

Cultural Dialogues

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Introduction

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For more than fifteen years, on the occasion of our conference, we have been in the habit of reflecting and inviting reflection on the topics of identity and communication, mostly in a comparative perspective, and by taking into account the most important developments in theory and criticism.

In various theoretical accounts, identity emerges as flexible, malleable and open-ended, apart from having a unique ontological core. Modern identity, as Stuart Hall shows, is constituted in a “dialogic relationship between two axes or vectors, simultaneously operative: the vector of similarity and continuity; and the vector of difference and rupture” (Hall 1994: 395).

To a certain extent, the ethnocentric position is “natural” and should not be mistaken for xenophobia. However, the encounter with otherness has a relativizing effect upon any narcissistic or self-centred disposition (even when we talk about collective identities): “*Identity* means cognitive effort and dialogue with the other; for an ‘ecology’ of communication, identities must be strengthened and what separates us must be acknowledged” (Parpală 2020: 97). That is why any investigation of the self should be dialogical / intercultural (Sondrup & Miller 2002):

“Intercultural communication dealing with fundamental questions relating to human existence that penetrates beyond the superficial and vacuous requires a willingness to interrogate and adapt presuppositions and even the most fundamental ways of perceiving and thinking” (Sondrup 2002: 18).

In the eighteenth century, when cosmopolitanism began to gain momentum, Montesquieu explored the issues of identity and alterity in the epistolary novel *The Persian Letters* (first published in 1721). At one point in the narrative, he humorously makes one of the French characters ask the ultimate ethnocentric question: “How can anyone be Persian?” Which could be read, of course, as “How can anyone be different from me?” This metaphysical interrogation suggests that our first instinct is to universalize our own identity, ethos and heritage, converting them into standards for the assessment of difference. However, as the studies of comparative imagology argue, *self-images* are continuously adjusted and reconfigured by interaction with the *hetero-images* (Dyserinck 1986) that communities form and foster. Strict ethnocentrism is, of course, not feasible, in the long run, because cultural

identities are never pure but rather already hybridized, continuously shaping and reshaping themselves according to influences received and to deliberate intercultural dialogue. The Romanian poet and philosopher Lucian Blaga (1994: 192) distinguished between influences which have a *shaping* effect, and influences which are *catalytic*, stimulating the target culture to evolve along the lines of its own “stylistic matrix” or archetypal nucleus and not that of the influencing culture.

As scholars activating in several fields of expertise, from linguistics and communication theory to political science and literary studies, the contributors to our volumes also show us how the engagement with the past (and various traditions) is in fact part and parcel of any academic endeavour. The current post-postmodern mindset is still so mesmerized by deconstruction, that one might not feel surprised when tradition is equated with everything antiquated, backward or even dangerous, to the extent that it is grounded in “essentialist” assumptions. The attack of deconstruction on the humanistic legacy of the West did not, however, entirely delegitimize previous modes of thought, worldviews or value systems. A healthy integration of tradition can be very useful, through polemical and sometimes consensual dialogue with what the work of other generations and currents of thought have to offer. Equally important is, of course, the engagement with contemporary, “fashionable” theories, often from related or even more distant fields. When drawing from such intellectual movements, as literary studies, which are always enthusiastic about interdisciplinarity, are prone to do, there is also a risk of shallowness or misunderstanding:

“‘Theory’ is a genre because of the way its works function. The practitioners of particular disciplines complain that works claimed by the genre are studied outside the proper disciplinary matrix: students of theory read Freud without enquiring whether later psychological research may have disputed his formulations; they read Derrida without having mastered the philosophical tradition; they read Marx without studying alternative descriptions of political and economic situation” (Culler 1982: 9).

