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14TH ESSE CONFERENCE
29 AUGUST – 2 SEPTEMBER, 2018, BRNO, CZECH
REPUBLIC

Dominika Kováčová

AS A European federation of higher national associations for the study of English, the European Society for the Study of English (ESSE) aims to foster international cooperation and research in the study of the English language, literatures in English and cultures of English-speaking people. Among its main objectives is the organization of biennial conferences that would regularly bring together scholars and teachers from all parts of Europe; Brno was privileged to have been chosen to host the 14th ESSE conference last year. The conference, which took place on 29 August – 2 September, 2018, was jointly organized by the Czech Association for the Study of English and the Department of English and American Studies at Masaryk University and attracted an estimated 650 academics from more than 55 countries all over the world. While organizing a conference of such magnitude might seem like a challenging and daunting task, the Organizing Committee, chaired by Ivona Schöfrová, a Ph.D. student at the Department of English and American studies (Masaryk University), and an excellent team of student assistants, went to great lengths to ensure the smooth running of the ESSE conference.

The start of the conference programme was preceded by a Doctoral Symposium which took place on Tuesday (28 August 2018) and on Wednesday morning (29 August 2018). After the welcome address by the President of ESSE, Liliane Louvel, more than 25 doctoral students presented their research in one of the following fields: English Language and Linguistics, Literatures in English, Cultural and Area Studies. The presenters gained valuable feedback on their work from established scholars in their fields, as well as from their peers. Besides actively participating in the presentation sessions, participants also attended György Szönyi's (University of Szeged) lecture titled "Promiscuous Angels: Enoch, Blake, and a Curious Case of Romantic Orientalism" on Tuesday at noon.

From Wednesday afternoon until Sunday at noon, the 14th ESSE conference offered a rich academic and social programme which was evenly distributed between the days of the conference. Each day participants had a chance to attend one of four plenary lectures, a number of parallel lectures, round-table sessions, and seminars that all took place in one of three conference venues. The venues – the

University Cinema Scala and two buildings of the Faculty of Arts at Masaryk University, Building K at Comenius square and Building N at Janáček square – are all conveniently located within walking distance of each other in the centre of Brno and conference attendees were thus able to move easily between individual sessions. The registration of participants started on Wednesday morning in Scala and continued throughout the conference. While social and cultural events organized within the conference followed the academic programme in the evenings, attendees were also invited to take part in guided tours of the historical centre of Brno offered by the Tourist Information Centre and to reserve their places in a tour of the UNESCO World Heritage Site Villa Tugendhat.

At the opening ceremony on Wednesday (29 August 2018), all participants were welcomed to Brno by the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Milan Pol, the President of ESSE, Liliane Louvel, the President of the Czech Association for the Study of English, Jana Chamonikolasová, the Secretary of the Czech Association for the Study of English, Michael Kaylor, and a member of the Organizing Committee, Don Sparling. After the warm greetings, Anne Fogarty from University College Dublin delivered the first plenary lecture entitled *Modernist Aftermaths?: Joyce Effects in Contemporary Irish Fiction* in which she discussed the legacy of Joyce upheld by contemporary Irish writers and investigated stylistic experimentation with a focus on materiality, the body, gender, and affect in four recent Irish novels. This lecture, as well as the following plenary lectures, took place in an auditorium of the University Cinema Scala which accommodated a large audience of conference participants.

Among the twelve seminars scheduled for Wednesday afternoon after the plenary lecture, there were, for example, S14 *Advances in Cognitive-Linguistic Approaches to Grammar*, S30 *Intralingual Translation*, and S61 *Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama: The New Medial Challenges of Adaptation*. In the evening, the first official day of the conference concluded with a welcome reception at the Governor's Palace at the Moravian Square where all conference participants wined, dined, and mingled with their international colleagues. Everybody enjoyed the friendly atmosphere and what the programme had to offer. This reception included, for example, a concert of the local band Mayham & Eggs. It also presented an excellent opportunity for meeting new colleagues and for strengthening cooperation among ESSE members.

