

ABSTRACTS

The Uses of Biblical Narrative: Gyula Illyés and the Making of a National Poet

Péter Dávidházi

Gyula Illyés (1902-83) has often been called *the* national poet in twentieth-century Hungary. The familiar master narrative about his life maintains that he was born on a humble Transdanubian farmstead, and after the vicissitudes of childhood he moved to Budapest, got involved with the 1919 revolution, had to leave the country, and by 1922 he was in Paris where he could have chosen the glossy career of a chic, elegant, Frenchified or international poet, but instead he returned to his own people and became their committed spokesman in his works, living up to the example of his role-model Sándor Petőfi, the great nineteenth-century national poet. But focusing on a poem Illyés wrote in 1931, “The Prophet,” one can realize how inadequate such a narrative can be. Written five years after Illyés came home from Paris, the poem recalls memories of a childhood event and reveals that Illyés adopted the role of the Petőfi-style national poet by adapting it to an ancient prophetic model, that of his namesake, the biblical prophet Elijah. It is in the light of poems like “The Prophet” that the Central-Eastern-European tradition of the national poet (the poet as a spiritual leader, a spokesman of the people when addressing God, or that of God when talking to the people) should be reconsidered. Some fractions in Hungarian literature applaud this role as the most vital part of their heritage, others deplore it as embarrassingly obsolete, and the fierce debate indicates one of the deepest schisms in Hungarian culture. Illyés’s oeuvre, however, is a fine example of how efficiently the emblematic figure of the national poet could integrate prophetic traditions. (PD)

Memory, Interiority, and the History of the Novel

Patrick Parrinder

Early novels were frequently described as “histories,” but this paper argues that novels from the beginning have both affirmed and undermined historical narrative. Novelists address the “idle reader”—not the reader in search of education or public knowledge—and their concern with private

experience leads them to present situations about which the truth can never be known.

More's *Utopia* is not a novel, and indeed it effectively denies the possibility of private experience in the ideal society. Nevertheless, More's prologue and epilogue contain vivid moments of intimate history which serve to obscure the public record of Hythloday's voyage. The episode of Montesinos' Cave in Cervantes's *Don Quixote* questions the whole project of history, since Quixote is the only witness to events about which his testimony cannot be shown to be either true or false. Finally, in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* the story of what actually happened on the island is displaced by the story of Crusoe's attempts to record it in his diary. In each of these three examples, the novelist constructs a narrative that is more engaging and more diverting than the "real" history it refuses to reveal. (PP)

The Secrets of Modernism: Henry James and Conspiracy

Roland Végső

The essay argues that the modernity of Henry James's fiction lies in its treatment of the figure of secrecy. It discusses the problem of the secret in James's writings on three distinct levels—the metaphysical, the aesthetic, and the political—in order to break with two dominant traditions of James criticism: on the one hand, it rejects traditional readings based on the assumption of the absolute autonomy of the aesthetic; on the other, it also criticizes the historically later preoccupation with the omnipotence of power. In order to illustrate how this alternative "aesthetics politics" functions in James's works, the essay concludes with an examination of the role of conspiracy in *The Princess Casamassima* (1886). (RV)

Faulkner's "John Browns"

David Vanderwerken

Of all the "real" figures American writers have fictionalized, perhaps none has had more diverse representations in so many genres as John Brown, orchestrator of the abortive 1859 raid on the Federal armory in Harper's Ferry, Virginia (then)/West Virginia (now) in an attempt to arm slaves for a revolt. Poets, playwrights, novelists, and even librettists have created "John Browns." Bruce A. Ronda, in his recent, comprehensive book *Reading the*

