

NEWS AND VIEWS IN ENGLISH * FROM THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION MU

the messenger

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editorial

Dear Reader,

If you are a newcomer to this, the house journal of the Department of English – welcome! We trust you will find several items to hold your interest in this special double issue.

If there is something you (student, teacher, English enthusiast) would like to write or read about here, please send us your suggestions to gabroska@hotmail.com or to the.messenger@email.cz .

Thank you.

Enjoy the conference.

Your editor
Gabriela Oaklandová

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news from the department

The Oxford Conference

Between April 2 – 9, Lucie Podroužková took part in the Oxford Conference: Reading Reputations, held by the British Council at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. (For more please see pages 12-15.)

Inter-Act

A conference promoting tolerance and understanding through ELT and drama called Inter-Act was held in Brno from 22nd to 24th April. An international meeting of teachers and educators, held jointly by EDEN (the English Drama Educational Network), the British Council and Člověk v tísni, addressed intercultural issues in education, both in practice and theory. This was accompanied by a Drama Day, where both pupils and teachers prepared and performed short sketches on intercultural (in)tolerance. Lucie Podroužková and one of our students, Michaela Marková, attended.

Accreditation

We received good news from the Accreditation Committee of the Ministry of Education: both single-English and double-subject *magister* programmes have been accredited and will run from autumn 2005. Also, the single subject follow-up magister study programme will open next year.

Entrance exams

June is traditionally the month of both state exams and entrance examinations procedures. This year, we received about 500 applications for the single-English study programme and approximately the same number for the double-subject study programme.

Chemnitz

In April, a group of teachers (Renata Povolná, Olga Dontcheva-Navratilová, Irena Hůlková and Jarek Ondráček) spent ten days in Chemnitz, where they presented their current research done within a joint project between Masaryk University and the Technical University in Chemnitz. Their research concentrates on the level of complexity and coherence in spoken (Renata and Jarek) and written (Olga and Irena) English. Apart from presentations and discussions of the project and some course descriptions, our teachers attended some mainly linguistics-oriented classes, and participated in a two-day course called *English for Academic Purposes*, led by Anna Mauranen from Finland.

In May, their German partners (Josef Schmied, Christoph Haase, Katrin Voigt and Isabel Heller) came to Brno, where they presented their current research and discussed, among other things, possible cooperation in the development of course descriptions and materials. Katrin (with Renata) also demonstrated her experimental way of teaching and testing grammar (above all the past and perfect tenses) to some 2nd year students in a computer lab.

In the future there will be more visits and discussions between the research teams, more cooperation in course design, some exchange of teaching materials, and further presentations. Hopefully, at the end of next year there will be a joint publication on complexity in spoken and written English, published in Chemnitz.

Book World 2005

A meeting of reading-group leaders and English library staff was held on May 5 – 6 at the British Council's Prague headquarters. The team worked with Rachel van Riel, who is the founder and president of the Opening the Book agency, on promoting reading and literature. The meeting ran concurrently with the Book World exhibition, where two British Council lectures were given – by Rachel van Riel on Readers' Development, and by Meic Stephens on Welsh literature.

Barcelona

At the beginning of June, Zdeněk Janík and Ivana Hrozková travelled to the University of Barcelona to attend a conference entitled Towards Competences for Internationalization in Schools, an official closing of the three-year Comenius project Argonauts of Europe.

New baby

The department has yet another baby to spoil, called Filip Adam.

The Department is pleased to announce a

SHORT STORY COMPETITION

All entries must be originals and written in English.
The committee might exercise discretion in potential language difficulties.
Shortlisted stories will be published in the Messenger.
The winner will receive a financial grant of 2,000 Kč.

All contributions must be submitted in both hard copy and on a diskette by November 28, 2005,
to lucie.podrouzkova@gmail.com.
The results of the competition will be announced by December 9, 2005.

Macmillan Readers Limerick Competition

For more information, see mcnews@macmillan.cz

STUDY EXCHANGE PROGRAMMES NOTICEBOARD

Exchange programme and scholarship opportunities on offer can be viewed at Zahraniční vztahy,
<http://www.ped.muni.cz/wscience>.

interview

Dalibor Zachoval is a journalist and editor-in-chief of *Veronica*, a bi-monthly magazine with an interest in ecology and the environment. He lives and works in Brno. Here, he is in conversation with Andrew Oakland.

Tell me something about your history.

I was born in Brno in 1970 and have lived here all my life. First I studied at the secondary technical school of mechanical engineering [*strojní průmyslovka*], the only school I could get into even though I really didn't fancy it. After school I worked as a building labourer, then for a while as a lumberjack. It was only after this that I got into my "first" university – the Technical University [VUT] to study mechanical engineering. But I have no gift whatsoever for matters technical and the Changes in 1989 allowed me to change course. I left the VUT in 1990 and in 1991 was able to begin studying subjects in which I had a genuine interest – History of Art and Ethnology, at the MU Faculty of Arts.

I started to work for Czech Radio in Brno while I was still a student; I ended up working there on the newsdesk for six years. I used an "early" computer to access the major news

agencies, reading the details they posted of breaking news items. I had to use English and German as well as Czech, my first serious lesson in how important world languages would become for me and my work. It was my job to decide which items to use in our bulletins.

I had long been used to keeping up with domestic and international news; when I was a child my father had insisted that I read a newspaper every day. He would check that I did so by giving me little tests, which is something that really got me down when I was at primary school. But before long I learned the value of this training, and I have to say that today I still read the newspaper from cover to cover. As a budding journalist in the days before keyboard skills were widespread I bought myself an old typewriter so I could get my fingers up to speed.

It was not long before I began to see my professional future as being in journalism. Although History of Art and Ethnology were subjects I enjoyed and found stimulating, I knew it would be difficult for me to make a living out of them. So I decided to keep them on as hobbies.

Would you say that the quality of news reporting here has improved since the early Nineties?

Certainly it's better than it used to be. But the quality of our reporting is still notably

lower than that of certain countries which lie to the west of us. I'm thinking in particular of investigative journalism. Often, when a Czech journalist hits on something momentous he/she is not able to carry it through to a satisfactory conclusion. Just think of the affairs surrounding Stanislav Gross [the former Prime Minister of the Czech Republic] and how long he was able to cling to his job after the news of his misdeeds broke. It's quite clear to me that he would have been forced to resign much earlier in certain other countries: forced by the media, who would have asked him questions to which he could provide no satisfactory answers. Still, I would have to say that the Gross affair has also demonstrated the power of the press to exert irresistible pressure, even though in this case it took a frustratingly long time for it to bear fruit. Time will tell if Czech journalism has made any real gains out of the Gross Affair. I hope – and believe – that we will be seen to have taken a step in the right direction. We need our press to be the “watchdog of our democracy”; I think a properly functioning free press – along with an independent judiciary and an apolitical police force – is the best safeguard against totalitarianism.

How long have you been in your current job, with the ecology and environment bi-monthly *Veronica*?

This is my eighth year.

Don't you miss the politics?

Conservation of the environment is also an exceptionally interesting area. What's more it has never been more topical, perhaps because of the many years during which it is was neglected here. I enjoy it much more than I would enjoy writing political commentaries – both the people you get to work with and the issues you get to think about are richly various and almost always very interesting. And, regrettably, our interest in conserving the environment will increase as the planet gets into more and more difficulties. And by this I mean the interest of our generation.

Tell me something about your working day.

It depends very much whether I am putting together the next issue. Otherwise, I – on behalf of *Veronica* – might be working with another organization on a book or some other form of publication. What is always great about my working day is that I don't have to be at my desk until 9am; all those years when I was working for Czech Radio I had to get up at 4-ish. My day invariably begins with a look at the post and a run through my e-mails – we tend to get a lot of correspondence. I might have an article or two to look through, or I might be missing an article I need – in either case, I will probably end up speaking to the author. It's often

difficult to get contributors to meet their deadlines, and of course it falls to me to chase them up. A lot of my work is administrative and it frequently concerns money and attempts to get hold of it – the writing of project proposals, the quest for grants and funding, etc. I'd say that my work is made up of forty per cent editing and sixty per cent admin.

What do you see as the future for the magazine?

Well, things are going pretty well at the moment. We have the largest circulation in the Czech Republic for a magazine of our type. We have subscribers in ten countries. It often seems to me that the issues we address have far more popular currency abroad than here, which I think reflects poorly on our politicians and the work (or lack of it) they do to promote environmental conservation. It is necessary every year for us to find sponsors and advertisers to guarantee our continued existence; we have managed to do this for nineteen years (which makes us the second oldest magazine of our type in the country). In the eight years I've been working here I've seen a lot of magazines with our kind of profile fold – both here and in Slovakia.

We've had many conversations in the past. Knowing what your interests are, I'm surprised you live in Brno rather than in Prague.

Wow, that's a big question! I think a lot of Moravians would enjoy answering this one. In Prague there are incomparably more opportunities for journalists than in Brno, as I know from my own experience and that of colleagues and friends. And this applies not only for journalists, of course. As I said, I come from Brno and I've always lived here. When I graduated I faced up to the question of whether or not I should move to Prague, and I reached the conclusion that – if I did and I ended up there – I would be very unhappy. I love Prague as a city and I love all its sights; it's a really beautiful place. But I like the life in Brno; I like the way people relate to one another here. It seems to me that this is a warmer, friendlier place than Prague. I've been travelling to Prague regularly for more than twenty years. My best friend lives there – and has done so since we were kids – and these days I often need to go there for my work as well, not least because I'm on the board editors of a Prague magazine. I make special trips to Prague to see concerts or exhibitions. But I'm always happy to be back in Brno. Brno feels like a town during the day and in evenings and at weekends something like a village: I love that about Brno.

conference pages

The Participant's Guide To The History of the ELT Conferences

Lucie Podroužková

Every year in September, they gather in some Bohemian or Moravian town, invade the students' halls, dash from class to class and carry around bags with logos such as Longman, Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press or Macmillan on them, stacked with new teaching material. They are of all ages, from various schools or free-lance, from different parts of the country as well as from abroad, but they all are ELT buffs and they have come for the conference.

But do they know where, when and how the ELT conferences started?

If the answer is no, just read below.

My colleague let out a groan of frustration and despair. She had just returned from the administration department where she had been dealing with conference invoices, one of which had been returned undelivered. This was not my colleague's fault. She had simply copied the address from the application form, letter by letter, number by number. After all, it does daunt your spirits if you cannot even rely on people writing out their own address correctly.

My colleague and I and everybody else involved in the conference organization are

not professional administrators. We are university teachers, assisted by a handful of students and temporarily transformed into secretaries, accountants, weightlifters (when water bottles need to be replaced in the vending machines, beer barrels delivered for the reception party and tables arranged for the publishers), lobbyists (for financial support), managers and technicians. Since we cannot even dream of employing a professional conference manager, we develop a series of nervous ticks and an increasingly dishevelled, wild look as the conference draws near.

It is at these moments, however, when it is good to remember that there were times when the idea of an ELT conference for teachers from this country and abroad seemed little short of science fiction. Yet these were also the times when the first seed of the now well-established ELT conferences was planted.

The origins of these annual symposiums are to be located in Brno. In 1986, Josef Hladký, the *spiritus agens* of the Department of English at the Faculty of Arts of what was then still J.E. Purkyně University, initiated the first gathering of scholars in English and American Studies from throughout Czechoslovakia, who at that time were working in almost total isolation. In 1990, by then Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the newly renamed Masaryk University, he was approached by the British Council with the proposal that he should organize a national conference for teachers of English.

Consequently, the first BETEC (Brno English Teaching Conference) took place in May 1991. It was a grand event, with both top British academics and British royalty in attendance. Anybody who meant anything in ELT was present, including this year's keynote speaker, Professor Widdowson. Prince Charles arrived not only as a guest of honour but as an active participant, too, delivering a lecture on the importance of grammar.

The two subsequent BETECs (1992, 1993) were again organized by the English Department of the Faculty of Arts in Brno. On both occasions, the conference team was coordinated by Don Sparling, who had been a member of the first BETEC organizing committee (headed by Professor Hladký) and who now also acted in the capacity as the first president of the MSSUA (Moravian and Silesian Association of Teachers of English).

