

Az angol irodalom története. II: A kora újkor irodalma az 1480-as évektől az 1640-es évekig
[The history of English literature. The literature of the early modern period from the 1480s to the 1640s], edited by Attila Atilla Kiss and Endre György Szőnyi, Kijárat, Budapest, 2020.

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Volume 2 of the *History of English Literature* is a remarkable collection of essays edited by Attila Atilla Kiss and Endre György Szőnyi, offering a profound exploration of early modern English literature and culture, while also showcasing the intellectual prowess of an established yet continuously rising generation of Hungarian scholars. The book, which might aptly be titled *The Hungarian History and Research of Early Modern English Literature*, represents a significant contribution to Hungarian scholarship. It presents an updated and nuanced understanding of what Hungarian lay readers typically refer to as the English Renaissance. The volume not only introduces relevant new technical terms, such as “early modern” to a broader audience but also interrogates traditional narratives, and integrates the most recent advancements in cultural and critical studies. The authors are comfortable with describing the research tendencies in the past decades, as many of the most recent advancements are actually tied to the very authors of the volume. Nevertheless, this is, perhaps too shyly, never explicitly stated. I have known almost all of the authors individually and the educational, intellectual and cultural background they come from, so I knew what to expect in terms of quality and depth of research, as well as the ease of clear-minded writing that caters for lay readers from secondary and university students to fellow scholars. What amazed me though in reading the volume was how diverse and relevant this generation’s research is in early modern English literature and, as the Introduction phrases, in “the production of literature” (10).

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Although the title of the volume suggests a traditional chronological approach, the editors have chosen a more innovative structure. The volume is divided into three sections: I. “Társadalom és műveltség” [Society and culture], II. “Műfajok és médiumok” [Genres and media], and III. “A reneszánsz újragombolva: a hagyományozás médiumai” [Renaissance rebuttioned: the media of dissemination], and this organization provides three distinct perspectives on the early modern period, offering multiple entry points for the reader. This structure is intentionally designed to accommodate the diverse interests of readers and the likelihood that many will approach the text in a non-linear fashion. By doing so, the editors present a multifaceted, culture-, media-, and adaptation-conscious view of the English Renaissance.

The first section, “Society and Culture”, opens with an insightful preface discussing the methodologies and objectives of the collection. The essays here focus on the social, religious, and cultural transformations, layers of popular culture, and knowledge transfers of the period, with special attention to the birth of literary subjectivity and female authors (with insightful contributions by Endre György Szőnyi, Anikó Oroszlán, and Attila Atilla Kiss). Each (sub)chapter is meticulously curated. The papers feature each contributor’s strengths and research profile, as illustrated by Endre György Szőnyi’s “Változó reneszánszképek a kulturális fordulat után” [Changing perceptions of the Renaissance after the cultural turn], Tibor Fabiny’s “A reformáció kezdeteitől a puritán forradalomig” [From the early stages of Reformation to the Puritan revolution] exploring the religious and humanistic dynamics of the age, Kinga Földváry’s “A Tudor-kori krónikák” [Tudor chronicles], which delves into the formation of national identity and history, or Ágnes Matuska’s “Udvari és populáris kultúra a kora újkori Angliában” [Courtly and popular culture in early modern England] and Natália Pikli’s “A populáris kultúra változatai” [Varieties of popular culture], and Erzsébet Stróbl’s “A Tudor udvari kultúra és az Erzsébet-kultusz” [Tudor court culture and the cult of Elizabeth]. The section devotes an entire subsection of four insightful papers to the mediality of Renaissance culture, which is particularly justified by András Kiséry’s chapter that explores the media of the word (“A szó médiumai. Oralitás, kéziratosság, könyvnyomtatás” [Media of the word: orality, manuscripts, printing]).

The section “Genres and Media” is an extensive exploration of the literary forms – Poetry, Narrative, and Drama and Theatre – and their evolution during the early modern period. While this section showcases contributions from the youngest generation of scholars (Bence Levente Bodó, Ágnes Bonác, Dávid Marno), the majority of it is authored by internationally established academics such as Zsolt Almási, Annamária

Hódosy, Csaba Maczelka, Zoltán Márkus, Miklós Péti, and Péter Benedek Tóta, alongside the authors mentioned in section 1. The section's strengths are manifold: it delves deeply into the religious and philosophical peripheries of literature, examines rarely treated genres (e.g., country house or estate poems) besides the dominant/popular ones, and highlights authors often overlooked by other volumes with a similar target audience, such as Thomas Deloney and John Skelton. The drama and theatre subsection is particularly noteworthy. It covers a wide spectrum of spectacles (not just written drama) from medieval liturgical plays to the sophisticated tragedies of the Tudor and Stuart eras, emphasising the intricate connections between societal changes and theatrical expressions. It also underscores the non-linear/multi-thread nature of changes, including the impact of Puritanism, and the evolution of stagecraft.

The final section recontextualizes the Renaissance in modern scholarship and deals with the media of handing down traditions and includes essays on the digital humanities and the impact of internet research on Shakespeare studies. The influence of Shakespeare in film and popular culture is analysed, underscoring the de-canonization and democratization of his works. This section effectively bridges the historical period with contemporary cultural studies, emphasising the ongoing relevance and reinterpretation of Renaissance texts. As an important gesture, Kállay's essay on the Shakespeare machine addressed to the volume's assumed heterogeneous readership closes the collection.

To sum up, volume 2 of *The History of English Literature* is a standout contribution to Renaissance studies distinguished by its ambitious scope, innovative form, and rich content. It serves as a testament to the vibrant scholarly activity in Hungary by its engagement with global academic discourses and its exemplary accessibility to a broad audience. A unique feature across all volumes of this series is the practical and stimulating marginalia, which reference to other chapters, statements, and approaches in all the volumes of the series. This non-digital technique of note-taking on the margin is both visual and conceptual, reminiscent of the typography in Antal Szerb's revered *History of World Literature* (1936). Like hyperlinks, these marginal notes inspire further reading and aid in digesting the material. Through these references, the essential interconnectedness of the chapters and their authors becomes strikingly evident, reinforcing the ideal envisioned by the doyen of Hungarian English Studies, Péter Dávidházi: Hungarian scholars of English Studies together form a powerfully motivating community, one that thrives on mutual support and collaboration rather than competition or destructive rivalry, allowing them to continue teaching, writing, and ultimately, to "play on".