

Introduction

FOCUS 2025: Institutional Contexts

Literary institutions have been making their mark on literary production since ... Well, probably since their earliest days of their existence. But just how they exert their influence over what we recognize as literary, how they delineate the fields and the available concepts of literature and their changes over the course of historical time and in different contexts, and how they shape and mold individual aesthetics and *oeuvres* remain questions authors of this issue are trying to answer. There have been wide and varied theoretical attempts to engage with how institutions partake in the life of literature. Historicisms old and new have paid attention to the material conditions of producing, circulating and consuming literature, to institutions from patronage and the publishing business (Osteen & Woodmanse) to the evolution of criticism and the institutionalization of literary studies at university (Graff; Court) and in national curricula (Eagleton; Sinfield), to creative writing (Myers; McGurl) and to intersections of literary and popular cultures, as transmedial storytelling (Murray, Jenkins) and the rise of fan fiction (Jamison) and beyond. Literary scholarship followed in suit, creating an array of specialties and subfields together with different persuasions about just how important the connections between institutions and literature are, what their nature is, or how they can be described let alone interpreted and understood. Thus, our collection offers but a humble sample of insights into the intricate relationship between literature and its institutions.

Rebeka Petra Simon investigates how contested reading practices by women must have been during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and how Jane Austen herself participates in a debate about the possibility of female readerly agency through her portrayal of the readerly journey of Cathrine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*. Simon reads the novel as Austen's literary intervention in the development of institutionalized reading practices evolving in her time. She suggests that Austen saw reading as a way of negotiating cultural conventions, of gender as well as of reading. Soltan Jaber also understands and approaches relations between literature and institutions in terms of their exchanges, in his case how Seamus Heaney's plays embedded Irish political social realities in their ethical fabric, and how their performances, in turn, created occasions to engage with ethical dilemmas of patriotism, familial obligations, and especially after the Troubles of honouring the deceased. Jaber's nuanced reading of the plays and their institutional contexts forcefully demonstrates how theatre has always already been profoundly political, whether in Greece or Northern Ireland. Ágnes Zsófia Kovács opens the discussion of literature and institutions in yet another direction when she discusses Edith Wharton's engagement with economic forces in the literary marketplace. Comparing Wharton's pieces of travel writing as they appeared in journals and collected volumes, Kovács argues that they follow the colonial principle of boosting trade relations between

colonizer and colonized. Her analysis is thus a welcome addition to economic criticism trying to understand connections between economic conditions and literary representation. Petra Zsófia Balássy's argument concerns a contemporary institutional practice when she, using computational stylometry as devised in the field of digital humanities, undertakes to identify distinct stylistic patterns and dynamics amongst Booker Prize-winning novels in the first two decades of the new millennium. Balássy's findings testify to the presence of underlying patterns in terms of authorial style, and suggest the need for further research into a larger network, involving the long- and short-listed pieces, as well an extension of her research into literary networks of a more sociological kind. Finally, Rahma Feki showcases yet another institutional context for influencing our grasp of the literary, the educational. Feki's comparative analysis of *The Secret History* by Donna Tartt and *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis demonstrates how elite educational institutions (as represented in the novels in question and) responsible for upholding the highest standards of morality are fertile ground for transgressions questioning the relevance of morality for the existence of said institutions in the first place. Feki's argument also suggests that literary representation of transgression may also traverse their original contexts and find their way into the cultural mainstream.

As is customary, this issue also includes a review section. Gabriell Vöö reads *The Memory of Architecture in Edith Wharton's Travel Writing* by Ágnes Zsófia Kovács and finds the monograph rooted in the best Eastern-European intellectual traditions of interdisciplinary approaches to cultural complexity. Klára Witzany Hutková provides a thorough account of Salomé Paul's *Marina Carr and Greek Tragedy: Feminist Myths of Monstrosity*, and finds it a worthy contribution to both classical studies and scholarship on Carr. Mária Kurdi examines Maura Laverty's collected plays edited by Cathy Leeney and Deirdre McFeely, and argues that the volume *The Plays of Maura Laverty: Liffey Lane, Tolka Row, A Tree in the Crescent* significantly contributes to the understanding of the historical developments of Irish drama by documenting one of its lesser known periods. Finally, Kata Annamária Nagy reviews Charlotte Barnes's *Deconstructing True Crime Literature*, highlighting the ethical considerations in connection with the genre in question.

Finally, as the editor of this issue, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the contributors for their excellent papers or thorough-going reviews. Special thanks and acknowledgements are due to the invaluable work and support of our external referees: Imola Bülgözdi, Péter Dolmányos, Zoltán Dragon, Ágnes Györke, and Júlia Vallasek. I would also like to thank the University of Pécs for their support to maintain the journal. Last but certainly not least, the editorial board owe our thanks to John Thomas Voelker for his very helpful language editing of the texts, and to Lázár Vértesi for kindly undertaking the work of typesetting.

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The Editor
László Sári B.
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