

Credit Conference:

Literary Value and Canonicity

(an output from the doctoral course AJ43120, Autumn 2014)

Room G32, Friday 16 January 2015

Section 1: 11am – 12,30pm

1. **Alžběta Zedníková:** Anne Brontë: Elimination by Obscurity
2. **Eva Valentová:** The Charm of the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up: Peter Pan and Canonicity
3. **Velid Beganović:** There Is No Frigate Like a Book: Literary Media, Genres and Canonicity
4. **Pavla Štefanská:** Nora Roberts and Canon of Popular Romance

Lunchbreak 12,30pm – 1,30pm

Section 2: 1,30pm – 2,45pm

1. **Barbora Kašpárková:** Why Iris Murdoch Still Matters?
2. **Patrik Míša:** The Canonical Potential of A.S. Byatt's *Possession*
3. **Asma Hussein:** Originality: New Names? Name Anew?
4. **Petra Slavíčková:** Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, Friedrich Nietzsche and Tragedy

Coffee break 2,45pm – 3pm

Section 3: 3pm – 4,15pm

1. **Eva Hrkalová:** What Is Canonical about Jane Austen?
2. **Dita Hochmanová:** Henry Fielding between the Ancients and the Moderns
3. **Alexandra Stachurová:** Middleton Rediscovered – Thomas Middleton's Comeback to the Canon of Renaissance Drama
4. **Antonín Zita:** William S. Burroughs and the Beat Generation: History of Criticism
5. **Robert Švábenský:** Literary Value and (Potential) Canonicity in McCarthy's *The Blood Meridian* and *The Road*

Velid Beganović

There Is No Frigate Like a Book:¹ Literary Media, Genres and Canonicity

According to Harold Bloom, 'in each era, some genres are regarded as more canonical than others.' Bloom takes this idea up from Alastair Fowler, who claims that 'each age has a fairly small repertoire of genres that its readers and critics can respond to with enthusiasm, and the repertoire easily available to its writers is smaller still'. In this paper, I aim to verify the validity of these claims by trying them out against the 1930s literary peace writings in Great Britain. I look at both what could be considered canonical writings of the time in this field, (such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, H. G. Wells' *The Open Conspiracy*, Bertrand Russell's *Which Way to Peace?* and Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas*) and the non-canonical ones (such as Huxley's short essays and Dimitrije Mitrinović's *World Affairs* column in the *New Britain* magazine). Following naturally from this is another question which I argue is very important for the canonisation of a certain work, that is, the question of the medium. While it is clear that each period prefers its own set of genres and the genre of a canonical work is often addressed, very little emphasis is placed on the medium in which that work was published. For instance, I argue that while the avant-garde magazines were at the forefront of modernism, pushing its frontiers and stretching its boundaries, it was in their nature not to last permanently, and with their perishing a great deal of the material published in them was doomed too to canonical oblivion from the start.

Dita Hochmanová

Henry Fielding between the Ancients and the Moderns

The presentation aims to show the work of Henry Fielding in the context of his unique position between two modes of thought represented by the ancients, who adhered to the values of the Graeco-Roman world, and the moderns, who strived to break from this tradition. My contribution would like to demonstrate that Fielding's knowledge of and indebtedness to the classical world combined with his desire for innovation and experimenting with literary form made his texts connected to the excellence of his canonical predecessors as well as original and forward-looking. The paper focuses especially on Fielding's development of the genre of the novel and his ability to absorb, merge and unite the traditional with the new, which I believe is one of the major qualities of his texts securing him a place among the other remarkable writers of the era.

Eva Hrkalová

What Is Canonical About Jane Austen?

The question is tricky, and the answer even more difficult. Since this paper takes a rather Bloomian point of view, it does not question the canonical value of Jane Austen, but it aims to find the very "something" which Austen's novels possess. Similarly to John Wiltshire, it asks the question: Why do readers still READ Jane Austen? What draws them to the book when they have endless choices of various film and TV adaptations?

¹ A line from a poem by Emily Dickinson, "There Is No Frigate Like a Book"

The paper also examines different critical approaches (such as feminism, New Historicism, and even Marxism) to her works, employed to find some inherent qualities in them. It debates and doubts the successfulness of these approaches, agreeing in some points with both Harold Bloom and Brian Vickers. The paper also seeks the answer in the reader response theory, supported by Rita Felski; however, also this approach gives only a partial solution. Therefore, in the end, the author of this paper will create her own conclusions, explaining both the popularity and the inner quality of Austen's works.

Asma Hussein

Originality: New Names? Name Anew?