Old Man: John Brown in American Culture, surveys the many avatars—from demon to angel—of this most complex historical figure. However, the most powerful voice of twentieth-century American fiction, William Faulkner, only uses Brown twice in his work, indirectly in *Light in August* and directly in *Go Down, Moses*. While both usages may be minor sidebars in two novels with huge issues to dramatize, yet both episodes tell readers much about how Faulkner interpreted this man who believed that God would smite the slave-owning South in ways that would make Sodom and Gomorrah look like a barbecue. Faulkner, loyal son of the South, paints an ambivalent portrait of Brown, featuring him as a fanatic yet racist abolitionist in *Light in August*, whose fanaticism and racism increase in direct proportion to whiskey consumed, and as a simple, unlettered loner taking violent action against injustice, with God's tacit approval, in *Go Down, Moses*. (DV)

Contesting the Real in American Fiction: Donald Barthelme, “The Angry Young Man” (1992)

Jaroslav Kušnír

The paper analyzes Donald Barthelme's use of postmodern narrative techniques such as overlapping of various genres and styles, the use of postmodern parody, metafiction, and others as they manifest themselves in his short story *The Angry Young Man*. At the same time, by using theories of postmodern parody (Linda Hutcheon) and theories of possible worlds (Hrushovski, Ronen, and others), the paper points out the way Barthelme creates various ontological levels within his story's fictional world and how these levels generate meaning related to both the actual world (physical reality) and the more abstract world of language and fiction. In the author's view, within the mimetic mode of this short story, Barthelme appears to treat the status of the Angry Young Man group of authors in history and the inadequacy of their style of writing in contemporary social, cultural, and literary situations. Within the allegorical framework (in Craig Owen's understanding), by using metafiction and other postmodern techniques, the author undermines the mimetic principle, its rationality and objectivism, and points out the unreliability of reason to explain and understand the world. At the same time, within this allegorical framework and by using metafiction, Barthelme seems to point out a commercialization of popular culture through its institutionalization (teaching at schools, presenting in media), which reduces its former critical potential played in the society. (JK)

“Playing with a loop of string”: Tropes, Folds, and Narrative Form in Kurt Vonnegut

Neil Easterbrook

In essays about Kurt Vonnegut Jr., Toni Morrison, John Barth, and other contemporary American novelists, Zoltán Abádi-Nagy has consistently linked his reading strategies to those of narrative form, especially the metafictional tropes that have marked postmodern fiction. Taking Abádi-Nagy as a constant point of reference, this essay addresses tropes of narrative form in Vonnegut’s *Cat’s Cradle* and *Galápagos*, building from the central conceit that structures *Cat’s Cradle*, both a child’s game played with a single piece of string tied into a circle and a metaphoric instance of self-reflexivity that binds the text together. Indeed, “playing with [this] loop of string” is a synecdochic trope for Vonnegut’s oeuvre, a play or fold (*pli*, as Gilles Deleuze argues in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*) that forms the text’s figural economy and produces for readers an endless series of chiasmic reversals. (NE)

Imagining Science in Kim Stanley Robinson’s Novel *Galileo’s Dream*

Donald Wesling

Through his 2009 novel about Galileo’s discoveries in astronomy and fundamental physics, which involves time/space travel to the moons of Jupiter 1000 years into the future, Kim Stanley Robinson presents favorable images of the intellectual endeavor of science. This is science fiction about science, as implied critique of the politics-inspired relegation of research findings, in the years 2000-08 in the United States. (DW)

Woody Guthrie’s “Union War”

Will Kaufman

In the summer of 1941, shortly after the Nazi invasion of Russia, Woody Guthrie jumped off a transcontinental cattle car and made his way to Pete Seeger’s door in New York. Guthrie greeted Seeger: “Well, looks like we won’t be singin’ no more peace songs.” Churchill, he said, had “flip-flopped” in declaring Stalin an ally: “Reckon we gotta flip-flop too.”

