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English Studies during Pandemic Times

The COVID-19 pandemic, as an unprecedented global phenomenon, has deeply affected higher education and academia. It has also forced us to reconsider the place of the Humanities during periods of severe economic and social crisis. This special issue gathers papers on the impact of the current pandemic on topics within the field of English Studies.

Culturemes in an Italian-English Bilingual Food Blog during COVID-19

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Abstract. This paper presents a parallel corpus study of culturemes in the Italian and English versions of the food blog *Juls' Kitchen – Stories and Recipes from Tuscany* during COVID-19 total lockdown in Italy (9 March-18 May 2020) to ascertain how some culturemes may have shifted due to lifestyle changes originating from COVID-19 measures. Three categories of culturemes are analyzed: time-related, food-related and lockdown-related. The results show that lifestyle changes have affected not only the practice and narration of cooking but also such fundamental tenets of culture as time, in different ways in the Italian and English version of the blog.

Keywords: culturemes, food blogging, COVID-19, corpus-assisted discourse analysis, parallel corpora, Italy.

1. Introduction

Personal blogs are one of the most enduring genres[1] of computer-mediated communication (henceforth, CMC: Yus 2011), although they have changed significantly since they first became popular in the 1990s (Blood 2002). Ever since the advent of Web 2.0, blogs have been increasingly hybridized (Herring et al. 2005; Diemer and Frobenius 2013; Cesiri 2016a), not only due to the emergence of social media but also because of the evolution of the blog itself as a genre into the video log or vlog (Frobenius 2014), which has made it possible for what used to be known as *personal logs*, with a clear antecedent in personal diaries, to be actually based on multimedia platforms.

In comparison with the past, therefore, the contemporary blog is an ever increasingly multimodal CMC genre, and it is not only or predominantly a tool for self-disclosure (Ligorio and Barzanò 2018), personal expression and online socialization (Bronstein 2013) but also, and perhaps most significantly, a sophisticated Internet-based platform designed to market the blogger's own products, whether tangible, like items sold on corporate blogs (Bondi and Diani 2015), or intangible, like the experience of local and traditional food.

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[1] Some scholars reject the notion of the blog as a genre, on account of its hybridity, by stressing the risk of confusing the medium with the genre (Primo et al. 2013, 341). To settle this issue and to account for the differences between personal, corporate and special interest blogs, Garzone (2017, 45) has suggested that blogs be considered a "macrogenre." In a similar way, Hadžiahmetović Jurida (2013, 533-534), in the wake of Baron (2008), views blogging as a genre colony whose members all share a set of features of Netspeak (Crystal 2006). In this paper, we rely on the classic notion of the blog as a CMC genre, as applied by Herring (1996) and in the vast literature that has developed in the wake of her work.

In this paper, we present a corpus study of a bilingual food blog, *Juls' Kitchen – Stories and Recipes from Tuscany*,[1] maintained in Italian and English by Giulia Scarpaleggia, a food writer, photographer and teacher of Tuscan cooking. The blogger is a food professional, with an academic background in communication sciences,[2] and runs *Juls' Kitchen* as a family business, together with her husband, Tommaso Galli. This study is part of a larger project on multilingual food blogging as a vehicle of intercultural communication (Fusari 2021), where local food traditions and recipes are often an occasion to promote the blogger's national heritage, and blogs are bilingual, or sometimes multilingual, to engage readers worldwide in a storytelling that will facilitate the understanding of the blogger's own country, nation and culture(s).

Although analyzing elements of culture in language, with corpus or other methods, is known to be rife with methodological and conceptual obstacles (Schneider 2018), the notion of cultureme adopted in this study has proved to be useful and quite easily applied to corpora. Culturemes are lexical references, also sometimes referred to as homophoric (Halliday and Hasan 1976, 71), which are defined and applied slightly differently depending on the area of research in which they are used. For instance, socio-cultural studies understand culturemes more widely as "abstract entities that allow for the classification of social interaction (their empirical equivalents being behaviouremes) and whose correspondent words are typically associated with nonverbal signals, such as gestures, interpersonal proximity and distance, acquired social roles, age, gender and other" (Nagórko 2004, 134; our translation). Translation and language studies tend to adopt a somewhat narrower view of culturemes as "elements that carry cultural information: the smallest unit that carries this kind of information" (Cuciuc 2011, 139; our translation). In this paper, we espouse Faber and Vidal Claramonte's (2017) view of culturemes as "semplates,"

> a blend of semantic and template [...] a cultural frame or linguistic pattern imposed on the environment to create, coordinate, subcategorize, or contrast natural categories. It is a kind of semantic pattern that facilitates concept clustering in a frame-like representation [...] The meaning of bread and rice dishes thus goes beyond their composition (ingredients) and includes factors such as location, time, preparation, eating event, historical and geographical context, etc. A semplate can lead to a deeper understanding of culture-specific objects and their relatedness (Faber and Vidal Claramonte 2017, 158).

In fact, corpus queries performed on the Italian and English version of this blog demonstrate, as we see below, that lexical items expressing culturemes are not strictly speaking untranslatable, but they are typically associated with different phraseologies in different languages, precisely because they rely on different cultural background assumptions. Therefore, they are not *impossible* to translate, but their translation occurs, at least in this specific blog, within a different context and co-text in the Italian and English version, to accommodate the food and world knowledge that the blogger expects her Italian and international followers to have.

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[1] The blog is available at: https://en.julskitchen.com/blog.
[2] Information available from the blog media kit: https://en.julskitchen.com/media-kit (retrieved on 24 February 2022).

2. Methodology

Juls' Kitchen has been running since 2009, and it now has a following of about 100,000 users, especially from Italy, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and North Europe.[1] It is also present on most social media (Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram), and has its own channels on YouTube and Spotify. In addition to these external platforms, *Juls' Kitchen* has also moved its Tuscan cooking classes, previously held in the blogger's own family home in Colle di Val d'Elsa, in the province of Siena, to the e-learning platform Udemy, to be able to keep the business going even amid the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of writing, on-site classes have started again, while those online on Udemy remain available as an alternative. The blog's international reach is further demonstrated by the fact that it was awarded the Best Food Culture Editor's Choice Award in the 2019 Saveur Blog Awards held in Cincinnati, as well as by the interaction with users on the blog itself, and especially on its associated social media, occurring mostly in English as a Lingua Franca (henceforth, ELF). Besides working with several Italian food companies and magazines, *Juls' Kitchen* has also featured in the British magazines *The Simple Things* and *The Foodie Bugle*.

Juls' Kitchen represents a suitable case study for bilingual blogs marketing the intangible (in this case, food) heritage of Italy to an international audience because:

1. it is, to the best of our knowledge, the only Italian blog that is entirely available both in Italian (https://it.julskitchen.com/) and in English (https://en.julskitchen.com/ blog);[2]
2. its main focus is food heritage, especially Tuscan, with as close a focus on recipes as on the narratives that introduce the food and ingredients described in each post;
3. due to the presence of long introductory personal narratives before each recipe, it has been selected as a term of comparison for another study of food heritage and identity that this author is developing as part of the same research project (Fusari 2021).

The fact that food writing generally, and food blogging specifically, are powerful devices to narrate personal experience (McGaughey 2010; Lee, Samdanis and Gkiousou 2014; Cesiri 2020), and that they also play a role in the branding of tourism destinations (Francesconi 2007; Manca 2013; Peštek and Činjarević 2014; Renko and Bučar 2014; Cesiri 2016b; Bezzola and Lugosi 2018) is already well attested in the literature. In this paper, we set out to answer some more specific research questions about how a dramatic event affecting the whole world,

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[1] Scarpaleggia, personal communication, 2 April 2021.
[2] There is actually a sizable number of Italian-English blogs on the Internet, some also including more languages, but translation is neither systematic (i.e. not all the original Italian pages have a correspondent in English and/or in other languages) nor performed by professional translators. *Juls' Kitchen*, despite some occasional minor inaccuracies, is written in idiomatic standard English.

i.e. the COVID-19 pandemic, has impacted on the presence, role and use of culturemes in food narratives.

As a matter of fact, due to movement restrictions that have often made it impossible for people to travel, some of the most affected blogs have been those that promote tourist destinations directly, or local food traditions, as pre-travel information for an international audience speaking English as a Lingua Franca for tourism. Food blogs also sometimes provide a set of associated on-site services, like the Tuscan cooking classes offered by the author of the blog under analysis. These activities have had to be cancelled or moved online during the pandemic, necessitating blogging platforms updates and/or requiring bloggers to resort to extra plugins or external videoconferencing services.

Our main research questions, therefore, are:

1. In the posts written during total lockdown in Italy (9 March-18 May 2020), as well as in more recent COVID-related ones, do this blog's keywords reveal a shift in culturemes, intended not as culture specific, allegedly *untranslatable* words, but as "semplates," following Faber and Vidal Claramonte's definition provided above?
2. As food writing is a typical example of narrating an experience (Arhendholz et al. 2013, 126), to what extent can this experience "move" online? In other words, based on the data on hand, do food making and food blogging provide a creative substitute for their associated "live" activities, like sharing food, attending cooking classes or going on a "gourmet" holiday?

