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Students and Supervisors



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INTRODUCTION

This volume began as a publication of the Nurturing Excellence (TDK) workshop at the Institute of English and American Studies of the University of Szeged. Along the way, the pool of contributors was extended to include not only students but their supervisors as well. Amid the Covid-19 pandemic situation, some involved were not in the position to send their material so their essays had to be replaced or simply left out. Even so, there are significant points of convergence among the pieces that represent basic research priorities of graduate students and faculty members. The title of the volume indicates some of these convergences: sentiment, history, and intermediality as directions of critical interest. The essays of the volume also showcase, but obviously do not fully represent, the variety of research going on at our Institute.

Nurturing Excellence or O/TDK is a national competition organized for students active in Hungarian higher education. The competition takes place on two levels, the local and the national within the time frame of two years. First, any active student of a department can register for the local readings with an essay in the Fall semester. The essay has to be about the size of a BA paper, and it is presented in two ways, in writing and orally. To begin with, two copies are handed in, and two readers assess the written work, each giving a maximum of 30 points divided into 5 aspects (project, argumentation, use of materials and novelty, format, language).

The readers also attach a detailed commentary of the academic merits of the paper to their assessments. Then, the competitor is asked to present a 15 minute version of the essay orally for a committee of three faculty members who specialize in the area but have not been involved in the assessment before. The committee can give max. 30 points for the presentation (based on its structure, logic, use of time, response to criticism).

Eventually, the sum of the points will determine the place the paper gets in the local competition. The committee also sets the limit for the national round when it determines the number of points necessary for an enrollment in the competition on the national level. For example, it may declare that out of the attainable 90, a minimum of 65 is needed for the national competition, but this limit may change from year to year. This local round is called the TDK. Next year or in the Spring of the same academic year, an improved version of the same paper is registered and is assessed in the very same way it has been processed at the home institution. The difference from the TDK, however, is significant: for one, the other competitors come from all over Hungary, i. e. there are many of them and their papers are all of good quality, second, the readers also come from all over the universities in Hungary, so the new assessments may be profoundly different from the ones the paper received at the home institution. The points attained will determine the position of the paper in the national competition of students. This round is called the OTDK. Only the best papers make to it this level.

In this volume, papers by Tamara Tamás, Olga Pinjung, and Bálint Szántó reached the OTDK stage of the student competition. The other papers were written by graduate students and faculty members who have kindly contributed their work to the project. So the organization of the sections does not follow the areas of the OTDK but maps out a roughly chronological trajectory of the essay topics. This trajectory is intersected by the student – supervisor axis, so the essays come in clusters: usually, the student comes first and a related supervisor sec-

ond, when this arrangement is possible. In addition, there is one case with two supervisors, and another without one.

Olga Pinjung's paper examines the identity changes of Kansas border guerrillas between 1850–1865. Irregular warfare emerged during Bleeding Kansas and lasted beyond the end of the American Civil War. The research introduces the identity changes of irregular bands of the North, i.e. Jayhawkers and guerrillas of the South, i.e. Bushwhackers by analyzing contemporary letters written by and/or about the most notorious figures of irregular warfare. The focus is on the Kansas-Missouri border area, as it was the center of guerrilla warfare due to the unique situation of the state of Missouri in the Civil War. Pinjung's approach to identity is to examine how the guerrillas saw themselves, how they were seen by the opposing side and how they were perceived by citizens. Her intention is to introduce the changes in identity and perception based on the primary sources.

Zoltán Vajda investigates the role of sentimental philosophy in Thomas Jefferson's correspondence with Maria Cosway. Jefferson's intellectual debt to Scottish moral philosophy has been well-documented; so has his preoccupation with the moral sense in humans as well as the significance of sympathy and affection for others in his theory of human relations. Nonetheless, research has treated his concepts related to them as homogeneous with no awareness of the differences in the usage of terms such as sympathy in view of the conditions under which they are generated. This essay argues for the relevance of such an approach to Jefferson's understanding of compassion, informed by Fonna Forman-Barzilai's observations about sympathetic spaces at work in Adam Smith's moral sense philosophy. Vajda explores the interaction of sympathetic spaces in Jefferson's seminal letter to Maria Cosway of 1786, where he employs them to generate a sense of continuity in friendship in the face of the disruption of the physical space of sympathy, his strategy involving reliance on cultural proximity as well as self-love.