MSSUA had been in existence since 1990. The original idea had been to establish a national Czech association of English teachers, but in the end separate organizations were set up reflecting the country's historical regions, with the Association of Teachers of English of the Czech Republic (ATECR) based in Prague, and the MSSUA opting for a more decentralized model, with "separate but equal" local centres in a number of cities in Moravia and Silesia.

Until 1993 the conferences were financed almost single-handedly by the British

Council. However, it was also helping fund similar events organized by the ATECR, and for this reason Bill Jefferson, the head of the British Council in the Czech Republic, proposed some degree of coordination between Bohemia and Moravia/Silesia. Finally it was resolved that the major annual conference of teachers of English in this country would be organized under the auspices of ATECR and MSSUA alternately. In 1994 the conference took place in Karviná, followed by Liberec (1995), České Budějovice (1996), Brno (1996), Prague (1997), Kroměříž (1998), Zlín (1999), Plzeň (2000), Zlín (2001), Liberec (2002), Brno (2003) and Pardubice (2004). Taxing as it may be to host such a large-scale event, the torch is carried on and this year has yet again come full circle, to Brno.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Josef Hladký and Don Sparling, who kindly recalled the beginnings of the conference at my request and whom I quote in the article, and to Nad'a Vojtková, Milada Franková and Marcela Malá for additional information.

Animating Literature, a British Council project

Michaela Čaňková
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A brief history of the Animating Literature seminars goes back to the first visit of Rachel Van Riel (UK), the leading spirit behind The Opening the Book project, to the Czech Republic in 2003 (www.openingthebook.com). The idea of establishing a series of literature seminars was born then with the further aim to set up reading groups formed mainly from the participants of the seminars. This was, of course, a long-term project. The literature seminars centred in and hosted by the eight British Centre regional libraries (Liberec, Brno, Plzeň, Olomouc, Ostrava, České Budějovice, Pardubice, Ústí nad Labem) were to attract anybody who enjoyed reading in English, especially teachers and students from the area. The idea was to have the seminars accredited by the Ministry of Education with each participant receiving a certificate of attendance.

I was asked to design and present the seminars and decided on the five following topics:

- 1/ Multiculturalism and colours of today's UK
- 2/ Living in a family or being single? Traditions and changes
- 3/ History - looking back and into the future
- 4/ Devolution - Identity and nationalism
What it means to be English/Scottish/
Welsh/Irish in the 21st century
- 5/ Stereotypes about the British - True or false in everyday life?

The seminars were designed not as academic lectures but as lively interactive workshops where we would read texts, do activities on related matters of cultural background, listen to music and the spoken word, and work with recent newspaper cuttings and other visual materials. And last but not least, the participants would have a chance to practise their English.

At the time of writing of these lines, the eight regional libraries have held the whole set of five seminars. However, in Karlovy Vary and at the Municipal Library, Prague the seminars are being presented throughout the year 2005.

The concept behind the seminars is that literature can never be separated from the cultural stimuli of the place and time of its creation - I believe that an understanding of cultural and political background is of equal importance to an understanding of the book itself.

The year 2004 being the Scottish Year, a special seminar has been designed which is devoted to today's Scotland and Scottish writers. The British Council will continue mapping contemporary British fiction with a Welsh literature seminar. The year 2005 is the Welsh Year and the new seminar will be presented in the regional libraries from September onwards.

Michaela Čaňková will be presenting her sample AnimLit workshop on Saturday 10th at 16:15 in room 59.

*The fair city wherein make abode
So many learned imps that shoot abroad
And with their branches spread all Britainy
(Spenser, 1596)*

**The Oxford Conference:
Reading Reputations
April 3 – 9, 2005**

Lucie Podroužková

The Oxford tube spat me out into High Street, the one place in the city centre where the traffic gets busy. Its noise, however, does not penetrate the stone walls of the college buildings. These, adorned with chiseled cups of magnolia trees leaning onto them, harbour quite another world, the ancient seat of academia, the University of Oxford.

I recalled how five years ago, a grateful guest to one of the Oxford schools, I wheeled around the town on a rusty, rickety bicycle, in pursuit of literary lectures and eyeing the students curiously for visible signs of genius. This time I had come to Corpus Christi, one of the oldest colleges in Oxford, to attend the Oxford Conference, held yearly by the British Council for teachers of British literature.

Corpus Christi dates back to 1352 and is the smallest of the Oxford colleges. My room was located in the West Wing, with a view of neighbouring Christ Church and the Meadow from one side, and of Corpus Christi's little secret garden from the other. There, hyacinths, day lilies, irises, the glory of the snow, woodruff, lungwort, primula, virburnum and exotic bougainvillea were blooming next to various herbs, wild spurge, dead-nettles and all kinds of plants which anywhere but England would be plucked out as weed. An English garden is a cultivated wilderness, offset by a flawless lawn and neat paths.

The college has a tiny chapel, adequate in size perhaps for the number of students attending daily services nowadays. In the ancient library one can still see how precious books used to be chained to the shelves at which students stood while studying. Today, students have workstations here, with laptops plugged in. In the Hall, where we took meals, the well-trodden wooden floor, plain wooden

benches and high ceilings and windows reminded me how much of *Harry Potter* is in fact an imaginative description of the English boarding-school life.

The conference opened with **Allan Pulverness's** linguistic exploration of the word "reputation". The collocations connected to building, maintaining reputation and changing reputations all mapped the nature of reputation and its processes, which **John McRae** then applied to a most readily available example of William Shakespeare. But we were in for a bit of a surprise when both Allan and John were shooed away from the pulpit by **Sean Matthews** and **Claudia Ferradas Moi**, who began their confident promotion show on *18 Immutable Laws of Corporate Reputation* by Ronald J. Alsop, a marketing columnist and editor of The Wall Street Journal. We were asked to implement onto literature teaching Alsop's concise business corporation strategy, which consisted of:

- 1 establishing a good corporate reputation (e.g. "maximise your most powerful asset" or "convey a compelling corporate vision")
- 2 maintaining that reputation (e.g. "control the Internet before it controls you", which was to become a catch phrase for the coming week)
- 3 repairing a damaged corporate reputation (e.g. "never underestimate the public's cynicism")

and concluded with a final and foolproof piece of advice:

- 3 "if all else fails ... change your name".

This was a gimmick, of course, but the implications are serious. After all, where is the place of literature in a world where reputations are built on and derived from promotion and sales?

The point was taken further by a co-

presentation given by **Ron Carter** and John McRae, entitled *Hooray Henry?: big traditions and small canons*, which presented two opposing attitudes to the literary heritage, drawing on the work on Henry James as a case study. Upholding the literal meaning of the title idiom, Ron chose to embrace James for his sophisticated complexity and deliberate, delicate employment of language, whereas John argued that James's very ambiguity renders his works close to unreadable. The question raised was, what do we actually read when we read - the work, the writer or the reputation? Contrary to Ron's argument that writers of the past are a valid choice for the canon and the teaching of literature, John advocated the presence of contemporary authors in the classroom.

A considerable part of the conference discussions revolved around The Man Booker Prize, a major literary award which is an important factor in the making and breaking of reputations in contemporary fiction in English. Writers invited were asked how much they care about the Booker and how much the nominations change their career. **Valentine Cunningham**, Professor of English Language and Literature at University of Oxford and author of a number of highly acclaimed books on literature and theory, discussed the politics and procedures of The Man Booker with **Peter Straus**, a former publisher of Picador and now literary agent to many prize-winning authors.

We learnt that the prize did not really take off until 1990, when TV came into play. Nowadays its impact is global and all the short-listed titles become instant bestsellers. The whole prize-awarding process is followed by the media, literary professionals and the reading public alike. Writers themselves become obsessed with wanting to win: Ian McEwan allegedly took personal offence when his short-listed *Black Dogs* was finally not selected for the 1992 award.

Every year, The Man Booker committee appoints the panel and the chair, whose task is to choose from around 120 to 140 titles the one they believe to be the best novel of the year. Each publisher is allowed to register two titles, although some books may be called in

(as was the case with McEwan's *Amsterdam*, which won the 1998 Booker Award). Between April and June the panel must announce the long list, which in fact works out to reading up to three books a day. Professor Cunningham has been on the panel twice, in 1992 and 1998, and could therefore offer a qualified assessment of the insider's view as well as a little literary gossip. He shared with us his evaluation strategy, which lies in making three piles of books, according to "unlikely winners", "likely winners" and "hot shots". In the end, the winning title is always a compromise and tends to be no one's first choice. There is absolutely no time to read seriously, both Valentine and Peter said but agreed at the same time they still believed the award is important: it brings books onto the television screen, it injects positive energy in the book market and boosts both reputations and sales. These shoot up from an average of 200,000 paperbacks to a million copies per short-listed title.

In the course of the next few days, **Peter Childs**, a lecturer in post-colonial and contemporary literature and a holder of a National Teaching Fellowship in 2004, led a very inspiring session on reading and teaching literature, in which we worked with F.R. Leavis's introductory passage to *The Great Tradition* and the opening of *Enduring Love* by Ian McEwan.

But perhaps the best moments of the conference were when poets and novelists themselves came to talk to us about their art. **Patience Agbabi** performed poems from her collection *Transformatrix*, talked about her work with schoolchildren and perhaps surprisingly for someone who brings poetry, rap and 70s disco together, voiced the importance of form, even traditional forms such as sonnet, sestina or villanell.

Ali Smith read *The Universal Story* from her short-story collection *Other Stories and Other Stories* and extracts from a new novel called *The Accidental*. She talked about polyphonies of narrative voices and the impact of other writers, praised the new energy in contemporary Scottish writing and, true to her reputation, awed us with all kinds of statistics. "There's always another story",

“influence is good”, “exciting time to be a Scottish writer now”, “incredible fluorescence of writing, quite interested what will happen next”, “the brain changes most between 13 and 15 years of age”, “we have more in the head in half a day than people in all their life 100 years ago”, my scribbled notes say. Ali also spoke about co-editing *New Writing 13* (with Toby Litt) and how upset she was at the way the book was marketed. Together with Patience, they discussed the commercial side of art, the changing relationship between the world and art, the importance of structure (“structure is everywhere”), the importance of reading out loud, their favourite authors (Paul Muldoon, Muriel Spark, Kate Atkinson, Grace Paley, Liz Lochhead, Jackie Kay, Carol Ann Duffy, contemporary African poets and even Chaucer) their response to literary critics and their reviews (“good to have them but not really helpful”), the outreach of poetry and the eternity of realism. They agreed that art means craft, discipline and plenty of time.

W. N. Herbert read some of his poems and lectured on the predicament of a poet who is also a scholar. There is compatibility between art and academia, he argued.

Colm Tóibín, with his arresting Fanthomas looks, read a spell-bounding passage from his novel *The Master*, which was a runner-up for this year’s Man Booker Prize, and talked about his research on Henry James. He pondered James’s subtle mind, the moral ambiguity of his art, his suppressed homosexuality and a sense of loss pervading his later life. Colm also discussed the contemporary literary scene in Dublin and his public role as a cultural commentator on the radio, and described his stays in Barcelona and Argentina, which inspired the novels *The South* and *The Story of the Night*, respectively.

Margaret Drabble spoke of her frustration over *The Red Queen*, her most recent novel which the publisher forced her to rewrite and which was attacked for its free use of the diary of an eighteenth-century Korean princess. She talked about *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* she edited and its inclusion of the term “cultural appropriation” she campaigned for, about the

metropolitan and provincial novel (a distinction she finds, at least in her own case, a little artificial), about F. R. Leavis (who taught her mother and was still active at Cambridge when Margaret was a student), about writers she likes (Esther Freud, Ali Smith, Rachel Cusk, Monica Ali) and about the position of women writers and women in general. She read from her work and discussed her biography on Angus Wilson and the influence of Henry James on her novel *The Needle’s Eye*. She also explained why she found postmodernism an expression of worry and why she could no longer write novels like *The Radiant Way*.