In order to answer these questions, a considerable section of *Juls' Kitchen* (212 posts) was downloaded and converted into .txt. The largest part (176 posts written between 2016 and 2020) was collected into two electronic corpora, in English (88 texts) and Italian (88 texts) respectively; in addition to these, all the posts (18) that were written during lockdown, or mentioning lockdown, were aligned in a parallel Italian-English corpus (for a total of 36 texts, consisting of Italian originals and their respective translations). Table 1 illustrates the dataset collected for this study.

	Juls' Kitchen—Italian (words)	*Juls' Kitchen*—English (words)
Reference corpus	162,229	152,975
Parallel corpus	29,782	30,227

Table 1. Corpus size in word tokens.

The posts published before COVID-19 are labelled in Table 1 as "reference corpus" because their role in this study is predominantly to provide a reference to generate keywords in both English and Italian.

Another important difference between the reference and parallel corpora in this study is their assembling method. The reference corpora were bootstrapped from the blog, using the WebBootCaT tool (Baroni et al. 2006) integrated into the

current version of *Sketch Engine* (Kilgarriff et al. 2014). This procedure has a number of advantages in terms of speed, but it requires quite a high degree of manual work to clean up the texts from headers, metadata and other non-textual content that the software tends to bootstrap together with each blog post. The parallel corpus, instead, was assembled by manually downloading all the posts written in the relevant time period (9 March-18 May 2020), in Italian and in English, as well as more recent ones that included the keyword "lockdown" according to the website's search engine. The parallel corpus was also tagged for foreign borrowings (including, but not limited to Anglicisms in Italian and Italianisms in English), for further research. The resulting 36 files (18 in Italian and 18 in English) were then aligned manually on an Excel spreadsheet, and subsequently uploaded to *Sketch Engine* to compile a parallel corpus. The parallel corpus was aligned sentence by sentence, although sometimes the length of the unit of alignment was adapted to reflect the nature of the target text, which is not translated literally, but sense-for-sense, and partially adapted for an international audience.

As a starting point for the analysis, the Keywords tool was used. First, a general keyword list of both pre-COVID corpora was created, by using the largest and most register-balanced large corpus of Italian available on *Sketch Engine* prior to the COVID pandemic, Italian Web 2016 (*itTenTen16*), and its more recent English counterpart, English Web 2018 (*enTenTen18*), as reference corpora, respectively for Italian and for English. This procedure allowed us to obtain an overview of the keywords used in *Juls' Kitchen*, and of their respective context of use in the source and target languages, abstracted from the lockdown variable. Secondly, keyword lists were generated by comparing the Italian section of the parallel corpus with the Italian reference corpus, and then doing the same for English. Comparisons were made both at word-phrase level, and at sentence-paragraph level, to identify the behaviour of the main keywords in each corpus, with special attention paid to culturemes.

This methodology can be described as corpus driven (Tognini Bonelli 2001) as, at this stage in the study, no previous hypothesis had been made, and the analyst made her best effort to minimize the researcher bias that may have occurred if she had tested her own feelings and views of lockdown against the data.

3. Discussion

In this section, we present, analyze and discuss our corpus data, as stated above, with a corpus driven approach, i.e. starting from the data themselves, and trying to derive hypotheses from them. Our starting point, as is typical of this corpus methodology, are wordlists and, in our specific case, keyword lists extracted by using more general corpora, unrelated with either food or COVID.

3.1. General keywords analysis

Although the texts are in a translation relation to each other, Table 2 shows that the Italian version of the blog (pre-pandemic) prioritizes local lexical items, including a toponym, "Gambassi" (quite rare in *itTenTen16*, at 0.27 per million

words—henceforth, pmw), while the English version contains several Italianisms and names of ingredients that stress the Italianness, or indeed the *Tuscanness* of the food.

Keywords in Italian Reference Corpus	Keywords in English Reference Corpus
1. arista	1. Tuscan
2. Juls	2. pecorino
3. sambuco	3. Tommaso
4. cotogne	4. ricotta
5. Gambassi	5. Parmigiano
6. strudel	6. elderflower
7. crespelle	7. artichoke
8. caco	8. butternut
9. finocchietto	9. risotto
10. bomboloni	10. eggplant

Table 2. First ten keywords in *Juls' Kitchen* before lockdown.

The only keyword in common between the two lists is *elderflower* (*sambuco*), possibly because the blogger uses this ingredient and mentions it more often than is usually done in Italian (481.13 pmw in *Juls' Kitchen*, as against 1.23 pmw in *itTenTen16*). Elder trees are also comparatively more common in the UK and other English-speaking countries than in Italy (Schmitzer, Veberič and Štampar 2012, 128-130), and this may have balanced out the frequency of this word in *itTenTen16* and *enTenTen18* respectively. Table 3 returns an entirely different picture of the keywords.

Keywords in Italian	Keywords in English
1. Livia	1. pregnancy
2. lockdown	2. Livia
3. gravidanza	3. sauerkraut
4. pescatora	4. Piave
5. necci	5. hospital
6. crauti	6. sundried
7. ospedale	7. nutritious
8. Piave	8. alchermes
9. sformatini	9. marjoram
10. alchermes	10. rucola

Table 3. First ten keywords in *Juls' Kitchen* during lockdown.

The first and most important event that is narrated in this section of the blog is the birth of Livia, as the blogger was pregnant with her first child during lockdown. This may indeed have also affected the types of food described in her blog before and during lockdown: however, besides *nutritious* recipes and *sundried* fresh herbs (*majoram* and *rucola*) suitable for an expectant mother, both corpora also mention salty acidic food (*crauti/sauerkraut*), a traditional cheese (*Piave*), and an ancient Florentine spirit (*alchermes*), which are quite

unlikely to have been part of the blogger's own homecooking during this time period.

The high keyness of the word *lockdown* in the Italian keyword list (2nd rank) in comparison with the English one (39th) may well be related to its being an Anglicism in Italian, and in fact one that first appears in this blog only over a month into the Italian 2020 lockdown (on 17 April). Prior to that, in line with Italian generally (Pietrini 2021, 16-17), this emergency measure was referred to in *Juls' Kitchen* as *blocco/blocco totale*, as shown in the examples below, taken from the parallel concordance of *lockdown* in English. Both examples come from a blog entry entitled *Rivendicando il mio angolo di libertà. Tagliatelle al pesto di cavolo nero e mandorle*/'Claiming my corner of freedom: home-made tagliatelle with Tuscan kale pesto,' dated 19 March 2020:

(1) Poi la grande paura, la diffusione del Corona Virus nel Nord Italia e dopo pochi giorni l'intero paese in blocco. Ero in uno stato confusionale.
[Then the big fear, the spread of Corona Virus[1] in the North of Italy, and after a few days the whole country in lockdown. This left me in a state of haze].

(2) Ma ho intenzione di lavorare, scrivere, cucinare e fotografare per mantenermi sana di mente, per ricreare una routine creativa in questi giorni di blocco totale, per essere preparata per quello che verrà, una volta che questi tempi assurdi finiranno.
[But I intend to work, write, cook and photograph to keep me sane, to recreate a creative routine in the days of lockdown, to be prepared for what will come, once these absurd times will be over].

This keyword analysis has allowed us to break down the culturemes identified in this blog into three categories: time-related, food-related and lockdown-related.

3.2. Time as a cultureme

Where the notion of time emerges more clearly as a crucial element not only for lockdown cooking but also for food culture more generally, is in multiword key terms. In fact, there are no expressions of time in the keyword lists generated from the corpora prior to lockdown, and all multiword key terms are names of ingredients or kitchen tools (e.g. *extra virgin oil*; *cucchiaio di olio*). Conversely, the texts written during lockdown prioritize time spent cooking over cooking ingredients/methods, as shown by the presence in the Italian list of as many as seven chronological expressions (i.e. *tempo totale*, *newsletter mensile*, *ore prima*, *prime sere*, *per la prima volta*, *giorni successivi*, *una volta cotto*) and six in the English one (i.e. *prep time*, *total time*, *cooking process*, *virtual Advent*, *other week*, *difficult time*). Using concordances to explore the context, it emerges that these chronological multiword key terms can be broken down into expressions that refer to time as instrumental to managing the blog and cooking food (*tempo totale*, *newsletter mensile*, *ore prima*, *prime sere*, *per la prima volta*, *una volta*

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[1] The compound "coronavirus" is unusually spelled with two words here because, just like the Anglicism "lockdown," it was not yet lexicalized at this stage in the pandemic (Pietrini 2021, 23-29).

cotto; *prep time*, *cooking time*) and to lockdown time (*giorni successivi*; *virtual Advent*; *other week*; *difficult time*): they can thus be considered to be either procedural or experiential views of time.

A comparative view of the notion of time in the parallel corpus can be obtained via the Wordsketch tool (Figures 1 and 2), perhaps the most characteristic and unique feature of *Sketch Engine*, "a summary of a word's grammatical and collocational behaviour produced automatically" (Kilgarriff and Tugwell 2002, 125). Although Wordsketch is not typically used for comparative purposes across corpora, in our case it proved fundamental in order to explore the behaviour of time-related expressions in a genuinely corpus driven fashion, i.e. one in which "the corpus tells us what the facts are" (Sinclair 2004, 4), instead of making hypotheses and testing them against concordances and collocations.
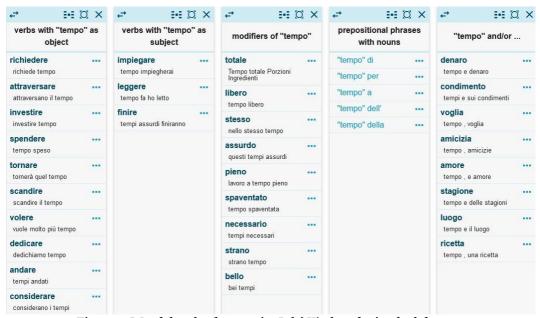

Figure 1. Wordsketch of *tempo* in *Juls' Kitchen* during lockdown.

