

---

## CONFERENCE REPORTS

---

### Shakespeare in Romania

*Pia Brinzeu (Timișoara, Romania)*

In November 2007 Professor Odette Blumefeld and her assistant, Veronica Popescu, from the Department of English at “Al. I. Cuza” University of Iași, together with a fairly large international steering committee, including Balz Engler (University of Basel), Marta Gibinska (Jagiellonina University, Cracow), Michael Hattaway (New York University in London), Ton Hoenselaars (Utrecht University), Angel-Luis Pujante (University of Murcia), and Alexander Shurbanov (Sofia University), organized the SHINE Conference on “Shakespeare and Europe: Nation(s) and Boundaries”.

What are nations? What are boundaries? Can such issues be defined in relation to Shakespeare? Or in relation to Romania, a country which can hardly be detected on any Shakespearean map? Can Romanians understand Shakespeare’s geography from a better position if their history and geography are peripheral, situated somewhere far away, at the other end of Europe? Spaces are both real and imaginary, and so are borders, but while real geography is political, imaginative geography is fictitious. Can Romanians then perceive the latter correctly, when entering it from a real country, close to the Levant?

These were some of the questions raised – and answered – by the two Romanian plenary speakers, Odette Blumefeld and Madalina Nicolaescu, as well as by the other participants, academics from fourteen Eastern and Western European countries. Amongst the “Easterners”, Marta Gibinska asked whether Hamlet lived in Denmark, England or Poland, while Alexander Shurbanov outlined the way in which Shakespeare created new worlds that have taken centuries for the British to discover. Of the “Westerners”, Michael Hattaway focused on passages in Marlowe, Shakespeare and Peele to clarify the Renaissance notions of empire, state, nation, and territoriality, England being

frequently celebrated in that period as a poeticised “isle” with topographical boundaries transmuted into sacral thresholds. Balz Engler pointed out how multilingual productions of Shakespeare’s plays in Switzerland could gain political importance, and how performances re-created nations and added much to a better understanding of multinationality and multiculturalism. Ton Hoenselaars discussed the attention paid to Shakespeare by prisoners-of-war in World War I, underlining how relative the notions of nation and Europe were, especially when reflected in the way in which Shakespeare was decoded on the continent. In the opinion of Carla Dente (Pisa University), theatrical energy moved from the established performances on the stage to marginal street performances, highly popular especially in the period when the theatres were closed. Manfred Pfister (Free University Berlin) discussed the way in which British writers developed the intertextuality of *Sonnet 66*, feeling the rich artistic density of the poet’s moral fatigue. Performances across boundaries, the creation of alternative European settings in various stage and film productions, Shakespeare in translation, the “other” in terms of religion, ethnicity and race, film adaptations in East-European countries were all challenging topics and starting points for long and hot debates about the Shakespearean work and world, debates that were prolonged, as is usual in such circumstances, after the actual sessions.

An important event was also a meeting at which the future of *Shakespeare and Europe* conferences was discussed. The participants agreed to change the name SHINE (Shakespeare in Europe) to ESRA (European Shakespeare Research Association) and to hold the 2009 conference in Pisa.

A closing visit to several monasteries in Bucovina, a region covered with glittering snow, helped the Shakespearean scholars glide into a

world of beauty and art that the playwright himself might have enjoyed and perhaps even have used as the setting for a midwinter night's dream – a dream in which we, its spectators and critics,

would have been invited to understand that the potential for all the changes in the reception of Shakespeare's work lies deep within us and in our love for his work.

---

**“The Plots of History”**

**12th International Conference on Culture & Power: University of Oviedo, Spain**

26-28 September 2007

*J. Rubén Valdés Miyares (Oviedo, Spain)*

---

Just as the 12th Culture & Power Conference was about to end some friends could see me watching Monty Python's Flying Circus sketches rather compulsively. It was in fact a sketch from Terry Gilliam's Personal Best DVD, chapter 16, where a “dullard” who is sitting in an empty room is offered a chance to escape the “drab, boring life” he leads. The dullard is suddenly propelled by a canon, through various surrealistic images including waist-down naked Moulin Rouge dancers and policemen, into another room (or perhaps the same) where he finds portraits consisting of purchased bits of other people's far more interesting lives, while the announcer's voice keeps interpellating him to buy: “beautifully-framed photographs of other people's lives. Hang them in your den, stand them on your desk, or next to your bed. Pretend they are pictures from *your* past.” As the dullard is happily flying around the room full of newly hung old family pictures, the door opens and uncles, aunts and all his new relatives start arriving, deciding to stay for a couple of nights, a month, or three years, asking for the bathroom, toothpaste ... Until the producer's voice can be heard shouting “Shut up! Not good enough.”

Actually, I had seen the sketch for the first time (belatedly, I must admit) a few months before hosting the conference, and it had haunted me throughout the preparations. Would the Conference be good enough? Would we get more than we bargained for? I was watching it again at the end of it, to relax and experience how I reacted to it *after* the event. And my feeling was of satisfaction. We had issued a call for papers inviting people to analyse the many ways in which the past is being reconfigured, and we had a generous response in terms of paper proposals, many of them

excellent, from many parts of the world, some as far away as York (Canada), and Toyo (Japan), as well as those from closer to home such as Oviedo and the rest of the Iberian Peninsula. Our framework had indeed been filled with a colourful collection of pictures of the past.