Last year, the contributions in our volume (*Forms of Critical Thinking*, 2022) brought into attention the various forms of critical thinking, from thorough text analysis or close reading to the sceptical epistemological positioning and strategic suspicion towards inflexible dogmas or totalitarian systems of thought. Genuine critical thinking is what helps us navigate the profusion of revoluted or still fertile models and theoretical frames, interestingly intermingled with very recent or emerging fields and subsets of theory. The four plenary conferences were exemplary for this type of simultaneous dialogue with tradition and the contemporary, in cognitive linguistics (Csillag 2022), theology (Gaál-Szabó 2022), film analysis (Goss 2022) and gastronomic terminology as a cultural mediator (Teodorescu and Nicolae 2022).

The sense of reverence entailed by the use of a word like *tradition* might explain the reluctance of progressively-oriented thinkers to adopt a more traditional stance, even when the content of what has been transmitted (from the Latin *trado*-ere) is not ideologically unacceptable: “Tradition survived in English as a description of a general process of handing down, but there is a very strong and often predominant sense of this entailing respect and duty” (Williams 1976: 269). We are entirely aware that “modernity lives on the experience of rebelling against all that is normative” (Habermas 1982: 5) and that traditions themselves are not simply natural or organic but, to a considerable extent, “invented” or “imagined”, as “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (Hobsbawm & Ranger 2000: 1).

Of course, the premise of deconstruction is that most categories which pass for axiomatic are in fact “constructs” which, as a “natural” consequence, invite deconstruction or de-naturalization (and, one could add, demystification). The prevalence of parody within postmodernism is another consequence of this mode of viewing things, considering that parody is “repetition with difference” (Hutcheon 1985). The contemporary landscape also reveals a preference for “a special type of literary work that attaches itself remora-like to its source in seemingly parasitic dependence” (Coward 1993: 1). At the same time, these sorts of palimpsests, which David Coward calls “symbiotic texts”, function as “epistemic dialogue with ages producing parent texts, as authorial psychomachia, and, most importantly, as reading, misreading, and deconstruction of the literary past” (*ibidem*: 3).

That tradition is the other side of the modernist “coin” we know from T. S. Eliot who, in his 1917 essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, argued that tradition is not simply inherited, but you need to conquer it, if you want to be an artist, that every new and truly accomplished work modifies the past and the “simultaneous order” of literature; he postulated the necessity of a “historical sense” for the writer, which is a sense “not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence”, “a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal” (Eliot 1950: 14).

The tradition is, of course, not just a pretext for renewal through polemics and parodical deconstruction but valuable and relevant in itself. In Gerald L. Bruns’ terms, we should “think of tradition”, in a hermeneutical framework, “as inscribing, in its irrepressibility and irreducibility, what cannot be done away with, or that which must be faced” (Bruns 1991: 12). Another piece of the puzzle is given by the energies of dialogue, polemic or otherwise, or of *appropriation*, which, one could argue, is what keeps tradition alive, while (radically) changing it or contradicting it: “Appropriation in this sense is what keeps tradition from turning into a museum. Tradition is not mere repetition but is the modern subject’s mode of being historical” (*ibidem*: 6).

We could better understand these phenomena if we refer to concrete examples from the cultural diachrony. During the European Renaissance there was a deliberate

movement *ad fontes*, a return to Antiquity and a renewed interest in preserving the corpus of Greek and Roman culture. From the field of New Historicism or Cultural Poetics, Stephen Greenblatt documented in his book, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*, the discovery in 1417 by the Italian humanist Poggio Bracciolini of the manuscript of Lucretius' poem *De rerum natura* (*On the Nature of Things*). The impact of this book on writers, artists, thinkers and scientists from the Early Modern period on was tremendous, according to the American critic: Botticelli, Lorenzo Valla, Giordano Bruno, Galileo Galilei, Michel de Montaigne, Sigmund Freud, Charles Darwin, Thomas Jefferson and Albert Einstein are just a few of the authors who were fascinated by Lucretius' original and "dangerous" poetization of Democritus' and Epicurus' atomistic system. Atheism and materialism were the hallmarks of this work and what made it challenging or subversive, because Lucretius dismantled religion and especially eschatology (representations of the afterlife), claiming that the fear of death is pointless, because the soul itself is made up of atoms which vanish at the moment of death. The pursuit of pleasure thus becomes the ultimate ideal for the proponents of this system. This is an example for how a certain trend of thought, in this case represented by modern atheism (which often has an antitraditional stance) can seek and find validation in an ancient book.