Figure 2. Wordsketch of *time* in *Juls' Kitchen* during lockdown.

In terms of Processes instantiated by verbs that have "time" as their Goal,[1] time is viewed as a fundamental resource not only to cook,

> (3) Perché è quando divento la fonte della tua ispirazione, quando ti chiedo di investire tempo e denaro, acquistando gli ingredienti per preparare una ricetta (14 May 2020).
> [Because this is when I become the source of your inspiration, when I ask you to invest your time and money, buying the ingredients to make a recipe].

but also to write:

> (4) Iniziare un blog richiede *tempo*, creare un pubblico richiede tempo, trovare la propria voce richiede tempo (1 February 2021).
> [Starting a blog takes time, creating an audience takes time, finding your voice takes *time*].

This procedural view of time, however, goes hand in hand with the experiential (i.e. lockdown) one, sometimes described euphemistically:

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[1] The model of grammar we rely on in this study is the Systemic Functional one expounded in Halliday and Matthiessen (2014). Here, we refer to the System of Transitivity, where Processes are "doing words," typically realized by verbs, and Goals are Participants that undergo the action, typically realized by noun groups in the position of the traditional direct object of structural models of grammar.

(5) Questo strano tempo di riposo imposto ci ha dato spazio per vivere a pieno la gravidanza (23 July 2020).
[This downtime gave us time, and space, to fully live the pregnancy].

(6) Ho sempre lamentato una mancanza di tempo per lavorare ai nostri progetti personali [...] Ecco, è arrivato il momento. Il momento giusto per scrivere, cucinare, ricercare e esplorare, il momento giusto per scrivere quel libro che ho tenuto troppo a lungo in un cassetto, il momento di fare un passo avanti verso nuove esperienze (19 March 2020).
[I've always lamented a lack of time to develop personal projects, so this can be the time, the *time* to write, cook, research and explore, the time to write the book I've kept in a drawer for too long, the time to take a step towards new experiences].

Sometimes, procedural cooking time and experiential lockdown time merge into one single concept of time, viewed as a resource that used to be scarce and is now, all of a sudden, available in excess:

(7) Il mio primo pensiero, quando, all'inizio di marzo, abbiamo dovuto cambiare la nostra vita quotidiana nel giro di una notte, è stato che finalmente avrei avuto il tempo di fare un inventario del mio congelatore e della mia dispensa (17 April 2020).
[My first thought, when, at the beginning of March, we had to change our daily life in the span of a night, was: well, now I'll have the time to do an inventory of my freezer and my pantry].

(8) Passo forse più tempo a cucinare di quanto non facessi prima, e sì che ci passavo le ore in cucina (23 March 2020).
[Perhaps I spend more time cooking than I did before, if this could even be possible, as, basically, I used to live into my kitchen].

Despite a clear attempt, visible especially in Examples 5-7 above, to adopt a glass-half-full perspective on lockdown, the evaluation of time shows a generally negative Appraisal,[1] as illustrated by the presence of adjectives like "absurd," "hard," "challenging" and "difficult."

The data in Figures 1 and 2 may actually seem to suggest that time spent in lockdown is described more frequently and in more detail in the English translation than in the Italian original. However, a more in-depth inspection of concordances shows that the opposite is true. This emerges particularly from an examination of some excerpts that have not been translated into English or that, vice versa, have been added to the English version with no equivalent in the source text, as we see below.

3.3. Food as a cultureme

The parallel corpus contains 102 units of alignment (typically sentences or clauses, as seen above in the methodological section) that have not been translated into English, and one hundred that have been added to the English

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[1] Again, in line with the Systemic Functional Linguistic perspective on grammar and discourse, we rely on Martin and White (2005).

version without a direct equivalent in the Italian source text. Additions and eliminations tend to pertain directly to the expected background food knowledge of Italian and international readers respectively.

(9) Di solito io uso una farina tipo 1 (26 May 2020).
[I usually use the Italian type 1 flour, which roughly corresponds to a stone ground flour].

(10) Le ricette dell'Artusi mi piacciono perché sono sempre sorprendentemente moderne (10 February 2020).
[Artusi is considered the father of the Italian cuisine, you can read it more about this here. I like Artusi's recipes because they are always surprisingly modern].

(11) Di origine nord-europea – il pound è appunto la libbra, intesa come unità di misura – si è diffuso poi in tutto il continente, in America e in altri stati (26 May 2020).
[Originated in the North of Europe, the pound cake spread throughout the continent, in America and in other countries].

(12) Preferisco sempre usare uova biologiche da allevamento all'aperto, quelle che si riconoscono dal codice 0 stampato sul guscio (26 May 2020).
[I always prefer to use organic free range eggs].

Some additions and eliminations, however, do not simply refer to practical aspects of cooking or *realia* (i.e. flour, Pellegrino Artusi's cooking book, units of measurement or types of eggs in Examples 9-12), but rather to the blogger's expectations of the readers' culturally determined taste, cooking habits and feelings elicited by certain ingredients.

(13) Ho mantenuto la bagna all'alchermes, forse per nostalgia, ma tu puoi usare del caffè poco zuccherato o una bagna alcolica (6 April 2020).
[I kept the alchermes soaking syrup, probably out of nostalgia. If you cannot find Alchermes – the Tuscan liqueur made by infusing cinnamon, clove, nutmeg and various other spices, whose uniquely red colour derives from the traditional use of cochineal insects – substitute with another spiced liqueur or coffee].

(14) Fino a qualche anno fa, avrei fatto il mio risotto alla pescatora solo con olio extravergine d'oliva, evitando il burro. E avrei omesso anche il Parmigiano, sia mai che si abbini il pesce col formaggio (3 March 2021).
[Until a few years ago, I would have made my seafood risotto just with extra virgin olive oil, skipping the butter altogether. And I would have left out the Parmigiano, God forbid! Italians are very particular when it comes to pairing fish and cheese, even though there are quite a few exceptions, especially in the South of Italy].

(15) Si deve poter gustare ogni chicco di riso, anche se non è separato come nel pilaff. È la consistenza unica del risotto. Richiede lavoro e attenzione, ma ne vale assolutamente la pena (3 March 2021).
[One must be able to taste each grain of rice although it is not separated as in pilaff. It is a labour of love, but it is totally worth it].

(16) Prendevano una manciata di castagne secche dai grandi sacchi che aspettavano all'ingresso, pronti a diventare farina. Infilavano le castagne in tasca e andavano a scuola. Durante la mattinata sgranocchiavano quelle castagne: quello era il loro spuntino, dolce e nutriente (1 February 2020).
[They would stash the dried chestnuts in their pockets and go to school. That was their morning snack, simple, sweet and nutritious].

In Examples 13-16, the reasons for not mentioning the characteristic texture of rice or dried chestnuts in the English version, or for explaining that Italians do not typically eat fish with cheese, is not their untranslatability, as it is often assumed in translation studies whenever culturemes are discussed, but their "cultural meaning, eating contexts, shared memories, and emotions" (Faber and Vidal Claramonte 2017, 174), which do not coincide for the discourse communities reading the blog either in Italian or in English. This applies specifically to the notion of comfort food expressed in the two versions of the blog.

Items labelled as "comfort food" in Italian	Items labelled as "comfort food" in English
1. frittata	1. baked apples
2. torta salata	2. omelette
3. insalate ricche	3. pie
4. pappa al pomodoro	4. hearty salads
5. minestrone	5. gnocchi alla romana
6. brodo di pollo	6. pappa al pomodoro
	7. minestrone
	8. lasagna
	9. chicken broth

Table 4. "Comfort food" in Italian and English.

Table 4 shows that these culturemes are more numerous in the translated version of the blog, perhaps also because the expression *comfort food* is borrowed from English. A comparison with *enTenTen18* (Figure 3) actually shows that what counts as comfort food in this blog, apart perhaps from soups, dumplings, lasagna and pie, would not be understood as such in an English-speaking context, where high-calorie, carb-rich and/or piping hot dishes seem to prevail.

soup	•••
casserole	•••
pudding	•••
pie	•••
meatloaf	•••
pasta	•••
dumpling	•••
cheese	•••
potato	•••
stew	•••
meatball	•••
Chili	•••
dish	•••
lasagna	•••
risotto	•••

Figure 3. Types of "comfort food" in *enTenTen18*.

It appears clear that what counts as comfort food is culturally mediated (Pinnavaia 2020, 36-38), and also influenced by the socially and psychologically overwhelming experience of home confinement: for example, some significant changes have already been identified in Italian eating habits, specifically as concerns increased consumption of red and processed meat, biscuits, spreadables, and especially baking mixtures for homemade biscuits, bread and pizza (Bracale and Vaccaro 2020, 1425). As we see below, the blogger provides a definition of comfort food ("we tend to consider comforting what we know better") and explicitly recognizes that it is a resource to adapt her business offer to the challenges of COVID-19 related travel restrictions.