The second day of the conference (30 August 2018) started with the first round of parallel lectures. Altogether, eighteen parallel lectures took place during the conference and all were scheduled for a morning time slot from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. On Thursday, five parallel lectures, which all attracted a large audience, were delivered: PL02 *A Register Approach to Morphosyntactic Variation in World Englishes*

by Elena Seoane, PL06 *Choreographers of Speech: Social Space as Performance Space* by Jean-Rémi Lapaire, PL10 *Women's Words: Victoria Ocampo and the Reception of Virginia Woolf in Hispanic Countries* by Laura M^a Lojo-Rodríguez, PL15 *Risks of Mediation: On Guides and Interpreters in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century British and Anglo-Irish Travel Writing on the Ottoman Empire* by Ludmilla Kostova and PL16 *Sandcastles and Beach Chairs: Banal Geopolitics in Modernist Literature* by Virginia Richter.

After the round of parallel lectures and a short coffee break, participants attended one of fifteen seminar sessions or a round-table session entitled RT1 *Literary Journalism and R/Evolution*, which took place during the next time slot from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. All participants reunited in Scala after lunch for the second plenary lecture, *The Sound of English Literature in Musical Translation*, presented by Marta Mateo from the University of Oviedo in Spain. The lecture underlined the role of English literature as the source for musical texts and studied the complex relationship between English literature, music, and translation. In her analysis, Mateo demonstrated that the choice of the textual strategy adopted for the translation of a musical text depends on a number of factors, such as the purpose of the translation, the translation modality, and the genre of the musical text.

On Thursday afternoon, the conference programme continued with two rounds of seminar sessions and everybody thus made their way to the seminar rooms in Buildings K and N after the plenary lecture. Thirteen seminars and one round-table – RT4 *Meeting of the Gender Studies Network* – were first organized from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m., while in the second round, which started at 5:30 p.m., fourteen seminars and the round-table RT3 *Cross-Border Dynamics: Mediation and Hybridity across the British Isles, Italy, and France* took place. Being the second day of the conference, Thursday was particularly noteworthy to me as I actively participated in the afternoon seminar S12 *The Transformation of News Discourse in the Age of Social Media* where I delivered my presentation entitled “Social media trespassing: The analysis of news articles reporting on the most liked Instagram post of 2017”. The chance to present my research to an international audience who provided me with constructive feedback proved extremely valuable. Each presentation of our seminar session was followed by a fruitful discussion of the author's findings, its theoretical framework, and its relation to the main topic of the seminar. This encouraged a productive dialogue among ESSE members even outside the walls of the seminar room. Based on my experience as both a presenter and a listener to several other presentations, I can safely assume that the atmosphere was similarly stimulating in all seminar groups throughout the conference.

Since strengthening relationships among its members is important for the effective running of ESSE, each conference day offered a rich social programme with ample opportunities to meet one's colleagues in a less formal environment. On Thursday evening, two theatre performances were staged specifically for the ESSE conference – namely, A. R. Gurney's play *Love Letters*, performed by the theatre company BEST Divadlo (BEST standing for "Brno English-speaking Theatre") and Physical Poetry by the Czech musician, author, and artist, Petr Váša. *Love Letters*, which tells the story of two childhood friends by means of their lifelong correspondence, was held at The Cabinet of the Muses, while the performance of physical poetry – a genre created by the author himself – took place at the Centre for Experimental Theatre. Both venues are located in the city centre within a ten-minute walk from the University Cinema Scala, and it was thus easy to get there in time after the academic program had finished. Conference attendees who did not manage to book their tickets for the Thursday performance of *Love Letters* could go to a rerun on Friday (31 August 2018) or on Saturday (1 September 2018). On Saturday evening, there was a unique opportunity to attend a screening of the critically acclaimed Czech film *Kolya* in Scala at 8:30 p.m. Set in late 1980s Czechoslovakia, *Kolya* was directed by Jan Svěrák, and won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film and the Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Language Film. The screening was open for all conference participants and shown with English subtitles.