The conference paper presents a reading of Derek Walcott's *Tiepolo's Hound* which was published in 2000. *Tiepolo's Hound* is a book-length poem; some prefer to call it a verse-novel. Thematically, the poem is about painting. It offers a historical account of Impressionism. Moreover, it is published with a twenty-six full-colour reproductions of Derek Walcott's paintings (watercolour and oil paintings). Structurally, the poem fuses two painters' stories in a corresponding parallel, not synchronous simultaneity, though, as the two painters are separated by a century: Camille Pissarro, born in 1830; Derek Walcott, in 1930. The poem retraces the artistic career of St. Thomas-born painter Camille Pissarro and concomitantly recounts that of St. Lucia-born poet and unfulfilled painter Derek Walcott disguised as the poem's narrator persona. Hence, *Tiepolo's Hound* is both a biography and an autobiography. The formal combination of verse and paintings reflects a desire, on the side of Walcott, to portray the seen world more than verbally. In addition, this combination asserts the difference between Pissarro's embrace, perusal, realization, and expression of his artistic longings in the 'sublime' landscape of metropolitan France, symbolic of Empire, and Walcott's which have recourse to the fertile and virgin (indeed, fertile because virgin) scenery of 'ordinary' St. Lucia. In other words, it is the difference between Walcott who pays tribute to the native land of his childhood and Pissarro's reverence of Empire. The presentation offers yet another reading of this combination: The artistic career, both in written literature and visual culture, is subject to the same politics of centre/periphery and dominating/dominated. More specifically, this issue is to be addressed in relation to Walcott's aesthetics the core concept of which is Adamic "naming" as the first step towards establishing a native art free of the assumptions of the hegemonic metropolitan canons and their compulsions.

Barbora Kašpárková

Why Iris Murdoch Still Matters?

This paper focuses on Anglo-Irish philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch and discusses the canonicity of her literary works. The aim of this presentation is to explore whether Murdoch fulfils the parameters of Harold Bloom's rigid rules in his *The Western Canon* (1994). The first part of the presentation will look at Bloom's ideas on Canon and canonicity: first, the centrality of Shakespeare; secondly, the polemics with what he calls the 'School of Resentment' (sociology, feminists, Marxists, etc.); thirdly, the difficulties for new writers to become canonical (even suggesting, that there are not new "real" good writers).

The second part of my presentation will turn its attention to Iris Murdoch's current process of recognition and "canonization" (ranging today from critical acclaim to more negative views of her novels).

Patrik Míša

The Canonical Potential of A.S. Byatt's *Possession*

The presentation focuses on the novel *Possession: A Romance* by the British author A.S. Byatt. The aim of the presentation is to highlight the possible canonical features of the novel, and to discuss the novel's potential to become a canonical text.

Petra Slavíčková

Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, Friedrich Nietzsche and Tragedy

In my presentation, I will argue that one aspect of canonical works is its "dissonance." Though Nietzsche uses this term in relation to the Dionisian and Apollonian in *The Birth of Tragedy*, I am going to use it rather loosely to characterize the gap in the canonical works that we mentioned in the class. For Walter Pater, "perfection. . . is attainable only through a certain combination of opposites" (*Plato and Platonism* n.p.). The question that I wish to pose is how the reading of *Jacob's Room* changes as we try to apply it while interpreting the novel as directly influenced by early works of Nietzsche.

Alexandra Stachurová

Middleton Rediscovered – Thomas Middleton's Comeback to the Canon of Renaissance Drama

In 1938, in the Foreword of *Hengist, King of Kent*, J.Q. Adams expressed dissatisfaction with Thomas Middleton being "of the major dramatists contemporary with Shakespeare [...] the most neglected by modern scholarship" (vii). Although enjoying fame and popularity on the Jacobean stage, after Middleton's death his plays almost disappeared not merely from theatres, but also from the knowledge of scholars and the Renaissance dramatic canon. Only at the end of the 20th century Middleton's plays have started gaining prominence again, an ongoing trend crowned with the publication of *The Collected Works* in 2007, and returned to the canon of Renaissance drama. This paper introduces several theories explaining this matter, such as the fact that Middleton's works were not published en masse until 2007, and that many Middleton's works were ascribed to other authors. But, primarily, this paper claims that Middleton's rediscovery has been elicited by the intrinsic qualities of his works—the open, frank sexuality of the characters, the moral ambiguity of the plays, and intriguing topics—which seem strangely contemporary today.

Pavla Štefanská

Nora Roberts and Canon of Popular Romance

Due to being a relatively new niche in academia, popular romance studies have yet to compose an official academic canon of the genre. However, if such list of book which withstood the test of time and contributed to the development of genre should exist, Nora Roberts would hold an important place there. With one hundred eighty nine bestsellers, Roberts has reigned in the Romancelandia for more than thirty years and is universally acknowledged by popular romance academics and readers alike as one of the giants of the industry. This paper aims to show in detail the important role Roberts has played in shaping the American popular romance.