D. J. Taylor defended the traditional concept of “the man of letters” and Victorian writers such as George Gissing and W. M. Thackeray, discussed his biography of George Orwell and seemed to disclaim his critical debut *A Vain Conceit*, a scathing denunciation of the 1980s British fiction which caused a considerable stir when published. Despite his outspoken preference for nineteenth-century fiction and his reputation as a merciless critic, Taylor praised a number of writers working today: Carol Birch and Julia Darling for an exemplary provincial novel, Hilary Mantel for her believable characters and Justin Cartwright for the cool elegance of his style. Nevertheless, he came full circle with Mary Man, an almost forgotten nineteenth-century short-story writer he greatly admires.

Twice a day, the conference split up into sections, aimed at a more practical approach to literature. I attended a workshop on James’s *The Turn of the Screw*, Claudia’s session on Ali Smith’s short story *Blank Card*, and observed a creative-writing workshop with W. N. Herbert. There were also a number of reading groups taking place which discussed selected texts from the *New Writing 13*, and presentations by individual members of the conference.

We were given information on the projects and web pages of *Counterpoint*, the Cultural Relations think-tank of the British Council (see www.counterpoint-online.org), and web resources for literature teaching (see www.encompassculture.com),

www.contemporarywriters.com). Helena Kovaříková reported on the British Council's literature activities in the Czech Republic, such as *Animating Literature* and the *Kostelec seminar*.

Apart from all this and more, what have I brought back with me? Rather than its treatment for purely academic premises, I urged for a communicative approach to literature and was pleased to see an emerging need to reevaluate the vocabulary of current discourse.

I was also delighted to discover that the Czech Republic is not quite the backwater we tend to take ourselves for, thanks to the dynamics generated by the local British Council, its projects and the close links it promotes between the offices, partner libraries and educational institutions. There were even moments at the conference when Helena and I whispered to each other, "But we are already doing that."

The conference brought together many interesting participants from all over the world, from France to Estonia, Germany to Kazakhstan, Malta, Uganda and Malaysia. I was happy to note that many people from the former Eastern bloc were present and that it gets harder to tell the difference between scholars from the East and West. After all, this was my first time in Britain when I walked straight through customs, without being subjected to a daunting interview with an immigration officer.

*Yet, O ye spires of Oxford! domes and towers!
Gardens and groves! your presence overpowers
(Wordsworth (1820),*

The Story of Oxford

Lucie Podroužková

Oxford is often nicknamed the city of dreaming spires, a reference derived from the opaque gleam the college towers emanate when seen from a distance. For centuries, the town has been shaped by the development of its university. Many college buildings are not in fact as ancient as their origins, as they have expanded to accommodate increasing numbers of students and to meet the demands of modern study and research. Most of the earlier extensions are inconspicuously incorporated into the body of the halls, but the massive, concrete buildings from the 1960s, displaying their crude modernity, also shape the image of contemporary Oxford.

Teaching existed in Oxford as early as 1096, and when in 1167 English students were banned from studying at the University of Paris, Oxford, with its strategic position in the English Midlands, seemed to provide an ideal location for an emerging centre of learning. There are no precise dates but it is certain that by 1207 there were about 1,000 students at Oxford. They rented rooms together and had a servant for the heavier and dirtier household jobs, such as changing the straw in the room and chopping wood. The knowledge the students had access to was limited in scope but revolutionary for the times. Bachelors were being educated in subjects such as mathematics, geography and geometry; the master's degree included medicine, law and astronomy. Among their teachers was a Franciscan monk called Francis Bacon, whose discoveries include the precursor of a telescope and the cause of the rainbow.

In the Middle Ages, the development of the University and increasing numbers of students led to an escalation of conflict between the local people and the students, often over women. The clashes between town and gown finally led to riots, in one of which more than 60 students were killed. This

prompted the establishing of the first halls of residence. Since those days, the colleges are entered through a small door in the entrance gate, which can be closed quickly in case of danger.

Throughout history, Oxford was a place of both secular and religious teaching. Active at Oxford were the Church reformer John Wycliffe, William Tyndale, whose translation of the Bible had a crucial influence on the religious education of the nation, and John and Charles Wesley, whose prayer meetings laid the foundations of the Methodist Church. In the late nineteenth century Oxford became the home of the so-called Oxford Movement, which opposed the Darwinian theory which sought to revitalize the Church of England.

From very early on, Oxford enjoyed a special status with those in power: kings, popes and sages. In the sixteenth century Queen Elizabeth I asked Oxford to provide men for the Government and showered privileges on the University in return. Charles I, on the other hand, is a monarch ill-remembered. During the Revolution, he was in hiding at Oxford and ordered the colleges' silver to be smelted into coins. Finally, he was caught when trying to escape from the town disguised as a servant, and beheaded.

The Oxford of the eighteenth century did not promote itself as a place of learning and the academic elite. Being there was a sign of social privilege rather than intelligence, and rich young men arrived to display their wealth and indulge in sports and idleness.

In the nineteenth century, Oxford produced a number of future Prime Ministers. One of them, William Ewart Gladstone, a great supporter and lover of Oxford, officially established a degree in science, which till then had not existed.

The beginning of the twentieth century saw a tragic period for Oxford as a whole generation of its illustrious young men lost their lives in the trenches of the First World War.

From 1878 the first women began to arrive in Oxford. For a long time, they were confined to women's colleges only and before 1920 they could not receive degrees. Some colleges did not open their gates to women

until the 1980s. Now, apart from St Hilda's, which remains a women's-only college, they all admit both men and women.

The acceptance of women as Fellows was an even slower process, which began in 1948 with Agnes Headlam-Morley, the first woman ever to be appointed to a full professorship at Oxford. Nevertheless, many famous women are counted among Oxford's graduates: the politicians Margaret Thatcher, Barbara Castle and Indira Gandhi, the scientists Dorothy Hodgkin (winner of the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1964) and Margaret Turner-Warwick (first female president of the Royal College of physicians), the explorer Gertrude Bell, the writers Iris Murdoch, Dorothy L. Sayers, Monica Ali, Ali Smith, Jeanette Winterson and Helen Fielding, the actresses Rosamund Pike and Emilia Fox, the founder of the Save the Children Fund Eglantyne Jebb, and many other professional women.

Among the most famous male Oxonians are Alexander Fleming, Arthur Halley, Bill Clinton, Tony Blair, Rowan Atkinson and even Hugh Grant. A great number of writers came to Oxford to study, notably P. B. Shelley (who was expelled on account of his political views), Oscar Wilde (who was a brilliant student), Philip Sidney, John Donne, Jonathan Swift, Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, Kingsley Amis and Philip Pullman. Some of them liked Oxford and remained loyal to the University (W.H. Auden), others hated it (T.S. Eliot). The literary names most readily attached to Oxford, however, are three of its teachers whose books address children and adults alike: Lewis Carroll, an eccentric introvert, who taught mathematics at Christ Church, J.R.R. Tolkien, a Professor of Old English at Exeter College and allegedly a boring lecturer, and C. S. Lewis, the author of *The Narnia Chronicles*. Other children's writers associated with Oxford are Kenneth Grahame, the author of the *The Wind in the Willows* and, more recently, J. K. Rowling, who has never lived in or studied at Oxford but whose name draws crowds to Christ Church, where some of *Harry Potter* was filmed.

The University of Oxford now consists of 39 colleges, which form independent bodies.

Seven colleges accept graduates only, one is for Fellows and one targets part-time and continuing education. All other colleges accept both undergraduates and graduates, although the current trend is towards graduate programmes. The average fee for a UK/EU student is around £2,000 but together with living expenses the costs amount to approximately £5,000 per year.

Currently, the number of students attending the University is over 17,000. Many come from outside the UK but only 14 are Czech. Despite the number of students and an equal number of bicycles rimming the buildings, the college yards are very quiet. The reason is very prosaic: the students are studying most of the time. The College libraries are open twenty-four hours a day, a necessity rather than an excessive luxury for students trying to meet their essay deadlines. On average, they are required to write three academic essays per a fortnight, which they then discuss with their tutor. In fact, most tuition at Oxford is on a one-to-one or one-to-two basis, a scheme which places considerably higher demands on the student than lectures or big seminar groups. Therefore, Oxford students are officially banned from working, even part-time, to be able to concentrate fully on their academic development.

*The clever men at Oxford
Know all that there is to be known.
But they none of them know half as much
As intelligent Mr Toad. (Kenneth Grahame)*

Oxford Quiz

- Oxford is a town in:
 - the South-East
 - the West Midlands
 - the North-East
- Oxford University consists of:
 - graduate colleges only
 - 39 self-governing colleges
 - 39 faculties
- Town and gown refers to:
 - to civil clothes and exam uniforms
 - the townspeople and students

c, the yearly carnival

- The first women received degrees from the University of Oxford in:
 - 1878
 - the 1980s
 - 1920
- Lewis Carroll, the author of *Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass*, was:
 - an Oxford don at Christ Church College
 - an Oxford don at Exeter College
 - an Oxford don at Magdalene College
- Harry Potter has a link to Oxford because:
 - J.K. Rowling studied at Oxford
 - J. K. Rowling was born in Oxford
 - sequences of the *Harry Potter* films were shot there
- The Hall is
 - the main Oxford shopping centre
 - a college common room
 - a college dining room
- The current number of Oxford students is approximately:
 - 20,000
 - 17,000
 - 30,000
- The most common type of tuition at Oxford is:
 - small seminar groups
 - lectures
 - tutorials
- Oxford students:
 - are required to support themselves by part-time jobs
 - may do so
 - are officially banned from doing so

Contemporary Literature Quiz

Match the writers to their works:

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| 1. Colm Tóibín | A <i>Enduring Love</i> |
| 2. Patience Agbabi | B <i>The Radiant Way</i> |
| 3. Ali Smith | C <i>The Master</i> |
| 4. Ian McEwan | D <i>Transformatrix</i> |
| 5. Margaret Drabble | E <i>Other Stories and Other Stories</i> |

linguistics pages

Teaching Pronunciation as Communication: How Far Have We Come? (IATEFL SIG Event “Pronunciation in Practice”)

Jaroslav Ondráček

On Saturday June 11th 2005 I was privileged to take part in a one-day seminar on teaching pronunciation in Reading in the south of England. The event was held by the IATEFL Pronunciation Special Interest Group and was coordinated by Dr Jane Setter, lecturer in English Phonetics at the University of Reading. (Dr Setter was one of my teachers - and examiners - at last year's summer course in English Phonetics in London.)

The seminar offered a series of eight talks by prominent methodologists, mainly from England but also from Italy, including a plenary talk by Martin Hewings, the author of “Advanced English Grammar in Use” and recently also of “Pronunciation Practice Activities”, which was published by Cambridge University Press last year. The main stimulus for writing this book was a quote from a paper from 1987 by Marianne Celce-Murcia: “there are currently no materials available for teaching pronunciation communicatively.” This consequently became a motto for our seminar. After nearly 20 years, the seminar speakers, Martin Hewings in particular, took an inventory of materials

now available that attempt to offer a communicative option in the area of pronunciation teaching.

As Martin Hewings pointed out in his talk, at the time when Celce-Murcia wrote the paper, there were about four methods used in teaching pronunciation: “listen and repeat“, “tongue twisters“, “minimal pairs“ and “wordshifts and stressshifts“, mainly focusing on isolated words and sentences, mostly using artificial, not authentic examples, making the whole process of teaching pronunciation highly unmotivating and “irrelevant-looking“.

Since 1987, however, a lot of the materials published have tried to put pronunciation into a context, and there has also been research going on that has influenced the practice of teaching pronunciation.

One of the first resources contextualising pronunciation practice was Mark Hancock's “Pronunciation Games“, which was first published in 1995 and uses techniques such as pairwork for discussing differences in pictures, where students end up using words with one or two problematic sounds at a time. Another, quite recent, attempt is the “Streaming Speech“ on-line course by Richard Cauldwell, who turned some authentic corpora materials into a teaching course focusing mainly on aspects of connected speech as opposed to slow, careful speech. The full title of the course is “Streaming Speech: Listening and Pronunciation for Advanced Learners of English“. It is available for a fee in a free

demo version at www.speechinaction.com in two versions: British/Irish and American/Canadian. Among other things, it teaches how to segment an utterance in 5 parts which correspond roughly to the individual constituents of the tone unit, studying and practising mainly what would basically correspond to the head of the tone unit, in which native speakers usually “swallow” almost everything. (It is really important to get a good dose of listening and systematic practice here.) I have won in the seminar lottery a two-week free access to the whole thing, so I may be able to tell you more about it in the next issue of this magazine.