The *swerve* (which is an equivalent for Lucretius' concept "clinamen"), can also be a metaphor for the difference engendered by any new appropriation of what is already there or inherited: a deviation and dissimilarity or discontinuity on the background of continuity. *Clinamen* is also the name of the first (of six) "revisionary ratios" identified by Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1997) as defence strategies employed by a disciple (or an "ephebe") of a great author, when confronted with his own awareness of being influenced by a master, whose shadow can be overwhelming. "Strong poets", Bloom argued, like Lucretius himself, "opt for *clinamen* as freedom" (1997: 14).

The relevance of tradition is all the more prominent in discussions about what is often called the "canon" or "great books", or, in a narrower perspective, the *Western Canon* (see Bloom 1994). The term became fashionable in the 90s in an American academic environment, but in Europe the same problematic has been debated under the rubric of "the classics", that is, authors and texts of certified value from previous generations. An important criterion for canonicity is, in Bloom's opinion, "strangeness", which he defines as "a mode of originality that either cannot be assimilated, or that so assimilates us that we cease to see it as strange" (Bloom 1994: 3). This description of originality as ambivalent or paradoxical would not be possible without the underlying pattern of the dialogue with tradition which becomes the standard (the main meaning of the Greek word *canon*) whereby we judge novelty and recognize value. The implication is that the canon *as* tradition offers the code allowing us to decipher and assimilate (or, perhaps, maintain as unassimilable) the new work of art which will determine, as Eliot noticed in the essay already mentioned, a reset or reorganization of the "simultaneous order" of literature.

“Strangeness” is also the concept used by Mads Rosendahl Thomsen (2013) for outlining a redefined world literature as a new paradigm for studying “literature beyond the nation”; in the new global context, strangeness is “mediated through genres, bicultural references, and (im)migrant experiences” (Thomsen 2013).

Canonical strangeness can evoke in our minds another important notion in literary theory, i.e. “estrangement” or “de-automatization” / “defamiliarization” (*ostranenie*), a concept proposed by Russian formalist Viktor Shklovski in the essay *The Art as Technique* from *Theory of Prose* (1991). We get accustomed with everything around us, even new and exciting things, which makes our perception become automatized, Shklovski argued. It is the task of the writers to “make it new”, to free the objects (and language itself, of course) from their instrumental banality and make them regain their “aura” and their “strangeness”, as if shining a strong light on them.

Such a representation of literariness (or the specificity of literature) involves working with the given, the received data and ideas, the déjà-vu or déjà-lu, in a word, the past. By always refreshing and appropriating what is already there, original artists (or scientists, for that matter) create their own traditions, sometimes “inventing their precursors”, as Jorge Luis Borges claimed in the essay *Kafka and His Precursors* (1964). We, the readers are not excluded from this process: it is ultimately, the readership who is perceiving Kafkaesque elements in Zenon’s paradoxes or the Chinese encyclopaedia quoted by Borges. We could also call these modes of appropriating the past *strategic misreadings*. The invented precursors are co-opted for a personal agenda: it is the very essence of the mechanism proper to literary (and sometimes scientific) renewal.

The fabric of culture is maintained through a perpetual revisitation of the past in order to define more precisely the identity of the present paradigm and to devise the best models for future action. The “historical sense” identified by T. S. Eliot applies to the scientists as well, not only to the literary creators. Scholars engaged in various domains of expertise can have ambivalent relations with the heritage of their own discipline, including us. We strive to be original by effectuating a swerve, a clinamen, an *écart*, by deviating, slightly, moderately or radically, from the received body of knowledge. From within their particular fields, the scholars fulfil their role of mediators (of cultural identities and/ or theoretical trends) and facilitators of dialogues – between texts and cultures, readers and texts, or between theoretical and critical schools.

