggests, research into this area provides new data and more details concerning ballad repertoires, as well as complicating the general (and sometimes flawed) picture of women’s economic activities and social status in the given era. Remaining in the eighteenth century, Gabriella Hartvig’s essay, “‘The first will serve the bookseller’s purpose’: Sterne’s double title page in *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick*” is a piece of philological scrutiny into some telling aspects of the relations between Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* and his book of sermons, discussing the ways in which they reflect on each other in spite of representing different types of writing. Throughout her exploration, the author refers to and quotes from numerous brief newspaper notices and advertisements, which are valuable and sometimes revelatory documents from the 1760s. The section closes with Andrew C. Rouse’s “‘Hark! I Hear the Cannons Roar’: Twenty years in the life of a “new tune.” Here the author follows the variants of a tune that first appeared in an English street ballad relating the defeat of the Turks at Vienna in the seventeenth century.

The following two sections of the volume comprise four essays on American fiction, drama and film, respectively. Ljubica Matek and Jasna Poljak Rehlicki write about an arguably special campus novel under the title “The (Im)Possibility of Academic Integrity in John Williams’s *Stoner*.” Here the co-authors discuss *Stoner* as a rather untypical campus novel which, through the eponymous protagonist’s tragic fate, transmits the worrying idea that the humanities and the humanist way of thinking are no longer relevant in our era. Thus, Matek and Rehlicki claim, the novel creates a new type of tragic hero, the teacher of humanities. Next, László B. Sári’s essay, “Crisis and Literature: Future Imperfect, or the Case of Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis*” argues that *Cosmopolis* (2003) marks a new turn in its author’s later career by juxtaposing postmodern ideas and a poetic use of language while transgressing the confinements of the technological sublime, an aesthetic mode that had characterized DeLillo’s earlier work.

The essay on American drama, “Legacies of the Past and the American Family: Sam Shepard’s *True West* and Suzan-Lori Parks’s *Topdog /Underdog*” is by Lenke Németh. It offers a comparative analysis of *True West* (1980) and *Topdog /Underdog* (2002), pinpointing that despite the two playwrights’ different cultural backgrounds and inspirational forces, both of these works address the devastating effects of the absence of an authentic past. The highly creative use of metadramatic elements in both plays is also explored by the paper, in this way referring to developments in contemporary American theatre. Flanking Németh’s contribution Réka M. Cristian’s “Journeys Into Night: Age-wise Cinematic Constructions in *Cas and Dylan* and *Our Souls at Night*” addresses the imbedding of certain cultural narratives in two recent North American movies in order to investigate the markers of lifecourse identities and the ways in which the (self-)representation of senior citizens are challenging cultural myths of aging through various acts of performativity.

In the third section the only essay on Irish theatre is Bence Gábor Kvéder’s “The Witness, the Silenced, and the Rebel—Women in Search of Their Voice: Female Characters in Brian Friel’s *Translations* and Anne Devlin’s *Ourselves Alone*.” Here the author stresses the importance of Friel’s “heroines” as prototypes and forerunners of the problems and ideas embodied by Devlin’s three female protagonists, hypothesizing that despite the 150-year difference between their plots, the portrayal of women’s experiences in the two dramas sheds light on some of the most acute and devastating social and cultural traumas Irish people have had to face during their troubled history. Kvéder’s paper is followed by an interview conducted by Mária Kurdi with Deirdre Kinahan, author of several both socially oriented and formally experimental plays contributing to the treasury of the contemporary Irish theatre. In this interview Kinahan also talks about her latest stage work, *Rathmines Road*, at some length, which premiered during the Dublin Theatre Festival in October 2018, harvesting considerable audience success whereas provoking critical debates at the same time. The anniversary issue of *FOCUS* is closed by two reviews, one of which offers comments on a collection of essays published in honour of the centenary of Arthur Miller’s birth written by Lívia Szélpál. The subject of the other is a book which demonstrates in detailed analyses of plays new, philosophically grounded theoretical approaches to figurations of the dramatic character in British postmodern theatre, reviewed by Mária Kurdi.

I would like to express thanks and gratitude to all the contributors for their papers and book reviews which appear in the issue, as well as to the three conscientious working editors, Csaba Maczelka, Andrew C. Rouse, and Lívía Szélpál. Special thanks are due to the invited members of the advisory board for this particular issue, whose valuable help has been instrumental in bringing the text of the submissions into their final form. Hopefully, the journal will celebrate many more anniversaries with collections of essays reflecting scholarly dedication to, and interest in novel readings and interpretations of both earlier and contemporary literary works and cultural phenomena or practices across the vast and extremely productive Anglophone world.

Mária Kurdi
Editor-in-chief