Robert Švábenský

Literary Value and (Potential) Canonicity in McCarthy's *The Blood Meridian* and *The Road*

For nearly forty years, Cormac McCarthy has been regarded as one of the prominent voices of contemporary American fiction. His novels span the Southern Gothic, the Western, and the post-9/11 apocalypse. Most of his works have won both expert as well as readers's acclaim. Yet two of them seem to have triggered a considerable greater degree of attention and critical discussion, which might be regarded as a prerequisite indicating their potential to be included in the modern literary canon.

In my paper, I aim to discuss McCarthy's *The Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West* (1985) and *The Road* (2006) as these two candidates and to point out which literary values make them stand out of contemporary American fiction. Referring to Rita Felski's theory on aesthetics, Harold Bloom's self-constituted Western Canon and Jack Stillinger's ideas on the editorial influence and contribution to literary works, my paper brings into focus the issues of time-favor relevance, novelty and decadence of both topic and form as major elements of the two books' literary value and (potential) canonicity.

Eva Valentová

The Charm of the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up: Peter Pan and Canonicity

According to John Keith L. Scott, it is the readers who make works canonical, not any inherent quality within the works themselves. Nevertheless, there must be something in these works that makes them so appealing. The aim of this paper is to present what constitutes this "something" in the story of Peter Pan. Apart from the obvious charm of a character that remains forever young and manages to avoid responsibilities connected with adulthood, the paper explores other reasons for the enduring appeal of Peter Pan, such as its ambiguous and hybrid character. Indeed, just like its protagonist, both the story and its narrator are a betwixt-and-between, disrupting the boundaries between the modes of drama and novel, between the audience/readership and the author, and between the literature for adults and for children. Another reason for the continuing popularity of Peter Pan is the fact that the story has become a modern myth, to which Barrie actively contributed it two ways: first, by mystifying its authorship and, second, by his initial resistance to the idea of setting the story in print. The undying appeal of Peter Pan lies not only in the arguably universal topics the story deals with, but also in

its shape-shifting and hybrid character that makes it truly original and strange. The proof of this appeal can be found not only among the readers, but also among other writers who have produced countless adaptations.

Alžběta Zedníková

Anne Brontë: Elimination by Obscurity

Both Charlotte and Emily Brontë and their respective works, *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, have their set place in the English canon and are among both the most celebrated authors and works of English literature. Their youngest sister, Anne, and her works, *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, however, are neither part of the English canon nor universally acknowledged and loved. Considering the author's obvious talent and the fact that Anne's works, particularly *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, generated even more passionate reactions and discussions than the works of her sisters, one wonders how the youngest Brontë came to be completely forgotten, while her sisters and their works became culturally immortal.

This presentation argues that the youngest Brontë and her works were refused and thrown into obscurity because of the revolutionary mode of thinking they presented: an "uncompromising attack on masculine vice" and "explicit demand for equality" (171). In order to quieten her powerful and very unequivocal social and moral criticism, Anne was systematically degraded, originally by her sister, eventually by the society, to a "pretty, little, slight, feminine" (Miller 172) woman who did not really know what she was doing when she created the two texts. A dangerous thought is easier to dismantle by soothingly and apologetically questioning the author's respectability and skill, as Charlotte did in her famous "Biographical Notice" to the posthumous edition of *Wuthering Heights*, rather than responding to the argument with a proper answer. When the Brontë story was taking shape, because of the threat she presented to 'proper' society, Anne became the very stereotype she tried to fight: a woman who behaves, sees and defines herself through the lens of the patriarchal society she lives in.

Antonín Zita

William S. Burroughs and the Beat Generation: History of Criticism

The Beat Generation authors have gone through different periods of acceptance – from the center of media attention to the literary skid row, from a laughing stock for the academia to accepted and acknowledged writers. The media craze of the fifties that followed the publication of *On the Road* and *Howl*, although essentially leading to a near-fatal downfall of the writers, also romanticized the Beats by further enveloping them into a countercultural aura that remains undoubtedly connected to them even today. William S. Burroughs, however, was in a slightly different situation in the USA and UK than the other writers because he was being mentioned by his peers and the press without actually releasing anything to the public. Subsequently, Burroughs' reputation as a controversial and obscene writer was already present in the mindset of the general public prior to the actual release of *Naked Lunch*, the obscenity charges the novel was charged with upon its release cementing it only further.

The novel was initially either praised for its confessional qualities of a drug addict's personal hell or damned for its obscene language. With the rise of post-structuralism,

however, *Naked Lunch* (and Burroughs' work in general) sparked new interest in the academia that lasts even today. The presentation will discuss the history of Burroughs' popular and academic reception, thus showcasing the most common critical interpretations of Burroughs' work as well as addressing the issue of "how" and "why" is Burroughs being read.