

### Issue Editor's Note

Throughout the period of nearly three years during which this issue was coming into life, our world was seriously shaken by numerous armed conflicts in Ukraine, in the Middle East, and Asia. Several other disconcerting issues of political, social, ideological, existential, or environmental nature have also emerged as troubling concerns often fomenting profound divides. The six international and four Hungarian contributions in the current issue of the *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*—now published by the international publishing house Sciendo/DeGruyter—reflect on such conflicts from multiple perspectives.

The Brexit referendum in 2016 and the UK's consequential leave from the European Union revealed a great degree of fragmentation and division in British society—exposing multiple layers of social, economic, and political crises fueled by propaganda and manipulation that appealed to people's insecurities, fears, and (perplexed) sense of nationalism. The 51.89% vote in favor of leave served as a compelling experience, which has driven intellectuals in various fields to reflect on what happened and help discern and comprehend how Britain had got there. Scholars in the humanities have endeavored to offer a wide array of commentaries and analyses approaching the Brexit problem from multiple vantage points—as the first cluster of three outstanding contributions to this issue demonstrate.

These essays—generously recruited and pre-edited by Professor Tamás Bényei of the University of Debrecen, one of the authors himself—are extended and revised versions of papers given at the 2020 ESSE Conference in Lyon (postponed and held online in 2021 due to the pandemic) in the seminar entitled *Countdown to Brexit: Community and Body Politics in Contemporary British Fiction and Visual Arts*.

The first piece in this section, Catherine Bernard's "Reembodying Utopia: The Politics of Nature in Ali Smith's 'Seasonal Quartet'" probes Smith's well-known literary work—an exceptional attempt to portray what "Brexit reactivates and signifies culturally and politically" and to reflect on "the dialectics of past and future at work in the Brexit vote"—which looks at the deep identity crisis that had poisoned British society for long. Catherine Bernard's subtle reading of the novels focuses on how the quartet—transforming "the condition of England" genre—through the "affective politics of nature" and inspired by artists such as Barbara Hepworth and

Tacita Dean and their art as a “self-reflexive mirror,” engenders “possible futures beyond the crisis.” The cyclical patterns of the seasons in the quartet’s symbolic universe, the dynamics of the temporal and physical changes of nature, the shape-shifting characters in the novels who mediate between and transcend beyond realities and subjectivities in space and time symbolically breaking down the divisions, the locks, the fences, the enclosures, and the hedges, as Bernard argues, affect, with a “utopian gesture,” “the promise of collective redemption and change.”

The second essay in this cluster also engages with Smith’s “Seasonal Quartet,” albeit with a focus on the second sequel, *Winter*, published in 2017. In “Figures and Grounds: Art and the Body Politic in Ali Smith’s *Winter*,” Tamás Béneyei offers an engaging and nuanced study of the novel—with a view to how it problematizes “Brexit by revitalizing the metaphor of the body politic.” The essay discusses the role of landscape and how the aesthetics of various artistic representations in post-World War II British landscape painting and art, especially Barbara Hepworth’s works, represent and (re-)negotiate the trope of Brexit—the experience of a gravely disrupted and dismembered Britain—the image of the “quartered kingdom.” In a fascinating analysis, the essay also examines the novel’s “intertextual conversation” with William Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* and how it resonates with the contemporary British political and social scene—conclusively “addressing the ways in which the reimagining of the body politic is entangled with Smith’s poetic strategies.”

Wolfgang Funk’s analysis, “Open Wounds and Physical Divisions: Pre-Brexit Visions of a Divided Kingdom,” the third essay in this section, discusses three seminal pieces of the so-called pre-Brexit novels, published well before Britain’s leave from the European Union. Julian Barnes’s *England, England* (1998), Tony Saint’s *Refusal Shoes* (2003), and Rupert Thomson’s *Divided Kingdom* (2005) demonstrate how these literary works, which showcase border imagery and various border discourses—borders “both real and metaphorical, mental and physical, external and internal”—anticipate and warn of many of the divisive “faultlines” that had come to light on the way to Brexit, and which had long hurt the nation, ultimately causing deep injuries so famously expressed by Anish Kapoor’s illustration in the 3 July 2019 issue of *The Guardian* with the image of the British Isles and Ireland ripped apart by “a gouging and festering wound.”

While Brexit manifested and affected a deep identity crisis in British society, the imminent ecological concerns and serious environmental problems, such as global warming, biodiversity loss, air pollution, acid rain,

or deforestation, are equally dire challenges that should force humans to engage in immediate action. Hatice Bakanlar Mutlu's inquiry "New British Nature Writing, or an Emergent Hope" discusses three notable pieces of the recently emerging genre of new British nature writing. These first-person, non-fiction works by contemporary British authors—which, as Mutlu claims, can be categorized as eco-memoirs—including Kathleen Jamie's essay trilogy *Findings*, *Sightlines* and *Surfacing*, Amy Liptrot's *The Outrun*, and Carol Donaldson's *On the Marshes: A Journey into England's Waterlands* challenge the Anthropocene, and with their transformative power could serve as an inspiration and alternative to enliven an eco-centered approach to the natural world and "cherish hopes for a livable future for our planet."

With a focus on how spatiality informs and engenders memory construction and text production, András Tarnóc's essay "'There is never any ending to Paris': Manifestations of Spatiality in Ernest Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast*" analyzes one of Hemingway's classics, his memoir posthumously published in 1964, in which the author reminisces about the exciting and empowering years he spent in Paris between 1921 and 1926 as a young, yet unrecognized writer in an attempt to reconnect with his young self—in a subjective tour down memory lane. Drawing on a great body of theoretical background including, among others, Martin Heidegger, Henry Lefebvre, Pierre Nora, and Walter Benjamin, Tarnóc discusses Hemingway's spatial practices, the psychogeography of the author's Paris universe, how the city of Paris serves as a *lieu de memoire* for the author, how the dialectics of the here and there, the experience of in-betweenness negotiate Hemingway's identity, and how he discovers the actual and poetic geography in his attempt to seek refuge in the past—in Paris, a city that "for the rest of your life, . . . stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast."

