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**FILOVER: PUBLIC LECTURES AT THE FACULTY
OF ARTS OF MASARYK UNIVERSITY IN BRNO**

Jiří Lukl, Ivona Vrzalová and Miroslav Vrzal

IN the spring and autumn of 2019, two series of lectures for public organized at the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University in Brno took place. The series had been prepared as part of the FILOVER project, the abbreviation standing for “*Filozofická veřejnosti*” (The Arts Faculty for the Public), whose main aim is to present and popularize the research that is being done at the Faculty of Arts.

The project was originally inspired by CEREHIS (“Centrum pre religionistiku a historické štúdiá,” Center for Religious and Historical Studies; based in Košice, Slovakia), which attempts to do the same, although it is not directly connected to any specific institution of higher education, and it exclusively focuses on historical and religious studies. The FILOVER project itself began to take shape in the early autumn of 2018, when three doctoral students of the Faculty of Arts came together with a shared vision of popularizing the Faculty, its departments, studies, and the humanities and social sciences in general, as they felt that these areas were rather underappreciated amongst the general public. They were also driven by their affection for the Faculty and the humanities, which, in a way, is reflected in the name of the project. “Filover” may also be read as “Fi-lover” – the lover of philosophy (taken to its extreme, this method would render “the lover of the love of knowledge”). The students behind the project are Miroslav Vrzal, who has since completed his studies and earned his Ph.D. in the study of religions, Ivona Vrzalová, née Schöfrová, a doctoral student of English literature, and Jiří Lukl, a doctoral student of English linguistics.

FILOVER has garnered the continuous support of the Faculty of Arts and especially of the Faculty library, who lent the FILOVER team its Reading room (Čítárna) in building D for the lectures, and of the two home departments of the team, The Department of English and American Studies and the Department for the Study of Religions.

As it was not certain how wide a support the project would receive from the various departments of the Faculty of Arts, the team decided that the series scheduled for spring 2019, in sense and fact the pilot series, would draw from the well of academia of the two parent departments, and so they came up with the theme “Anglisticko-religionistické jaro 2019” (The Spring of Anglicist and Religious Studies

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2019). There were eight lectures in total, four from the Department of English and American Studies and four from the Department for the Study of Religions. The lectures took place by-weekly, on Tuesdays at 6 p.m. and ran from late February to early June. The attendance varied from 30 to 70 people, averaging around 50 people a lecture.



Doctor Jan Beneš and his audience during his lecture “USA za mřížemi” (The United States behind Bars) (Photograph: Eva Růžicková)

The lectures began with Jan Beneš’s talk titled “USA za mřížemi” (The United States behind Bars¹) on 26th February. Doctor Beneš talked about the issues of stringent American criminal laws contributing to an overpopulation in US penal facilities, which are increasingly “industrialized” and privately owned. In essence, prisons have become businesses where more prisoners mean more money. The series

¹ All the lectures were given in Czech. We provide the English translations of the titles for ease of comprehension.

continued with Jan Reichstätter's "Křesťanská Evropa? Christianizace a asimilace pohanských elementů v prostoru severně od Alp" (Christian Europe? Christianization and the Assimilation of Pagan Elements North of the Alps) on 12th March, which focused on the history of contact, peaceful or otherwise, between Christianity and the Pagan religions during the times of the late Roman Empire and in the centuries following its fall. In the third lecture which took place on 26th March and which was titled "b jako brno aneb rozprávky v ulicích města Brna" (b as brno or tales in the streets of the city of Brno), Jana Pelclová analyzed the discourse of various tags and graffiti one can find in the streets of Brno. Another lecture followed on 9th April. Aleš Chalupa presented a novel approach to the study of the process of Christianization in and of the Roman Empire. According to Chalupa, this process was to a certain degree influenced by such macro-historical factors as plagues, famine and climate change. The lecture was titled "Jak Evropa ke křesťanství přišla: Nový pohled na okolnosti christianizace Římské říše" (How Christianity Came to Europe: A New View on the Circumstances of the Christianization of the Roman Empire). On 23rd April followed another Anglicist lecture, this time on the Great Bard and his appearance as a character in films and TV shows. The lecture was given by Filip Krajník and was titled "William Shakespeare jako filmová a televizní postava" (William Shakespeare as a Film and TV Character). František Novotný delivered the next lecture titled "Kacíři a libertini v Brně? Kauza Jana a Alberta a její context" (Heretics and Libertines in Brno? The Case of Jan and Albert and its Context) on 7th May. The lecture focused on mid-fourteenth century situation in Central Europe and especially in Brno concerning various religious sects and their persecution.

The Anglo-Americanist part of the series concluded with a lecture by Tomáš Pospíšil given on 21st May and titled "Filmy Atoma Egoyana: Hledání identity v čase kulturních konfliktů a nových médií" (The Films of Atom Egoyan: The Searching for Identity at the Time of Conflict of Cultures and New Media). The lecture presented some of the filmography of this Canadian director and then focused on the film *Adoration*, interpreting the film's most important themes and motives. The entire spring series concluded on 4th June with a lecture by one of the organizers, Miroslav Vrzal. The lecture was titled "Metal a satanismus" (Metal and Satanism) and presented some of the more (but also less) known connections between various satanic religious groups and beliefs and the musical genre which is well known for its tendencies towards extreme expression through music but also through other means.

