

stimulation pattern for a desired limb movement. Before the stimulation pattern is applied in reality the effect of the stimulation may be studied using the computer model. The model helps to identify movement parameters and biomechanical characteristics like the presented muscle force - muscle length relationship or other intrinsic properties that can not be measured experimentally.

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Researching Literature in Minnesota How Updike's Fiction Meets Life in the Upper Midwest

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Abstract

My paper summarizes my experiences in the United States during my Fulbright grant from a double perspective. I first look at my professional achievements during the nine months spent at the University of Minnesota, delineating the framework of the project I am working on and assessing the progress I made by the end of the grant. Then I write about my personal and non-academic experiences: the way of life I became part of, the places and people I got to know and met, and the manifold ways in which I feel I benefited from this opportunity. My paper is illustrated by photos I took during the grant period.

1. Academic Achievements

I applied for the Fulbright Research Grant in the hope that a nine-month period spent at an American research university would help me progress considerably with my dissertation and give me the chance to gather material for finishing the paper later, possibly after the end of

the grant period. As for my host university, I chose the University of Minnesota for two reasons. Firstly, it has a huge research library (with more than 5 million volumes in total) including an exhaustive collection in humanities and literature. Secondly, my would-be supervisor, Professor Kent Bales,

works there at the English Department. I thought working under the supervision of Prof. Bales would be ideal because he is an authority in the fields I am also working in, he has published and lectured about aspects of the topic I was going to investigate, and, finally, I had known him from a trip he had taken to Debrecen to speak about Hawthorne and Updike a few years before.

The choice proved to be right and very fruitful, and I grew to be grateful to both Prof. Bales and the library for their help with my project—equally crucial, albeit somewhat different in nature. At the beginning of the grant period, my dissertation was in the stage where its framework, principles, and building blocks had been carefully thought over, I had done some research and written a sample chapter, but I needed a lot of time, substantial background literature and a good Adviser-critic to proceed. Luckily, the Fulbright grant provided me with all three.

My project's full title is "The Interaction of Discourses in John Updike's 'Scarlet Letter' Trilogy." The dissertation is based on the assumption, somewhat simplified here for the sake of brevity, that Updike's three novels, which other critics have already named the "Scarlet Letter Trilogy," have more in common than just the theme (the depiction of life in modern America from a certain point of view and employing similar characters) and Hawthorne's classic *The Scarlet Letter* to which all three allude at various points. I state that the three most important themes, raised by Hawthorne

and rewritten, updated and further illuminated by Updike; namely, religion, sexuality, and science, are the manifestations of deeper linkages among the three books than being merely shared topics. I explain these deeper linkages by borrowing Michel Foucault's influential theory on discourses (or modes of argument) and the interdisciplinary criticism that has grown out of Foucault's ideas on language, society, and social interactions. I understand the three main discourses operating in Updike's chosen novels as essential social practices, legitimizing processes of language, and ways of gaining power. The novels show the intricate ways in which different discourses manipulate the characters (as individuals): the battles between characters' views or as conflicting ideas within one character are staged by different discourses which turn out to be the sources of the ultimate antagonism in the texts. In other words, the characters are all created and articulated by certain discourses, and thereby the novels become the loci of clashing methods and modes of argument. Characters and plots can also be analyzed as sum totals of intertwining discourses, whose aim is to validate themselves and to discredit and refute other discourses.

My dissertation first identifies the textual behavior of discursive formations in the novels. The main body of my study is devoted to three central issues: (1) the triad of religious, scientific, and sexual discourses, as constantly clashing and thus weaving a continuously changing relationship among characters. The sites that the characters inhabit in the

texts appear as coherent subtexts created by these discourses. However, much as they strive to, the subtexts cannot be synthesized to form a metanarrative, and emerging meanings are partial and mutually exclusive; (2) at times, traditional discourses are deconstructed when a meta-perspective appears and the narrators show their own texts to be unreliable, manipulative, and paradoxical; (3) finally, Updike's discourses also show remarkable vitality in creating the discursive identities of characters. Thus characters break up, multiply when doubles or antagonistic counter-selves are introduced. Parallel to this process, the notion of seemingly unified subjects is dismantled: the characters are controlled by (and not in full control of) the language(s) that they speak.

