

Preface

FOCUS 2020

The present volume of *Focus: Papers in English Literary and Cultural Studies*, edited by Mónika Fodor, differs from the previous, thematically structured issues. The editorial team of *FOCUS* did not specify a particular theme for the 2020 issue marking the transition toward interdisciplinary and multimodal approaches in literary and cultural studies. Humanities face significant and rapidly occurring changes, which scholars feel the need to mirror in their works. The new take is not about offering a single guiding post to make meaning in literary or cultural works rather about offering innovative ways to develop mindfulness and strategic thinking based on centuries-old literary traditions. With the emphasis on keeping the gates wide open, we aimed to encourage young and experienced colleagues to submit work that represents the exceptionally diverse landscape of the humanities in the twenty-first century. The variety of submissions proves that we have accomplished our mission as the present collection of essays ties change and stability in the humanities into a single yet heterogeneous knot. The papers reconceptualize the old in the new context for new audiences and apply computational tools and methods to various works spanning from the eighteenth century through the twenty-first century. While traveling has become cumbersome and less frequent in the past two years due to the pandemic, access to online sources, including archives, databases, or other web-based sources, has gotten easier, making the digital transition smoother and faster. We believe that *FOCUS 2020* reflects this turn with the versatility of themes and approaches.

The current volume contains eight essays arranged into two parts, a commemorative piece and two book reviews. The first section addresses British and postcolonial studies, and the second, North American studies.

There are two essays dealing with English literature in the present issue. Both of them discuss aspects of William Blake, the eminent romantic poet, painter and engraver's work. In "Blake's Allegory of Tolerance" György Fogarasi's argument departs from philosophical approaches to the controversial notion of tolerance dating back to ancient times. The main bulk of the essay offers a contextualized reading of "A Poison Tree," a poem Blake included in his *Songs of Experience*. Fogarasi emphasizes the presence of an ironic narrative tone in the poem, which is basically concerned with the poisoning capacity of repressed anger, allowing for the interpretation that here Blake creates a complex allegory of tolerance and its consequences. As the author summarizes, "Blake's poem is an allegory of tolerance conceived as a disguised form of revenge. It is an ironic allegory, but it is also an allegory of irony, insofar as irony is the prime rhetorical form of dissimulated attack." The other essay on Blake, "'The Book Of eternal brass': The Bible and the Laws in William Blake's *The [First] Book of Urizen* and Emanuel Swedenborg's *The Last Judgment*" by Csaba József Spalovszky presents a comparative approach involving one of Blake's prophetic books and a

work of the eighteenth-century theologian, philosopher and mystic, Swedenborg. It is the relation to the Bible and biblical laws that Spalovszky maps and scrutinizes, tracing also Swedenborg's influence on Blake, who felt greatly motivated to engage with the master. As the author concludes, "*The [First] Book of Urizen* was written in the period when Blake started to criticize Swedenborg and reinterpret his theological teachings, and this prophetic book is more abundant in contrasts than in strikingly obvious parallels." Thus Spalovszky manages to draw attention to new subtleties of the influence of Swedenborg's theology on Blake.

Two essays are concerned with Irish and Scottish cultural phenomena, respectively. In both Ireland and Scotland, a revival movement was taking place in the twentieth-century, emphasizing and utilizing the role of culture and literature in nationbuilding. Annetta Kavanagh's "James Christopher O'Flynn and The Cork Shakespearean Company" explores the work of a Catholic priest, Fr. O'Flynn, who established a theatre company in Cork of young working-class people he managed to inspire and assist to the extent that they were playing Shakespeare, the English bard amid the national revival. One way of looking at their activities is that the company under Fr. O'Flynn appropriated Shakespeare for the cultural and spiritual advancement of the Irish, whom Shakespeare once looked down upon according to some of his plays. In her essay "Hugh MacDiarmid's Influence on the Scottish Literary Revival," Gertrud Szamosi outlines the cultural background of The Scottish Literary Renaissance that has significantly reshaped the literary tradition of Scotland from the 1920s onwards. The movement was primarily fuelled by Hugh MacDiarmid, whose main intention was to separate it from the English literary tradition by preserving a distinctly Scottish form of national identity. This new perspective of Scottishness focused on the revival of language and national consciousness both in their historical and international context. In the author's view, MacDiarmid's representative epic poem, "A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle," speaks for some of the emblematic notions of the Scottish cultural and political revival.