As on previous occasions, the conference, revolving around the interrelations between culture, knowledge and its political implications, was attended by the core group of IBACS (the Iberian Association of Cultural Studies), which has been behind the Culture & Power seminars from the beginning, encouraging the new hosts, and safeguarding the quality of every successive conference: Chantal Cornut-Gentille, Felicity Hand, David Walton, Sara Martín, etc. It is good news that IBACS has been given a new lease of life at its general assembly, even gaining valuable new membership. The focus of the conference this time was historical, and the two keynote speakers who were invited for the purpose, Hayden White and Keith Jenkins, duly fulfilled their mission to confront cultural studies with the postmodern historiography both of them stand for. The John-Wayne-like presence of Hayden White, in particular, rounded off every session he attended (which were many) with the vivid eloquence of a Marxist sophist.

Despite its historical theme, however, the conference attracted relatively few historians in addition to the keynote speakers, although there were a few brave ones, including José Ruiz Mas on the siege of the Alcázar de Toledo from the perspective of English-speaking travellers, Antonio López Vega on intellectual historiography at the crossroads, and Maurizio Peleggi on the emplotting of Thai history, all three of them showing a reflective concern with

the theoretical, linguistic, aspects of writing history which many more contemporary historians should have. Or so it was believed by most other participants in the conference, who were philologists, particularly literary scholars.

It requires little effort for English Studies practitioners familiar with postmodern novels to adopt a textualist position with regard to history, for example when Carla Rodríguez addressed Alasdair Gray's novel *A History Maker* on a panel devoted to Scotland as the textual construction of a historical nation. Thus the borders between fiction and history were constantly blurred as literary papers, particularly from a gender perspective, confronted their historical topics head-on while the historians, and some philologists with a more markedly historicist outlook, approached the narratives and myths configuring our knowledge of the past. They all met in the no-man's land of Cultural Studies, along with many other papers whose subjects were more "characteristically" cultural (often in a political sense), such as Carlos Seco on Celtic Football Club and Irish rebel song or Maribel Romero on the image of prostitutes, and those of cultural theory, like Irene Pérez on space as a social construct, Tania Roy on Adorno, and Esther Sánchez-Pardo on de Certeau.

That our textual culture is also becoming increasingly *visual* was abundantly clear. Michihiro Okamoto's paper made just this point, and Pawel Schreiber illustrated how history was visualized in three Polish comics on the Holocaust. Film studies were well represented, far exceeding the panel "Shooting History" which had been allotted to them, and appearing in other panels, such as Soraya Santamaría on Deepa Mehta's *Water* in the first gender panel, Olga Seco on interracial intimacy in US Cinema in the second historical identities panel, or Beatriz Oria on *Local Hero* in the panel reflecting on Scottish culture. It is not just a happy coincidence that the next Culture & Power conference, whose call for papers was announced during the one presented here, will be devoted to "Genre, Ideology and Culture in the Cinema" in Jaca (near the Spanish Pyrenees).

At the conference one could also notice the

link between visual culture and the performance aspect of postmodern historiography. Needless to say many papers were supported by visual aids, to such an extent that Carolina Sánchez-Palencia (presenting with Manuel Almagro a paper on post-soviet *film* narratives in the panel of historiographic metafiction) complained that all this rather looked like a "Culture & Power-point" conference. But the idea of visual performance in historical narrative was also importantly behind the panel of "historiographic meta-theatre", a felicitous term that Alexander Feldman coined for the paper he contributed to the panel, and Susan Ashley and Chris Weedon's excellent papers on historical museums and exhibitions.

A most vibrant (dare I say "sublime"?) moment in the conference was when Hayden White responded to his acknowledged disciple Keith Jenkins's talk on the impossibility of historical representation – of definite knowledge about the past. Professor White found such critiques of traditional historiography and philosophy "troubling" because he saw them as "taking refuge, in a dogmatic way, in deconstruction", which seemed to him "like a kind of closure, even if it's the closure of non-closure." He circumvented instead the problem of representation by arguing for a more "presentational" approach to historical discourse "as performance, as *Darstellung*", in line with modernist art, which long ago abandoned the representational, mimetic approach. White finally referred to two editorials in *El País* that day (September 27<sup>th</sup> 2007) on "La ley de la memoria histórica", which he described as a debate over "the practical uses of the past", concluding that, as historical discourse is "used by the establishment to exercise control over the consciousness of citizens, this is why it's important to address the question of history as something more than merely a search for the truth about the past. Because the past is always present, whether we want it to be or not." Through this masterful intervention, White not only proved once again that he is a pragmatist calling us to arms in the field of historical discourse: he also justified the need for conferences like ours.