The volume is divided into two main sections: *Identity and Comparative Literature* and *Discursive Variations*. There are 11 articles and the authors come from Romania (University of Craiova and University of Bucharest), from Spain / USA and Hungary. If scholars in general are mediators and initiators of dialogue, comparatists, in particular, view their task as that of mitigating strangeness or foreignness (through domestication and reduction to the “universal”, acknowledging that this notion can be perceived ethnocentrically) or, on the contrary, through

keeping it as such, in order to be known and appreciated as difference and otherness. Apart from the methods of comparative literature *per se*, the comparative frame of mind underlies all the analyses, by juxtaposing and contrasting various perspectives on literature. The 7 articles in the first section map the multifaceted problematic of identity from several angles and from the standpoint of various approaches: theories of space and genre, poetics of humour, age studies, cognitive stylistics, digital studies, comparative literature, ecocriticism.

Raluca Boboc from the University of Bucharest, Romania, is the author of *Self-displacement and the Experience of Spatial Otherness in 20th Century Travel Memoirs: Nicolas Bouvier and Karen Blixen*. The theoretical premise of the paper is that our experience of space is intermingled with identity formation, as shown by Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* and with foreignness or alterity, as demonstrated by Jean Baudrillard and Mac Guillaume. The analyzed texts are *Out of Africa* by Karen Blixen, a self-displaced Scandinavian writer and the travelogue *The Way of the World (L'usage du monde)* by the Swiss writer Nicolas Bouvier. Here the foreign space is experienced as cultural and inner enlargement and growth (for Blixen) and also as becoming (for Bouvier). In the paradigm of self-displacement, the meeting of the other is assumed as an existential strategy. By letting travel itself teach him everything he needs to know, Nicolas Bouvier fashions a new identity out of epiphanic moments of intensity experienced on the road. The Danish writer Karen Blixen found in Africa, where she lived for seventeen years, an archetypal home, after slowly discovering the many layers of the natural and human landscape of this space. The town Nairobi is described, anthropologically but also subjectively, from the standpoint of various types of dwelling preferred by the ethnic groups living there, including Indian Somali and European. While exploring otherness, the author discovers and shapes her own self as an emergent writer, whom literary critics characterized as modernist, but also with elements of Romanticism and Postmodernism.

Death and laughter. Situational humour in Caitlin Doughty's "From Here to Eternity" is an article by Cristina-Mihaela Botîlcă from the University of Bucharest, Romania. When dealing with serious topics as pain or death, the use of humour is usually frowned upon and suspected of cynicism. Hence, the relative scarcity of studies in this field, considering that the death scene is often regarded as taboo. The author analyses the *modus operandi* of what has often been called "graveyard humour" in the book titled *From Here to Eternity* (2017) by Caitlin Doughty, a mortician and head of a funeral home in Los Angeles, who has documented her travels around the world, with a focus on various death rituals and what they revealed about dominant mindsets regarding death phobia or death acceptance. The original angle the research proposes is an assessment of the role situational humour plays within this corpus. The most frequent strategies found in Doughty's book are humour related to the body-corpse, humour of relatability, and situational humour. Humour, even dark and self-deprecating, is a coping mechanism which can sometimes prove helpful in easing anxiety or death phobia, as one of the first steps on the bridge

between denial and acceptance. It is never at the expense of the dead person or at those grieving someone's death. When used wisely, this type of humour can even have a healing, therapeutic effect, especially on those who already have the philosophical disposition of confronting their own mortality.