Another resource mentioned was W B Dickerson et al.’s 1999 publication “Discourse Pronunciation for Advanced Learners” (University of Michigan Press), which has an accompanying workbook. Also, it has proved useful to link pronunciation practice to experiences and attitudes towards English, asking students questions like “What is your earliest memory of learning English?”, “How did it sound to you?”, “How does it sound to you now?” and “Why did you decide to learn English?”

Other resources which can be used to teach pronunciation and which are now generally available – apart from the “Streaming Speech” mentioned above – are various dictionary CD-ROMs and spoken English corpora. A sample from the British National Corpus, we were told at the seminar, is available for study purposes at www.lextutor.ca.

Obviously, Martin Hewings’ keynote speech set the tone for the other speakers, who covered some concrete areas of English pronunciation and methods they have developed and/or use in their classrooms. The topics varied from teaching English pronunciation to Chinese learners and a “possible sequence for the teaching of English suprasegmentals” to “Pronunciation Learning cards”, using OHTs for pronunciation- and especially intonation-teaching in a lively way and, last but not least, some activities for training teachers.

The whole seminar, which was accompanied by a Cambridge University Press display and a book raffle at the end, offered a lot of interesting ideas and also an opportunity to meet pronunciation teachers not only from Britain but also from Hong Kong, for example. New professional contacts were made as well as normal human friendships.

One last thought: it was mentioned a couple of times during the seminar how often not only communication breaks down but also job opportunities are lost because of bad or simply unnatural pronunciation. A lot of Asian immigrants to Britain can testify to this fact, although their grammar and vocabulary may often be excellent!!!

So, what about you, dear reader? Is your English pronunciation strong enough not to “segregate” you from native speakers when you are perhaps seeking a job in Britain? Please think about this during your travels in the coming months and years. And have a really magnificent school-year!!

methodology pages

TOEFL and Recent Developments in ETS Language Assessment and Admission Testing

Lucie Podroužková

PART TWO: OTHER ETS EXAMS

Although TOEFL remains the most commonly required admission test, it may be that the school asks for the scores from one of the other ETS examinations.

In 1979 ETS introduced TOEIC – Test of English for International Communication. Like TOEFL this test, too, may be required by American universities; indeed it was specifically developed for them. However, the main users of TOEIC today are manufacturing companies (40%), only then followed by educational services (23%) and financial institutions (12%). TOEIC aims to “measure the ability of non-native speakers of English to communicate in the international workplace”. Compared to TOEFL, it is less academic: the passages in the Reading Comprehension section are shorter and in terms of vocabulary the focus is on professional English. The exercises are taken from everyday business life, such as meetings, reports, phone calls or travel. The test lasts two hours and its level spans from intermediate to advanced. The test scores differ considerably from TOEFL but can be converted using the following formula: $(\text{TOEIC score} \times 0.328) + 307$. Here the

minimum pass is 150 and the maximum 900 points.

GMAT is a Graduate Management Admission Test, originally designed by ETS for the Graduate Management Admission Council, at the demand of higher institutions offering MBA programmes. Its purpose is “to help graduate schools assess the qualifications of applicants for advanced study in business and management”. More than 1,000 such schools require GMAT scores from their applicants. GMAT is a computer-adaptive test (CAT), which means that the level of the next question is determined and automatically selected according to the previous multiple-choice answer. If you respond correctly, the following question will ultimately be more challenging. On entering an incorrect response, the computer will go on to provide the student with a question of a lesser difficulty. The test measures verbal, mathematical and analytical writing skills. The Writing Section consists of two analyses (of an Issue and of an Argument), each 30-minutes long. The Quantitative part, involving problem-solving and data sufficiency, contains 37 questions in 75 minutes total time. The Verbal Section, which is made up of reading comprehension, critical reasoning and sentence correction, allots 75 minutes per 41 questions. The score is determined by the number of questions answered and ranges from 200 to 800 points. The average score required for admission is 550. The test can be taken nearly every workday and, again, Berlin, Munich and Budapest are the closest available test centres for GMAT. As with TOEFL, registration must be made via the International Office in the Netherlands.

GRE (Graduate Record Examinations) is very similar to GMAT in both structure and function. Here, however, two types of test are included: the General Test, offered as both a paper-based and a computer-based test which measures skills “not necessarily related to any particular area of study”, and the Subject Tests, administered as a paper-based test only which measures “achievement in specific subject areas and assumes undergraduate majors or extensive background in those disciplines”. Currently, there are eight subjects tested: Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Literature in English, Mathematics, Physics and Psychology. The General Test requires Analytical Writing (two writing tasks per 45 and 30 minutes), the Verbal Section, which consists of two 30-minute parts, and the Quantitative Section, which is of 60 minutes’ duration. The subject test takes 2 hours 50 minutes. The CBT version of the General Test can again be taken almost daily at CBT centres; paper-based General and Subject Tests are administered two to three times a year.

Useful links:

www.gmac.com
www.usbsp.cz
www.gre.org
www.fulbright.cz
www.act.org

For this article, ETS materials, information from the Fulbright Commission and data from an ETS workshop in Prague have been used.

Written and Oral Assignments, 1st year, regular students, practical language

Findings from the evaluation

Nad'a Vojtková

I have recently participated in a joint British Council / AMATE project called Evaluation in ELT. The project has several stages and the first part of it is aimed at using evaluation for our professional development. As I only started to teach at the Faculty in September 2004, I was very much interested in what my students thought about various aspects of the courses I been teaching. My colleagues from the Faculty of Education in Plzeň joined me and we prepared a new way of evaluation.

We decided to use the focus group technique as an evaluation tool. The purpose of the evaluation was to compare our assumptions with those of the students as far as the assignments were concerned. We prepared a set of 6 statements in which we described a current situation on the course. Then we asked 10 first-year students to comment on them and change them so that they would express their views and opinions. The whole discussion was recorded and noted and I analysed the notes and tapescripts.

Assumptions:

1. Four assignments per semester is reasonable
2. The second, fourth, sixth and ninth weeks of the semester are ideal for assigning these.
3. Written instructions are sufficient for successful completion of the assignments.
4. Two weeks is enough for completion.
5. Written assignments are more important than oral ones.
6. Assignments are relevant to the course content.

Analysis and summary:

1. There was 40% agreement with that assumption. 50% would like to have more assignments, 10% would like to have fewer.
2. There was 80% agreement here; the students would like to have them every second week. However, 40% would like to have them more at the beginning of the semester. One student suggested students should be provided with a list of topics at the beginning of the term and complete them at their own pace.
3. 50% agreement here; 30% would like to have both written and oral instructions, 10% would like to have only oral and 10% did not express a view.
4. 50% agreement again; 30% thought they needed less time, 10% needed more time.
5. 40% consider oral assignments more important than written ones, 50% thought they were the same and 10% disagreed with the statement.
6. 100% agreement on this statement. All students thought the assignments were relevant to course content.

The overall agreement of my assumptions and students' views (expectations) was 55%.

I can say that I had slightly lower expectations. It can be concluded that students generally appreciate working on assignments, both oral and written; they find them highly relevant to the course content and the teachers can be more demanding both in the number of and the deadlines they set the assignments. However, one of the things students mentioned as a great benefit of assignments was the feedback they got from the teacher. If I wanted to increase the number of

assignments I would have to limit my feedback because of the number of students in the first year. Also doing oral assignments (presentations) is a very time-consuming process. I will have to think of ways of increasing the assignments in a manageable way.

Let me thank the students of the first year and Shannon Douglass for their help.

CUP News

Nad'a Vojtková

This time I would like to draw your attention to a brand-new course for adults – Face to Face.

The course is aimed at people who want to learn to communicate quickly and effectively in today's world.

Its authors Chris Redston and Gillie Cunningham have based the course on the communicative approach and combined the best in current methodology with special new features designed to make learning and teaching easier. The course is informed by the Cambridge Corpora and fully compatible with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Each Student's Book is provided with free CD-ROM/Audio CDs which contain a wealth of activities to consolidate work done in class.

Come and have a look, I have copies in my CUP library.

Eva Boudová is 84 years old and for all her working life she was as a pharmacist. I decided to ask her for an interview because I believe her to be a perfect example of the old adage that “it’s never too late to learn a foreign language”. As soon as we started to have lessons together I realized that she would be an excellent and hard-working student.

When did you start to learn English?

I started in 1939 – at the beginning of the Second World War – but only continued for a few months. My husband and I had private lessons.

Can you speak any other languages?

At grammar school we had four languages. One of them was voluntary. I can speak German very well. We had French for four years and Latin as well. And I had a voluntary seminar of Russian.

That’s quite amazing. When did you come back to English?

It was in 1991 and I had language courses for 2 years.

It’s a long time since 1939. Did you remember anything?

Not much. Hardly anything, actually.

And I guess you didn’t have much opportunity to practise your English during the communist era?

No, and we couldn’t travel, which was a pity. I am glad that my grandchildren can travel.

(Note: Her daughter and grandchildren are excellent students. They are studying in Oxford and Vienna and at other famous towns and universities. Her granddaughter is a translator from English and German. Her late husband was able to speak five languages, so it’s obvious that this family has languages in its blood)

Back to languages, what do you find most difficult about English?

It’s a difficult language. I don’t like spelling and grammar rules. I’m used to German where there are stricter rules. Also listening and speaking are difficult things for me but that’s maybe because of my age.

Yes, your biggest problem is that you often switch to German while speaking English. But in my experience high-school students make the same mistake. And, of course, French and German can help you with vocabulary since it is often similar.

Yes, that is certainly an advantage for me.

What was the main reason to return to English one more time in 2004?

Well, my granddaughter recently married a Scot. I wanted to make sure I could understand them.

And are you able to understand them?

Well, when he’s speaking to me I understand. But when he speaks with my granddaughter I don’t understand.

So I guess we ought to have a lesson on the Scottish accent.

I don’t know: maybe it’s just that he speaks too quickly for me.

literature pages

In each issue of the Messenger, Lucie Podroužková browses the library shelves for both new arrivals and all-time favourites to give an informal review and a personal recommendation, concluded with a comprehension question for potential readers.

When Imagination Wrecks Lives

Touching and superbly written, *Atonement* (2001) is probably the best novel by Ian McEwan so far. It is a glorious summer day in 1935 and thirteen-year-old Briony Tallis has designed posters, programmes and tickets for *The Trials of Arabella*, a melodrama in verse she has written to honour her brother's arrival; she is trying to get her cousins Lola, Jackson and Pierrot to rehearse their parts. Her mother has withdrawn into a darkened bedroom to still the "furry beast" of migraine and is listening to the muffled breath of the house. Downstairs, the furious clanking of pans is heard in the preparation of a welcoming roast, which in the heat of the day no one will want to eat. Briony's sister Cecilia is chain-smoking and reading *Pamela*; she is feeling irritable, restless and expectant. Robbie, the son of the family cleaner, Cecilia's childhood friend and excelling fellow-student at Cambridge, is tending the garden, his head soaring with ambitious plans and visions of a bright future.

In a few hours, he will see Cecilia strip to her underwear and dive into a garden fountain for the broken pieces of a precious family vase. This act will change the relationship

between them forever but it will also set in motion other unforeseen events.

By the time the day ends and Leon – in the company of his rich friend Paul Marshall, a chocolate factory owner – arrives, the vase has been repaired, the rehearsals have been abandoned, Cecilia and Robbie have discovered they are in love with each other, Jackson and Pierrot have disappeared and Lola has been raped. With the vivid imagination of a budding writer, Briony, who has witnessed and misinterpreted the tension between Robbie and Cecilia, believes she has identified the dark shadow of a man she has caught a sight of, and she accuses Robbie of the rape. Robbie is arrested and goes to prison.

