

HU ISSN 1219-543X

PUBLICATIONES
UNIVERSITATIS MISKOLCINENSIS

SECTIO PHILOSOPHICA
TOMUS XV. – FASCICULUS 2.

E TYPOGRAPHEO UNIVERSITATIS

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PUBLICATIONES UNIVERSITATIS MISKOLCINENSIS
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REDEGIT CONSILIUM MODERATORUM FACULTATIS
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Kiadja a Miskolci Egyetem
A kiadásért felelős: Dr. Dobróka Mihály rektorhelyettes
Miskolc-Egyetemváros, 2010
Megjelent a Miskolci Egyetemi Kiadó gondozásában
Felelős vezető: Dr. Péter József

A közleményt készítette: Nagy Krisztina
Példányszám: 200
Készült

Miskolci Egyetem Sokszorosító Üzeme
A sokszorosításért felelős: Kovács Tiborné üzemvezető
TU – 2010 – 780 – ME

**AN ERF RETROSPECTIVE:
PAPERS FROM THE ENGLISH RESEARCH FORUM
2004–2009**

**EDITED BY
ATTILA DÓSA**

**LANGUAGE EDITOR
TED BAILEY**

CONTENTS

Editor's Foreword	7
Papers from the English Research Forum	
Lawrence Normand: Shangri-La and History in 1930s England	13
Anthony W. Johnson: Ben Jonson's <i>Volpone</i> and the Coronation of Prosopopoeia	25
Colin Swatridge: What is Critical Thinking?	37
Zoltán Töltéssy: Some Ideas Concerning Conceptual Metaphors	43
Judit Szabóné-Papp: Construction Grammar: A Brief Overview	51
Tom Hubbard: "Fiddlers and Painters and Suchlike Irreligious Folk?": Calvinism, Music and the Visual Arts in Scotland at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century	55
Ted Bailey: Genre and the Self: Identity in Harriet Wilson's <i>Our Nig</i>	63
Aladár Sarbu: The Lure of Lacadaemon: A Note on Pater and Modernism	71
Attila Dósa: In-betweenness and Identity Construction in Douglas Dunn's Poetry	87
Carlos Morton: The Inconstant Border	103
Carlos Morton: California Backnotes, the Fantasy Heritage, and Greaser Laws	105
† Dezső Bánki: Uncertainty and Indeterminacy of Meaning in "La belle dame sans merci" by John Keats	107
Ákos I. Farkas: Canon and Canonicity in Huxley's <i>Point Counter Point</i>	115
Agnes Huszár Várdy and Steven Béla Várdy: Hungarian Victims of the Steel Mills and Coal Mines of Western Pennsylvania: As Reflected in the Émigré Poetry of That Age	129
Ildikó Kocsis: Dissimulation in Jane Austen's <i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	147
Margaret M. Manchester: A Wife's Liberty of Conscience: Gender, Religion and Political Order in Early New England	163
Paul Shore: Mission "Mostly" Accomplished: Tracking Jesuit Successes and Failures in Hungary and Transylvania, 1640-1750	178
Creative Writing / Translation	
Tom Hubbard and Attila Dósa: Two Poems by Áprily in Scots	193
Emese Lénárt: Three Poems	195
Eszter Lévai: "Andrina" by George Mackay Brown	199
Gerry Miller: Four Irish-Hungarian Poems	205
Colin Swatridge: <i>The Escapologist</i> (extract from a novel)	213
Appendix	
Speakers in the English Research Forum 2004-2009	229
Szerzőinknek	235

THE EDITOR'S FOREWORD

In 2004 we launched a series of talks and events which came to be called the English Research Forum. Its main goals have been cementing the identity of the English Department at Miskolc and creating a framework for talking about research interests outside the classroom. Despite the difficulties that academics everywhere are all too familiar with, the Forum is still up and running, and it continues to meet three-four times each term.

Here at Miskolc this is a recently founded and modest English Department which functions in the shadow of other prominent institutions in the country and is encumbered in striving for research excellence by many factors. First, since the majority of our students go into business and industry, they demand mainly a reasonable founding in language skills (which they can complement with a choice of specialized courses in literature, linguistics, and culture), and so the numbers of our language classes have always gone well beyond the traditional amount carried by faculty at research universities. Second, educational policy both at the national level at, regrettably, *intra muros*, is cutting, one after the other, the lifelines necessary for development. One further reason may be that, physically speaking, we are located in a region that has been severely hit by economic crises and dislocation in the last few decades: it is a region where young talent is skimmed off by top institutions in the country and from where, after graduation, young people tend to migrate to the capital, if not abroad. However, residing in the periphery (both metaphorically and literally speaking) does not automatically entail an indifference to the international exchange of ideas related to the subject of English. The Forum's primary job has been, therefore, to organize events that raise student attention and, whenever it seemed possible, to bring in scholars of note.

This special issue of *Publicationes* wants to be a record of our activities in the Forum's first five years. In that time, over forty (both formal and informal) events were organized. Papers were delivered by staff and students on their research; readings were held in and outside the university; and speakers were invited from Finland, the Czech Republic, the United States, and all member countries of the UK except Wales.