This essay explores Guthrie’s songs and writings in the context of the crisis of the American Left in its reactions to the Hitler-Stalin pact, the

dissolution of the pact, and the US entry into the Second World War. As an avowed communist sympathizer and Popular Front activist, Guthrie initially excoriated Franklin Roosevelt as a warmonger; but with the breaking of the Hitler-Stalin pact, Guthrie was soon throwing his weight behind the war-production effort in a host of songs, essays, and letters. After Pearl Harbor and Guthrie's own entry into the Merchant Marine, the war became for him a fight for international socialism and industrial unionism. The essays thus engages with the narrative of the "Union War" that Guthrie constructed in order to accommodate the fitful negotiations of the American Left as it attempted to define its relation to the events of 1939-45. (WK)

The Unmaking of a Gentleman: George Johnston and a Mixed-blood Dilemma

Robert E. Bieder

George Johnston, a mixed-blood born in 1800, was not typical of the majority of mixed-bloods on the Michigan frontier. As a member of one of the most distinguished families in Sault Ste. Marie, George was a man of some importance. His father was an Irish gentleman fur trader and his mother a daughter of a local Ojibwa band chief. George and his siblings received excellent educations for that place and time. George considered himself a gentleman far above the many white voyagers, other mixed-bloods, and definitely the Indians. In the 1820s George's world fell apart and he died in penury in 1874. This paper details the strange turn of events that brought about his downfall and also poses the question of whether his curious death was by accident or design. (REB)

High Plains Local Color, or Maybe It's Maybelline

Robert Murray Davis

American writers of a certain bent seem irresistibly drawn to the culture of bucolic America envisioned by Thomas Jefferson. Ironically, some of these authors are literary carpetbaggers no less eager to identify and exploit local recourses than their villainous subdividers, corporate hog farmers, or road builders. Still, the novels I examine all seek to create a kind of high-plains pastoral, using a common set of formulas.

These include identification of a fading community not previously exploited for literary purpose and at least superficial research into details of scenery, general ambience, and the appearance and language of the inhabitants; a character to serve as vehicle for the plot who is either an outsider or a returned exile, basically an expository device to make the familiar strange or vice versa; villains who exploit people, landscape, or resources in ways that undermine community values; one or more characters who embody or enunciate those values; sex, though optional, that is primal, mystic, loud, and earth-shattering; integration of the central character into the community; resolution in terms of smallness, limitation, greenness, and respect for local values.

While these values are worthy of respect, they are, in Annie Proulx's *That Old Ace in the Hole*, Sharon Niederman's *Return to Abo*, and Robert James Waller's *High Plains Tango*, contaminated by cynicism, sentimentality, pseudo-mysticism, or a combination that frequently ignores the reality of small towns and real economic and environmental conditions of the twenty-first century West. (RMD)

Interwar New York—City of Europeans: Forging a New Identity

Tibor Frank

The paper focuses on European immigration into New York City in the interwar years, with particular attention to creative intellectuals, many of them Jewish, arriving from Germany, German-speaking Central Europe, and particularly Hungary. The contribution of European immigrants influenced the growth of the New York Modern, transferring key elements and notions of European modernism into the United States. In New York, Europeans found an eager acceptance of new ideas and art-forms and forged a new identity rooted in their European origins and their newly acquired US experiences. This particularly fertile blend made New York in many ways into a European city. (TF)

Travel Writing as a Substitute for American Studies in Hungary

Tibor Glant

Since the publication of *Journey in North America* by Sándor Bölöni Farkas in 1834, Hungarians have viewed the United States (generally referred to as

“America”) with keen and relentless interest. The US represented a political and economic promised land for Hungarians and was seen as a land of miracles and disappointments. During the course of the 180 years since the publication of Bölöni’s book, state censorship has partially (much of the nineteenth century) and sometimes fully (the communist period) prevented open and free discussion of American matters in Hungary. The governments at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries commissioned a group of experts to study the economic and educational system of the United States, but this first thorough survey was abandoned after World War I. Between the wars, the US was discussed freely and openly, but this was cut short by the communist takeover following World War II. Hungary regained her freedom only in 1989. All through this period, travel writing substituted for the systematic study of the United States, or American Studies, in Hungary. Similarly, Hungarians have always admired the American political and constitutional system, yet at a series of historical turning points (1848-49, 1918-20, 1945, and 1989) the various elites of the time always chose not to adopt it. (TG)

