

## Countries, Scholars and Genres in Tribute to Kathleen E. Dubs: An Introduction

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This book has grown out of a collaboration between Catholic University in Ružomberok (Slovakia), Pázmány Péter Catholic University (Budapest, Hungary), and Masaryk University (Brno, Czechia), with the aim of fostering cross-border cooperation among these countries in the field of English Studies. It is centred around the legacy of Kathleen E. Dubs (1944–2011), a distinguished mediaevalist and literary historian who worked at two of the universities, and whose influence is still felt at – and beyond – all three. Our initiative seeks to honour her memory and continue her legacy, particularly as 2024, when the idea of the project came up, marked what would have been her 80th birthday. This volume, therefore, brings together scholars, researchers and students to build and strengthen professional ties and personal bonds: some of us are Kathleen's close colleagues and friends, some still consider her their academic mentor, some have greatly benefited or learnt from her teaching or her research – some simply acknowledge her for her achievements, without having met her.

We aim, therefore, to commemorate Kathleen through a publication that highlights her academic legacy and facilitates the dissemination of recent scholarly achievements in her fields of interest. A unique aspect of our project, we believe, is its dual focus on scholarly research and the personal-emotional connections within academia, inspired by Kathleen's impactful career. Her work at universities in two Visegrad countries (Hungary and Slovakia) and her personal connections in a third (Czechia) provide a foundation for this initiative, which seeks to unite a community of researchers who share both professional interests and a personal appreciation for her contributions.

Kathleen E. Dubs was a university professor, mediaevalist and literary historian. She was born an American, but after the first half of her academic career she moved to Eger, Hungary, and worked at Pázmány Péter Catholic University and Catholic University in Ružomberok until her death in 2011. This book is compiled from papers produced over 2024 and 2025, contributing to Kathleen's scholarly fields: literary studies, mediaeval literature (both Old and Middle English), Chaucer, mediaeval philosophy (especially Boethius), early American literature (especially Benjamin Franklin), Frederick Douglass, the works and legacy of J. R. R. Tolkien, and teaching writing. With this, we aim to pay tribute to her achievements and exceptional personality, and promote her legacy as someone whose academic activity crossed borders in several senses of the word.

The book opens with László Munteán's touching imaginary letter to Kathleen, in which he speaks, in a deeply personal tone, about how Kathleen's eccentric but at the same time rigorously professional attitude left its mark on his formative years. Though the letter, as well as the personal memories in it, come from László, it stands at the outset of our book as a representative of the sentiments and recollections of many of us, and as such, it lays the foundation for the rest of the volume.

The academic content of the book starts with the first section entitled "The Tolkienesque and Fantasy" since an important part of Kathleen's scholarship and professional interest is tied to the work of J. R. R. Tolkien and the genre of fantasy in general, and the papers in this section approach these topics from many different perspectives. Janka Kaščáková discusses topics very close to the heart of both, Kathleen Dubs and Tolkien: academia and the Catholic Church. She demonstrates how Tolkien's deep knowledge of classical and mediaeval philosophy is reflected in the character of Saruman who, as she argues, embodies the dark and corrupt side of teaching and the priesthood. Then, Ildikó Limpár offers an analysis of a contemporary Hungarian "religious science fiction" series by Raana Raas (Etelka Görgey), *Csodaidők* [Miracle Times] (2006–2010) and *Időcsodák* [Time Miracles] (2012–2022). Apart from offering an insight into the workings of Raas's invented world, she traces and examines the many parallels between these two tetralogies and Tolkien's oeuvre, whether on the religious, linguistic or world-building levels. Károly Pintér's contribution deals with the genres of fantasy and science fiction in general; more specifically, he examines the varieties of "mindscape", fictional phenomena present in fantastic fiction, showing their great and ever-growing variety. He maintains that rather than rejecting them as escapist or irrelevant, they should be perceived as a form of valuable insight into the workings of the human mind, society and the concerns of both. The final paper in this section is Laura Škrobánková's discussion of the stages of development of H. P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos from its original literary form into a multi-author, multi-genre and multi-media phenomenon. The author demonstrates that even though it had more humble origins than other mythoi, Lovecraft's philosophy of cosmicism, his Pantheon and its different elements inspired the works of a wide range of contemporary authors and intellectuals.