3.4. Lockdown as a cultureme

A third category of culturemes, in which many details are omitted from the English translation, are indeed those referring to the frustration of lockdown life, as well as to the coping strategies the blogger and her family have adopted to overcome it.

> (17) E per fortuna che poco prima del lockdown mi ero rifornita delle mie farine preferite per panificare, in vista della stagione dei corsi di cucina che avrebbe dovuto iniziare proprio in quel periodo. Questo ci ha garantito pane e pizza ogni settimana (17 April 2020).
> [I was lucky as before the lockdown I had stocked the pantry with huge bags of bread flour and whole wheat flour in view of the cooking class season which was due to start soon].

> (18) Per lo meno, alla fine di questo periodo difficile, avrò la mia ricetta per la pizza ben collaudata, che sarò felice di usare ogni volta che avremo degli amici a cena. Perché tornerà quel tempo (17 April 2020).
> [At least, at the end of this difficult time, I'll have my recipe for pizza, something I'll be happy to use whenever we'll have friends over for dinner].

(19) Questo 2020 ci ha tolto tanto: libertà, persone amate, viaggi, corsi di cucina. A ben guardare, però, ci ha anche dato cose che ricorderemo, che hanno cambiato per sempre la nostra vita in meglio, che ci hanno dato fiducia (30 December 2020).
[This 2020 has taken a lot from us: freedom, loved ones, travels, cooking classes. On a closer look, though, it has given us things that we will remember, that have forever changed our lives for the better].

(20) Il lockdown ci ha sicuramente aiutati a mantenere la gravidanza in una dimensione intima e privata. Praticamente non sono più uscita di casa, tranne che per le visite mediche, gli esami del sangue e le mie passeggiate quotidiane in aperta campagna. Ad oggi devo ancora tornare al supermercato (23 July 2020).
[The lockdown definitely helped in keeping the pregnancy in an intimate and private dimension, as I barely exited the house, except for doctor visits, blood tests and my daily walks in the open countryside].

One possible explanation for downplaying lockdown anguish in the English version of the blog is that most posts were written before total lockdown was implemented in other countries besides China and Italy.[1] Therefore, seen as a "semplate," total confinement could not yet be considered a "shared experience," suitable for "the establishment of rapport on the basis of common ground" (Lutzky and Gee 2018, 182), i.e. a viable cultureme to share with an international audience. In translating these posts, the cultural implications of not walking into a supermarket for several months on end, or of doubting whether it will ever again be allowed to invite friends round for dinner, may have been considered by the blogger not to be, at that time, fully understandable by a non-Italian reader.

Especially in the English version of the blog, as seen in the examples above, a sunny-side-up view of life tends to prevail, possibly as a marketing strategy to keep the international audience interested in travelling to Italy to attend Juls' cooking classes, "once these absurd times will be over" and "we'll experience a new Renaissance." Early into the pandemic (4 April 2020), the blog featured a podcast, available only in English, which was prefaced by this quite optimistic outlook:

> I think comfort food is also extremely influenced by culture, as often we tend to consider comforting what we know better. That's why I asked a few friends from all over the world to share with us which is their favourite comfort food. It will be like travelling from country to country, through the best and most comforting foods. Get ready to be hungry.

Meanwhile, the blog has, like most businesses in Italy and beyond, jumped on the bandwagon of videoconferencing "replacements" of what used to be live events. Specifically, *Juls' Kitchen* is on Udemy with three cooking courses (*Fresh Pasta Cooking Class*; *Vegan Cooking Class*; *Italian Dessert Cooking Class*) available

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[1] Depending on the intensity of the lockdown policies enforced by each government, the meaning of the Anglicism "lockdown" has varied considerably from country to country and from language to language, ranging from drastic measures that have prohibited all mobility within 200 metres from home, to a ban on inter-regional or intercity travel, to "intelligent lockdowns" that have discouraged movement without overtly forbidding it (de Haas, Faber and Hamersma 2020; Jarman et al. 2020; Ren 2020).

only in English, with Italian subtitles. Although the courses are described in Udemy as "a virtual Tuscan cooking course," this captioning does not seem to reflect the Tuscan tradition as closely and as faithfully as the written blog posts do. In fact, the Udemy online courses appear to address an international audience entertaining a rather more stereotyped view of Tuscany than the average readers of the blog are expected to have. Furthermore, the courses are all delivered asynchronously, and described by the blogger herself in their description page as "a compromise:" therefore, they are perhaps not even expected to provide a real substitute for "teaching classes in our cooking studio in the countryside, meeting people at the local café to begin the market tour, working for clients and brands to create recipes and organizing workshops and gatherings," which the blogger openly admits to missing.

An analysis of the word *travel* and its associated vocabulary in pre-pandemic blog posts reveals that references to travelling have more than halved since lockdown was first enforced, from 234.45 pmw pre-pandemically to 115.09 pmw post-pandemically. Therefore, "travelling from country to country" metaphorically, on videoconferencing and social networking platforms is certainly not quite the same as travelling in "real" life, as the blogger herself stresses in the description page of her online courses, but it is a way for her family business to "rethink our offer, to change it according to the completely new situation." After all, *Juls' Kitchen* is one of hundreds of thousands of small family businesses in Italy that have been hit very hard by the 2020 total lockdown (ISTAT 2021, 73), so it is quite normal for its owner to look for alternatives to stay afloat, as well as to express the hope "to return to a new normal, to be able to travel and see places, to have a pizza with a bunch of friends, or a cappuccino and a jam croissant at the local café as an act of normality, and not as an exceptional moment to remember" (from the blog entry entitled *Castagnaccio con la ricotta. Inizia l'attesa del Natale*/'Castagnaccio, chestnut cake with ricotta. Waiting for Christmas,' dated 1 December 2020). However, the blogger is under no illusion that life online will ever be able to replace "real" live interaction, especially as far as a characteristically bodily experience like making and eating food is concerned.

4. Conclusion

This paper has analyzed a largely unexplored area of food writing, culturemes, in a discourse that could be described as *lockdown food blogging*, focusing on new specific features of food blogs resulting from lifestyle changes triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated restrictive measures. The study has concentrated on one of the most popular food blogs in Italy, among the countries worst affected by COVID and adopting some of the most severe and long-lasting containment measures. This blog, however, was selected not particularly because of its popularity, but above all because it is, to the best of this author's knowledge, the only Italian-English bilingual food blog that is entirely available in both languages at a native or near-native level of fluency.

Our research questions on culturemes have extended beyond food items and ingredients, focusing specifically on the evolution of food, time and lockdown related "semplates" (i.e. cultural frames or linguistic patterns). In fact, the quite

drastic COVID-related restrictive measures implemented in Italy since March 2020 seem to have initiated a change in Italian lifestyle, as well as in its perception by foreign foodies, potentially interested in using a blog like *Juls' Kitchen* as a pre-travel springboard to begin planning a holiday to Tuscany.

The results show that the lifestyle change ensuing from COVID-19 containment measures in Italy has affected not only the practice and narration of cooking by this food blogger, but also such fundamental tenets of culture as time. Time, indeed, is one of the main culturemes in this blog, before and during the COVID pandemic. This is not completely unexpected, as time is always of the essence whenever a person is cooking: it is both a procedural element in cooking instructions, and a measure of our common human experience, of which food making and eating is perhaps one of the most highly ritualized and culturally loaded epiphenomena. However, what our corpus data have revealed is a progressively tighter intertwining of these two views of time, i.e. procedural and experiential, with an increasingly strong determination, as the lockdown months dragged on, to come up with some rose-tinted-glasses self-care or coping strategies to make this "forced respite" time matter and count.

These strategies include walking down memory lane, e.g. in the excerpts reported about alchermes, dried chestnuts and other types of comfort food. However, these imaginary flights on the wings of old memories are arguably not open to the international readership of this blog, as they are one kind of cultureme that typically tends to get "lost in translation." As a matter of fact, while most names of foods and ingredients *are* translated in this blog, and therefore do not seem to create any serious translation obstacles, what does not seem to carry from one language to the other, and consequently from one version of the blog to the other, is the feeling, the taste, and indeed the longing that certain traditional foods elicit.

However, perhaps the brightest silver lining that the blogger can see, as is probably the case for most people at this particular time in history, is the hope that

> we'll get through this and we will rediscover a new country, which will be waiting with open arms for everyone to come back, to enjoy our food, our art and culture, our cities and countryside, the mountains and the seaside, but mainly, our generous hospitality (19 March 2020, English version).

Overall, our investigation has revealed that most differences in the understanding of the role of food in the two versions of the blog are not connected with (un)translatability, but rather with the blogger's expectations of the food and world knowledge of her followers, reading and interacting with her respectively in the local language (in this case, Italian), and in ELF for social networking. This consideration may be tentatively generalized to the discourse of multilingual food blogging today, as it emerges quite clearly not only from the study of the present blog but also from a previous one within the same project (Fusari 2021).

The answer to our ultimate research question, i.e. whether the experience of food making marketed by the blog, especially through on-site cooking classes, could somehow "move" online, is, however, largely negative. The data actually show that food narratives, like many other kinds of narratives, can indeed provide solace from lockdown-induced feelings of isolation and trauma, but they do not

have enough meaning potential to provide a substitute for "live" activities. That is why the word *travel* has not only been progressively disappearing from this blog, as lockdown months rolled by, but the blogger herself also describes her brand-new online cooking courses, made available on a popular e-learning platform, as a "compromise," made in the hope that better days will lie ahead.