Conversation and the Authority of Normal Discourse in Richard Rorty’s Metaphilosophy

Péter Csató

The essay discusses Richard Rorty’s metaphor of conversation—introduced in his seminal *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979)—in the context of his metaphilosophy. Rorty adopts Thomas Kuhn’s terminology when distinguishing between “normal” and “abnormal” discourse, condemning the former (which presupposes in-place discursive norms) as a possible source of uncritical consensus and commending the latter (which privileges idiosyncrasy and innovativeness over consensus) for its energizing and emancipatory potentials. Rorty, however, not only refrains from the kind of rhetorical invention associated with abnormal discourse, but also seeks to redescribe complex philosophical and theoretical abstractions as well as idiosyncratic rhetorical configurations in his own pragmatic terms. He demystifies the highly specialized terminologies of academic philosophy, whereby he devises a metadiscourse which has a “normalizing” function (for it makes philosophy available for a wider circle of interlocutors), but it also enables Rorty to mark out an authoritative position for his own philosophical thought. (PCs)

Versions of the Clown in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Sam Shepard's *Kicking a Dead Horse*

Gabriella Varró

While Samuel Beckett's fascination and recurring involvement with the figure of the clown is relatively well known in the criticism, Sam Shepard's entanglement with the same dramatic type character has been almost entirely ignored. This study intends to bridge this gap in the critical discussion of Shepard and emphasizes the relevant analogies that exist between the dramas of these authors. The investigation focuses on the significance of the clown character and various clowning traditions in the two selected plays, specifying those real life models which might have influenced the artistic representations. The analysis also underlines the embedded-ness of the clown within the Theatre of the Absurd, calls attention to the Irish shades of this often mysterious and clearly paradoxical theatrical archetype, as well as discusses fundamental similarities between the dramatic actualizations of the type in *Waiting for Godot* and *Kicking a Dead Horse*. (GV)

Narrative in Drama: The Example of Contemporary Irish Women Playwrights

Mária Kurdi

The operation of narrative in drama is an increasingly important field of scrutiny, given that the boundaries of drama have become rather fluid due to the fertilizing presence of the variety of transgeneric and transmedial phenomena and methods characteristic of cultural production in our time. Drawing on the largely verbal traditions of the genre in Ireland, storytelling and narrative in recent Irish plays take different forms from deploying types of "generative narrators" to multiple-voiced narration as well as monologues. Drama written by emerging female authors in the 1980s and 1990s is of particular interest: they reconfigure elements of the distinctive Irish theatre traditions and generic developments in world theatre by renewing the ways in which narrative can be used in theatre. The present essay investigates the respective, complex uses of storytelling, the homodiegetic narrator and the monologue form in three plays, written by Marina Carr, Christina Reid and Elizabeth Kuti, as characteristic examples of the interface of drama and narrative in Irish playwriting. Considering the

innovative ways in which they explore intersubjective relations, these works provide material for further theorizations of the overlapping strategies of performance and narrative on the contemporary stage. (MK)

“The economics of utter idiocy”: The Rise and Demise of the Celtic Tiger

Donald E. Morse

The essay discusses the “rise and demise” of the Celtic Tiger, drawing a trajectory of success of the nation that went, in James Joyce’s words, “up like a rocket and down like a stick.” As the most globalized nation in the world, Ireland produced a host of global-village idiots, who, through greed and corruption, killed the Celtic Tiger within a few short years, bursting the housing bubble and plunging the country into steep economic decline. The essay focuses on both the historical and economic background of this trend as well as its echo in literary works such as Brian Friel’s far-too-neglected play *The Mundy Scheme*, Tom Mac Intyre’s *Only an Apple* (2009), Anne Hagerty’s *One Day as a Tiger* (1997), Chris Binchy’s third novel, *Open-handed* (2008), and Paul Murray’s *An Evening of Long Goodbyes* (2003) and *Skippy Dies* (2010). (KM)