In 1940, the English military forces in France begin a rapid retreat. Robbie, who was released to join the war effort and has survived atrocities in France, is now making his way through German air-raids to Dunkirk for evacuation, clinging to Cecilia's love but changed in all else. Cecilia has severed all connections with the family and is now working as a ward sister in Balham hospital. Briony's life too, has taken a diversion. She has not gone to Cambridge but instead she, too, is training to be a nurse; she is also seeking to re-establish contact with her sister. In the atmosphere of nervous alertness of wartime London a meeting takes place between herself and Cecilia, in which she is unexpectedly confronted with Robbie, too:

If it was a double take, it was undramatic. As soon as their eyes met, his hands dropped to his sides and he gave a little winged sigh as he continued to look at her hard. However intimidated, she felt she could not look

away. She smelled the faint perfume of his shaving soap. The shock was how much older he looked, especially round the eyes. Did everything have to be her fault? she wondered stupidly. Couldn't it also be the war's? (399)

In 1999, Briony, now a old woman and a major novelist, is attending a family reunion, which brings together some of the people who were present on that fateful summer day. She witnesses the long-delayed premiere of her childhood masterpiece. Briony has been briefed by her doctor that she is suffering from vascular dementia: "In summary, as he helped me into my coat, he gave me the route map: loss of memory, short- and long-term, the disappearance of single words – simple nouns might be the first to go – then language itself, along with balance, and soon after, all motor control, and finally, the autonomous nervous system. Bon voyage!" (355) She now knows the time is short in which she can examine her guilt and mould her confession into novel form. Aware of the responsibilities and power of the novelist, she acknowledges the narrative as her own voice:

All the preceding drafts were pitiless. But now I can no longer think what purpose would be served if, say, I tried to persuade my reader, by direct or indirect means, that Robbie Turner died of septicaemia at Bray Dunes on 1 June 1940, or that Cecilia was killed in September of the same year by the bomb that destroyed Balham Underground station. That I never saw them in that year. That my walk across London ended at the church on Clapham Common, and a cowardly Briony limped back to the hospital, unable to confront her recently bereaved sister. That the letters the lovers

wrote are in the archives of the War Museum. How could that constitute an ending? What sense or hope or satisfaction could a reader draw from such an account? Who would want to believe that they never met again, never fulfilled their love? Who would want to believe that, except in the service of the bleakest realism? I couldn't do it to them. I'm too old, too frightened, too much in love with the shred of life I have remaining. I face an incoming tide of forgetting, and then oblivion. I no longer possess the courage of my pessimism. When I am dead, and the Marshalls are dead, and the novel is finally published, we will only exist as my inventions. Briony will be as much of a fantasy as the lovers who shared a bed in Balham and enraged their landlady. No one will care what events and which individuals were misinterpreted to make a novel. I know there's always a certain kind of reader who will be compelled to ask, But what *really happened*? The answer is simple: the lovers survive and flourish. (370-1)

Many years earlier, this woman made a fatal mistake, which she has spent her whole life examining and atoning for. Now, she will finally be released into a liberating forgetfulness.

For thought:

Did Briony commit a crime?

The book is available in the library upstairs. Ian McEwan is interviewed about the novel in the BBC World Book Club, at <http://www.bbc.co.uk>

Contemporary American Stage

Lucie Podroužková

Apart from the recently deceased Arthur Miller, Edward Albee, occasionally David Mamet and Sam Shepard, contemporary American playwrights inspire relatively little critical discourse, rarely feature in literary anthologies and remain generally ignored by textbook writers. This series wants to redress the balance by introducing a number of American dramatists working today who are worthy of note and attention.

Part 1

TINA HOWE:

Public Places and Private Hysterias

Beaches, galleries, restaurants, screaming children, public faux pas and fits of neurosis, role playing and dressing up, language games and cross-talk all animate Tina Howe's plays. Howe has received a number of awards, most notably an Obie for Distinguished Playwriting, an Outer Critics Circle Award, an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in Literature, and three fellowships (two NEAs and a Guggenheim). Her play *Coastal Disturbances* was nominated for a Tony Award and *Pride's Crossing* was short-listed for the 1997 Pulitzer Prize and awarded the 1998 New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Play. Yet Howe had to wait long for both critical acclaim and public recognition. Several of her works were initially turned down or received hostile reviews and it was only her 1983 play, her most low-key and a most near-to-realism drama, *Painting Churches*, that brought Howe her first major success and due attention. Nevertheless, Howe's unusual settings, her slapstick humour, her denial of realism (Howe admits to inspiration from the Theatre of the Absurd), eccentric characters and chaos whipped up in public arenas, seem to continue to puzzle and even upset American audiences.

Tina Howe Levy was born in 1937 into a privileged family and studied at exclusive private schools. In college she started writing plays. Defying her mother's intentions for

her: "I fought tooth and nail with my mother against being a debutante and marrying a stockbroker"¹, she went to live in Paris for a year, married an "unsuitable" Jew (the writer and historian Norman Levy) and taught at various high schools, trying out her dramatic pieces on restless teenage students. She now lives in New York, rarely making public appearances: "I'm at home with my typewriter where nobody can see me".²

*"For me, artists are the nearest we come to heroes in our society"*³

Howe has been commended for her "powerful sense of the visual"⁴ and indeed, visual arts (and arts in general) are one of her constant preoccupations. In *Painting Churches* (1983), young, upcoming artist Margaret Church returns home to help her parents move house and paint a portrait of them. Both the extravagant and brash Fanny and her self-absorbed husband Gardner, now sliding into senility but once a prominent, Pulitzer-winning New England poet, prove very undisciplined sitters:

GARDNER: How am I doing, Fan?

FANNY: Brilliantly, absolutely
brilliantly!

MAGS: But you're making faces.

FANNY: I'm not making faces.

(Turning to Gardner and making a face)

Are you making faces, Gar?

GARDNER: (Instantly making one):

Certainly not! I'm the
picture of restraint! (144)

Unable to hold still, they begin clowning, and imitate scenes from famous portraits by famous artists while Margaret vents frustrations of her own:

¹ Howe. Tina Howe Levy.
<http://www.uni.uiuc.edu>

² Howe. Tina Howe Levy. <http://www.uni.uiuc.edu>

³ Howe. In: Bigsby: Tina Howe. In: *Contemporary American Playwrights*. CUP: 1999.

⁴ Bigsby: Tina Howe. In: *Contemporary American Playwrights*. CUP: 1999.

MAGS: Remember how you behaved at my first group show in Soho? ... Oh, come on, you remember. It was a real circus! Think back. ... It was about six years ago ... Daddy had just been awarded some presidential medal of achievement and you insisted he wear it around his neck on a bright red ribbon, and you wore this ... *huge* feathered hat to match! I'll never forget it! It was the size of a giant pizza with twenty-inch red turkey feathers shooting straight up into the air ... Oh, come on, you remember, don't you?

FANNY: (*Leaping to her feet*):
HOLD EVERYTHING!
THIS IS IT! THIS IS
REALLY IT! Forgive me for
interrupting, Mags darling,
it'll just take a minute.

(*She whispers excitedly to Gardner*)

MAGS: I had about eight portraits in the show, mostly of friends of mine, except for this old one I'd done of Mrs. Crowningshield.

GARDNER: All right, all right ... let's give it a whirl.

A pause; then they mime Michelangelo's Pietá with Gardner lying across Fanny's lap as the dead Christ.

MAGS: (*depressed*): The Pietá.
Terrific!

FANNY: (*jabbing Gardner in the ribs*):
Hey, we're getting good at this.

GARDNER: Of course it would help if we didn't have all these modern clothes on.

MAGS: AS I WAS SAYING...

FANNY: Sorry, Mags, ... sorry...
(150)

It becomes apparent that Mags's painting is a vehicle for the examination of family relationships, the family's past, and also a journey toward a mutual recognition and reconciliation. For Margaret, it means emerging from the shadow of her parents' powerful personalities, as an individual and an artist in her own right. At the same time, she must accept her parents' ways of facing old age and ultimately, death.⁵

The Museum (1976) takes place in the contemporary section of an art museum, on the last day of an exhibition called *The Broken Silence*. Featuring thirty-nine characters, the play consists of short scenes of the visitors' comings and goings. There are culture enthusiasts and snobs catching up with what is hot in the town, sketchers, photographers trying to obtain permission from the Director to photograph the show, friends of the artists, one of the artists himself, the curator giving a tour, a dignified French couple, people struggling to tame their audio-guides, people looking for another exhibition and people looking for each other. The play registers their various reactions to the art works exhibited, from admiration and excitement to disgust, bafflement, detachment and ridicule. Rather than independent entities, the exhibits function as projections of those who look at them. Indeed, as the play progresses, there is a sense in which the visitors themselves become objects of art, under the scrutiny of the audience.

In Howe's more recent play, *Rembrandt's Gift* (2001), former actor Walter Paradise and his wife Polly Shaw, a world-class photographer, meet the great Dutch painter, who materializes in their New York flat. Among stacks of old costumes and with the landlord about to evict them, "the three spend the day together testing the limits of art, love and old age".⁶

⁵ The play was turned into a disappointing film called *The Portrait* (1993), starring Gregory Peck, Lauren Bacall and Peck's own daughter Cecelia Peck.

⁶ Tina Howe. <http://www.doollee.com>

When food starts to fly

The Art of Dining (1979) is set in an exclusive restaurant co-owned and managed by a couple who act as a chef and a waiter. While Ellen prepares the meals with loving affection and a truly artistic skill to perfection and finery, Cal glides through the restaurant serving them to the enchanted customers. Like *The Museum*, *The Art of Dining* exposes people's private anxieties as manifested in their public behaviour. Whereas in *The Museum* people are described through their reactions to art, here the guests are characterized by their attitude to food, as "hungry", "hungrier", "afraid of food", "enthusiastic and good eater", "neurotic eater", "perpetually on a diet" and "son and husband of good cooks".⁷ Paul and Hannah enjoy almost orgasmic pleasure over the ordering and consuming of their meals. Herrick, Nessa and Tony argue about and steal each other's dishes, competing in frugality ("I am stuffed!", 102) but picking secretly at the food till "their real hunger and shame sets in"(118). Elizabeth, a talented writer but pitifully shy and extremely clumsy, drops a lipstick into her soup, tries to fish it out and spills the soup into her lap. In the meantime, the cooperative effort in the kitchen breaks down as Cal, a compulsive eater, has unthinkingly consumed ingredients for Ellen's cooking. Ellen breaks down and goes on strike. Cal finally saves both the business and his marriage by preparing an improvised flambé dessert. The customers, who up till now have been at their tables keeping themselves to themselves, now gather around the flaming platter from which Ellen serves and, in a state of collective bliss, begin to feast.

*Going berserk allowed*⁸

One of the two plays that provoked considerable distaste among both critics and

audiences was *Birth and After Birth* (written in 1977 but only produced in 1995), a play about the "wonder and terror of motherhood".⁹ Bill and Sally Apple invite their friends Mia and Jeffrey to celebrate their son's fourth birthday. Bill and Sally sing odes to parenthood before it comes out they themselves can have no more children. Their darling, performed by an adult actor, rips the presents open and systematically wrecks the flat, and Mia, who is afraid of maternity, falls into a fit of mock labour.

In *Approaching Zanzibar* (1989) Howe parodies the concept of the American family and the pioneering journeys to the West. The Blossoms travel across America to visit their aunt, a sight-specific artist who is dying of cancer. As they pile into the car they also pack with them their fears and concerns. Wally is a composer struggling with writer's block and inhibited by his prodigal son Turner, who seems in every way more adept. The daughter Pony is a bespectacled nine-year old, who is afraid of death and feeds on flowers. Like her husband, Charlotte is also suffering a loss, mourning the end of her fertile days. Her menopausal changes cause some outrageous behaviour: Charlotte rips off her clothes at one moment and pours champagne over herself in the next. Finally, the journey towards death ends in celebration of life when aunt Olivia, wearing Pony's glasses, and Pony, wearing Olivia's wig, bounce on the bed, performing "wondrous spins in mid-air"(76), eating orchids and playing "geography".

Roar in the female hearts

Although there are men as well as women in Howe's plays, and the men are often kinder and more understanding than their female counterparts, Howe consciously expresses her allegiance and tribute to womanhood. Her plays describe an array of female experience and "the dailiness of women's lives – marriage, child raising, housekeeping and entertaining – subjects many consider

⁷ Bigsby: Tina Howe. In: *Contemporary American Playwrights*. CUP: 1999.

⁸ Howe about the Marx Brother films. In: Bigsby: Tina Howe. In: *Contemporary American Playwrights*. CUP: 1999.