Hogar Abdullah considers the way Toni Morrison's 2008 novel, *A Mercy*, reverses traditional meanings of freedom and enslavement in the seventeenth-century. Morrison presents a thought-provoking perspective of freedom in her use of a specific trope: a chiasmus of freedom and enslavement formed in the narrative of the enslaved Florens, the main African American female character of the novel. The paper highlights Morrison's problematization of the concept of freedom by investigating the implications of her allusion to the tale "The Ass in the Lion's Skin" in the novel. Inspired by the transformational implications of the chiasmus 'the ass in the lion's skin and the lion in the ass's skin' in paving the way for the enslaved characters to achieve a relevant freedom, the paper claims that the tale is used to illustrate her idea that freedom lies within individuals and is related to their psychological understanding and awareness of their status and position. With a focus on the ways the main characters of the novel perceive their status in terms of freedom at the time of the seventeenth century colonies, the paper also highlights Morrison's imaginative project of rewriting the North American history.

Irén Annus's paper discusses ideological implications of cartoons by Thomas Nast. Nast, father of the editorial cartoon in the US, has long been the target of harsh criticism for his representation of the Irish in the second half of the nineteenth century. One key concern among his critics regards a sense of unrelenting anti-Catholicism that prevails in his images. This study revisits a selection of Nast's works and, relying on Borer and Murphree's frame analysis (2008), investigates the ways in which these images portray Roman Catholicism and the Irish. It argues that to achieve a more elaborate understanding of these pieces, the images must be interpreted at the intersection of then current cultural representational practices in cartoon art, socio-political, economic and cultural realities in the US in general and in New York City in particular, and the convictions and values that Nast himself maintained. The paper finds that a contextualized frame analysis uncovers the reasons behind Nast's degrading visual criticism of both Irish

Catholics and the Roman Catholic Church in some of his images, but it also demonstrates that Nast expressed no objection to or criticism of the Catholic faith itself and was able to express compassion for the Irish whenever he believed it was truly deserved.

The aim of Réka Szarvas's paper is to compare the evolution of the female-written detective woman to the waves of the feminist movement. Detective fiction is considered to be a tableau of the social issues considered important in the period they are written in, and this is true to the female detective, too. Through looking at the suffragette, the women's liberation and the post-feminist movement, Szarvas intends to explore how the most important versions of the female detective (at the birth of the character, the spinster sleuth, the feminist hard-boiled and the heroines of domestic noir) act as a reaction to the social issues connected to women.

Ágnes Zsófia Kovács's paper analyzes Edith Wharton's relation to John Ruskin's art history in her *Italian Backgrounds*. The paper posits that Wharton's visual and architectural perspective comes from contemporary trends in art criticism and travel writing. Wharton is defying an earlier tradition of travel writing that came with an interest in picturesque scenes, curious sights, ruins and landscapes. Instead she prioritized the observation of architecture and architectural arrangements. In criticism this difference is called the contrast between the belletristic tradition of the picturesque and John Ruskin's model of precise observation. The question in the case of Wharton is how her travel accounts represent the change from picturesque critical model to that of precise observation, and what the exact reason for the change in her case is. The paper shows that Wharton was interested in the observation of visual culture and architectural space in order to give evidence of the historical continuity encoded in them. Her observations and comparisons measure up the extent of the cultural continuity pictures and buildings carry. For Wharton, Italy and France represent ideal locations where centuries of cultural legacy and connection can be perceived just by the observation of pictures, buildings, even of cultivated landscape.

Shreya Bera's paper studies the representation of 20th century Indian American community through the conflicted nature of 'homes' in Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Desirable Daughters* (2002). Even though postcolonial writers and diasporic writers are not the same, most hyphenated writers explore the problems originating in the colonial past: the process of rebuilding nation and identity, and how people of different origins create postcolonial selves in response to their lives in a foreign land. Bharati Mukherjee reinvests the idea of the postcolonial self by explaining the traumatic process of creating a home in the USA. Extending the interdisciplinary spectre of the sublime and Sigmund Freud's the uncanny (1919), the essay claims that *Desirable Daughters* showcases the rise of the postcolonial diasporic woman through the representation of shifting ideas of home against the theoretical backdrop of the sublime and the uncanny. By referring to the works of Bonnie Mann, Catherine Bronstein, Homi Bhabha and Vijay Mishra and use the aesthetics of the liberatory sublime and the uncanny as groundwork to explain the rise of diasporic woman as postcolonial woman and her shifting idea of home.