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The FILOVER Team (from left to right: Jiří Lukl, Miroslav Vrzal and Ivona Vrzalová) and associate professor Tomáš Pospíšil (Photograph: Veronika Konečná)

Seeing that the lectures in the first series proved to be of interest to the audience, as some of them reached or even breached the capacity of the Reading room, the FILOVER team began to plan and prepare the next series for autumn 2019. It was decided that more departments should be involved in it; however, given that FILOVER continued to receive generous support from the Department of English and American Studies and the Department for the Study of Religions, lectures by academics from these two departments would still form the bulk of the autumn series. The lectures still attracted considerable attention and averaged between 30 and 35 people in the audience. This time, the lectures took place on selected Wednesdays at 5:30 pm.

The semester was opened by Dominika Kováčová on 25th September with a lecture titled “#influencer: Celebrity sociálních médií a jejich jazykový projev” (#influencer: Social Media Celebrities and Their Linguistic Expression). The lecture was based on research Kováčová had done for her dissertation thesis and examined the world of social media, specifically of influencers and the language that they use to effectively establish themselves, garner support from a large number of users and maintain that support over time. She was followed by the historian Lukáš Farsora and his lecture, which took place on 9th October and which was the presentation

of a book that he co-authored titled “Mýty a tradice středoevropské univerzitní kultury” (The Myths and Traditions of Central-European University Culture). The book was published in 2019 as a contribution to Masaryk University’s centenary celebrations. The publication mainly focuses on non-metropolitan universities. The following lecture presented the world of contemporary Russian literature. With the title “Současná ruská literatura pohledem českého překladu” (Contemporary Russian Literature Seen through the Lens of Czech Translation), the lecture, delivered by Josef Šaur on 23rd October, asked the questions: which titles from Russian literature have been translated into Czech in the last twenty years and what does it say about contemporary Czech perception of Russian literature? What can contemporary Russian literature tell us about the state of Russian society? Is contemporary Russian literature worth reading at all?



Professor Lukáš Fasora during his lecture “Mýty a tradice středoevropské univerzitní kultury” (The Myths and Traditions of Central-European University Culture) (Photograph: Kristýna Exnerová)

Marek Vlha and his lecture “Bohemians aneb Češi, Cikáni, bohémové. Příběh jednoho pojmu a zrození obrazu českého etnika v USA” (‘Bohemians’ or Czechs, Gypsies, Bohemians. The Story of One Name and the Birth of the Image of the Czech Ethnic Group in USA) given on 6th November talked about a topic that might be

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considered to lie on the boundary between Anglicist and Historical studies – the formation of Czech enclaves in the United States and their perception by general American society. Martin Lang delivered the first religious studies talk of Autumn on 13th November. His “Evoluční a kognitivní studium rituálu aneb jak zkoumat náboženství v laboratoři” (Evolutionary and Cognitive Study of Ritual or How to Investigate Religion in a Lab) presented cutting edge research of ritualistic behavior leading to the formation of cohesive religious groups. The cognitive research utilized various hi-tech instruments typically employed by neuropsychological sciences. The next lecture was given by Jiří Rambousek on 27th November. It was titled “Carrollova Alenka: kraj divů nejen pro děti” (Carroll’s Alice: The Land of Wonders Not Only for Children). In the lecture, doctor Rambousek dealt with the various issues of translating *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, including the many neologisms that Carroll had used, as well as hidden meanings for adult readers.

The last lecture of the series was given by Tomáš Hampejs on 4th December, who talked about the advantage of using digital models for the investigation of religions, in this case specifically ancient religions of the Mediterranean. The lecture was titled “Věštění z digitálních modelů: výlety do formálních imaginací studia starověkých náboženství” (Divination from Digital Models: Excursions into Formal Imaginations of the Study of Ancient Religions).

After another successful series, naturally, the FILOVER team began to plan a third series for the spring of 2020, and one lecture, shared by Tomáš Kačer with a presentation of his monograph *Dvoustletá pustina: Dějiny starší americké dramatiky* (A Two-Hundred-Year Wasteland: The History of Older American Drama), and Šárka Havlíčková Kysová with a presentation of her monograph *Režisér jako koncept: Tvorba operního režiséra Miloše Wasserbauera v padesátých a šedesátých letech 20. Století* (Director as a Concept: The Work of Opera Director Miloš Wasserbauer in 1950s and 1960s), did in fact take place on 26th February. However, then the global pandemic of COVID-19 stifled social, cultural and academic life around the Globe, ended the series, and put the FILOVER project temporarily on hold.

The team is now currently hoping for the project to restart soon after this forced prolonged pause. It is certain that this is not going to happen in the spring semester of 2021. However, when it *does restart, new lectures on a broad array of topics will be prepared so that the public might* continue to get acquainted with the various interesting and important research being done at the Faculty of Arts.

The FILOVER team would once again like to thank all parties that participated on the success of the project in any way. Namely, the team greatly appreciates the assistance it received from the Faculty library, the generosity of the Department

of English and American Studies and the Department for the Study of Religions and their heads, associate professor Jana Chamonikolasová and Aleš Chalupa, Ph.D., the good work of the photographers Veronika Konečná (photos from spring 2019) and Kristýna Exnerová (photos from autumn 2019), and above all, all the people who decided that it was worthwhile to spend their evenings learning about literature, film, people, their societies, history and the world.

FILOVER Website:

<https://www.phil.muni.cz/filover>

FILOVER Facebook Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/filoverFFMU>



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