The next section, "Across Genres and Ages", touches upon several other areas that lay within Kathleen's sphere of interest and her influence on her students, such as various mediaeval and later historical themes. Yet the most significant aspect of this section is that it goes beyond these themes and develops them in a perspective that crosses genres and centuries. In this way, this section pays tribute to Kathleen as a teacher and guide, because established and rising scholars alike apply her varied views to their own areas of research.

Beatrix Balogh enters into a direct conversation with Kathleen's own paper on Benjamin Franklin's satires, published in the late 18th century. Balogh's analysis of Franklin's texts shows that he understood well "both his audience and the power of media", being the commanding and forceful public voice of his times. Then, in her comparison of literary fashion styles spanning six hundred years, Katarína Labudová finds fascinating parallels in characters' clothes in *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Handmaid's Tale*. While Chaucer's characters' outfits express their social status, Atwood evocatively uses a range of styles and colours as "a weapon of political control". Nora Júlia Levická approaches Atwood's prose from yet another angle, one that underscores a feminist approach to literary criticism, which goes hand in hand with the author in question. Levická performs a reading of *The Penelopiad*, Atwood's re-writing of *The Odyssey*, framed in trauma theory with a particular focus on the issue of motherhood as an internalized wound. Nóra Séllei pays her tribute to Kathleen by studying mediaeval female figures in books by the contemporary biographer Victoria MacKenzie. She highlights MacKenzie's ability to bring to life Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, who become familiar despite remaining in the "foreign country" of the past. In the last chapter in the section, Ianina Volkova ventures into contemporary fantasy in an effort to connect the genre's defining features with some of the most innovative works of the celebrated contemporary author Neil Gaiman. While finding several common features with classic representatives of the genre such as Lovecraft, she reaches beyond the genre of literary fantasy in her study of graphic novel *The Sandman* and a collaborative work, *Good Omens*, showing how in these works dreams function as liminal, ritualistic spaces.

The final section of this volume speaks about a totally different aspect of English Studies, paying tribute to a special side of the multifaceted academic that Kathleen was. It is titled "Language in Transition and Transfer" as it highlights the ways in which Kathleen the scholar and Kathleen the teacher found interest in and contributed to linguistic matters. Being a mediaevalist, Kathleen had a thorough grasp of Old and Middle English – the periods in the early history of the language that the contribution by Katalin Balogné Bérces and Shanti Ulfsbjorninn examines. They explain, with support from both empirical and theoretical perspectives, that the contradictory accounts of the sound change called *h*-dropping actually reflect a familiar property of linguistic structure, expected to especially characterize patterns in transition and flux. Another form of transition and transfer for a language happens via translation: Dóra Pődör's paper addresses various facets of this process in a very special and intriguing field, the adaptation of personal names. It does this, in perfect accord with Kathleen's enthusiasm, through the Irish Gaelic translation of Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, pointing out the difficul-

ties translators face in their attempt to convey the original connotations in such a manner that the shapes of the words fit the phonological and grammatical peculiarities of the target language. Finally, with the intention of honouring Kathleen's dedication to teaching, and the teaching of writing in particular, Csilla Sárdi discusses in her case study the methodological issues raised by, and students' perceptions of, the process of essay writing skills development in university language classes. She concludes that not only the product of writing but its process, too, needs focussed attention in the form of careful task design, with a realistic and clearly defined purpose and audience, with constant feedback, and with group-focussed and individual guidance both before and after the writing task.

The chapters of the book, as shown above, survey all the major fields of interest of the late Kathleen E. Dubs, through either tangential relevance or direct reference to her and her oeuvre – showing how both her cherished themes and her own work on them live on in current scholarly research. We hope that our initiative will serve as an exemplar of academic collaboration and knowledge sharing across genres, crossing country borders and passing beyond traditional academic boundaries.