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A PREFACE TO THE PAPERS

In September 2011, the Institute of English Studies, the Center for Hermeneutical Research at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary, together with the Hungarian Bible Society, hosted the international conference *The King James Bible (1611–2011) – Prehistory and Afterlife*. The four hundredth anniversary of the King James Bible (KJB), a major influence in shaping the literature and culture of the English-speaking world, was indeed an extraordinary public event in 2011. Queen Elizabeth II praised its language in an address to the nation; Prince William chose its text for his wedding liturgy; rare book collections of the largest libraries proudly exhibited their unique and precious copies; and scholarly conferences were organized throughout the United Kingdom, the United States, and several other countries. Linguists have demonstrated how the proverbial nature of the KJB has filtered into the English language. Here are some well-known examples: *east of Eden* (Gen. 4:16); *how the mighty are fallen* (2 Sam. 1:19); *to everything there is a season* (Eccl. 3:1); *Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven* (Matt. 6:20); *turned the world upside down* (Acts 17:56); *A thorn in the flesh* (2 Cor. 12:7). These expressions all first appeared in the KJB. There are also several expressions that had already been used in the five earlier translations,¹ but it was due to the widespread popularity of the KJB that they found their way into the natural speech of everyday English people: *apple of his eye* (Deut. 32:10); *salt of the earth* (Matt. 5:13); *mote... in thine own eye* (Mat. 7:3); *in the twinkling of an eye* (1 Cor. 15:52) and so on.²

While it is obvious that the KJB has been respected both as the inspired word of God in English and as a cultural icon of the English speaking world, why then, we may ask, is an international conference devoted to this topic in Hungary, linguistically and culturally so remote from the English-speaking world? The answer is twofold. First, our university, founded after the collapse of communism in 1992, was named after the Calvinist pastor Gáspár Károli (ca.

¹ Wycliffe (1382–4); Tyndale (1526, and 1530–1); 1534 Geneva (1560); Bishops (1568); Douai-Rheims (1582 and 1609–10).

² See David Crystal: *Begat. The King James Bible and the English Language*. Oxford: OUP, 2010, 263–300.

1529–1591), whose name is associated with the publication of the first complete Bible in Hungarian (1590). The Károli Bible (KB) was printed in the small village of Vizsoly in the Eastern part of the country and, is therefore sometimes also called the "Vizsolyi Bible." With some exaggeration, we may say that the KB has played a similarly iconic role for Hungarians as the KJB has for the British. Although the KB was the linguistic medium of a minority culture, it has also played a tremendous role in the making of Hungarian identity through the language and the literature it inspired. Several of the greatest Hungarian poets from the 17th century up to the present day (Dániel Berzsenyi, Sándor Petőfi, János Arany, Imre Madách, Endre Ady) were Protestants (mainly Calvinists, but some of them Lutherans) and thus their poetic language frequently carries the cadences and imagery of the KB, just as the poetry of John Milton, John Bunyan, William Blake, S. T. Coleridge, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oscar Wilde, R. S. Thomas is deeply immersed in the text of the KJB. Another parallel between the two Bibles is the movements of emerging and re-emerging conservative support for "the KJB only", or "Authorised Version", a movement ironically called "AVolatry", just as there are calls for the exclusive use of the KB against any new translations - a phenomenon that may be likewise called "KBolatry".

The other reason for the conference is related to the first. "English Studies" have established themselves in the curriculum of Hungarian universities for over a hundred years, in the early 20th century. The first English Departments began to flourish between the World Wars, but with the advent of communism, English Studies began to be considered as suspicious because of their allegedly implicit imperialistic ideology. Since the 1960s, they were smuggled back into the curriculum to the extent of becoming perhaps the most popular subject within the Faculties of Humanities by the time of the radical political changes in 1989. While Marxist ideology dominated the official academic discourse in the humanities, including English Studies, courageous and cunning professors and lecturers tacitly challenged the foundations of the old system by introducing the insights of text-oriented New Criticism, and structuralism; ideology-free approaches to teaching or writing about English and American. These scholars managed to read and interpret even premodern literature in terms of modernity, or, of the absurd. Shakespeare, among others, was hailed as "our contemporary" after the thought-provoking book of Jan Kott. Within this agenda, one could easily see his or her own mirror in a Shakespeare play, or in a tale of Geoffrey Chaucer.

However, the idea that "Shakespeare might be our contemporary, but we are not *his* contemporaries," a witty remark of a contemporary scholar, has promoted the new recognition that the alterity, or difference, of premodern

culture – including medieval and Renaissance literature – should be acknowledged. This perception is definitely a recent development that has emerged as a new paradigm only with the advent of the 21st century. True, the movement in Hungary had already begun as early as the mid 1980s when the works of Northrop Frye, Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, and others were discovered and used by scholars of English literature at Hungarian universities. The critical and scholarly contribution of these North American intellectuals had a strong impact upon studying early modern English literature through a rediscovered history-oriented perspective, sometimes called the "religious turn" in early modern studies. John N. King, David Scott Kastan, Brian Cummings, and others have explored the vast material concerning the Bible-centered literary culture of the English Reformation.

In the Hungarian academia, the new interest in religion, or the religious context of literature, is also explained as a counter-effect of the formerly exclusive Marxist attempt to erase religion from even cultural memory. As early as 1995, only three years after their foundation, the English Departments of the two church-related universities, Pázmány Péter Catholic University and Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church, decided to organize an international conference on "Teaching the 'Bible and Literature' at Universities." The proceedings of the conference were published as *The Bible in Literature and Literature in the Bible* (Budapest: Pano Verlag Zürich and Center for Hermeneutics, 1998).

The idea of organizing the conference on the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible was meant to continue this initiative that began in the mid 1990s. It goes without saying that in the years between this above-mentioned publication and the present volume, the Department (now Institute) of English of Károli Gáspár University has continued to organize similar conferences. For example, in 2007, our university hosted the first conference on Jonathan Edwards in Europe (its papers were published in 2009 by Oxford University Press as *Understanding Jonathan Edwards*). The proceedings of the conference on the 400th anniversary of Milton's birth were published by our university as *Milton Through the Centuries*. The centenary of Northrop Frye's birth was also celebrated with an international conference, its proceedings published by our university as *Northrop Frye 100 – A Danubian Perspective*.

In 2011, we focused on the King James Bible. Scholars, both young and old, local and visitors, came together to share and discuss their insights or discoveries. We issued a call for papers on both the "prehistory" and the "afterlife" of the King James Bible. In this volume, we are offering a selection of half a dozen of

papers in each section. Due to various difficulties, mostly financial, the editing of the present volume took longer than we expected.

The relevance of these papers, however, remains valid even almost five years after their original delivery. It was an exciting challenge in 2011 to organize a conference on the KJB at Károli, an institution that itself is a living example of the KB's afterlife. In 2016, it is an equally exciting moment to launch this modest volume for a broader audience. The KJB project has, in the meantime, been inculturated into its receptive Hungarian context: over the past few years, KJB has come to mean "Károli's (King) James Bible (Conference)." The KJB, thus contextualized, now found a place in Hungarian English Studies.

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PART I
THE KING JAMES BIBLE