This interplay of discourses works against a coherent and unified sense of interpretation and meaning. All three novels, albeit to a different degree, agree in denying the possibility of a synthesis of discourses and in suggesting the fragmentation and relativity of truth claims. Moreover, this shared distrust of language's signifying processes is another link with Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*—a relationship that Updike's novels constantly confirm by casual intertextual references. As a consequence, an interpretative model can be established which shows the texts of the "Scarlet Letter" trilogy as a uniquely and specifically rewritten and extended corpus of Hawthorne's text. When investigated from this critical perspective, *The Scarlet Letter* itself also shows remarkable intertextual openness as a "writerly text," and, thus reread, it yields new meanings

much in line with the postmodernity of Updike's texts.

Besides focusing on Updike's novels, my dissertation will have a chapter on a possible rereading Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. With this chapter I intend to shed a new light on why Updike was able to successfully expand and update Hawthorne's writing for the audience of late-twentieth-century America. I also hope that the dissertation will call attention to some neglected aspects of Hawthorne's original work.

Trying to put this proposal into practice, during the Fulbright grant period my working method was intensive reading and regular consultations with Prof. Bales, who would comment on my ideas about the literature and its significance in light of the dissertation. He was also kind enough to read my writings—sketches, sample chapters and presentations that I prepared during the research period. Moreover, he also offered his help beyond that and we are in contact even today.

I feel that professionally these nine months were very fruitful. I tested, as it were, the results of my research in May 2004, towards the end of my term, by presenting a paper at the Second Annual Cultural Studies Association Conference in Boston, MA. The paper was entitled "Mirage in the Desert: Topography, Identities and Community in John Updike's *S*." It focused on some aspects of discursive identity and their relationship to different concepts of community through the close reading of *S*, an Updike novel which is also part of the "Scarlet Letter Trilogy." Relying on Foucault's theories about

discourse, power, and the self, my essay interpreted this composite view of success versus failure, as related to the discursive construction of new selves, by a tripartite process. I first looked at the place; namely, Sarah's (the protagonist's) interpretation of the desert as an attractive locale. Then I examined the relationship of the individual and the group, as related to the possibility of building up the ideal community in the Arizona desert. Thirdly, I explored the role of language and narrative in constructing and deconstructing the textual image of self and community. Finally, I concluded that in Updike's *S.*, however competent the individual is in manipulating the discourses which present her in public, she, ultimately, is lost in the web of alternative identities which she tries to adopt. The novel therefore places the discourse of the organic, self-created subject and the Utopian community in an ironic context, showing the prospect of creative self-renewal a mirage.

2. Non-Academic Adventures

2.1 The Twin Cities

I spent the nine months of my scholarship at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Although I have been to the United States before, I have never visited the Upper Midwest: My sole experience of this area was a previous layover at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport. Now, when flying to Minneapolis/Saint Paul for the first time on August 28, 2003,

I also changed planes in Chicago, but this familiar experience was soon to give way to something very new.

The Twin Cities proved to be a very attractive locality to live in. This conglomerate of two large and a number of smaller cities has altogether two million inhabitants, so in size it is comparable to Budapest; however, it occupies a much larger area. I lived in Saint Paul, but worked on the Minneapolis campus of the "U of M" (as it is colloquially called); the daily bus ride took about 20 to 40 minutes, depending on the traffic. Though literally twin cities, Minneapolis and Saint Paul have quite a different character: the former looks younger, rougher, more vibrant, more energetic—in short, more Western; the latter, the state capital, has a lot of preserved 19th century architecture, has a more refined atmosphere and more of a peaceful small town feeling about it—it is said that Saint Paul is the westernmost European-style city in the United States. The Twin Cities have a rich literary heritage—I visited the hills which serve as the setting for the opening of Sinclair Lewis's novel *Main Street*, and I went to see Francis Scott Fitzgerald's house in an elegant block of Summit Street in Saint Paul. I also found Fitzgerald's bronze statue in Rice Park, standing at the edge of the sidewalk very casually, almost lost among passersby (he was a short man, it turned out, at least by today's standards).