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Pandemic and Politics in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*[1]

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Abstract. As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, readers and scholars turn to previous pandemic writing. Among the accounts of past pandemics, Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) might not be the most familiar, although it stands out, not merely because of its female author and futuristic, dystopian mode. Its real distinction is that it predicts the social and political fallout of a pandemic in ways that echo the global experience of coronavirus reaction over the last few years, specifically, the ideological polarization created by anti-pandemic measures.

Keywords: Mary Shelley, plague narrative, dystopia.

1. Introduction: Writing the plague

Living through a pandemic has always led some survivors to record their experiences, whether with the disease itself or with the social fallout from decimation. An early historical text is that of Michael Platiensis, who records the arrival of the plague on the island of Sicily in 1347, while the classic narrative in English is Daniel Defoe's Journal of the Plague Year (1722). These European narratives, separated by 375 years, both influenced Mary Shelley's apocalyptic novel *The Last Man* (1826). Like her predecessors, Shelley describes the fearful rumors, the arrival of the novel disease, the rising death rate, the quest for refuge and the final breaking of the wave of plague over a stricken population. Even in the late twenty-first century of the novel's setting, Shelley's characters "called to mind the plague of 1348, when it was calculated that a third of mankind had been destroyed" (Shelley 2008, 233). From Platiensis, Shelley takes the motif of the arrival of the plague-stricken ship in a European harbor, although her doomed ship comes from Philadelphia, not the east (Shelley 2008, 217). Shelley herself had not lived through one of the major outbreaks of Yersinia pestis in Europe. At the time of writing *The Last Man*, a cholera pandemic had arisen in India and was spreading rapidly. This did not reach Great Britain until long after the novel was published (not until 1832), but English awareness of the disease would have come through the British military, which was engaged in the affected regions (McGrew 1960, 61).

Shelley's is not therefore a documentary record of a disease pandemic, rather a speculative projection of how a catastrophic plague could alter social and political norms. *The Last Man*, I will argue, anatomizes one feature of pandemic politics that will be familiar to us from the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-22: the political weaponization of denial.

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2. Shelley's life and fiction

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley was born into an unusual family, in 1797, the daughter of the rationalist philosopher William Godwin, an early supporter of atheistic individualism, and his wife Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Fulfilling her intellectually and socially rebellious destiny, Mary escaped to Italy with the married poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley. Out of the chaotic perambulations of this couple and their friends came her novel, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818), considered by some to be the first science-fiction novel in English (Sterrenburg 1978, 347; van der Laan 2010, 298; Holmes 2016, 490). Following her husband's tragic death, Mary Shelley kept writing: a journal, letters, a travel memoir and five long novels. Among the latter group is *The Last Man*, in which Shelley works through the romantic entanglements of her youth, while projecting a political experiment into the final decades of the twenty-first century.

The Last Man has been read as a *roman à clef*, where Percy Shelley, Lord Byron and Mary's step-sister Claire Clairmont are ill-concealed in the guise of the fictional characters: Adrian, Lord Raymond and Perdita, respectively (Peck 1923, 198; Ruppert 2009, 149; Murphy 2020, n.p.). Sufficient has been written about this aspect of the novel (Peck 1923, 202-214; Sterrenburg 1978, 327-328; Lokke 2003, 117; Paley 2008, xvi-xix), and I will not explore it further.

If you have not yet read *The Last Man*, should you run out and buy, borrow or download it? Well, perhaps not. Its language is inflated, its apostrophic digressions are dated, and its pages littered with poetic excerpts. In its defense, Shelley does analyze the psychological dynamics of male-female relationships. Though she depicts the kind of passionate love that she had known with Percy Bysshe Shelley, her book shows the erosion of such love in the futile blame game of the participants in the fading love match between Lord Raymond and Perdita. Her depiction of marriage dynamics is far ahead of its time; English literature lacks its equal until George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-1872). In the novel's leisurely chronicle of revolution and social breakdown, disease does not enter until volume II of *The Last Man*, which is a three-volume novel.

3. Plot of *The Last Man*

Since this novel is long and, unlike *Frankenstein*, not canonical, I will offer a brief sketch of its plot. The story begins with the end of the British monarchy in 2073 (Shelley 2008, 20). Thereafter, the narrator, Lionel Verney, follows the entangled social and political lives of a group of friends who take leadership positions in the new republic. Lord Raymond attempts to rule the country as the Protector until he leaves to fight in the Greek-Turkish wars, where he is wounded and dies. Subsequently, the arrival of the plague on the shores of England destroys centralized governance, even the enlightened regime of Adrian, Earl of Windsor. City and country are in turn devastated, family members die and a small party including Verney, his niece Clara and Adrian, now the Protector, flee to Europe in search of a warmer climate. After a pause in Paris, where a plague-denial cult has taken over, the much-depleted group treks on to Italy. Verney, Adrian and Clara are the last three survivors until the latter two drown off the coast of Italy, and

Verney becomes the titular Last Man, who proceeds alone to Rome and thence by boat, perhaps to India.

But wait—we learn that these are not events but prophesied events. The novel's frame relates the finding of scattered fragments of an ancient prophetic story by an unnamed nineteenth-century person, possibly female, possibly Shelley herself (Lokke 2003, 132). This external narrator has reassembled the oracular fragments to reveal the tale of the plague and the last man on earth. The reader tends to forget along the way that Verney's story is only a prophecy by the Cumaean Sibyl from a distant classical past, inscribed on oak leaves and requiring re-animation in the early nineteenth-century. What matters to us is that it foretells the end of the twenty-first century, bridging millennia, in fact. Shelley's novel is the fictional equivalent of a message in a bottle (Morton 2003, 264), discovered, re-inscribed and passed forward.

4. The coming of the plague

In volume II of *The Last Man*, the plague enters the consciousness of the English characters as a rumor, a mere word: "This enemy of the human race had begun early in June to raise its serpent-head on the shores of the Nile" (Shelley 2008, 175). The disease approaches from the east, afflicting Constantinople, where the Turkish war is raging and Lord Raymond is bound, then Athens (Shelley 2008, 223), France and Italy (Shelley 2008, 235). Once the disease has crossed the Channel, the description of a deserted London recalls our own recent experience of lockdown: "[. . .] since the commencement of the visitation, London appeared sufficiently changed. There were no carriages, and grass had sprung high in the streets; the houses had a desolate look; most of the shutters were closed; and there was a ghast and frightened stare in the persons I met, very different from the usual business-like demeanour of the Londoners" (Shelley 2008, 250). Within months, desertion has given way to mass death, or as Shelley metaphorically expresses it, "the banqueting hall of death was spread only in London" (2008, 281).

4.1. Origin theories and isolationism

As it moves across Europe (not as swiftly as the recent coronavirus, since travel is more leisurely in Shelley's imagined decade of the 2090s), various theories of its cause are advanced. Most people blame "effluvia" (Shelley 2008, 188) or "pestilential air" (192), relying on what Wills (2020, n.p.) calls "the now-outdated miasma theory of disease," and imagine that a cold winter will help to dissipate it (Shelley 2008, 195). "It was called an epidemic. But the grand question was still unsettled of how this epidemic was generated and increased" (Shelley 2008, 231). This causal uncertainty leads to hesitation and over-confidence about the protective effect of geographical separation: "there was no immediate necessity for an earnest caution [. Being an island, it was felt,] England was still secure" (Shelley 2008, 231). Only after the plague has arrived in London do the inhabitants see the futility of their myth of isolation:

> [W]e fancied that the little channel between our island and the rest of the earth
> was to preserve us alive among the dead. It were no mighty leap methinks from
> Calais to Dover [. . .] the sea was to raise a wall of adamant—without, disease, and

misery—within, a shelter from evil, a nook of the garden of paradise—a particle of celestial soil, which no evil could invade—truly we were wise in our generation, to imagine all these things! (Shelley 2008, 248).

Even the narrator, Verney, succumbs at one point to the illusion that he can save his family by seeking "uncontaminated seclusion" (Shelley 2008, 243).

4.2. Skepticism and denial

Some leaders are skeptical of the danger and ridicule any attempt to plan for the arrival of the contagion in Britain (Shelley 2008, 221). The plague denial and downplaying depicted in *The Last Man* are described by Olivia Murphy as similar to Britain's real historical actions, "ventriloquizing the complacent response from England to early signs of disease in its colonies" (Murphy 2020, n.p.). As in the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders initially worry more about the impact on trade and the economy in general than about losing their population. There is a theory that "in a year or two pestilence would cease" (Shelley 2008, 237). However, it soon becomes apparent that "the epidemic was gifted with a virulence before unfelt" (Shelley 2008, 223) and that an escape to the country is not a permanent solution (223). The year 2094 proves to be the *annus horribilis* for England (Shelley 2008, 239). Given the uncertainty about origin, the privileging of commerce over life, and the deluded denialism of a few leaders, Shelley has anticipated our twenty-first-century experience of the pandemic. What differs with the novel's plague is its fatality rate—almost 100%; nevertheless, Verney does survive his infection (Shelley 2008, 342-343); moreover, Shelley's futuristic society has not advanced medically to the point of vaccines, so there is no treatment, either preventive or curative.