The first essay in the North American section, Zoltán Vajda's contribution, focuses on sympathy, a long-time concern in literary studies, and self-interest in Thomas Jefferson's moral philosophy. The paper traces the roots of two paradigms in the concept of sympathy and explains how sympathy made its way into America by the time of the War of Independence. Vajda argues that the moral sense was a fundamental concept of Jefferson's moral philosophy involving the ideas of care and love for others and stressing the feelings of pain and suffering. Moreover, in this alternative variety, self-interest and self-love are also constructs. Tracing these notions, Vajda brings selected textual examples from Jefferson's vast correspondence with Thomas Law, William Short, and Maria Cosway. The essay points out how the Jeffersonian use of sympathy builds on the dichotomy of different interests of the "Head" and the "Heart." The paper concludes with the ways in which Jefferson displayed a specific attitude toward both models of sympathy.

In the remaining three papers of the section, the concepts "adaptation," "use of digital humanities," and "literary refashioning" emerged as the keywords cutting across the genres, themes, and approaches. Katerina Siapatori writes about literary refashioning and adaptation of ancient Greek drama in David Rabe's drama *The*

Orphan. Siapatori argues that in adapting Aeschylus's *The Oresteia* and Euripides's *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Rabe juxtaposes elements of the two Greek dramas to represent and record the events which mark the generational trauma and the familial war in Agamemnon's house similar to the Vietnam War. The essay examines how Rabe questions archetypal identities as formed in the source texts and follows up on how the playwright ascribes a transformational fluidity to the characters through literal metamorphoses and fragmenting. The essay pinpoints how Rabe's drama deconstructs the notions of time and place and interweaves the mythical topography of the ancient past with the post-war America of the 1970s to underline the timelessness of war and violence. Siapatori concludes that Orestes and Rabe's other dramatic figures are also metaphorically orphaned. In her reading, orphanity becomes a universal and communal concept.

The critical comparison of the uses of carnival in Patricia Highsmith's novel *Strangers on a Train* and its film adaptation by Alfred Hitchcock is the focus of Alejandro Nadal-Ruiz's essay. Nadal-Ruiz explores the role of carnival as a literary mode that creates irony by challenging the traditional order of events. The analysis draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the "carnivalization of literature," which is the permeation of humorous reversal of social hierarchies into literature. The essay discusses how both Highsmith and Hitchcock employ carnival elements to highlight the insanity of the two strangers' minds. In their portrait, the amusement park transpires as a site where people from different social classes interact freely and where any behavior can become acceptable. Nadal-Ruiz gives a detailed analysis of how cinematography supports the representation of the carnivalesque and becomes a basis for the dialogue between literary text and film.

Zsófia Novák writes about current tendencies of gamification and virtual space altering humans' perceptions of reality in episodes of *Black Mirror*. Novák focuses on two episodes, "Hated in the Nation" and "Fifteen Million Merits," to prove how the social environment's influence on behavior can be misused. Moreover, an individual's digital presence and data can easily become the target. The episodes reveal that instrumentarian society intentionally employs concealed methods that transfigure human behavior to make it more predictable and exploitable. The episodes depict metatechnological parables and trigger intricate reactions in the audience calling attention to the immense vulnerability of human beings.

The essays are followed by a commemorative piece written by Mária Kurdi about the works and accomplishments of Herbert Woodward Martin, an American professor of English who taught in our department on a Fulbright grant just thirty years ago. In addition, we came to know a prize-winning poet and performer in his person. Martin also translated some of the Hungarian Géza Szócs's poems, who translated a poetic text by Martin in turn.

Two book reviews close *FOCUS 2020*. In the first, Mónika Rusvai provides an overview of an edited collection of essays on fairy tales as literary experimentations. In the second book review, Saleh Chaoui critically evaluates Claire Chambers's monograph on contemporary British Muslim novels and sensory studies.

Finally, we express our thanks and gratitude to all the contributors for their papers, book reviews, and commemorative essay. Our special thanks go to the invited

members of the advisory board for this particular issue, whose invaluable help has been instrumental in bringing the submitted texts into their final form. We also thank the technical staff who added the final touch to the issue: Lázár Vértes for the typesetting and Kontraszt Plusz Kft for printing. We hope that *FOCUS* 2020 will pique the reader's interest with the diversity of literary and cultural issues it puts into perspective.

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Issue editor