On Friday (31 August 2018), the academic programme started at 9 a.m. with four parallel lectures: PL01 *The Lexicographical Management of English: Usage, Authority and Stance (1961-Present Day)* by Stefania Nuccorini, PL04 *Norms and Strategies in Translating Children's Literature: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland in Polish* by Izabela Szymańska, PL08 *A Dialogue Between the East and the West? Uses and Abuses of Sharawadgi* by Martin Procházka, and PL14 *Speculative Selves: Money and Subjectivity in Transatlantic Fiction since 1870* by Gert Buelens. The programme then continued with a wide offer of thirteen seminars devoted to diverse topics from English studies and the round-table RT2 *Unpacking Anti-Gender Campaigns in the Context of Rising Populism in Europe*. During this round of seminar sessions participants could attend, for example, S03 *Specialised Discourse: Wherefrom and Whereto?*, S25 *A European Perspective on ESP Teaching and Learning Research*, S40 *The (Neo-)Picaresque Appeal in Anglophone Post-colonial Fiction*, and they could engage in a scholarly discussion with fellow ESSE members there.

The plenary lecture on Friday was delivered by Alfred Thomas from the University of Illinois in Chicago. Under the title *Shakespeare's Bohemia: Religious Toleration in an Age of Confessional Polarization*, the presenter discussed the significance of Bohemia in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and highlighted its role

in fostering religious tolerance in an intolerant age of English religious politics by contrasting it with the more enlightened situation in France and Central Europe. This lecture, like all plenary lectures, attracted a large number of conference participants to the auditorium in Scala where a Poster Session and the ESSE General Assembly also took place afterwards. Ten posters covering diverse topics from English literature and translation studies to linguistics and language learning were displayed in the Scala vestibule and their authors eagerly welcomed any questions about, and feedback on, their work from international colleagues.

At the ESSE General Assembly, which followed the Poster Session, the president of ESSE addressed members with topical issues related to the organization and thanked the organizing team for their hospitality and the excellent work they had done. After the treasurer, Alberto Lázaro, provided an overview of the financial situation, all ESSE members were cordially invited to the 15th ESSE conference that is to take place from 31 August to 4 September, 2020 in Lyon, France. Furthermore, the General Assembly was reserved for the announcement of the winners of the 2018 ESSE Book Awards which recognize and financially reward distinguished publications by ESSE members. Book prizes were awarded in two categories – the ESSE Book Award as Category A and the ESSE Book Award for Junior Scholars as Category B – for single-authored books first published in 2016 or 2017 in three fields: 1. English language and linguistics; 2. Literatures in the English language; 3. Cultural and area studies in English. The president announced the winners, and everyone congratulated the authors on their achievements. Three of the awarded authors were present at the conference to personally accept the prize, namely Laura Olcelli for her book *Questions of Authority: Italian and Australian Travel Narratives of the Long Nineteenth Century* (Literature, Category B), Sandrine Sorlin for *Language and Manipulation in House of Cards: A Pragma-Stylistic Perspective* (Linguistics, Category A), Silke Stroh for *Gaelic Scotland in the Colonial Imagination: Anglophone Writing from 1600 to 1900* (Cultural and area studies, Category A). At the end of the General Assembly, one other significant moment took place as the incumbent President, Liliane Louvel, introduced the new ESSE President, Andreas H. Jucker from the University of Zurich, and officially handed over the presidency to him. The new president, whose term of office began on 1 January 2019, thanked Prof. Louvel for all her previous work and graciously accepted his new responsibilities.

The academic program on Friday concluded with a round of fourteen seminars scheduled from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Among these seminars, attendees took part in, for instance, S04 *The Language of Cyberbullying: Verbal Aggression in Online Communication*, S31 *Landscapes of Childhood in the Modernist Short Story*, and

S54 *Urban and Rural Landscapes in Modern India between Rupture and Continuity*. Later in the evening, participants were invited to a conference dinner at Hotel International where they enjoyed delicious food and a rich cultural program with their colleagues. Those wishing to attend the dinner could reserve their seat prior to the conference.