The university is shared between the twin cities, having a campus in both, and therefore equally influential in some of their neighborhoods. It is a huge research university with a student population that totals 45,000—roughly, the double of

my home university of Debrecen. The campuses are also very large—there are three bus lines, free and run by the University, connecting the two campuses or running around their peripheries. I grew to like both campuses very much, partly for their distinctly different feel: the Minneapolis campus is very much urban, with the downtown skyline clearly visible in the vicinity; it has modern high-rise buildings, busy roads intersecting it, and a lot of students in any time of the day during term time; but it also has the Mississippi river cutting it in half and the nicely preserved riverbank serves as a pleasant backdrop and a peaceful place for a good afternoon's reading. The Saint Paul campus, on the contrary, feels distinctively rural: its historic buildings are scattered amid large meadows, parks and the University-owned pastures used by the departments of agriculture.

Of course, it took me quite a long time to discover all this and more: the Gopher Way—that is, the heated subway system that connects almost all the buildings so you do not have to go outside in the chilly winter weather; the variety of restaurants, pubs, and bars which serve the huge student population; the abundance of cultural programs, free movies, talks, lectures, and even theater performances organized by either the student union or one of the numerous student societies. All these, sometimes, made it unnecessary to leave campus even after I finished my daily work, so I would stay for some evening program and would go home only later in the evening or at night.

I was quite lucky because I managed to find accommodation even before leaving

Hungary. With the assistance of the University's housing services website, I found the ad of a house which seemed to meet my expectations so I applied to be one of the tenants. Thus, upon arrival, I at least had somewhere to go. The house was located in a quiet street in Saint Paul, and by moving into my upstairs bedroom with a window to the street, I became member of a very colorful household community consisting of three Americans, a Chinese, and a Jordanian, all of them students of a sort. Although some of them moved out and others took their places as the year went on, the house provided an interesting mix of international-American atmosphere all along where cultures met and were constantly interacting. Once every week, one of us cooked an international dinner for the others, partly to introduce part of his/her culture in a graspable (tangible? delectable?) way to the others, and partly to provide an opportunity for socializing. This practice proved to be highly successful, not only because of the variety of food we got to experience, but also because it meant a motivation to improve one's cooking skills—as for me, improvement was badly needed and I missed Hungarian food anyway, so, fortunately, this practice forced me to prepare my favorite dishes once in a while. My greatest feat in the culinary arts, perhaps, was the "bejgli" that I baked for Christmas; just as at home, it came in two varieties, one roll with poppy seeds, the other with walnuts. It took me two days to bake it (I had to start all over a few times), but when it was ready it was just like it had to be. It met unanimous success, especially the poppy seed-filled variety.

Perhaps I spent as much time in the library as at home—after all, it was the books that I came for. During the nine months of my scholarship, I got to know the library's five floors, if not all of its 5.5 million books, pretty well. On a typical working day, I would leave home by bus that dropped me off right on campus, a short walk from the library building; I would spend the day by reading, working, and making notes, these long periods interspersed by a quick look at the newspapers and the inevitable lunch break. When the sun set, I usually left for home or for some social event that could include friends, films, or beer, depending on the occasion.

Getting around the Twin Cities is easy—if you have a car, that is. I did not, nor did my housemates, for a while, so I wholly depended on the bus. Fortunately, public transportation in the Twin Cities is relatively well-developed, and my accommodation lay near a good bus line, with buses running even during the night. I got to know the bus system quite well, and, as a university employee, I could buy monthly passes at a discounted price (not nearly as cheaply as students, though) which certainly contributed to my mobility. Besides buses, mass transit includes the Twin Cities' first new tramline (old ones were discontinued back in the 1950's), but, sadly, it was still under construction in 2003-2004 and opened a few months after I left, so I could not try this attractive means of getting around the city. This would have been all well had not a bus drivers' strike occurred in March 2004, which lasted for six weeks and left the whole metropolitan area without public