Adela Catană from Ferdinand I Military Technical Academy, Bucharest, Romania writes about *Attitudes towards Age and Aging in Critical Utopias*. Age, the author argues, is both a biological reality and a cultural construct, discussed in public and academic discourses, just like the process of aging, or senescence. Ever since the beginning of culture, age has inspired philosophical reflections of all sorts. Nowadays, we have Age Studies, which developed from gerontology, a scientific field configured in the 30s. More recently, this topic is caught within a network of identity categories, like class, gender, race, ethnicity, or ableness. This interesting intersectionality generates some literary resonances in two North-American book series, two "critical utopias" which will constitute the article's corpus: Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* and Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*. Age comes into play because the protagonists in these novels are young people with high hopes for a better future who grow up in a malignant adult world. Because of the dire conditions they live in, destitute children are forced to mature too soon, while the privileged ones prolong their childhood, becoming infantile adults. In Atwood's dystopia, there is a type of characters who only grow physically, thus resembling cognitively impaired persons. Attitudes towards old age also vary, from acceptance to total rejection. In *The Hunger Games*, the elderly are regarded as heroes of survival. The rich cling to their youth, through make-up or plastic surgeries. The texts analysed here can help us take distance from the many stereotypes and preconceptions regarding age and the identity of people in various stages of life.

Christianity through Metaphors: A Cognitive Linguistics vs. Traditional Linguistics Approach of Daniel Turcea's Poetry is the following article, by Steliana Mădălina Deaconu, from "Titu Maiorescu" University, Bucharest, Romania. The author focuses on the poetic output of Daniel Turcea (1945–1979), a special, *sui generis* Christian poet. The first sub-chapter presents some data from the poet's biography. The most important element or event, with decisive consequences for his creation, was his re-conversion to Christianity, after a period when he idolized science, rejecting religion. His two volumes of poetry, *The Entropy* and *The Epiphany, the Last Christian Love Poems*, highlight the transition from one stage to another, a trajectory punctuated by repentance. His illumination was also reflected in his behaviour and social engagement: he was very generous and charitable, thus putting into practice the Christian doctrine and ethos. He finished *The Epiphany*, a volume with a simple but profound style, while being terminally ill. He died of leukaemia, after discovering that suffering purifies the soul. His poems are structured around Christian Orthodox insights, especially the inner quest for God, who is "closer to us than our soul". The theologian Dumitru Staniloae appreciated the "dogmatic depth" of Turcea's poetry. The study analyses recurrent metaphors for God, poetry as blessing, praise-offering and sacrifice; also, metaphors for words as

logos, for letters as iconostasis, for the body, passions, suffering, despair, limitation. The approach is rooted in cognitive stylistics and discourse world theory. But these approaches are also contrasted with and complemented by a traditional stylistic analysis of the same corpus. The latter is based on the Group μ 's model for metaseemes (semantic figures) alongside with simile, metonymy, synecdoche. The goal of this multifaceted analysis has been to demonstrate Daniel Turcea's originality, creativity and the novelty of his poetic language.

The next article is by Carmen Popescu from the University of Craiova: *World Literature and Comparative Literature: Some Methodological Aspects*. The aim here is to review the main directions in the joint fields of world literature and comparative literature, from the standpoint of epistemology and methodology. While world literature can be seen as the (quasi-infinite) corpus or object of study, comparatism is the method used in order to study literary works from various backgrounds in a transnational perspective. Comparative literature has sometimes tried to model itself after hard sciences (especially natural sciences). Apart from this emulation, an interesting aspect noticed by scholars is that, in today's intellectual landscape, the method is morphing into an ethics, influenced by postcolonialism, cosmopolitanism and Michel Foucault's considerations about "epistemic violence", which posits comparison as potentially invalidating for those literatures which are not part of the core Western "canon". Instead of seeing world literature as a corpus or a canon, David Damrosch proposed to understand it as "mode of circulation and of reading" (2003: 5). Not all branches of comparative literature are dominated by ideology. Some have focused on devising new and fertile critical methods, including by borrowing and adjusting already existing theoretical frameworks (literary history, intertextuality and the theory of palimpsest, archetypology etc.). From this perspective, comparatism qualifies as a method of methods or a meta-method.