4.3. Racist conjecture

As with COVID-19, there are indications in Shelley's futuristic England of ethnocentrism, "racist assumptions" (Murphy 2020, n.p.) and even outright racism in the attribution of the plague's origin and spread. "It [the plague] is of old a native of the East, sister of the tornado, the earthquake, and the simoon. Child of the sun, and nursling of the tropics, it would expire in these climes. It drinks the dark blood of the inhabitant of the south, but it never feasts on the pale-faced Celt" (Shelley 2008, 233). Even welcoming travellers from the East is initially thought to be safe for Europe: "If perchance some stricken Asiatic come among us, plague dies with him, uncommunicated and innoxious" (Shelley 2008, 233). This imperialist ideology proves wrong as the plague enters Europe. Verney's own experience disproves the concept of Celtic imperviousness: he eventually catches the infection from a dying Negro who collapses against him as Verney is returning to his family. By the time England has ceased to be a place of refuge from the plague and has become instead a place fled by pandemic refugees, it is clear that "this sense of racial superiority and immunity is unfounded" (Murphy 2020, n.p.).

Overall, the impression in the novel of an advanced western-European civilization unfairly wiped out by a contagion brought in from places far to the east is reminiscent of the conspiracy theories and ethnic name-calling and

bullying that accompanied the recent pandemic. Shelley's plague originated with the Other and results in the destruction of whatever bulwark of values had been erected against the Other.

4.4. Leadership failure

If the novel has a villain other than disease, it is Ryland, the nominal Protector of England, who must abandon his oligarchical principles and reveal his incompetence once the plague threatens. "He was incapable of meeting these evils by any comprehensive system; he had resorted to expedient after expedient, and could never be induced to put a remedy in force, till it came too late to be of use" (Shelley 2008, 131). Ryland gives in to despair and refuses the burden of leadership, which then falls on Adrian, the scion of the former royal family and the figure modelled on Percy Shelley. Ryland talks the politician's talk, but in times of crisis he retreats to a selfish and despairing individualism. This lies in contrast to Adrian's insistence that community offers the only solace in extreme conditions. Ryland, we later learn, dies alone in the solitary spot to which he had retreated for an illusory safety, surrounded by hoarded food (Shelley 2008, 319). The plague thus exposes the failings of the conservative, aristocratic, oligarchic view of power and temporarily validates Adrian's more socialist, communitarian, egalitarian ideal—even though Adrian, ironically, is the real aristocrat.

Shelley's plague of 2094, then, resembles that of 2019-2022 in these four features: conspiracy theories surrounding the origin of the disease; reliance on exclusion and national isolation; racist ideology and actions accompanying its onset; and failures of leadership both before and after the arrival of the epidemic. There is one further similarity involving the appearance of a strong pandemic denial movement led by a charismatic figure.

5. Personality cult

In 2021, a pastor from a Los Angeles megachurch confidently proclaimed "There is no pandemic" (Henderson 2021, n.p.). This denialist mindset was surprisingly common in America and is well summed up by an article in the *Washington Post*: "Downplaying the threat and refusing to comply with social distancing measures require an indifference toward the common good, a certainty that the ends will justify the means and a brash confidence that God will be on one's own side" (Du Mez 2020, n.p.). A similar certainty emerges as a pandemic outcome in *The Last Man*: after 150 pages analyzing governance issues in the futuristic England (monarchists versus republicans), Shelley complicates the challenges of leadership by having the English remnant abandon England for the continent. There she introduces a figure called the "impostor prophet," who heads one faction of the English refugees in Paris (Shelley 2008, 380-381). The reader's insight into the religious group is facilitated by their recruitment of Juliet, a sympathetic female character who occupies one of the novel's many sub-narratives. Widowed, alone and a single mother, Juliet epitomizes the vulnerable person who often falls into the clutches of a cult-like belief system, those "panic struck and tamed by sorrow" (Shelley 2008, 387). This prophet exploits vulnerability by "desir[ing] to rule over these last stragglers from the fold of

death" (Shelley 2008, 386). Verney tries to save Juliet, and the reader first anticipates another of the novel's rescued-maiden incidents. However, this time, reader expectations are dashed: Verney is captured by the cult and released only by Juliet herself, whom Verney describes as a "dupe" and "misguided victim" (Shelley 2008, 392).

Shelley's nameless prophet builds on established religion but extends its teaching to exact complete subordination to the group and its leader, who is "instigated by ambition" (Shelley 2008, 386) and leads, not to keep his flock alive, but to prolong his own leadership. The Elite, as the group is called, thus resembles modern-day cults. It further recalls the recent pandemic experience by its insistence that they alone offer any hope in the face of the plague. The Elite exacts obedience in return for exclusive submission to a divine will (in reality, the will of the leader) (Shelley 2008, 385-386). Juliet becomes "a steadfast proselyte, and powerful auxiliary to the leader of the elect" (Shelley 2008, 388). The group does not believe in any of the methods of avoidance practiced by Adrian's group, nor will they agree to seek a warmer climate as a method for potential survival. The Elite resembles the various anti-vaccine, anti-mask, "plandemic" and virus-hoax groups that sprang up in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in the US. In contrast to the situation in 2020 and 2021, the opposing, normative group in Shelley's England and Paris lacks any solid prophylactic—no vaccines, no masks, no medicines, not even any coherent theory of social distancing, to offer its adherents. The line between the two sides is thus less clearly science versus anti-science, but hopeful communal action versus despairing individualist capitulation. In 2020, the polarization (Coren 2021, n.p.) often came disguised as alternate science, among congregations in North America and parts of Europe "that have rejected vaccines and even social distancing and masks" (Coren 2021, n.p.). The anti-science factor in denialism became evident in the overlap between COVID denial and climate denial, as reported by the BBC in 2021 (Spring 2021, n.p.).

5.1. Concealment of the truth

The imposter prophet maintains his flock by offering blind faith and false assertions, which are "false, yet vehemently asserted" (Shelley 2008, 385). In this way, Shelley anticipates the "fake news" component of the COVID-19 pandemic, as her narrator notes the power of these false assertions over "the ready credulity of the ignorant and fearful" (Shelley 2008, 385). Then, as now, disinformation and "hypocritical jargon" (Shelley 2008, 390) "seldom failed in drawing over to their party some from among our numbers" (Shelley 2008, 385-386). Verney diagnoses correctly that the prophet rules through fear (Shelley 2008, 390) and maintains the level of fear by artifice, cruelty and fraud (Shelley 2008, 392). Journalists from the *New York Times*, writing during the recent pandemic, diagnosed similar features in the COVID skepticism of evangelical movements in the United States: "some have been energized by what they see as a battle between faith and fear, and freedom and persecution" (Dias and Graham 2021, n.p.). Concealment props up the illusion of safety offered by the prophet's cult; thus, any deaths within the cult are denied: "Those who sickened were immediately and quietly withdrawn [. . .] while some plausible excuse was given for their absence"

(Shelley 2008, 406). Nor do the prophet's actions pursue from sincere belief; according to Verney the false leader is "fully aware of the lie" (Shelley 2008, 406), resembling the twenty-first-century politicians who, possessed of the latest scientific data, nevertheless led their party/country in the opposite direction: "5 Leaders Who Mishandled the COVID-19 Pandemic" (Garguly 2021, n.p.), or "The Notorious Nine: These World Leaders Responded to the Coronavirus with Denial, Duplicity and Ineptitude" (York et al. 2020, n.p.). Garguly's top five made the list by early denial of the pandemic and active propagation of misinformation. A similar issue of power drives the cultists in *The Last Man*, where concealment of the unpalatable death toll functions to burnish the power of the false prophet, as some regions in the US did in 2021 to prop up the anti-science stance of their leaders.

5.2. Violence

Shelley's narrative even anticipates one of the most negative effects of the rise of a populist leader at a time of crisis: proxy violence—of the kind evident on January 6th, 2021 at the Capitol building in Washington DC. Here is how Verney tells the story:

> I found everything in a state of tumult. An emissary of the leader of the elect, had been so worked up by his chief, and by his own fanatical creed, as to make an attempt on the life of the Protector and preserver of lost mankind [i.e. Adrian]. His hand was arrested while in the act of poignarding the Earl [. . .] the wretch [. . .] vaunted his design, and madly claimed the crown of martyrdom" (Shelley 2008, 404-405).

Verney explains this cult-like pattern of behavior by evoking human nature under stress: "Men love a prop so well, that they will lean on a pointed poisoned spear; and such was he, the impostor, who, with fear of hell for his scourge, most ravenous wolf, played the driver to a credulous flock" (Shelley 2008, 405). The metaphor of the wolf, previously applied to the plague itself, has here been transferred to the cult leader who feeds on human fear and vulnerability. Ultimately, the imposter prophet escalates from inciting violence among his followers to being violent himself: he stabs his follower Juliet, who has finally denounced him to the group: then "the wretch with that energy of purpose, which had borne him thus far in his guilty career, saw his danger, and resolved to evade the worst forms of it—he rushed on one of the foremost, seized a pistol from his girdle, and his loud laugh of derision mingled with the report of the weapon with which he destroyed himself" (Shelley 2008, 407). This kind of crisis leader relies on intimidation and violence and yet accrues the most fanatical followers. To be clear, Shelley does not distinguish between two types of ordinary people—the followers of either Adrian or the false prophet. Instead, Shelley reveals that it is the *leader's* character and motivation that differentiate one group from the other. Habitually pacifist, Adrian leads by example, and though he has (by twenty-first-century standards) no greater hope of cure to offer, he at least guides with honesty, imagination and selflessness.