⁹ Howe. Introduction to *Approaching Zanzibar and Other Plays*

unworthy of stage.”¹⁰ There are women celebrating their fecundity, women mourning their sterility and women combating their fear of motherhood, of old age and death. There are women pitched between their longing for freedom and a desire for security. There are frustrated, bored and unfulfilled women and extremely neurotic, insecure women, who struggle to attain selfhood and to defeat the lingering influence of their dominant mothers.

In *Coastal Disturbances* (1986), young New York photographer Holly Dancer can cope neither with her separation from major gallery owner and exotic outsider Andre Soir, nor with her attraction to Leo, a life-guard who courts her on the beach where she used to spend her childhood summers and where she now returns. Overwhelmed and torn between Andre, who arrives to whisk her away to her former life in New York, and Leo, who hovers over the beach displaying his sexy looks and gentlemanly assistance, Holly keeps falling off her high-heeled shoes and ends up crawling in the sand, groping for control:

HOLLY: I knew this was a mistake. I
knew I shouldn't have ...

*(She tries to walk again, but
promptly falls)* WHOOPS!

LEO: Look, if you took off those
shoes ...

HOLLY:*(Scrambling to her feet)*: I
TOLD YOU: IT HAS
NOTHING TO DO WITH
MY GODDAMMED
SHOES! IT'S YOU! *(She
pulls off her shoes, takes a
few tentative steps and
immediately falls)* See ...?
It's you ... There's only one
way to do this *(She hands
Leo her shoes)* Here ... stand
back ...! *(She drops to her
hands and knees and starts
crawling off the beach)*
(244)

The other people on the beach are Faith, her adopted daughter Miranda, her friend and guest Ariel with son Winston, and a retired couple, M.J. and Hamilton Adams. Faith, now glowing with a pregnancy of her own, celebrates female fertility while Ariel is recovering from the frustration of a recent divorce and is hollowed with barrenness: “my childbearing days are over ... My equipment has dried up.”(206) Hamilton, once a top eye surgeon with “an eye for beauty”, goes about picking shells contentedly and soothing his wife's complaints, while M.J. produces amateur watercolours, of which she is very sceptical: “I'm just a dabbler, just a dabbler.” (208). Like Ariel and Holly she too, struggles with a lack of fulfilment, loss and self-doubt, but in the final scene she and Hamilton remain the only bathers on the beach, setting up a picnic to celebrate their wedding anniversary, assisted by Leo, who watches their preparations with some envy.

Like M.J., Dinah in *One Shoe Off* (1993) belongs to a generation which cannot break its marriage vows easily. A famous costume designer, she lives with her husband, former actor Leonard, in an upstate New York house which is sinking into the ground, torn down by the wind and overrun with burgeoning vegetation: “mushrooms nesting in the mittens, avocados blooming in the galoshes, broccoli sprouting out the umbrellas ... green beans quickening, okra stiffening, zucchini swelling...”(939). Dinah has invited their new neighbours Clio and Tate for dinner, but both hosts are thrilled at the prospect of another visitor, their long-time friend and famous film director Parker Bliss. Clio and Tate arrive, to mutual apprehension and embarrassment: Dinah keeps running off to change into her spectacular theatre costumes, Tate breaks into nursery rhymes, and names keep being mixed up. In the end and after much prolonged waiting, Parker arrives and with him the real party begins, with dressing up, feasting and games. Clio and Parker woo each other under Tate and Dinah's jealous, reproachful eyes. A love affair is about to begin and frustrations

¹⁰ Howe. Introduction to *Approaching Zanzibar* and

emerge. When the guests depart, Leonard questions Dinah about his suspicion of her involvement with Parker eleven years ago:

DINAH: The joke's on me. Everyone assumed it was a *fait accompli*, so it wouldn't have made any difference. Good old Dinah, ever the dutiful wife. (*Imitating herself*) "It's not right, Leonard would never get over it, he's bound to find out, I know him. He'll see it in my eyes, he'll smell it in my hair, nothing gets past him when it comes to me."

LEONARD: You were faithful.

DINAH: If you can call it that. I wanted him, I just couldn't go through with it. (949)

This is a moment of crisis but also of resurrection. Dinah and Leonard now face up to and challenge their fate hand in hand, shouting their grievances into the gale raging outside, "which finally starts to subside"(950). There will be a change in the weather.

Pride's Crossing (2001) is built around the memories of Mabel Tidings Bigelow, a world record holder for swimming across the English Channel. Now an "indomitable nonagenarian"¹¹, a woman who once dared the waters of La Manche but "pulled back from risking marriage outside her social milieu"¹², Mabel takes one more plunge to make a crossing into her own past. While planning a grand croquet party such as she knew in her childhood, Mabel revisits her life when she was ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty-five and sixty, recalling her stiff-upper-lipped mother, her brother's heroic diving feats, her other, temperamental brother's suicide, her record-breaking swim, and most importantly, a young Jewish doctor who she gave up in exchange for conformity. Howe had long

wanted to write "about passion of old ladies" born at the turn of the century, who never had a chance to "flower and assess themselves and find out who they were."¹³ The play is a tribute to Howe's own aunt Maddy, who "never swam a stroke, never married and never broke free of the privileged Brahmin straitjacket"¹⁴, but in whose heart "there's a roar. I wanted to give it to her."¹⁵

Among Howe's recent works are *Women in Flames* (2001), the one-woman piece *Such Small Hands* (2003) and translations of Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* and *The Lesson*.

Howe, Tina. *Coastal Disturbances. Four Plays by Tina Howe*. Theatre Communications Group. NY, 1989.

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Bigsby, Christopher. Tina Howe. In: *Contemporary American Playwrights*. CUP: 1999.

¹¹ Jones: Tina Howe's *Pride's Crossing* Gets NYC Revival, at T. Schreiber Studio, March 25-April 18. <http://www.playbill.com>

¹² *Pride's Crossing*

¹³ Tina Howe. In: Karen Holbert: *Dramaturg Notes: An Inspired Creation*.

<http://www.theatrewesternsprings.com>

¹⁴ Howe. In Pacheco: *Channel Surfing*. <http://www.fb10.uni/bremen.de>

¹⁵ Howe. In Pacheco: *Channel Surfing*. <http://www.fb10.uni/bremen.de>

Irish week 2005 (19th March – 25th March)

Michaela Marková

Have you ever considered the usefulness of announcements hanging on boards in school corridors? Fortunately, one of the boards in the English Department (MU in Brno) is dedicated to messages about coming conferences, academic events and available grants – all referring to English teacher training and future careers. Sometimes it is rather difficult to choose an appropriate event to fully satisfy one's needs – both professional and personal.

It is my pleasure to inform you of a happening that positively fulfilled all my expectations and, moreover, meant a significant enrichment of my knowledge of Irish culture and literature. The event I am talking about was the 10th annual Irish Week (19th March – 25th March, 2005), which took place in Bystřice pod Hostýnem and in Olomouc.

The outline of the week was fairly rich and offered plentiful samples of various literature genres from different periods. Even the most fastidious bookworms would definitely be able to choose at least one area of interest. The reading list, which participants were asked to go through in advance, included works by Kate O'Brien, John McGahern and Charles Parnell. All the literature sessions were led by university lecturers of Irish literature from Charles University in Prague and Palacký University in Olomouc, and also by visiting lecturers from Dublin College and the University of Sheffield.

The first half of the event took part in the charming neighbourhood of Bystřice pod Hostýnem (a small town near Olomouc) and was spent in discussion about cultural issues –

past and present. Participants had the great opportunity to watch a number of Irish movies and movies about the Irish way of life, which further complemented and specified their view of Irish culture. The astonishing experience was amplified by friendly gatherings in a cosy pub nearby, where everyone was expected to amuse the others with an Irish joke, song or tale while sitting by the fireplace (which is quite a typical pastime of the Irish).

The second half of the Irish week was held at the English Department of the Palacký University Faculty of Arts. The lecturers provided significant analyses of reading samples to draw important connections with events of Irish history; they also addressed the origins and causes of particular cultural features.

Students were taken onboard to experience famous voyage tales (e.g. St. Brendan's voyage), heard an elaborate comparison of Czech and Irish varieties of censorship, tasted the bitterness of the post-famine years, had revealed to them the beauty of Irish poetry and sexuality in Irish literature.

I was pleasantly surprised when I learned that the idea of this annual happening originated many years ago directly among students of the English Department of Palacký University, who had a great teacher of Irish literature and were willing to spend their free time talking about it. I would like to offer them - and Ondřej Pilný and Matthew Sweeney, who continue in the brilliant tradition today - my sincere thanks for this. The Irish week was an amazing experience for me: I got to know more about Irish literature, history and culture, and, what is more, I met many friendly people whom I am already looking to meeting again next year at the 11th Irish week.

culture pages

An English Summer

Andrew Oakland *spent much of the summer reading newspapers and the odd book, watching TV and listening to the radio. This is what he found out.*

Britishness, Multiculturalism and 'Treason'

Throughout the summer the efforts of Britain's journalists and the interests of its socially-engaged - and in London, of course, general - public have been in thrall to July's bomb attacks. There has been much head-shaking and hand-wringing that the perpetrators should have come from within, were, to greater and lesser extents depending on how the term is treated, 'British'.

I was planning for this page a consideration of various views on the attacks, the ground out of which they grew, and their resonance in British society, drawing on what I have encountered in the British media in recent weeks. It fast became clear to me, however, that to do this would mean embarking on a major study which I would fail to complete in time for the deadline for this issue of The Messenger. So I have chosen instead to present selected thoughts of a few commentators which I hoped readers would find to be of special interest.

Max Hastings, Daily Mail, 16 July

"Today, the word 'treason' sounds fantastically old-fashioned. The London bombs represented the most explicit possible assault upon the peace of the realm and the welfare of its citizens. Yet to describe those who carried out the bombings as 'traitors' sounds almost satirical to a modern ear.

"[...] We should be dismayed that this [reaction] is so. Nothing seems more

important for any society's health than that its citizens should feel a duty of loyalty."

Andrew Rawnsley, Observer, 17 July

"The truth is that nothing will ever be quite the same again ... The first change is to the balance between freedom and authority. The ratchet will move further in the direction of control at the expense of liberty.

... Britain's tradition of freedom of speech, historically one of the least cramped in the world, will not survive this unaltered."

Will Hutton, Observer, 31 July

"...it's not hard to take the conservative argument further; Britain is too polyglot, access to its generous welfare state is too easy and there's been too much concern for tolerance, observance of human rights and concern for the underdog ... Enoch Powell's warning that the streets would one day run with blood has been proved right ...

... one of the paradoxical saving graces of Britishness is that it is too vague an idea to be deployed in such a way. Whether Norman Davies documenting how Britain has been constructed from successive waves of immigration in *The Isles*, or historian Linda Colley describing how Britain was essentially an eighteenth century political artefact as the result of the union of England, Wales and Scotland in *Britons*, both unite to show how the idea of Britain is not a faith like the idea of say, France, or America - or nationalistic like the idea of China or Russia.

"... trying to concoct a new urgent conservative British faith as part of a concerted effort to persuade young British Muslims of the value of their adopted country will not be part of any solution - however much some may wish it. Britishness does not admit of such manipulation, which is why millions of British are so loyal to the idea even while not being overtly loud about it."

Thomas Kielinger, London-based correspondent of Die Welt, in Observer, 31 July

"Germans have always admired the British ability to create a world order out of their own values. I've seen this eroded for no good reason at all other than to make arrivals feel comfortable."

Jeremy Paxman, author and broadcaster, in Observer, 31 July

"You have a perfect right in this country to do what you want without anyone asking what you are doing or why you are doing it."

Jonathan Freedland, Guardian, 3 August

"... the way America approaches its newcomers. It does not allow a vacuum where national identity should be, but fills the void with Americanness. Loyalty is instilled instantly ... whether it be saluting the flag at school or singing the national anthem at a ballgame ...

"It seems there are two ways to fill the identity vacuum. The French model of citizenship, which asks people to shed their differences to become French. Or the American, which allows people to keep their differences - and become American ... Britons' instincts would probably lean towards the American approach ... Our crypto-federal structure, welding Scots, English and Welsh, allows for that; successive waves of immigrants have added to the mix."