Paula (Pascaru) Teodorescu from The University of Bucharest signs the article *Chen Qiufan Co-writing with AI - a Posthuman Vision on Writing SF Literature*. On the background of the increasing digitalization of Chinese society, newer generations of Chinese writers are experimenting with innovative modes of writing within the SF genre, while also capitalizing on the growing national interest in science and technology. Nowadays, authors are even incorporating AI tools in the creation and production of their stories, which, in their turn, thematize this very feature. AI can be defined as a machine with human-like intelligence, in a recent addition to electronic literature and other computer-assisted forms of literature, such as hypertext fiction, interactive fiction, generative literature, etc. Hence, the ensuing debates about the (presumably) programmable nature of literature and creativity in general. There are already virtual singers and poetry produced by robots. The paper focuses on three recent works by Chen Qiufan, an award-winning science fiction writer born in 1981. Rejecting the widespread technophobia of traditional culture, this writer embraces AI as an asset likely to be exploited as a creative tool, instead of being feared and demonized. Underlying all this are principles derived from the

philosophy of Posthumanism, wherein humans are no longer viewed as above other species and the environment but interconnected with these elements. By referring to certain aspects of Daoism and Confucianism, the author argues that the notion of co-creation between humans and non-humans, as promoted by Posthumanism, shares similarities with the traditional Chinese view of creativity that emphasizes the importance of collaboration in creation. One Chinese author, Wang Yonggang, even compared the function of AI in generating literary text to the contribution of the nine Muses of Greek mythology whose role in aiding the poet with divine inspiration and formal patterns of composition is well known. The three creative projects by Chen Qiufan analyzed here demonstrate the feasibility of collaborative content generation between humans and AI. These recent literary experiments make us aware, the article concludes, of the importance of seeing AI-human generated texts as a collaboration between humans and machines, rather than a replacement for human creativity, originality and authenticity.

Marinică Tiberiu Șchiopu from the University of Craiova, Romania, is the author of *The End of the Ocean by Maja Lunde: an Eco-emotional Analysis*. He starts from the premise that *cli-fi* (climate fiction), and maybe speculative fiction in general, is a pre-traumatic genre, as noticed by Kaplan 2016. This type of fiction is designed to entice environmental awareness but it also stirs powerful emotions, both for the characters, within the fictional world, and for the readers. Along with this emotional dimension, the simulated situations stimulate the readers' thinking and may even prompt them into action, when looking for better solutions (in terms of sustainability) to the current global crises. Some critics regard this type of fiction as a warning rather as a prediction or prophecy, pertaining to the devastating effect that anthropic activity has on the environment and human habitation. The effect these fictions can have on climate denialism is considerable, the author argues. The paper proposes an eco-spatial analysis of Maja Lunde's novel *The End of the Ocean*, at the confluence of ecocriticism, geocriticism, narratology and close-reading. At the center of this work we can find the archetypal element of the *journey*, as a literary *koinos topos* with multiple connotations, including *quest* or *pilgrimage*. The characters' deambulations (mirroring the water cycle depicted at the beginning of the novel) represent an indictment of the irresponsible behaviour which caused the raise of temperature resulting in on the one hand desertification and on the other hand in the melting of glaciers. The two alternating stories told by the Norwegian writer's fiction overlap thematically and structurally, but also as regards the emotional core identified by Șchiopu (following Glenn Albrecht's suggestion) as *solastalgia* (a combination of Latin and Greek elements: *solari* – "related to consolation" and *algia* – "pain").