6. A conclusion and a speculation

These final parallels between *The Last Man* and the recent experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the US, struck me forcefully on re-reading this novel during lockdown. That disinformation and denial should emerge in a pandemic had previously seemed a twenty-first-century phenomenon, born of the World Wide Web with its dark niches where odd conspiracies could flourish. But here was Shelley in the 1820s clearly anticipating how fake news, forcefully enunciated, could be harnessed by an amoral leader to impose a false reality in which followers would live or die. Whether modern science or traditional religious belief, both could be twisted to uphold the power base of an unscrupulous leadership. Suddenly, the oracular frame in which Shelley had wrapped her tale became a mirror of the author's own Sibylline act of prophecy.

Let us talk about that framing story, which may be the least persuasive feature of *The Last Man* for the twenty-first-century reader; we are likely to balk at that fragmented, leaf-inscribed prophecy from ancient times. Nor do we believe in the frenzied trances of the Cumaean Sibyl. But before judging, let us pause to acknowledge two aspects of the frame: first, Shelley's daring connection of pagan antiquity to her own imaginatively-driven Romantic era, and her projection 250 years ahead. Though unable to foresee the industrial revolution, fossil-fuel exploitation, jet planes and a few other things, Shelley nevertheless correctly saw that what human beings will become is always conditioned by the lessons learned (or not learned) about our shared humanity. Therefore, it is vital to transmit those lessons across centuries and even millennia. Second, an analogy for the scattered leaves on which the prophecy was written does exist in our own time; even in a sceptical age, we have our own time-travelling narratives. Consider the Future Library Project, an art installation by Katie Paterson (n.d.) that stores multiple texts (by writers such as Margaret Atwood and Karl Ove Knausgård) to be opened and published only in 2114 when the forest will have grown sufficiently to provide the wood pulp to make the paper on which these texts can then be printed—if, that is, human beings are still around and printing is still a thing. Paterson's unique art has added the dimension of deep time to art; Shelley's *The Last Man* moves freely in this dimension, constructing a tale from the mythological past, to be assembled in her present (which is our past), and foretelling the distant future (our century) in which the tale is composed and written down, thus re-initiating the narrative cycle. Shelley's conception is of a Möbius loop of narrative floating in deep time, and, just as Future Library is built on trust, Shelley's vision of leadership/governance is equally dependent on the mutual trust of mortal beings that wisdom can be transmitted through time in the "time capsule" of imaginative writing (Atwood 2022, 243).

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Reviews

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The work here reviewed begins with a description of the scope and nature of applied linguistics, provided by the author, Dr Nenad Tomović, Professor at the Department of English Language and Literature, at the Faculty of Philology University of Belgrade. As indicated in the title, the study offers a novel introduction to an amalgam of Applied Linguistics (AL) and English Language Teaching (ELT). More specifically, it aims at addressing both areas by providing description, explanation and examples from the author's rich experience as a theorist and practitioner.

The book is logically structured and organized into seven chapters: 1. What Is Applied Linguistics? (pp. 5-6); 2. Key Concepts (pp. 7-23); 3. Features of L2 (pp. 24-26); 4. Age (pp. 27-45); 5. Skills (pp. 46-85); 6. Micro-Skills (pp. 86-106); 7. Assessment, Evaluation, Testing and Grading (107-116). The book concludes with a bibliography (containing sixty-four references) accompanied by a web-bibliography.

Chapter one defines applied linguistics as a relatively new field, taking into account "the famous working definition of applied linguistics," which is defined as "the theoretical and empirical investigation of real-world problems" (5). The author goes on to discuss the connection between applied linguistics and other domains from which it extracts the relevant information, such as sociology, psychology, anthropology and information theory, to name just a few. The first chapter closes with a clear statement that "[o]n the one hand, applied linguistics is focused on language teaching and learning while, on the other, it requires at least some knowledge of other sciences and disciplines" (6).

Chapter two lays out a road for a mixture of approaches to theoretical and practical concepts viewed primarily from the angle of language acquisition. This section contains four subsections. The first one concentrates on language (7), bilingualism (8) and L2 (8-9). The second one, "Learning and acquisition," (10-11) looks at certain concrete examples from language learning as a conscious and formal process. The third subsection (11-17) descriptively explores diverse theories of first language acquisition, starting from the German psychologist Dietrich Tiedermann, "the first Western scientist who tried to explain the process of language acquisition" (12) in his work *Versuch einer Erklärung des Ursrpungus der Sprache* (1773) in the late eighteenth century, and moving towards behaviourism. Needless to say, the author also necessarily mentions

Chomsky's view, and two salient concepts: Language Acquisition Device (LAD) and Universal Grammar (UG), respectively (Chomsky 1965, 1967; Shatz 2007). Due importance is given to Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) (Penfield and Roberts 1959; Lenneberg 1967), Jean Piaget (1923, 1924) and Lev Vygotsky (1973, 1978) and one is greatly tempted to follow up these functional-cognitive ramifications. The fourth subsection focuses on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and learning (17-18). In addition to this, the author outlines simplistic definitions whilst re-visiting behaviourism and Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) and Error Analysis (EA) (19). Perhaps the most interesting description is dedicated to Krashen's Monitor Model (21) offering five hypotheses and reflecting on usage-based approaches to L2 acquisition (Krashen 1981, 1982, 1985).

Chapter three (24-26) is devoted to some features of L2. Moreover, it introduces the notion of a continuous process that is an essential ingredient in learning another language. At this point, the author lists the relevant concepts: *language transfer*, *negative transfer* and *interference* (24) whilst explaining interlanguage, pointing out that certain authors prefer using the term *cross-linguistic influence* (25). Additionally, it has been highlighted that bridging a gap between mistakes and errors may facilitate describing the concept of interlanguage. This section ends with another phenomenon related to both errors and mistakes, which is referred to as *backsliding* (26).

Chapter four delves into learners and the related phenomena, since "there is no teaching without learners" (7). This section consists of nine subsections. The first one opens with "one of the most important factors that should be taken into account" (27), namely, the age of students. The second subsection explains thoroughly learners' L1 (29), while the third one highlights cultural background as an independent factor (30-31). The effects of motivation, language aptitude (32-33), intelligence (33-34) and personality are also reported on in the form of detailed accounts of these phenomena in the fourth to seventh subsections. Learning styles, as particular ways of learning preferred by the learner, are described in the eighth subsection (36-37), whilst learning strategies are accounted for in the ninth subsection, paying particular attention to memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies and, ultimately, metacognitive strategies.

Chapter five lists and describes the four basic skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing) and explores instances of macro- and micro-skills. The focus is then shifted to listening, which necessarily includes different sorts of intensive, extensive and instrumental listening, followed by listening for pleasure and interactive and non-interactive listening. It should be mentioned that the first subsection contains a handful of illustrative examples and figures that link the phenomena under consideration. As we move on, the receptive skill of reading is observed in the second subsection (58-65), and the production of speech is described and explained in the third subsection (65-77). Writing as "the most important means of recording our ideas for millennia" (77) is seen as one of the most complex skills to teach since it is comprised of many different aspects. These aspects are described and explained in the fourth subsection. Furthermore, backed by representative literature the author illuminates the tripartite distinction between *writing as a means* (= writing for learning), *writing as an end* (= writing for writing) and *writing as both means and end* (78).

Chapter six shows a diversified potential of micro-skills research if one includes a range of abilities that students need in order to master a particular language skill covering pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary, respectively. Pronunciation is taken up in the first subsection (86-92), and vocabulary/lexis is approached from several current perspectives, the most relevant of which is presenting vocabulary (94-100). The third subsection gives a general introduction to grammar and then provides a rich source of examples pertaining to two main approaches: deductive and inductive. However, the author points out that "neither of these approaches can be simply described as good or bad, because both of them have certain strengths and weaknesses" (102). The author, then, considers another relevant aspect of grammar teaching, which can be seen as the opposition between form and function. The chapter closes with a representative number of sample exercises aimed at displaying potential variations of a wide-ranging grammar topic.

The final chapter focuses on the most difficult ingredients of the teacher's job, i.e. grading students, or more precisely, assessment, evaluation, testing and grading. As the author implicitly notices, this grading task has not been eased by some general approaches taking into account the overall students' performance. Additionally, the author reminds us of the key terminology focusing on assessment, formative assessment, summative assessment, formal and informal assessment (107). The author also supports the idea that testing is not always equated with assessment, and then introduces the concept of evaluation as "a long-term process which provides feedback about the student's learning, and his/her abilities and effort" (108). Professor Tomović's descriptive-explanatory account leaves no stone unturned, since we are presented with five categories of tests according to their purpose, tests based on their construction and then the number of elements tested. The first subsection offers the parameters of a good test. Elaborating on Harmer's (1987, 1998, 2007) categories of tests, the author demonstrates how these can be applied in practice. The second subsection presents the most typical types of test items and tasks, some of which pertain to discrete-item testing, the standard cloze procedures and gap-filling tests. Also, the author describes and explains sentence transformations, error correction and matching thereby closing the circle of testing procedures and practices.