## ***1<sup>ST</sup> Belgrade International Meeting of English Phoneticians (BIMEP 2008)***

*Biljana Čubrović (Belgrade, Serbia)*

---

The First Belgrade International Meeting of English Phoneticians has been the first of its kind to be held in the Balkans. The idea of hosting a phonetics conference, initiated by the English department of the Faculty of Philology, was welcomed by the University of Belgrade and generously supported by the British Council Serbia. The Faculty of Philology is proud of its international role within the University of Belgrade, which consists of 31 faculties and almost 90,000 students. As the Vice-Rector for International Relations, Professor Aleksandar Sedmak, nicely put it at the opening ceremony of BIMEP 2008, this Faculty is a “window on the world” of science and cooperation, with the wide variety of languages, literatures and cultures it cherishes.

BIMEP 2008 took place at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade, partly on the premises of the International Centre for the Slavonic Languages and partly in the Grand Hall of the Faculty, on 27-28 March 2008. The idea of the organizers was to have a specialized *segmental* day on 27 March and a predominantly *supra-segmental* day on 28 March. The event was divided into eight sessions, which were intertwined with two plenary talks given by eminent linguists in the field. The first invited talk was given by Professor Tvrtko Prčić, from the University of Novi Sad. The talk elaborated on the current state of affairs with regard to the pronunciation and orthography of English personal, geographical and institutional names in Serbian as a receiving language. Two approaches to the nativization of the English lexemes were included in the analysis, one theory-based, the other usage-based. It seems that the latter is predominant in reality, with a mixed bag of its own principles and methods. Dr Jane Setter of the University of Reading provided the BIMEP participants with a thorough overview of L2 prosody research, placing her emphasis on rhythm and intonation. The presentation examined different approaches to prosodic research, focusing on the production

of speech rhythm in Hong Kong English and Russian learner English, the production and perception of intonation in Chinese and Arabic learner English, and prosodic issues affecting the intelligibility of Hong Kong English. The findings were discussed in terms of their applicability to English as a Lingua Franca, and the possible contribution of such research to the development of pedagogies for pronunciation teaching and learning.

The eight BIMEP sessions, which took place from early morning till dusk, gathered together phoneticians from Bosnia-Herzegovina, FYR Macedonia, Hungary, Iran, Japan, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, and Serbia. Many of the participants raised highly interesting phonetic questions in their presentations, ranging from the early stages of the development of the English language to the intriguing issues of 21<sup>st</sup>-century speech science. One of the most notable presentations was that of Brian Mott from the University of Barcelona, whose highly didactic approach threw light on the transcription problems encountered by non-native students of English when presented with the unstressed vowel subsystem of this language. Although students soon become accustomed to associating the unstressed final vowel of words like *happy* with a shortened FLEECE type of vowel, for example, they soon run into difficulty at the morphological level with the representation of words like *archetype* and *architect*, whose second vowel may be represented differently in different dictionaries as being either of the FLEECE or the KIT type. The analysis of relevant examples shows that it is possible to offer practical advice to EFL students on how to produce consistent phonological notation, when dealing with such recent changes in the phonological system of English.

Especially interesting were those presentations that used a predominantly comparative approach. Papers that encompassed two languages were presented by Maja Marković, of the University of Novi Sad in Serbia, and

Takehiko Makino, from Chuo University in Japan. Dr Marković talked about different strategies used in the acquisition of the high monophthongs of English by native speakers of Serbian. Acoustic analysis of the durational characteristics reveals that the subjects have adopted only the general dichotomy of long vs. short, without applying subtler durational differences pertaining to English, which are largely dependent on the phonological context in English. Similarly, Mr Makino discussed the obvious difference between the vowels of Japanese and American English using the English Learners' Speech Database, compiled in 2002. The analysis of a small portion of the database shows the heterogeneity of the problems Japanese students have in producing English vowels.

Two more contrastive accounts concerning consonants were offered by colleagues from Slovenia and Hungary. Dr Klementina Jurančič Petek of the University of Maribor provided an overview of the acquisition of the voiced labiodental fricative by Slovene learners of English in several phonetic environments. Analysis has shown that some phonotactic statements need to be taken into account when teaching and learning sounds that have different qualities in the native and the target language. Ms Erzsebet Balogh, of the University of Szeged in Hungary, provided her own account of the Hungarian-English interferences in the

domain of the English dental fricatives. It appears that Hungarian learners of English have their own means of replacing or adjusting the marked sounds of English that also resemble the substitutions in other languages as L2s.

Lively discussions took place after each session, which also continued during short breaks and late in the evenings. One such session raised issues on the attitudinal values that pronunciation has on teachers and learners alike. The opinions, attitudes and views expressed by both students and teachers of English in Serbia were tackled by Tatjana Paunović, of the University of Niš, and Jovana Dimitrijević-Savić, of the University of Kragujevac. A pronunciation teaching session was also hugely successful as it confronted the different methodological policies used in Iran, Japan, and Serbia.

Judging from the reactions of the conference participants, the idea of having a highly specialized phonetic event in Serbia proved fruitful, putting this country on an international phonetic map. The University of Belgrade seems to have received a perfect gift for its 200th birthday this year. The next meeting of English phoneticians in Belgrade is scheduled for 2010, but the organizers are hopeful that BIMEP will become a regular biennial event, and that its first small anniversary will take place at the end of a full and active decade.