The fourth day of the conference (1 September 2018) started with the penultimate round of five parallel lectures – PL05 *Texts in Time and Time in Texts: Embodied Cultural Moments in Literature and Language* by Anthony Johnson, PL07 *Shakespeare and Contemporary Media Culture* by Maurizio Calbi, PL09 *In Their Own Voice: Women's Periodicals in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain* by María José Coperías-Aguilar, PL13 *Out of Hand: John Donne and Manuscript Circulation* by Daniel Smith, and PL18 *Why Read Joyce in the 21st Century?* by Dieter Fuchs – which all raised insightful and thought-provoking questions. The morning programme continued with a round of thirteen seminars, scheduled from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. As was the case on previous days of the conference, seminar groups convened in either Building N or Building K, and during this particular time slot participants could attend, for example, S05 *Language and Crime*, S29 *Literary Hermeneutics: Openness in Translating Drama and Verse*, and S66 *Shaping the News, Shaping the World*.

Following the lunch break, Josef Schmied from the Chemnitz University of Technology, in Germany, delivered the last plenary lecture of the 14th ESSE conference. In his lecture entitled *Functional Linguistic Approaches to Non-Native Academic Writing: Global Comparisons of Abstracts, Theses and Articles*, Schmied focused on three academic genres relevant for all academic writers, including ESSE participants, namely (conference) abstracts, theses, and journal articles. By analysing the strategies applied by authors to fulfil the function of the text, e.g. accepting their abstract for presentation at a conference, the lecture brought new theoretical perspectives on current practices in academic writing. After the plenary lecture, conference attendees divided again into respective seminar rooms where two further rounds of seminar sessions were organized in the afternoon and early evening. In each of these rounds, fourteen seminars took place, including, for example, S01 *Environmental Issues and the Anthropocene: Problems and Opportunities*, S15 *Blunders and Other Deviations from Manners and Politeness: Literary and Linguistic Approach*, S17 *Communicating across Culture: Local and Translocal Features of Genres in Online and Offline Environment*, S36 *Otherness and Identity in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Literature*, and S51 *English Printed Books, Manuscripts and Material Studies*. After the seminars ended, participants continued to enjoy the last evening of the conference by exploring the above-mentioned social programme.

Even though Sunday (2 September 2018) marked the last conference day and some participants had already started their journey home, it still offered a very interesting programme. In the morning, the remaining four parallel lectures were presented to an attentive audience: PL03 *The Multimodal Poetics of Football, Language and the Media* by Jan Chovanec, PL11 *Frankenstein 1818/2018: Science and Gender in Mary Shelley's Novel* by Lilla Maria Crisafulli, PL12 *The Monument and the Voice: Commemoration and Spectrality in British Literature of the Great War* by Tamás Bényei, and PL19 *Re-affecting Vision: the Body Politic of Contemporary English Art* by Catherine Bernard. Afterwards, nine seminars – S23 *Current Trends in Teaching English as a Foreign Language*, S57 *Transnational Biography in Europe*, and S71 *Britain in Europe, Europe in Britain: Cultural Approaches to "Brexit"* among them – the academic program then concluded at 12:30. Finally, all devoted participants were invited to attend the conference closing ceremony where the ESSE President and the Organizing Committee thanked everybody for having come to Brno and for having created such a wonderful and inspiring atmosphere throughout the conference.

After the conference closing ceremony, participants applauded and said goodbye to their colleagues and friends. Everybody was glad to have spent the previous days in the company of fellow researchers and to be leaving the conference venue full of new ideas and perspectives. In sum, all conference participants would agree that the organization and the actual outworking of the 14th ESSE conference successfully followed in the footsteps of the previous years and set the bar high for the next conference. All ESSE members are excited to meet again and share their expertise with their international colleagues next year in Lyon!



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