Johann Hari, Independent, 5 August:

"... it is increasingly clear that, forged with the best of intentions, multiculturalism has become a counter-productive way of welcoming people to our country. It promotes not a melting pot where we all mix together but a segregated society of sealed-off cultures, each sticking to its own.

„[...] they are Asian. So I do nothing, and nor do any of the other nice liberals who live here, even though this family is as British as we are. Isn't there a word for treating

people differently because of the colour of their skin?

"... Multiculturalism has caused people to do this on a national scale.

"... multiculturalism binds the hands of those who want cultural change in immigrant communities by demanding tolerance and respect for reactionary traditions."

Education

The big story in Education this summer has a familiar feel to it. A very familiar feel. This is a story which comes round every August in two waves, a story you could set your watch by. It goes something like this:

Wave 1: "As the A-level pass rate is now 103% - last year it was 102%, the year before 101%, in 1984 60% - might it not be the case that grades have become inflated to such an extent that they no longer serve as a useful guide for university entrance and the prospective employer?"

Wave 2: "As the GCSE pass rate is now 103% - blah blah blah blah - blah blah blah ... plus, could this not be because students are choosing not to take more difficult subjects - such as can be found among the modern languages and natural sciences - in favour of simpler options, such as media studies, communication studies, and media and communication studies?"

This year, the outpourings from the press and broadcasters on this matter were as predictable as ever. I wouldn't wish the anguish of mismarked examination papers on anyone, but we have to admit that the A-level script-marking cock-up of last year did make the story a little more compelling, not least as a similar fiasco had happened with the Highers in Scotland only a couple of years earlier.

A less imposing, for me far more appealing Education story to do the rounds this summer concerned the word, and hence the reality of, 'failure'. According to retired

primary-school Liz Beattie (as reported in The Times of 20 July), we would be doing ourselves and our society a service if we were to replace 'failure' with 'deferred success'. Presumably, if we die while still in pursuit of the finishing post, we can defer our success to the next life. Reactions to Ms Beattie's call are reported to include "Politically-correct madness!" and "Mollycoddling!" Education Secretary Ruth Kelly told BBC Radio 4 that the idea deserved "nought out of ten".

Books

The longlist for the Man Booker Prize for fiction (for writers from the Commonwealth and the Republic of Ireland) was announced on 10 August. Among the nominees are Ian McEwan, Salman Rushdie, Julian Barnes and Kazuo Ishiguro – bighitters all, I'm sure you'd agree. So far I've managed to take in only the McEwan (**Saturday**), which has some special moments but is far too contrived to deserve favourable compassion with the gems of his *oeuvre*, and decidedly not in the same league as last year's Man Booker winner, *The Line of Beauty* by Alan Hollinghurst. I'm hoping for a win for Barnes and his **Arthur and George** (the Arthur in question being Conan Doyle, the George a young man falsely accused of livestock-maiming whose name Doyle determines to clear), this on the evidence of a couple of favourable reviews and a quick flick through the book in Waterstones.

TV

For lovers of *The Office* (and who *didn't* love *The Office*?), the new Ricky Gervais/Stephen Merchant sitcom **Extras** was probably the British TV event of the summer. Gervais plays an aspirant actor who entered the business late and is, we suspect, still waiting for his first speaking role. The new show is a-*cringe*-a-minute in the manner of the old, though in *Extras* the cringes are more

effortfully wrought – no doubt this is because for most of us, a film set is a more exotic location than a paper merchant's office. Like *The Office*, *Extras* is post-politically correct: Episode 1 has a young woman back out of a date when she notices her consort has one leg longer than the other, and it features Ben Stiller playing himself as director of a gritty film about the 1990s wars in Yugoslavia who, we learn, has chosen the project for the *kudos* it will grant him; Episode 3 sees a lewd and foul-mouthed Kate Winslet playing a nun resisting the Nazis in the professed hope that the role will win her an Oscar.

Pop Culture

And, of course, Helen Fielding's **Bridget Jones** and her diary are back – in *The Independent*, on Thursdays, starting 4 August. Bridget is no older, or at least not much older, than when we met her last, still a playing Mark Darcy off against Daniel Cleaver and nominally a 'singleton'. What makes the columns so much more satisfying than the books are Bridget's scandalized comments on – and often skewed interpretation of – the events in the news: the first of the new columns include Bridget on 'deferred success' and Bridget on Madonna-falling-off-a-horse.

Cricket

As I'm under no illusions concerning the size of my readership for such a subject, I'll try and keep this brief. Besides, I state elsewhere in this issue how much I am looking forward to the forthcoming Ashes series between England and Australia. As I write this, England are 2-1 ahead with one to play and the levels of expertise have matched those of entertainment: I choose the word 'exquisite'. If you were to ask me in my present mood, "As an Englishman, which of your birthrights is your greatest treasure?", I would reply without blinking, "Cricket, bless my heart."

In each issue, The Messenger will bring selected entries from A Short Dictionary of Czech Culture by Andrew Roberts. The complete version of the dictionary can be viewed at

<http://pubweb.northwestern.edu/~aro918/>

Written by an American living in Prague, it creates an interesting dialogue between cultures, which we hope will lead to a stimulating discussion about how we reflect ourselves and others. Send us your views!

A Short Dictionary of Czech Culture

Andrew Roberts

The intent of this glossary is not to provide a complete account of Czech history and culture. I am neither a historian nor cultural critic, merely an observer of everyday life. My aim is simply to introduce the reader to some concepts – people, places, songs, slogans – known to all Czechs. These concepts generally do not appear in dictionaries, textbooks, or histories, or at least not in the form they do here. Where they do occur – mainly in daily newspapers or ordinary conversation – they are usually not explained.

Yet all of them are well known to Czechs living in the latter half of the twentieth century. They are the furniture of his or her mental universe. Just about every Czech alludes to them when talking to friends, situates new phenomena in relation to them, and assumes them to be a natural part of the world. I thus try to explain not just their literal meaning, but also the set of associations that has grown around them.

In choosing the entries for the dictionary, I have followed one simple rule. All of the concepts are things known to ordinary Czechs. Every Czech with a standard secondary school education should recognize virtually all of the entries even if they may be hazy on some of the details. Another title for this dictionary might be: Things That Every Czech Knows, But No Foreigner Does.

I have largely avoided high culture because it has been described better elsewhere. In any case, high culture is not well known by ordinary people. I have also focused more on communism than other eras because it is a particular interest of mine.

Most importantly, I am limited as a foreigner. I have tried to capture some aspects of the Czech cultural language, but everything came to me second-hand. I had to learn these terms and their associations, rather than being inculcated with them as a child. I publish this dictionary only in the hope that these concepts are not lost before someone better qualified takes up the task.

The dictionary is meant to serve a number of purposes. First, it is handbook for those exploring Czech literature, film, and music. One often comes across allusions to individuals or subjects that are difficult to track down in conventional reference sources. On a more prosaic level, it may help tourists with the meaning of street names.

The dictionary will also help students of history and popular culture who are interested in how Czechs are similar and different than citizens of other countries. One will find numerous entries common to all modern societies, while others are distinctively Czech. A quick comparison with Bart's dictionary of Hungarianness shows that many are particular to Eastern Europe. Several of Bart's entries could be reproduced in tact here, though Bart believes them to be authentically Hungarian. (See, for example, the entries *Zabíjacka*, *Kavárna*, and *Kdysi dávno*.)

For readers who wish to pronounce the words in the dictionary, here is a brief pronunciation guide. Czech is almost entirely phonetic (one letter = one sound), so knowing the spelling means knowing the pronunciation. All Czech words have stress on the first syllable leading to a singsong way of speaking. Vowels are continental: a = ah, e = eh, i and y = ee, o = oh, and u = oo. Long marks over the vowels simply lengthen them: thus, á = aaahhh, u/ú = oooooo. Consonants that do not correspond to English pronunciation are the following:

c = ts as in tsar

č = ch as in church

ch = a single letter pronounced as in Bach

j = like the consonant y (the English j sound is spelled dž)

ř = rzh as in Dvůrák

š = sh as in shower

ž = zh as in Dr. Zhivago

Ahoj (Hi): The two most common greetings in the Czech language have been borrowed from foreign languages. Ahoj entered the lexicon when Czech sailors fighting with the Allies in World War I heard the salutation ahoy. The equivalent cau comes from and is pronounced like the Italian ciao. Both can be used to mean both hi and bye (leading many Czechs to assume the same is true of 'hello' in English), though unlike 'hi' they can't be used with strangers or elders who should be addressed more formally (=> tykáni) with Dobrý den (Good day).

Akce Z (Campaign Z): "Voluntary" program of cleaning public spaces introduced under communism. Proclamation of an Akce Z by the local National Committee (=> Národní výbor) meant that groups of designated workers or students were required to clean up sidewalks, soccer fields, or highway shoulders in their local community. Though this work was called voluntary, in fact it was simply a form of forced, unpaid labor (the Z is said to stand for zadarmo – free). See also => Pracovní sobota.

Armádní umělecký soubor (Army Chorus): The largest and most famous of the many choruses that sang so-called masové písně (mass songs) praising the communist regime. Associated with the Stalinist fifties, the repertoire of these groups included titles like Sláva tankům (Hurrah to the Tanks), Za Gottwalda vpřed (Forward with => Gottwald) or Píseň o Fučíkovi (A Song about => Fučík) and featured inane lyrics about the beauties of socialism and the men who built and defended it. Musically they resembled nothing if not American musicals from the era of Oklahoma and South Pacific. Performances by these choruses were a necessary component of any state holiday and the songs were a part of all school curricula. The best-known composer in the genre was Radim Drejsl whose most famous composition Rozkvetlý svět (World in Blossom) features the lines "It's enough just to look around to see how much beauty surrounds us/Smoke from the factories and children in the sandbox." Upon his return from his first trip to the Soviet Union in 1953,

Drejsl was so disillusioned by what he saw there that he took his own life.

Baarová, Lída (1914-2001): Baarová was one of the most beautiful film actresses of the thirties and a frequent star of the drawing room comedies that were popular at the time. Memories of her, however, are tarnished by her romantic affair with Joseph Goebbels which infuriated Czechs and Nazis alike. After the war she was handed over to the Czechs and served a prison term, though upon her release she was able to resume her career in Germany and Italy. Testimony to fascination with her is the popularity of her autobiography, Útěky (Flights). In it she attributes her mistakes to youthful naiveté and a trusting nature. Still mixed feelings about her were raised after her death in 2001, when few former friends and colleagues dared to attend her funeral. A similar fate befell Adina Mandlová, another star of interwar films. False rumors linked her romantically to Karl H. Frank, one of the brutal rulers of the Protectorate (=> Protektorát). Though she was never tried after the war, she immigrated to Britain and never acted again. The allure of both is the universal story of an ingénue in distress who knows she has to take advantage of her beauty while she still has it.

Babička (The Grandmother): Probably the most popular Czech novel of all time. Written in 1855, Božena => Němcová's Babička still leaves Czechs weepy and sends them rushing to their own grandparents. The novel begins with the title character coming to live with her daughter and take care of her four granddaughters, including her favorite Barunka. There she teaches the children thriftiness, religiosity, and love of the Czech nation and Czech language, while at the same time dispensing wisdom to the local baroness. The novel itself, as its subtitle suggests, consists of "Pictures of Country Life". It is centered on the four seasons through which it describes age-old Czech customs, holidays, and superstitions. The best remembered story in the novel is that of crazy Viktorka who wanders the town insane, the result of having been seduced by a foreign soldier. In a trope widely repeated by Czechs, virtually all of the

troubles described in the novel are the result of foreigners disrupting harmonious Czech life. The grandmother dies in the end, though she retains such a place in Czech hearts that three films have been made of the book, and the village, in which she reputedly lived, Staré Belidlo in northeast Bohemia, has become a tourist attraction. Real-life Czech grandmothers continue to enjoy the fortune of Sunday afternoon visits from their children and grandchildren.