The next essay in the issue by Yi Zhang, "'Asiatic Black Man': W. E. B. Du Bois and Langston Hughes in Soviet Asia," the first of two essays investigating Afro-American Eurasianism through the twin cases of W. E. B. Du Bois and Langston Hughes, puts Du Bois's views on Soviet Asia in the focus discussing them from a new transcontinental perspective. In an illuminating analysis, drawing on an impressive body of primary and secondary sources, Zhang discusses the influences on and the evolution of Du Bois's concept of the "Asiatic Black Man" and argues that Soviet Asia served as "a psychogeographical and geopolitical conduit" which engendered Du Bois's conviction that a Soviet-type socialism was the alternative international world order—a utopia to "emancipate all humankind from racism" and shatter the color-line.

Due to its geopolitical and economic importance, the Middle East has always been a vital sphere of influence for the United States, a region that the US was determined to safeguard—even at the expense of coercion and war, especially so following the 1973 oil crisis. Rasha Awale’s inquiry “Twisted Narratives: The Neoconservatives’ Pursuit of War for Oil in the 1970s” offers a close reading of a series of public statements, articles, and various other publications from prominent neoconservative intellectuals—academics, political advisors, as well as journalists including, for example, Edward Luttwak, Robert Tucker, Norman Podhoretz, Eugen Rostow, Walter Laqueur, and Jordan Paust, who, as Awale contends, acted as the ideological masterminds behind schemes of confrontational foreign policy that rationalized the use of force and preemptive military action as means of conflict resolution—a strategy that defined the neoconservative approach to the region in the aftermath of 9/11. The analysis also highlights how such rhetoric in the 1970s was influenced by the Orientalist, anti-Arab discourse that positioned people in the Middle East as “the West’s cultural Other”—essentially against democracy and liberalism—who “can only understand the language of force.”

George F. Kennan, the legendary American diplomat, the father of containment, a highly esteemed expert on Russia, the uncompromising critic, the man who during his long, prolific, and influential career was unquestionably an unavoidable factor in American foreign policy. Despite his relatively early retirement from active service, he has been the subject of numerous historical analyses, and there is hardly any detail of Kennan’s career that has avoided scholarly attention. Zoltán Peterecz in “George F. Kennan and Hungary: A Cold War Visionary and a ‘remarkable people with rich civilizational qualities,’” however, relying on archival sources, the *Kennan Diaries*, as well as the valuable materials of the correspondence between Kennan and John Lukács, sheds light on a so-far rather neglected aspect of the diplomat’s life and offers insights into Kennan’s views on and attitude towards Hungary and Hungarian foreign policy—with a focus on Kennan’s commentaries and evaluation of Hungarian affairs in the late 1930s, during the period after World War II, and in 1956, as well as in 1986 when Kennan paid a personal, unofficial visit to Budapest. The essay thus is a “unique addition” to the expanding scholarship on American–Hungarian relations.

The creed of American exceptionalism, the very core of American identity, has always served as an underlying ideology to justify US foreign political conduct; therefore, it has oftentimes been contested and criticized. Atalie Gerhard’s essay, “American Veteran Noirs: Investigating

Exceptionalism and Its Post-World War II 'Trauma' offers a unique perspective on such critique by way of analyzing three film noirs: *Act of Violence* (1948) directed by Fred Zinnemann, *Angel Heart* (1987) by Alan Parker, and *Shutter Island* (2010) by Martin Scorsese. These cinematic narratives place American veteran soldiers suffering from traumatic war experiences and their consequences including PTSD, anxiety, and paranoia in the center. Through such troubled subjectivities, the films problematize and subvert the concept of American exceptionalism, destabilize the ethos of American moral superiority and heroism, and, as Gerhard demonstrates, question the righteousness of US foreign interventions following World War II, in the Cold War and beyond.

The Reformed College in the city of Debrecen, often designated as the Calvinist Rome, has been a powerful symbol of Reformation in Hungary since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Throughout its history, however, the college has had to face several challenges including conflicts with the Catholics following the end of the Ottoman rule, when the Catholic Habsburgs asserted their political influence over the Kingdom of Hungary. As a result, the City of Debrecen, by the force of law, was forbidden to finance the salaries of the clergymen of the Calvinist Church and those of the college professors—forcing the institution to raise funds from abroad and solicit financial aid from Protestant brothers in the Netherlands, Switzerland, and England. Based on a rich body of primary sources, especially the Archives of the Reformed Church District of Tiszántúl [Trans-Theiss region], Réka Bozzay's "English Financial Aid for the Reformed College of Debrecen in Light of Hungarian Archival Sources" concludes the essay section by tracing the history of the English Protestant aid in a studious account.

The review section contains four insightful reviews offering their critical commentaries on recent publications, which cover a broad scope of topics including the second volume of Katherine Mansfield's collected letters, Sahar Ghumkhor's *The Political Psychology of the Veil*, twenty-first-century productions of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*, as well as *The Prison Memory Archive* project in Northern Ireland.

As the editor of the issue, I wish to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of all the blind reviewers and all the members of the editorial board of *HJEAS*—review editor Gabriella Moise, copy editor Mariann Buday, language editor Jared Griffin, and technical editor Kálmán

Matolcsy—whose devoted and conscientious work helped foster the publication of the current issue. Words of appreciation are also to be extended to Editor-in-Chief Donald E. Morse for his unceasing commitment to the journal.

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#### **Works Cited**

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