The second part of the volume is entitled *Discursive Variations*, as a sign that the four articles within it are centred around the diversity of cultural discourse, invoking several epistemological frameworks, from cognitive linguistics to journalism. In the largest sense, discourse can be perceived as a series or a system of

regularities and predictable elements, as in the case of genres. At the same time, it suggests the close connection with, or even dependence, on the surrounding culture, with its underlying norms, procedures and expectations. Discourse also connotes polyphony, overlaying or multistratification. The receiver's part, is again, of utmost importance for the discourse to be understood in all its articulations:

“More and more we have come to realize that literature is not merely a particular set of discourses, defined, perhaps, on the basis of specific textual properties. It should at the same time be viewed in terms of various aspects of communication. Thus, we may take literary texts, in pragmatics, as a kind of ritual speech act, and try to show what the social conditions, functions and effects of such acts are in the communicative context of writers, publishers, readers, reviewers, school teachers, etc.” (Van Dijk 1978: 143-144).

Andrea Csillag, from Debrecen Reformed Theological University, Debrecen, is the author of *What Do Some Prepositional Phrases Reveal about Causes of Happiness?*, first presented as a plenary lecture. The article uses a lexical and a cognitive framework, in the line of Kövecses, in order to study the expression of happiness (or joy, enjoyment) in language. Happiness is one of the universal human emotions, associated with certain physiological reactions: flushing, increased heart rate, agitation / excitement. From the standpoint of cognitive studies, figurative expressions are either metonymies or metaphors. The present article intends to bring a contribution to the study of the prepositions associated to these expressions, especially those which indicate the cause of the feeling: *be happy in, about* or *with* and *glad at* or *delighted at*. The best approach for this issue is somewhere at the intersection of psychology and linguistics. Happiness can be engendered by the experience of love given and received, or by the fulfilment of plans, or by the satisfaction with the success we have achieved, or from work, family and friends, social relations in general, health, enjoyable free-time activities and so on. Or it can simply be determined by a lack of psychological distress. Using two monolingual dictionaries and a bilingual one, the study is conducted on a corpus of sentences containing the terms *happy, glad, pleased, delighted, happiness, joy, pleasure* and *delight*. The prepositions appear to be somewhat specialized: *in* suggests that causes are metaphorical locations, *at* refers to causes seen as metaphorical sights, *about* pertains to causes conceived as metaphorical topics for the emotional self, while *with* refers to causes as events or actions satisfying the emotional self.

Another of the three plenary lectures was *Traveling and Postculturality: Baudrillard Revisited* by Peter Gaál-Szabó from Debrecen Reformed Theological University, Debrecen. The article is interested in the analysis of Jean Baudrillard's *America*, a hard to classify work, which presents its object as a “fiction”, or, one could say, a hyperreal simulacrum, considering Baudrillard's famous contributions to postmodern theory. It is a perspective somewhat akin to Jean-Pierre Lyotard's considerations about the demise of metanarratives and delegitimation. Traveling

itself becomes a metaphor for the evanescence of space and can be seen as a form of post-cultural existence, signifying detachment from cultural space and exerting radical critique through non-fixity and distance. The American hyper-technologized “desert” epitomizes the characteristics of Western modernity while also revealing a dystopian future space. The performativity of traveling includes repercussions for the traveler’s identity. The traveler merges into this space, becoming symptomatic of it, as another non-entity in the procession of simulacra or an object in the hyperreal void. Unlike in Barthes’ *Empire of Signs*, difference dissipates, due to the hyperreal gaze of the floating traveler. According to Marc Augé, the non-places of supermodernity do not offer the possibility of connectedness. In the age of tribal nomadism, cultural space becomes inescapably heterotopic. Other useful concepts are “deterritorialization” (Arjun Appadurai) and “rhizomatic reterritorialization” (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari). In Baudrillard’s view, deterritorialization in traveling engenders radical alterity. In a post-cultural framework, marked by non-differentiation, where the cultural space loses its referentiality, the traveler risks disorientation, being caught between place and non-place in the functions of de-/reterritorialization. Therefore, postculturality may be considered a liminal phase, a transition to a new temporal-spatial paradigm.

