

LITERARY CULTS: TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES AND APPROACHES:

SCHEDULE

A workshop at the Institute for Advanced Study, Central European University

June 10, 2016, 10 a.m.

1051 Budapest, Nádor u. 9. / Gellner Room

10.30-10.45 ORGANIZERS' FOREWORD: [Alexandra Urakova](#), [Zsófia Kalavszky](#)

10.45-12.00 PANEL I. CULT STUDIES: METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES.

Moderator – Nadia Al-Bagdadi.

[Péter Dávidházi](#)

HOPES RECOLLECTED IN TRANQUILLITY: THE CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF A LITERARY CULT

[Alexandra Urakova](#)

A LITERARY CULT AND ITS DISCONTENTS: OUTLINING THE FRAMEWORK

Discussion

12.00 – 13.30 – Coffee break and Lunch break

13.30 – 15.00 PANEL II. LITERARY CASES: FROM THE 19TH INTO THE 20TH CENTURY.

Moderator – Orsolya Rákai.

[Stephen Rachman](#)

A CULT OF POE: THE CASE OF BALTIMORE'S MIDNIGHT TOASTERS

The case of Edgar Allan Poe, who has enjoyed varied cult status in the 19th, 20th, and 21st

centuries provides a complex example of how literary and cultic operations can figure and reconfigure oppositional politics, cultural contestation and identity formation. Bearing on 1970s Birmingham School of Cultural Studies that has provided a seminal scaffold for understanding subculture in terms of the politics of style, “lived ideology,” and ongoing contestation between the dominant institutionalized forms of culture, this paper will discuss a contemporary example of a Poe cult that began in the mid-20th century. The ritualized celebration of Poe’s birthday by a mysterious figure visiting his tombstone in Baltimore and placing a half-empty bottle of French cognac and three roses on the site (1949-2010) and Laura Lippman’s *In A Strange City* (2002) which uses this phenomenon as its central plot device. As the interest in this ritual and the secret identity grew beyond Baltimore, media interest in it made it into an annual spectacle, testing the extent to which this cult might be absorbed into mainstream culture, the extent to which this difference might survive. This cult around Poe affords an opportunity to clarify the complex dynamic between the cult and the mainstream that occurs when oppositional dialectics take up long established literary works and figures, especially those such as Poe whose works are already culturally and textually invested in othering.

[Zsófia Kalavszky](#)

“PUSHKIN THE UNDEAD”: PUSHKIN CULT IN THE 20TH CENTURY RUSSIAN LITERATURE (MIKHAIL ZOSHENKO AND MIKHAIL VELLER).

In 20th-century Russia, cults of prominent classics, and first of all the cult of Pushkin, not only effect their interpretative framework but also constitute plot lines of literary works (especially in Sergey Dovlatov, Andrej Bitov, Tatyana Tolstaya, and Mikhail Epstein). This paper will question whether we can consider the body of these works – the so-called *belletricheskaja puskiniana* – as a special area of cult research. In particular, it will focus on two short stories reflecting on two prominent events in the history of the 20th Century Pushkin cult – jubilee celebrations of 1937 and 1999. “During the Pushkin Days” (1937) by a famous Soviet writer Mikhail Zoshcenko and “A Monument to d’Anthès” (1999) by a contemporary Russian author Mikhail Veller will be interpreted as cultic meta-texts. The characters of both stories representing different social groups are trying to define their attitude to Pushkin in relation to his official cult informed and imposed by current ideology. Analyzing the stories’ narrative

strategies and the elements of their poetics (including humor, irony and satire), the paper will demonstrate how literary cults participate in creating, maintaining, and redefining a group identity; it will emphasize the community-generating power of cults and reflect on the role they played in identifying with historical past.

[Nadia Al-Bagdadi](#)

AN INTERVENTION: WHEN CULTURE BECOMES CULT – REMARKS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE ARAB *NAHDA* (RENAISSANCE) MOVEMENT

In this brief intervention, observations will be given from the field of modern Arabic literature in the 19th century: with the critique of classical tradition a re-definition of the classical Arabic heritage emerged and a new cult of literature as only space of and for truth, authenticity, and proximity to life.

Discussion

15.00-15.30 – Coffee Break

15.30-17.00 PANEL III. BETWEEN LITERATURE AND POLITICS, THE POLITICS OF LITERARY CULTS.

Moderator – Stephen Rachman.

[Louise Vasvári](#)

THE CULTIC AFTERLIVES OF ANNE FRANK

Although, or precisely because, Anne Frank's life represents but a tiny detail of the complex reality of the Holocaust, in contemporary memory culture she has become a cultural icon for "the six million," itself a Holocaust icon. My aim is to examine how her diary evolved in the fifties from a European document of World War II into an Americanized, commercialized and universalized appropriation of the Holocaust, which was then exported back to Europe. The subsequent international cultic status of Anne Frank continues with an unabated amount of cultural production in many genres, as well as its inclusion in the curriculum in schools around the world. To maintain Anne Frank's cultic status as archetypal innocent victim it has been necessary to mute reference to the gendered and sexual voice of her writing, which raises the

question of what degree of responsibility do representations of the Holocaust and of its individual victims have towards the past as well as the present

Hans-Jörg Sigwart

AN INTERVENTION: SPEAKING FROM THE MARGINS: HANNAH ARENDT ON THE PARIAH AS A LITERARY CHARACTER TYPE

In her reflections on the situation and historical development of Jewish communities in Europe during the 19th and 20th century, the political theorist Hannah Arendt examined the works of Jewish writers as representative articulations of broader social constellations – as viewed from the peculiar, socially marginalized position of the “Pariah”. In my brief intervention I will suggest, by drawing from Arendt’s interpretation, to perceive “cult status” as a peculiar position of an author’s work within a broader social and political constellation.

Orsolya Rákai

LITERARY CULTS, POLITICAL CULTS, AND SOCIAL SYSTEMS: RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

Cult research has been an innovative way of disciplinary self-reflection in the Hungarian literary studies since the beginning of the 1990s. Not only has it helped to free academic language from the mid-twentieth century Marxist jargon, it has also made Hungarian scholars aware of the systematic non-literary "interventions" into the field of literary studies. The study of cultic phenomena paved the way for critical theories representative of the so-called cultural turn into Hungarian academia while at the same time adding a specific Central-European flavor to these theories. It has become clear that cults perform important and perhaps uneliminable functions within the modern autonomous literary system. Cults can be seen as a special form of communication between various functionally differentiated social systems - for example, cultic phenomena can facilitate the connection between literature and economy and can be regarded as literature’s inner "marketing products" of a kind. These phenomena are becoming more and more articulated due to the post-millennium media turn, so it would be interesting to extend the cult research toward these new directions.

Discussion