Bachovský absolutismus (Bach's Absolutism): Even before communism there were names that the Czechs associated with brutal repression, and Baron Alexander Bach (1813-1893) was at the top of the list. Named Interior Minister of the Austrian Empire after the unrest of 1848, Bach's job was to quell nationalist revolts and restore order. His ruthless methods earned him the nickname Minister of the Barricades, and the period of his rule is referred to as Bach's Absolutism. Among his victims was the political journalist Karel => Havlíček Borovský who was one of the very few with the courage to defy Bach's persistent secret police. Even today Bach's legend lives on in the expressions *bachař* (prison guard) and *dej si bacha* (watch out).

Barrandov: The Czech film studios that occupy the same place in Czech consciousness that Hollywood does for Americans. The studios, along with luxury residences, were built on a hill to the south of Prague in 1931 by Miloš Havel – the uncle of Václav => Havel. They started production in 1933 and soon came to dominate the Czech film industry by producing nearly thirty films annually, most of them light drawing room comedies. Barrandov also developed the same mystique as Hollywood and was seen as the home to divine and untouchable stars. The studios were nationalized at the end of the war and immediately put to use in creating images of a better tomorrow. By the seventies and eighties they were again producing as many films as in the thirties and had rebuilt their reputation as the home to otherworldly stars. In accord with Czech tastes, its most popular products at the time were wacky comedies and filmed fairytales (=> *pohádka*).

Though Barrandov was privatized in 1993 and has largely ceased to produce domestic films – its facilities are now mainly in the service of foreign productions – for Czechs the name still symbolizes the magic of film.

Bat'a: The first family of Czech industry. In 1894, Tomáš Bat'a (1876-1932) founded a shoe factory in the town of Zlín that became one of the country's largest and most successful companies and a symbol of the growing economic might of Czech industry. Among Bat'a's innovations were assembly line production, a system of bonuses for workers, modern advertising, and profit sharing with employees. He also turned Zlín into a model company town providing workers with apartments and homes as well as pleasant surroundings. The company's habit of pricing goods in numbers ending in 9 – the infamous 19.99 – meant that these numbers are known in Czech as *Batavian*. The company was nationalized after the war by the communists and the Bat'a family emigrated and continued production abroad, especially in South America and the Caribbean. The new regime set about erasing memories of Bat'a who had become a symbol of bourgeois values and prosperity. The shoe factory was renamed Svit, the town itself was rechristened Gottwaldov after the first communist leader of Czechoslovakia (=> Gottwald), and a propaganda film entitled *Botostroj* (The Shoe Machine) became required viewing. The communists also unintentionally managed to destroy Bat'a's business credo – *Our Customer, Our Master* – and instituted a tradition of poor service that lasts to this day. Since 1989, the Bat'as have returned to the country and reopened their shoe stores. Like Leningrad, Gottwaldov has resumed its former name.

andrew's page

When Liverpool defeated AC Milan in the final of the UEFA Champions' League in Istanbul on 25 May, just about everyone was surprised. Interviewed the following day in one of the Czech dailies – I think it was *Lidové noviny* but it might have been *Mlada fronta Dnes*, to je jedno – Liverpool goalscorer / Czech legionnaire Vladimír Šmicer was happy to admit that at half-time (at which point Liverpool were behind 0-3) he did not expect his team to win. A reasonable expectation, I'm sure you would agree, especially as Milan were very worthy of their big lead after those first forty-five minutes. And Milan are widely regarded as one of the world's best club sides so it was hardly a surprise to see them in the Champions' League Final. To see Liverpool there was a surprise indeed, not least because they had finished only fifth in the English Premiership in the season just ended. However, I'm convinced Liverpool would not have scored three times in seven minutes and then taken the game on penalties if all of their players had been as rational as Šmicer (though I would in no way wish to disparage Šmicer's performance, in which in addition to scoring the team's second goal from long range he converted the winning penalty).

Guardian columnist Mark Lawson – writing on 28 May – recommends a video copy of the match as a study material for psychologists: while the Milan camp was celebrating victory at half-time (the players'

jubilation was heard by their opponents in the adjacent dressing room, so the story goes), the Liverpoolians were preparing to take it on. Would the Reds have had the indomitable will to achieve a staggering reversal if the burden of expectation had been on them rather than on Milan? Would Milan have scored more penalties if Reds goalkeeper Dudek had stood still instead of doing that "dance"? I'd only trust the specialist and the wise with these questions, so my considered answer is "God knows". But anyway, football is a wonderful outlet for otherwise undeclared romantic sentimentalism. You know, mind over matter and all that ...

Come the republic, vote Jamie Carragher for President!

This summer I will have further opportunity to exercise my otherwise undeclared romantic sentimentalism (O.U.R.S.) as the underdogs of England take on the mighty Australians at cricket. Actually, the current England cricket team is the best since the early 1980s. (England last won a test series against the Ozzies in England in 1981 – which, in my sporting memory, is something like the day before yesterday.) But the Australians are – according to all informed critics – still much the better team. Five-day matches are very bad for familial relationships. When I was fifteen, my parents found it hard to tolerate my hogging the living-room TV (*ergo* the living room) for the duration; I fear that my wife and kids will translate their own failure to relate to my passion into invasive action. I expect to be caught and bowled and then despatched back to the pavilion within the first over.

in my opinion

*In 2003 **Pavla Filinová** was selected as an exchange student to go to McLennan Community College, Waco, Texas. She spent two academic terms studying at the college and was not only offered a scholarship to return for another term but also emerged the winner of the local literary competition for the best essay, which we reprint below.*

My Declaration of Independence

Looking back at the events that have occurred in my life, the majority of them have had a certain impact on me. I realize that life as such is gradually shaped by various incidents I encounter every day. There are things happening in my life that are undoubtedly worth remembering more than others, but I believe that every event which crosses my path has a special reason. Moreover, learning through my own mistakes allows my personality to reach a higher level of experience. Since I attained this stage of self-awareness I have been inclined to focus my attention on educational successes rather than the ordinary matters of my everyday life. As I get older, I discover that the best way of maintaining complete harmony is to know how to keep my professional life in balance

with my personal affairs and to relish each moment of happiness. Nonetheless, the event that altered my life most significantly was becoming an official student at Masaryk University. The fact that I was accepted by the university uncovered fresh perspectives in my overall life and opened the gate to my self-reliance.

After graduating from high school, the only goal I selected to pursue in my nearest future was attending university. Being aware of the intricate entrance exam, especially in the area of education specializing in English language, I devoted an entire year to relentless preparation. Ultimately all the exertion paid off, and I succeeded. I achieved the status of a university girl, which was how the members of my family would refer to me for a while. This event brought a lot of meaningful changes into my life.

I was about to leave the small town I had grown up in, and also the people I had been surrounded with since I was a child, which was the first necessary step I had to take. Despite all the things I was leaving behind, I knew that moving out of the family home and taking on all the new responsibilities presented an opportunity I was bound to embrace. I moved into a brand new apartment in Brno, the second largest city in the Czech Republic, which is where the school is located. Sharing a room with three other girls was not always the most delightful

thing, but it helped me realize that life is truly based on making compromises.

Once I got accustomed to the challenging pace of school, I decided to explore the new city and look for a decent part-time job. I started work as a receptionist in a hotel, which only served to reinforce my devotion to learning foreign languages. I was happy to see that my life was heading in the direction that I had chosen to pursue. Living in Brno gave me the opportunity to discover myself as a newborn, self-expressive human being. I adopted the approach of facing life on my own. I even became financially independent of my parents, which I considered to be an incredible accomplishment.

At the end of the second year of my studies at Masaryk University, something unexpected happened to me. It was almost the end of the summer semester. On my way home from school, a little sign on the bulletin board caught my attention. The message was very simple: "Whoever wants to study in Texas, come to see me in my office." I figured that studying abroad might be the best way to accelerate the process of acquiring linguistic knowledge and to become familiar with a significant part of English-speaking society. The idea of moving out to Waco, Texas occupied my mind for the whole weekend. Consequently, I decided to apply for an interview. Fate took a positive hand in the matter. The final decision of the presiding committee was that I and another girl from

Masaryk University were the most eligible candidates for this student-exchange program. Fiscal demands became my main concern, but as it turned out, the only thing I had to pay for was the plane ticket. The rest of the expenses were to be covered by the Presidential scholarship. The idea of becoming a student at McLennan Community College brought an indescribable wave of excitement and enthusiasm into my life.

As I write this essay, I'm still at MCC in Texas, where I'm in the third semester. Living in a foreign country has surely been the most momentous and rewarding change in my life. I have embraced a completely different kind of daily routine along with a number of habits that have helped me to deal with a new environment. Discovering cultural differences has turned out to be a very enjoyable activity. The people by whom I'm surrounded have shown a great amount of support and belief in me, which has helped me grow in self-confidence.

I consider myself to be incredibly fortunate and honored to have received the chance to pursue my ambitions concerning English-language studies. Had I not been accepted at Masaryk University, this dream of mine would have never come true. I believe that all levels of education have an incredible power to open up new directions in one's life. In my case, it has become the key to the declaration of my own independence.

**What It Is Like
to Be a Czech Visitor in America
Or
In the Footsteps of Czech Heritage in Texas**

Hana Konečná

This winter, in the middle of January 2005, I came to Texas to participate in an exchange program of longstanding between Brno's Masaryk University and McLennan Community College in Waco, Texas. Later on, my husband Milan joined me to help with the bachelor's thesis I am writing under the supervision of Dr. Irena Přibyllová; this research sets out to present a survey of Czech culture in Texas which reaches into the present, with a particular interest in contemporary fiction and non-fiction.

I intended to monitor the present state in particular and to research literature with any Czech references, since I believe that many pieces of work based on history and emigration have been published. The U.S.A. is noteworthy for having been settled by culturally diverse groups. Being an English language teacher I think we should be encouraged to perceive a language as a mirror of our culture, something which reflects society's beliefs, values and attitudes. Moreover you learn more about yourself if you start thinking about others, about their culture. That is why we came to Texas.

However, I did not only go to school. Our first trip within America took us to North

Miami, Florida, where we participated in a special conference and festival on "Czech and Slovak Cultural Heritage on Both Sides of the Atlantic", which gave us a proper grasp of what Czech patriotism is like in America. Traveling by Greyhound bus was another extraordinary experience, though no doubt it has nothing to do with Czech heritage.

Then we became acquainted with Ms Henrietta Cervenka, an 86-year old member of the McLennan-Hill County Chapter of Czech Heritage Society, who took part in Czech language classes in West, Texas. Our impressions from the Czech class were great. I would not expect a group of people to come to West Public Library every Tuesday evening to study our native tongue with such effort. Joining or, I should say, leading, the class in a rendition of the Czech national anthem *Kde domov můj*, made us a bit homesick. By the way we experienced a lot with "Jindřiška", such as ending up in a ditch one dark, stormy night, but that would be another story.

In April we were guests of a meeting of the McLennan-Hill County Chapter of Czech Heritage Society of Texas. My husband and I gave a presentation on "Life in the Czech Republic Today". We met the Czech Honorary Consul for Texas, Mr Raymond Snokhous, and his wife Clarice, who invited us to taste Becherovka in their recently built house, a museum of the Czech influence in the West of the future.

As for my research, unfortunately I have not found much Czech fiction in Texas. This might be because the settlers simply needed to learn and speak English. There still are a few Czech newspapers, namely *Hospodář* and *Našinec* published in Czech, as well as *České stopy*, *Naše rodina*, *Věstník* and *The Texas Polka News* in English, and perhaps many more I have not come across. We have recorded several descendants of Czechs talking in nice Czech about their family life and history. Czech patriotism is really strong there, I have noticed; many of those with Czech ancestry are interested in their family history and visit their ancestors' homeland. We can only hope that this is passed down to future generations, and that Czech Czechs and American ones might meet and get acquainted. Our personal experience suggests there is some gap between the traditions preserved from the old times and the way of life in the Czech Republic today.

Czech Americans could read more Czech books, I think – though of course for this they would need to learn Czech. Young people, for instance those girls participating in Miss Texas Czech-Slovak Queen Pageants, might get in touch with Czechs of their own age; Czech patriots in America might be encouraged to travel the country on their own. In any case, a lot of people can speak English back at home in the Czech Republic nowadays; the fact some Americans still have no notion and experience of the Czech way of

life might even contribute to cross-Atlantic friendships and understanding.

In conclusion, let me thank Dr. Lucie Podroužková for her kind help and many pieces of precious advice.

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Aaron and Jarek

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