transportation. The strike forced me, as any other bus-dependent city dweller, to find alternatives. I got my bike out of the shed and rode it despite the still minus temperatures and the chilly wind. Not that I do not like cycling: in fact, one of the first things I bought upon my arrival in town was a used, but well-kept bicycle. During the subsequent months, I learned that the Twin Cities are an ideal place to cycle in: the terrain is relatively flat, the streets are wide, bike lanes and paths are abundant, and biking is very popular among residents, especially students. Besides, one can always find attractive, green city parks or lakes to stop by. (The Twin Cities have about a dozen major lakes within the city limits, all of them being beautifully preserved recreation areas.) I did exploit these favorable circumstances to go by bike wherever I could, which also familiarized me with many neighborhoods of the city, besides keeping me physically fit. There were just two main obstacles to biking: cars and cold weather. While the first could be avoided by carefully selecting the route (quiet side streets, bike lanes), the second was inevitable, so during the long and cold winter I took to riding the warm and comfortable buses.

Besides work and the long days spent in the library, I tried to discover as much of the city and the area as possible. Fortunately, my housemates were largely outdoor people as well, so it was easy to find company for my trips. Our first major excursion took us to one of the most beautiful corners of Minnesota: the north shore of Lake Superior. Going in early October had the advantage that we

could marvel at the bright fall foliage. The weather was crisp but not cold yet, and the skies mostly clear. We rented a car and during a weekend we traversed state parks and winding country roads, while visiting little towns and lighthouses in the area.

2.2. Winter in Minnesota

Not much later, at the end of October, winter has begun. After Halloween, soon we had snow falling. In general, among non-Minnesotans Minnesota winter has quite a reputation, and I have to admit that it was indeed long, with lots of snow and occasional really cold periods. But it was not unbearable, with winter days being a bit longer than in Hungary and the temperature seldom falling below -20 C. When it did, though, it tended to fall way below, but, with the crisp sunshine usually accompanying such situations, it did not feel extremely cold.

Strangely enough, Minnesotans are quite proud of their winter, and most of them even seem to enjoy it. Having seen the abundance of winter sports and outdoor events, however, this is understandable. For example, the city of Saint Paul organized its annual Winter Carnival at the end of January, the greatest attraction being a complete Ice Palace with high, crenellated walls, ramparts, and towers, built of the ice bricks from nearby lakes. An outdoor ice sculpture exhibition completed the picture, and, judging from the number of visitors on any given weekend day, people do love to go outside in the winter in Minnesota, rather than being confined to their warm and cozy houses.

2.3. All Around

A Fulbright Personal Enrichment Seminar, which I was selected to participate in, meant a quick and profound change from Minnesota winter as I flew to Houston, Texas, for a long weekend at the beginning of March. Together with about one hundred other Fulbrighters representing dozens of nationalities and coming from all parts of the US, we were learning about the interaction between individuals and civil society. This meant that we had lectures telling about the history of civic society in the US, the ways and means of participating in the work of NGO's, and volunteering. The theme of the seminar, I felt, was a very wise choice, as many participants came from a corner of the world with new and sometimes unstable forms of democracy, places where the concept of civil society is not fully operative yet.

Interestingly enough, I myself had another glance at the working of civil society, and this happened in Saint Paul. My landlady is an active member of the Catholic Church, so she frequently participated in charitable activities organized by the church or went to lectures offered on current social issues. She was always ready to speak to me in detail about these events, and once I even attended a film club organized by her church which also included a series of mini-lectures by ministers of different denominations, delivered after the films shown. It was illuminating to see how important a role churches play in organizing civic society in the United States, especially when compared to the situation in Europe.

