

Marianna Gula, Mária Kurdi, István D. Rácz, eds.
The Binding Strength of Irish Studies. Festschrift
in Honour of Csilla Bertha and Donald E. Morse.
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A Festschrift is a kind of book that celebrates outstanding scholars' achievement on special occasions like birthdays by collecting articles, essays, sometimes literary pieces and miscellanea from friends and colleagues. The book in hand is highly unique even within this category as it is a joint Festschrift in honour of the distinguished scholars Csilla Bertha and Donald E. Morse, who are both respected and acclaimed scholars in the field of Irish Studies understood in a broad sense. In 2011 they had been married for twenty-five years and, coincidentally, were celebrating a 65th birthday (Csilla's) and a 75th birthday (Donald's) early that year. The three editors of the volume, close colleagues and fellow scholars of Csilla and Donald, seem to have found it an exceptional opportunity to mark these anniversaries by one book for the two, which is a most appropriate decision in this case. As the preface to the honorary essays claims, the two were "literally brought together by Irish Studies, because it was at the IASAIL Conference of Graz in 1984 that they first met and then got married in 1986. Over the years their love for each other and their shared devotion to Irish literature and culture have proven to be mutually strengthening, a both energizing and uniquely prosperous combination at the same time" (11).

The present volume is one of those in which only scholarly essays (twenty-six in number) have been collected. Justifiably, one should remark, since Csilla and Donald themselves are very significant contributors to the art of Irish Studies both in Hungary and the wider world. Due to the authors' special choice of subjects and the editorial selection, the unique range of the interests shown in Csilla and Donald's own publications is well reflected on the pages of *The Binding Strength of Irish Studies*. Not surprisingly, the longest section of the volume is concerned with Irish drama and theatre, the field in which both Csilla and Donald have produced some books and numerous fine articles, the topics ranging from Yeats, Beckett, Friel and Murphy to less studied playwrights in the present. Of particular significance is the paper "The Supernatural in Conor McPherson's *The Seafarer* and *The Birds*" by Christopher Murray, which includes probably the first longer analysis of the second play in the title. Murray writes: "McPherson thinks allusively and analogically. He knows that ghost stories are and are not hokum: that they both hold the audience rapt—of *The Weir* (1997), for example—and at the same time offer entrance to the dark world of the Jungian unconscious and its disguised truths" (66-67), directing the reader to a most intriguing but rarely discussed feature of the playwright's work. Similarly, other papers in the section like "The 'Irish' Translation of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for*

Godot” by Anthony Roche, José Lanter’s essay on Thomas Kilroy’s *The Shape of Metal* or Eamonn Jordan’s exploration of Martin McDonagh from the perspective of postmodern whiteness enrich scholarship not only with new insights but by the refurbishing of approaches. Beside them, in “From Beirut to Belfast: Conal Morrison Stages Issues of Justice” by Dawn Duncan and in “Re-imagining Ireland, Occupying Iraq: Colin Teevan’s *How Many Miles to Basra*” by Patrick Lonergan are notable for their treatment of politically very sensitive and challenging pieces of the recent Irish theatre.

Donald’s ardent concern with the work of Joyce is paralleled by essays in the section “Joyce and Fiction,” where the tone is set by Marianna Gula’s paper about some fineries of revising the Hungarian translation of *Ulysses*, a work of considerable (if not formidable) dimensions. A former student of Donald, Gula’s contribution comes from an insider as she is heavily involved in the enterprise which will culminate in launching the much-awaited new *Ulysses* and making it available for the Hungarian audience on Bloomsday 2012 (the 130th anniversary of Joyce’s birth) in Szombathely, where else. The history of the Swedish reception of *Exiles* by Britta Olinder is the other paper on Joyce in the volume. Its thorough mapping of both theatre performances and radio productions of the play is wedged between writings that probe into more recent fiction and the Joyce-disciple Flann O’Brien, whose “English(es)” are examined by the writer’s inspired Hungarian translator, the young Transylvania-based scholar Erika Mihálycsa.

From among the few essays addressing Irish poetry the one on Yeats, Csilla’s great favourite, stands out. In this, the author Peter Kuch offers research findings on the publication of a group of poems by Yeats in the November 1920 issue of *The Dial*, aiming “to impose a pattern on the individual poetic ordering of the chaotic events that had inspired” them (191). The contributions of Borbála Faragó, Honor O’Connor and Michael Parker address issues related to contemporary Irish poetry ranging from Heaney to female representatives of this literary genre. Faragó’s paper is notable for exploring “[w]omen poets’ interaction with the physical space of the house,” which “offers diverse avenues of investigation” (179). The section under the heading “Cross-cultural Studies” adds to the scholarly kaleidoscope of the whole by drawing topics from the perceived dialogue between different cultures in a world-wide context with reference to Ireland or Irish writers. Wolfgang Zach looks at Edmund Burke’s concern with the abolition of the slave trade, whereas Gabriella Hartvig probes into the Anglo-Irish influence on the Hungarian emigrant writer Győző Határ’s work, especially considering the influence of *Tristram Shandy*, which Határ rendered into his native language. Other papers further enhance the diversity of the section: Aladár Sarbu’s thoughtfully contextualized essay “Artists as Critics: Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, and British Aestheticism” is flanked by the investigation of Dóra Pődör into the cultural ambassador-like activities of the distinguished Hungarian medievalist, Joseph Szövérfy, who was living in Ireland in the 1950s.

At the end of a congratulatory volume the Appendix offers precious information for the reader about the variety of ways in which the two eminent scholars have promoted the thriving of Irish Studies with high quality publications on a truly international scale. In addition, as the items enlisted testify, they have devoted much of their time and energy to the organization of conferences as well as to the editing of essay collections and journal issues containing papers on topics linked to Irish culture and aspects of Irish literature and theatre, including the relatively young art of Irish-Hungarian comparative studies. All in all, while the scholars are duly honoured and celebrated by the volume for their valuable scholarship, teaching work and hosting of professional events, the reader is presented with a book of high quality Irish Studies essays. For the fulfilment of these joint noble goals in a joint Festschrift on such a level all the contributors and the editors can be congratulated.