Réka M. Cristian surveys the fortunes of film criticism within American studies. American film theory and criticism are essential areas of American studies in general and of American film studies in particular. Their important milestones can be regarded as authentic paradigm dramas—as defined by Gene Wise—that open up multiple spaces of cultural encounters. These spaces include film history, various film offices and councils, censoring institutions, books, journals, documentaries, and also experimental filmmaking, alongside museums, various databases, archives, and registries and, last but not least, the academia.

Bálint Szántó's paper explores the use of transmedia worldbuilding techniques in the *Star Wars* (Lucas 1977) franchise. The aim of this paper is to investigate the way the narrative is changed by the expansion of an already existing story world, in this case, the *Star Wars* universe, to other media platforms. This type of interactive storytelling has been increasingly prevalent



in popular culture, and *Star Wars* is generally considered to be one of its pioneers. Firstly, the different academic approaches to the study of the transmedia phenomenon are discussed, with particular emphasis on Henry Jenkins's research (2006a, 2006b, 2006c), whose works on transmedia narratives and fandom studies are used extensively throughout the paper. After that, two important aspects of the *Star Wars* universe are analyzed in their relation to transmedia storytelling: its characters and its political system. For examining the effects of transmedia storytelling on characters, the iconic villain, Darth Vader is analyzed. His story was elaborated in many different comic books, novels, and other media products beyond the film, making him an excellent subject for this kind of analysis. Afterwards, the different political systems of the *Star Wars* universe are examined, and how different transmedia sources changed the fans' perception on them. By the end of the paper, it is concluded that transmedia storytelling played a great part in shaping the *Star Wars* saga into a modern cultural phenomenon, as it made its world more complex, interactive, and realistic.

Zoltán Dragon's paper explicates the role of photography in Frida Kahlo's art and in Julie Taymor's film *Frida*. Taymor's *Frida* is a spectacular collage of not merely the images we contribute to the name Frida Kahlo but of the image making technologies that make up that authorial name. Hence the diegetic construction of biography, painting and film all contribute to the cinematic reconfiguration of the work and life of the artist – yet it does so by silencing one particular frame that is intimately connected to both the work and the life of Frida Kahlo: photography. According to recent research, photography played a crucial role in the private and the artistic life of Kahlo, not only as a means of documenting her life (the well-known familial and friendly heritage from her father and also from one of her lovers), but as part of her artistic technique and a unique and meticulous technical expertise, as well. Dragon's paper tackles the extimate position of photography through the visual kaleidoscope of Taymor's re-imagining of technologies of the image connected to Frida Kahlo to draw a new frame for the multiple framings Frida's manifold narrative presents.

Zsófia Anna Tóth examines how authentic the aural representation of early 19th century England is in the 1995 film adaptation of Jane Austen's *Persuasion*. Her paper claims that this film version, even if not being a general and popular favourite, is actually a rather realistic and authentic representation of this time period in England and of Austen's own novel, too. The filmmakers had a very realistic, down-to-earth approach to the treatment of the story concerning visual as well as aural rendering. Authentic visual and aural rendering has become the vogue nowadays, but in 1995 the filmmakers were ahead of their time and the general public did not accept their interpretation because it was far from the "rose-colored sheen of nostalgia" (Collins 85) that viewers were accustomed to. In contrast to contemporary viewers' expectations of nostalgia films, the sensory experience of this film makes viewers actually feel being part of early 19th century England exactly because they hear the creaking of the floor, the crackling of the fire, the clanking of the cutlery etc., and not only some beautiful music/soundtrack under/next to the studio-perfected dialogues of the actors.

In her paper on ESL as a complex system, Tamara Tamás reports about her research on language learning anxiety. Foreign language anxiety (FLA) has been a widely researched area for decades. Although numerous factors have been identified, researchers have examined this notion by employing quantitative methodologies, with the selection of one or two variables which they thought responsible for FLA. Furthermore, the employed research designs could not explain contradicting results appropriately. Tamás examined the narratives of ten language learners of English from a complexity theory (CT) perspective: she was curious about how the characteristics of complex systems manifested in the data. The findings showed that FLA could be seen as a complex system because it was dynamic, complex, non-linear, open, and adaptive and it



showed inter- and intraindividual variability based on the participants' narratives. The results also supported that a qualitative design and a CT perspective may provide an additional understanding of the individual nature of FLA.

The University of Szeged was founded a hundred years ago. The institution started its first semester in October 1921 as the legal successor of the University of Cluj, which was relocated with its professors, students, and resources to Szeged after the Treaty of Trianon. The publication is dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the event.

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