

INTRODUCTION: “A WAY WITH WORDS”

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International Association of University Professors of English conference was held in Poznań in July 2019 and was, for many of us, one of the last on-site conferences where we could meet in person, listen to papers, and spend time with one another during coffee and lunchbreaks and enjoy the company of other specialists in the field during excursions. Proximity was then not seen as an anti-social behaviour. In November, the disconcerting news regarding the fast-spreading deadly disease reached Europe; in March, like most other European countries, Poland went through the first of a number of consecutive lockdowns. Within 2020 the world changed drastically, and so, in a way, we faced a new periodisation of history and started to look at our lives as B.C. (before Covid-19) and A.C. (after Covid-19), the latter capturing hope that one day we should reach the future in which the disease would be contained.

Looking back at the world before Covid-19, riddled with ecological crises yet strikingly less violent, has shaped the perception of the past. Such reminiscences, as proposed by Svetlana Boym (2001: xv) in *The Future of Nostalgia*, are “a rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress”, and, indeed, contemporary studies within humanities, based more and more on various intersectionalities, often return to older frameworks of criticism. This can be done with a critical agenda, negating the value of the notions and idea(l)s inherited, but also in search for perspectives and lenses that seem more universal, perhaps timeless. As Boym (2001: xvi) further notes, “nostalgia is not always about the past; it can be retrospective but also prospective. Fantasies of the past ... have a direct impact on realities of the future”. In a positive reading of this, the past is not only built upon, but it may likewise be transformed into a new potentiality, or as Olivia Angé & David Berliner (2015: 5) explain “nostalgic laments can

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involve both moral critique of the present and an alternative to deal with social changes". Literary and linguistic studies give us insight into the mentality and imagination of the Other, whoever they might be, which in time of transformation, conflict and unrest is no small matter.

During the pandemic, trying to stay connected with each other and the world, we receded into the seclusion of our homes and offices, where reading continued to be a worthwhile but nonetheless solitary and demanding task, yet frequently scrutinised from the perspective of the educational value of humanist studies for the younger generations. In the words of John Coetzee's (2007 [2008]: 191) protagonist Señor C. who in his eponymous *Diary of a Bad Year*, observes that "[d]uring the years I spent as a professor of literature, [I conducted] young people on tours of books that would always mean more to me than to them ...". The quote reverberates with the never-ending struggle for the importance of the study of languages and literatures in the academia, which has always been the refuge for scholars. This is how the famed or defamed "ivory tower" became the Ark – our archive. Literary, linguistic and cultural records stand for the Ark, showcasing the humane studies as necessarily preserving the knowledge and values humanity should hold dear. And knowledge, of any kind, is useless if is not made public.

To this effect, creating networks of scholars through publications forges yet another relationship, that between scholars of today and those of the past, whose lives and works live on in our collective memory. International Association of University Professors of English had in its ranks some of the finest scholars in their field, whose research reverberates in the works of their scholarly descendants. Many of the members remember Professor Ian Kirby (1934–2017). As a long-term Secretary General (1995–2013), he used to send us snail-mail large envelope letters with requests for membership fees. Professor Kirby cut a characteristic stooping figure, who could always be spotted near the venue of IAUPE conferences. He was extremely friendly and helpful, especially to the new members of the organisation. A medievalist with an interest in Middle English language and literature, he was the initiator of the Medieval Symposium. Kirby's efforts to promote medieval studies were seconded by Professor Matti Rissanen (1937–2018), a pioneer in English corpus linguistics, who was never seen *not* smiling. His dedication to the study of medieval texts and the support of younger colleagues in IAUPE was truly admirable. Likewise, Professor Wolfgang Viereck (1937–2018), IAUPE President 1998–2001, the organiser of IAUPE 2001 conference in picturesque medieval Bamberg, was a medievalist and linguist who began his acceptance speech of the honorary doctorate here in Poznań with a paragraph in Polish. His commitment to historical linguistics earned him the friendship of Jacek Fisiak (1936–2019), also a medievalist, a linguist and lexicographer, and IAUPE President 1974–1977. Even when he was very ill, he asked for books and newspapers as if realizing that written texts are life itself,