The book *Applied Linguistics and English Language Teaching* is a rich source of ideas and inspiration for applied linguists. And yet, the book represents a well-balanced, concise and remarkable source of practical ideas that may be utilized particularly by those interested in linguistic aspects of ELT in the actual classroom. More importantly, the author's style of writing is unpretentious, which makes this splendid book accessible to a wider audience as well as expert readers concerned with its subject matter, i.e. AL and ELT. Finally, the joy of elaborating on theory and applying the rich practice of ELT shines through the text provided by Professor Nenad Tomović.

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The editors of this collection of essays promise a lot with the title, to introduce and explore the diversity in the narration and writing of the novel. The volume consists of three major parts: "Intermediality and Narrative Theory," "Narrative Discourses in Classic and Contemporary English Fiction" and "Narrative Discourses and the Hungarian Legacy of Fiction." The majority of the contributors are established Hungarian scholars and PhD candidates at Hungarian universities, but the volume also contains an essay from the well-known cultural theorist, Mieke Bal. The nineteen essays of the collection focus on theoretical questions of narration or the questions of prose fiction written in English and Hungarian. Although not all of the essays are comparative in their approach, still the fact that the essays written about novels and short stories belonging to different eras and cultures are placed after one another, suggests that they are, in one way or another, connected, or even belong to the same novelistic traditions.

The collection is based on a series of academic discussions which started with the international conference *Focalisation, Narration and Writing: The Novel*, which was organised in May 2018 at Pázmány Péter Catholic University in Budapest by Kornélia Horváth and Sarolta Osztroluczky, co-editors of this volume. The presenters were "established and emerging scholars of literature and cultural studies not only from Hungary but also from different parts of Europe including the Netherlands, Estonia, Slovakia and Russia" (1). According to the "Introduction" written by Judit Mudriczki, co-editor of the volume, the editors' aim with the publication of this collection is "to show the diversity of approaches to narrative fiction that the participants had in common" (1). All the essays in the collection focus on or make use of one of two academic fields, novel studies or narrative theory (1).

The first section, entitled "Intermediality and Narrative Theory," contains five essays, which are theoretical and interdisciplinary in their approach. The first study is Mieke Bal's analysis of focalisation as a political tool in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and a description of how she and Michelle Williams Gamaker tried to recreate the effect in their film, *Madame B*, which, according to Bal, cannot be described by the traditional term *adaptation*, since it is rather "a response to the novel" (13). The essay is especially worth reading because it shows how writers and filmmakers use different strategies for focalisation and how these relate to each other. The cover of the volume features a still from the movie *Madame B* in which Emma is standing next to a row of windows, which can refer to the different windows that this collection opens to the topic of the novel. The second essay is Tibor Gintli's "Narrative and Speed," in which Gintli revisits Gérard Genette's duration or speed concept, a term used in Genette's *Narrative*

Discourse Revisited (1988), and convincingly analyses its flaws and offers another view on the speed of narrative. Kornélia Horváth takes a look at what three Central European authors think about the concept of the novel, linking Milan Kundera's, Béla Hamvas's and Géza Ottlik's ideas. The study assumes a cultural connection between the authors of the "geographic, political and cultural area of *Central Europe*" (41). Although Horváth uses the term *Central Europe*, this connection is even more interesting because two of them are Hungarian, so technically East-Central European authors (Béla Hamvas and Géza Ottlik), and one of them is a Czech-born French writer (Milan Kundera). András Kappanyos in his "Heteroglossia and Inner Monologue: Linguistic Events as Character Traits in *Ulysses*" introduces some of the hardships that the translators (Marianna Gula, András Kappanyos, Gábor Zoltán Kiss and Dávid Szolláth) of the new Hungarian re-translation of James Joyce's *Ulysses* faced. From this essay the readers not only get to know the struggles of the translators and their innovative solutions from the illustrative examples, but also get an idea of how the characters' different verbal strategies identify them in *Ulysses*. János Szávai deals with dream narratives in his essay and shows how dream narratives have lost their importance; they were mostly absent from the great realist novels and have become marginal in the contemporary novel. Although these five essays focus on vastly different themes, still it is common in them that they look for links between theories and novels and between works from different cultural backgrounds and eras.

The next section contains "case studies" as Mudriczki calls them in her "Introduction" to the collection (3). Seven analyses of Anglophone novels and short stories are presented in chronological order, starting with Lewis Carroll and Jack London and arriving at George R. R. Martin and Emma Donoghue. This vast variety means that we do not get a general overview of the topic, but rather glimpses of a series of topics, most of which are linked to the questions of narration. Antal Bókay studies the trauma narratives of Lewis Carroll, linking the author's personal life and his Alice books. Gábor Kovács analyses two short stories written by Jack London to show the functioning of narrative parallelism and the production of counterpart in prose language. Nóra Séllei moves away from more traditional analyses of Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* and instead of thematical questions looks into narration in the first chapter of the novel. Angelika Reichmann analyses narration and intertextuality in J. M. Coetzee's *Dusklands*. Yuliia Terentieva focuses on the representation of places, specifically on how the campus is portrayed in two novels by David Lodge, *Changing Places: A Tale of Two Campuses* and *Small World: An Academic Romance*. Terentieva interprets the campus both as a non-place and a heterotopia. Nikolett Sipos's essay is more closely connected to narratology; she analyses the narration in the first three chapters of George R. R. Martin's *A Game of Thrones*, which are told from Bran Stark's perspective, and briefly mentions how the television series translates this narrative structure into cinematography. Noémi Albert writes about another contemporary novel, Emma Donoghue's *Room*, reading it as a modern-day captivity narrative, and examines the importance of the child narrator's perspective.

In this section, the studies are about a wide range of prose fiction from authors of different eras and cultural backgrounds: the widely well-known nineteenth-

century English author Lewis Carroll; American author Jack London, who lived and wrote in the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century; Doris Lessing, who was born in Iran in 1919 and lived in England for most of her adult life; J. M. Coetzee, contemporary South-African-born novelist who later moved to Australia; contemporary English author David Lodge; one of today's most popular fantasy writers, the American George R. R. Martin; contemporary author Emma Donoghue, who was born in Ireland but lives in Canada. The novels and short stories discussed also belong to different genres. This list already shows the diversity that the title of the collection promises.

The last section further broadens this diversity by including Hungarian authors. László Bengi investigates the role of description in Dezső Kosztolányi's *Skylark*, which was published in 1924, reading *Skylark* as an allegory of description and studying description both as worldmaking and an approach. Mihály Benda analyses works by Hungarian authors Gyula Illyés, András Hevesi, and Jolán Földes, all of whom lived in Paris in the interwar period and published novels which depict the French capital city (Gyula Illyés: *Hunok Párizsban* [*Huns in Paris*]; András Hevesi: *Párizsi eső* [*The Rain in Paris*]; Jolán Földes: *The Street of the Fishing Cat*). He places emphasis on how these novels depict walking characters and compares them to the character of the *flâneur*, the emblematic figure of modernism, who was first introduced in the poetry of Charles Baudelaire. In the next essay, Sarolta Osztroluczky presents a comparative analysis of two short stories, *The Lost Boy* by American interwar author Thomas Wolfe and *Nothing's Lost* from the twentieth-century Hungarian author Géza Ottlik, who presumably read Wolfe's work before writing *Nothing's Lost*. She not only pays attention to the two short stories but also briefly compares the *oeuvres* of the two authors, which, despite their differences, "show remarkable and essential similarities" (219). Zoltán Kulcsár-Szabó examines one of Sándor Márai's novels, *San Gennaro vére* [*The Blood of San Gennaro*], focusing on the narrative structure and linking it to Márai's views and the time when he was an emigrant in New York and San Diego. Dorottya Szávai studies how "Kertész's texts function as continuous *ellipses*" (247) and connects Kertész' *oeuvre* to Franz Kafka and Albert Camus. The subject of the next essay by Sára Tóth is also the Nobel-prize winner Kertész: Tóth provides a reading of *Kaddish for an Unborn Child*; her analysis is based on Northrop Frye's views on literature. In the last essay of the volume Edit Zsadányi investigates works of three contemporary Hungarian women writers, Krisztina Tóth, Kriszta Bódis and Agáta Gordon using Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the subaltern and new subaltern to describe the marginalised voices depicted in the works of Tóth, Bódis and Gordon.

As we have seen, the essays of the volume address a variety of questions regarding narration and prose fiction in general, including both theoretical essays and analyses of novels and short stories. Although the collection does not provide a conclusion, it is successful in grasping and showing the diversity in narration and writing, and it may be interesting for many readers exactly because of the colourfulness of the themes in the essays. Still, there are some recurring questions in the volume: first and foremost, the questions of narration which appear in almost all of the essays, but we can also read about the correlation between an author's life and their work (Antal Bókay, Mihály Benda, Zoltán Kulcsár-Szabó), and the connections between fictional works published in different eras and

written in different languages (Sarolta Osztroluczky, Dorottya Szávai). The major strength of the volume lies in how its structure allows the wide variety of topics to merge seamlessly together and it makes the reader think about the general notions of the novel. Moreover, placing studies on Anglophone and Hungarian works next to each other also opens the door for discussion about the connections between them and may also help to introduce Hungarian literature to readers from other countries.

References

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