The key-note paper “‘*From that Victory, They Never Recovered*’”: A Critical Analysis of *The Express*’ Coverage of Brexit in Mid-2022 as Compared with *The Guardian* was presented by Professor Brian Michael Goss from Saint Louis University – Madrid, Spain Campus. The article is concerned with the coverage of the aftermath of Brexit in two British newspapers, aiming at a characterization of current extreme right-wing discourse. The author was surprised to discover, during his research for a course about globalization, that the British tabloid *The Express* continued to write abundantly (even excessively) on Brexit, in an emotional style, recalling the attitude of a scorned lover after a failed romance. Their rightist alignment is reinforced by the support expressed for the former American president Donald Trump. The discourse of these articles becomes the vehicle of a nationalistic, chauvinistic ideology obsessed with purity, in the us vs. them paradigm. In these “analyses”, replete with microfascist tropes, the enemies are the so-called Remainers (sometimes derided as Remoaners), the not sufficiently zealous Brexiteers and, ultimately, Europeans themselves. The tabloid’s Europhobia takes many forms: talking about the purported “fall” of Germany and the decay of Europe itself or portraying Brussels as a bully. Victimhood is the preferred attitude in the journalistic interventions, but weirdly combined with a sense of entitlement. Conversely, the leftist newspaper *The Guardian* lucidly assessed the economic situation: exports to the UK declined, perishable goods are harder to ship because of custom bureaucracy. The journal’s contributors noticed that support for Brexit has collapsed, that the youth is disappointed with these developments, that Scotland is trapped in an impossible situation, being constrained to share the same destiny as UK, although its citizens had not agreed with the separation. In final analysis, the Brexit “victory” seems to have been a pyrrhic one.

Alina Țenescu from the University of Craiova, Romania, writes about *Images of Perfume in Printed and TV Advertisements: “La petite robe noire” by Guerlain*. The chosen method is here cognitive semantics, applied on a hybrid corpus, of printed and TV advertorial materials, the main goal being that of identifying and analyzing the various categories of visual metaphors, which are prevalent in perfume advertisements. The types identified are pictorial simile, hybrid metaphor and contextual metaphor. The approach is based on the celebrated Lakoff and Johnson’s book *Metaphors We Live By*. The author reviews the literature in the field, by pointing out that rhetoric and implicit argumentation are deeply involved in the way graphic representations work. The research underlines that the persuasive effect of visual metaphors is attributable both to metaphorical rhetoric and to visual argumentation (Jeong 2008). Pictorial metaphors, which often rely on a more implicit and complex scaffolding, increasing the array of interpretations by the viewers, may still be inherently persuasive, even in the absence of verbal explanations. One ad for *La petite robe noire* by Guerlain employs pictorial simile by associating the bottle of perfume with the silhouette of a tall attractive woman dressed in a little black dress, thus suggesting that the fragrance itself is an invisible but perceptible garment which highlights the most positive and salient traits of the wearer. The second type, hybrid metaphor, associates the bottle with couture or luxury handbags with similar a shape and size. The juxtaposition indexes Parisian chic and connotes a desirable social status, given the limited edition of luxury goods, which only persons very invested in the cultivation of their own style usually own. The third example concerns an intricate advertorial message correlating the featured perfume with an advertising pole with rotating clips, an unconventional street publicity support. The contextual metaphor thus builds a meta-level of expressivity where the scent borrows the positive characteristics of top fashion design and advertising: quality, unconventionality, social prestige and status.

The articles selected for this volume are samples of serious and innovative scholarship from a variety of fields, providing compelling insights on crucial issues pertaining to, among other things: identity, otherness, communication, dialogue, humour, the anthropology of ritual, interculturality, comparative theory, cognitive metaphors, cultural space, ecology and literature, the rise of AI and its impact on creative writing, journalistic deontology and advertorial persuasion.

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