The first talks were given by our Erasmus guest professors. Lawrence Normand (Middlesex, London) spoke about recent developments in Shakespeare studies in March 2004 and, in a related vein, Anthony Johnson (Oulu, Finland) gave three distinguished talks on imagology and English Renaissance studies in October 2004. In 2007 Helena Janasová and Andy Chernel—both from Zlín, the Czech Republic—followed suit.

The Forum was launched formally just before the Christmas break in December 2004 with a talk on Hungarian education by Colin Swatridge. He was then

putting the finishing touches on his book *A Country Full of Aliens: A Briton in Hungary*. Colin intended his book to be both a private memoir of his years spent at Miskolc as “a part-time full-time professor” (as he calls himself) and a public response to George Mikes’s hilarious *How to be an Alien*, which is a Hungarian’s take on being an émigré in Britain. The formal launch of his book was held next fall, in 2005, involving a round table discussion with a number of students.

The Forum was also designed to give space to student achievement in various ways. One such way has been inviting students who spent a term at foreign universities with an Erasmus scholarship to speak about their experiences and give useful advice to fellow students considering applying for a grant the following year. The first Erasmus talk was delivered by Szilvia König; she was followed by Richárd Baráth (both studied at Middlesex), and then by Linda Lakatos (also Middlesex) and Éva Podlovics (Oulu). Another such platform has been inviting students to deliver papers on their original research. In December 2005, Gabriella Varga spoke about her research on the Oscar-winning Miskolc-born British filmmaker Emerich Pressburger. Her work was instrumental in a longer process that led to unveiling a plaque on Pressburger’s birthplace in Miskolc and organizing a round table discussion on Pressburger’s heritage at the CINEFEST 2009, which is one of Hungary’s bigger film festivals. In spring next year, Gábor Varga, then preparing for a PhD in philosophy at Szeged University, gave a talk on the ethics of Garrett Hardin. In 2008, I invited Ildikó Kocsis, who had written an excellent thesis on Jane Austen, to give a talk on lies and falsity in *Pride and Prejudice*.

On 28 September 2007, Miskolc University first joined the European initiative—drafted in 2005—of holding an annual “Researchers’ Night” with the ambition of bringing academic research closer to the public. Although it is research into the natural and industrial sciences that consistently receives the most attention at our university, the arts faculty also organized events and attracted a number of young people. Likewise, the Forum also moved into town from the campus and, happily, our Research Forum Café Bar was held to a packed audience in a downtown beer cellar.

During the past years many of our colleagues earned their academic qualifications on various levels (PhD and “habilitation”). I like to believe that the Forum was instrumental in providing a platform for rehearsing their ideas in public and inviting commentaries by, evidently, a lay audience when such a degree of specialization is concerned. The first of such talks was given by Zoltán Töltéssy in March 2005, who, at the time of writing, is working on his PhD at Debrecen University. Further talks were given by Éva Braidwood-Varga in May 2005—she completed her PhD on Wordsworth at ELTE University, Budapest, shortly afterward—by Ted Bailey, who defended his thesis on religious slave narratives just months ago at Debrecen, and by Dezső Bánki, who received his “habilitation” in philosophy at ELTE.

The Forum has drawn heavily on guest speakers. Some of our guests have visited once, others are returning visitors. In the spring of 2006, the Forum was proud to present two self-appointed ambassadors: one of Irish, the other of Scottish culture and literature. Gerry Miller, one of our regular guests, gave highly popular talks on the historical and cultural roots of modern-day terrorism in Northern Ireland. A close friend of Seamus Heaney, Gerry brought a personal message to Miskolc students from the Nobel Prize winning Irish poet. Our other ambassador, from Scotland, Tom Hubbard, delivered a fascinating talk on the double-sided nature of Scottish culture, which he illustrated with slides and musical extracts. His talk was followed by a Scottish–Hungarian poetry reading, which featured poetry from the anthology *At the End of the Broken Bridge* beside Tom's own poems.

We have had notable guest speakers from the United States, including Carlos Morton (UCLA, Santa Barbara), who gave a talk on Chicano culture in front of a full auditorium in March 2007. It was also minority culture that was in the focus of Steven B. Várdy's speech, delivered in June 2008. Professor Várdy (Duquesne University, Pittsburgh) gave an overview of the historical roots of Hungarian emigration to the US. In the spring term of 2009, our department was proud to co-host with Debrecen University Margaret Manchester (Providence College, Rhode Island) as a Fulbright Scholar. (Margaret was born in Budapest and left Hungary with her parents as a young child.) She gave a summary of a team research into early New England Puritan history at the end of her actively spent teaching term on April 29, 2009. Only the next day, the Forum was pleased to welcome another notable US historian, Paul Shore (then of Saint Louis University, now a visiting fellow at Boston College). Of half Hungarian origin (his father's side of the family comes from Veszprém county), Dr. Shore specializes in research on the Central and Eastern European history of the Jesuit order. He gave a refreshingly PowerPoint-free, *ex tempore* lecture on the vices and virtues—mostly reveling in the vices—of Jesuit missionaries working in and around Upper Hungary in the eighteenth century.