and that the loss of words means the loss of the world. His and all our colleagues' endeavours are continued in our own explorations of language and literature, and their memory is preserved in stories and anecdotes we recollect during our formal and informal gatherings. Berkeleyan *esse est percipi*, to exist is to be perceived, can be read analogically – to exist means to be remembered, in words. All four of our late contemporaries certainly had a way with words, their publications as well as witty public performances are lasting testimonies to that. They were great advocates of joining rather than dividing disciplines and us, humanists. In the same way that nostalgia merges the past and the present, we wish to celebrate these scholars not only for their achievements within their disciplines in the past but for how they lay foundations for the future that their research made possible.

The re-building of the structures of our scholarly work, openness to new methodologies and theories used in literature and linguistics is also linked with 'seeing anew' what has been done in the earlier scholarship. In hindsight, one of the most colourful figures in literary history whose written (auto)biography shows an exceptional love of words is the English mystic and proto-feminist, Margery Kempe. Answering an accusation of heresy, when a priest at Archbishop Henry Bowet's court reminded her that Saint Paul proclaimed "þat no woman schulde prechyn", Margery responded with an evasive answer. She insisted "I preche not ser, I come in no pulpytt. I vse but comownycacyon & good wordys, & þat wil I do whil I leue" (Kempe 1993 [1940]: 126). By defining preaching as the occupation of a pulpit, and, therefore, clergy, and all other speech as interaction: "comownycacyon & good wordys", she reserved for herself the possibility of sharing her experiences in other, albeit still public, contexts. Any conference alternates between, in a way, speaking from the pulpit and conversation, or "communication" in Margery's words. Her *Book*, thus, can be seen as a link, between the past and the present, between humanists, from many different countries. Besides, her life story brings out a colourful picture of the late 14th and early 15th-century Europe, of itinerant saints, women mystics, including Dorothea of Montau, of heroes and villains participating in the consolidation of *Respublica Christiana* and the re-discovery of the Orient. Margery's well-attested verbosity, gained her the notoriety of a garrulous wife and a loquacious mystic; in a different context, however, the "logorrhea" could be associated with her being the lover of words, *philo-logos*, which we all are. Margery strove to have our life written down just as the scholars aspire to have their papers published.

The papers presented herein offer new scholarship and fresh views on past and present traditions within humanities. The authors invited to contribute to the volume represent different academic disciplines and research interests but they all, directly and indirectly, comment on the leitmotif of this collection – "a way with words". The volume opens with Peter Orton's re-reading of the Anglo-Saxon *Riddles*. Acknowledging existing research and appreciating other scholars'

academic discoveries, Orton proposes new solutions to *Riddles* 48 and 59. Liliana Sikorska offers an in-depth study of the otherworldly and earthly marriages of Dorothea of Montau in the context of late fourteenth-century Prussia. Krystyna Kujawińska Courtney reflects on Jan Kott, celebrating his critical legacy and his enduring influence on contemporary Shakespearean studies. Continuing the study of theatre as a means of artistic and cultural expression, but also exploring the specificity of translation for the stage, Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech revisits Molière and his *Tartuffe* as reimagined through the “tradaptation” by Jatinder Verma. Lori A. Davis Perry looks back at the eighteenth century and reinterprets Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, examining this imaginative (near-)novel as an epistemological critique of the emerging sciences and their practitioners. Jewel Spears Brooker’s paper explores the artistic and poetic interconnections between T. S. Eliot, Donne, and Dante, presenting a re-evaluation of their poetry. Reporting on the library of Ann May Brennan (1902–1972), Mary Jane Edwards offers insight into Canadian culture and history, while reflecting on the practices of reading and the construction of reader identity as evidenced by Brennan’s extensive book collection. Ewa Kujawska-Lis analyses Philip Caputo’s *A Rumor of War*, demonstrating how linguistic heterogeneity becomes a key means of expressing – or attempting to express – the deeply personal experience of the Vietnam War. Finally, Herbert F. Tucker examines Eva Hoffman’s life as recorded in her memoir *Lost in Translation*. Collectively, the essays in this special volume illuminate connections between the past and future, forging bridges across continents and cultures, and fostering collaboration between researchers.

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