The Forum has aimed to invite Hungarian scholars of note—though it is an aim that is seriously encumbered by the university's uncompromising financial system as well as by lack of resources, which makes it impossible to pay visiting speakers. To circumvent that obstacle, first I invited two scholars, Ákos Farkas and Aladár Sarbu, who both teach full-time at ELTE, and who at that time gave courses at our department as part-time lecturers. Dr. Farkas, Hungary's top authority on Anthony Burgess, delivered two talks on Burgess: one in the fall of 2005 and one in December 2007. This special issue features his new article on Huxley, his new focus of scholarly attention. Aladár Sarbu's talk was related to what has come to be described as the "crisis" of English in higher education, on which he has published articles in *Neohelicon*. Here, he features with an article on Walter Pater which, in

an earlier version, was first published in a *Festschrift* for Professor Pálffy at Debrecen University.

Though it is not officially part of the curriculum, our department does have its platforms for students interested in creative writing. One of these is the *Coffee Break*, an anthology of student writings published annually before it went online in the year 2000 and is now found at: <http://www.uni-miskolc.hu/~aitmag/main.html>. Students from local high schools are invited to partake in annual writing contests jointly organized by the *Coffee Break* and the Szinvapark shopping center. In November 2007, we staged a poetry reading by our students, some of whom have appeared in Irodalmi Rádió (for more information visit: <http://www.irodalmiradio.hu/portal/>), and have had work published in the anthology *IrodalMatt a magyarnak* (IR, 2007) and elsewhere. Besides scholarly writing, some of our faculty members have also tried their hands at various literary genres. Colin Swatridge, for instance, is writer of several novels apart from his book of non-fiction, *Aliens*. In December 2006, he gave a successful reading from his then most recent novel, *The Escapologist*, excerpted here. In March same year, Tom Hubbard and Zoltán Töltéssy's bilingual reading night was held—a by-product of that venture is the joint translation of two Áprily poems by Tom Hubbard and the present editor. These translations are reprinted with permission from Scotland's prime avant-garde journal, *Zed2O*. Gerry Miller, our regular guest, also gave a reading from his own poems as well as modern poetry from Northern Ireland during his annual visit in March 2007.

Tangentially related to the ERF, a literary translation workshop has also been started. It is engaged in several projects and bringing together interested students outside the classroom. Partly, we do commissioned work: the translation of Colin Swatridge's *Aliens* is currently in progress, while a joint translation of two Áprily poems (with Tom Hubbard) was published in *Zed2O*, and our translations of a selection of ten poems by Gerry Miller were presented at the HUSIS conference at Pécs in 2007. Other ongoing projects include translating a series of short stories by Scottish author G.M. Brown (represented here by Eszter Lévai's translation of "Andrina") and translating a selection of short stories by various Scottish writers: altogether five stories have been published in *Nagyvilág*, Hungary's chief journal of international literatures.

For their assistance in producing this ERF retrospective, I wish to thank the following: Dr. Zita Horváth, Editor-in-Chief, for giving me an opportunity to bring all the contributions under one roof in a special issue of *Publicationes*; Dr. Ted Bailey for being a meticulous and keen-eyed language advisor; and Dr. Dezső Bánki for acting as second reader of some of the articles.

Acknowledgements are also due to the following: Dr. Tamás Bényei and Dr. Péter Szaffkó, editors of *Happy Returns: Essays for Professor István Pálffy* (Debrecen UP, 1999), for giving permission to reprint, in a revised form, Professor

Aladár Sarbu's paper; Professor Duncan Glen's widow Mrs. Margaret Glen for giving permission to reprint "Scottish Muid" and "Northern Roses," originally published in issue 21 of *Zed2O* (2007); Mr. Gerry Miller for giving me permission to freely pick from his work published in *Awakening* (Oswica, 2004) and from his other poems; Professor Carlos Morton for giving permission to reprint two of his articles which were first published in *The Santa Barbara News-Press*; and Dr. Lawrence Normand for giving permission to reprint his article from the *Buddhist Studies Review* 24.1 (2007).

I am grateful to all contributors individually for taking this modest scholarly venture as seriously as they all did. Copyrights remain with the individual authors in all cases where applicable.

Finally, and as always, I reserve my deepest gratitude to Nora: without her steady intellectual support the Forum would not have lasted, and without her patience in bravely shouldering much of the workload that raising and managing a young family entails, not even this modest though very fond record of the Forum's first five years could have been produced.

* * *

For updates on ERF events with photos, please visit:
<http://resforum.blogspot.com/>

Attila Dósa

POSTSCRIPT

At the time when this special issue was about to go into print, our department suffered the loss of a dear colleague, Dr. Dezső Bánki. His article is now posthumously printed. It is my sad task as editor to dedicate this issue of *Publicationes* to his memory.

AD