Turning back to the Houston seminar: I have to add that it did not just mean lectures and roundtable discussions. The organizers laid an equally important stress on acquainting us with everyday aspects of American culture in general and Texas lifestyle in particular. In this spirit, they organized a sightseeing tour of Houston for us, they took us to the Houston rodeo, and they found local families who invited us to a dinner in their own homes. This way we not only had a chance to meet people living in Houston and get a first-hand glance of their lives, but also got to know the other participants better. A trip to the NASA Center completed this rich program, before we said goodbye to sunny Houston and I, for my part, flew back to wintry Minnesota.

However, even long winters end one day, and, when spring eventually came, it meant new opportunities for trips and outings. On a late April weekend we set out to discover southeastern Minnesota, which is a rolling, green land of farms and apple orchards, interspersed by forests, and bordered by the mighty Mississippi river. Climbing a riverside promontory, we took a look at the wide, meandering river and at neighboring Wisconsin, but then turned the other way back to Minnesota to drive along the valley of the Root River, crossing little towns on the way which seemed to be still living in the 19th century with their wooden houses, colorful storefronts and clean, wide, empty streets. This is an area of the state where there is a sizeable Amish population, and we examined a number of stores selling their handmade artifacts.

At the beginning of May, I flew to Boston, Massachusetts for a cultural studies conference. The generous support of the Fulbright Professional Enhancement Grant, which made my trip possible, also provided me with the opportunity to discover one of the emblematic cities of the East Coast. The Cultural Studies Association conference, which I attended, lasted for five days, so I had ample opportunity to satisfy my professional curiosity in the dozens of thematic sessions offered besides spending some time of my own outside the lecture hall and the seminar rooms. I had my very own presentation on the very first day, before a meager audience, I have to say, but later I learned that many participants only arrived on the second or even on the third day. Few people could afford the time and money required to stay for the whole duration of the event—luckily, I was such a person. Early May proved to be a wonderful time to explore Boston—the parks, the tree-lined streets, the small front yards were all at their most beautiful. Boston and the area around are very much linked to John Updike, the author whose work my dissertation centers on, so I tried to look at the city through his eyes—with the help of the passages I remembered from his books. Although for me it was near to impossible to visit his hometown, I did travel a bit in the countryside north of Boston, an area which also features prominently as an inspiration and physical setting for much of Updike's prose fiction.

May also meant that my stay in the US was drawing to a close. I found myself thinking more and more about my trip back to Hungary. Just before I left,

however, with most of my things ready for packing and some heavy stuff as well as my books (amounting to several dozen) sent before me in cardboard boxes, I set on a very last trip to another emblematic city of the country: Chicago, Illinois. The distance between the Twin Cities and Chicago does not seem large on the map, but it took me more than six hours of driving to get there—another lesson in how vast the interior of the United States is. My landlady's family hosted me in Oak Park, a very attractive suburb of Chicago, during the four days of my visit. Oak Park has a very distinct literary importance: this is the town where Ernest Hemingway was born, and it was also his hometown through his early childhood. So one of the first sights I visited was his family's house, well preserved and functioning as a museum today. Then I spent a whole day just discovering downtown Chicago's architecture, starting with the very first steel-framed "skyscrapers" (pathetically short by today's standards), going through the art deco elegance of the Chicago Stock Exchange and the Federal Reserve Bank building, and ending the walk on the 95th floor of the Hancock Observatory (the second highest building in Chicago after the Sears Tower), looking around from the observation deck which offers a fantastic view of the city skyline giving way to the open space above Lake Michigan. In that evening, I had a taste of Chicago's jazz life by attending a live jam session in one of its jazz bars, listening to music inspired by a variety of African influences, yet being characteristically American.

When my time was up and I boarded my plane exactly nine months after I landed in Minnesota, I was reluctant to leave the Twin Cities, feeling that I would be happy to stay another nine months, if not more. Yet I knew that I had quite a lot to do at home, as I was assessing the ways I could utilize my American experiences at home. The most direct beneficial result of the grant, of course, was my doctoral dissertation that got its shape during the Minnesota months. I researched most of the literature that needs to be used for writing the dissertation, I bought some very useful books, and I brought with me an invaluable library of scholarly books, articles and electronic materials which is aiding me as I am continuing to write the actual text of the dissertation. However, I feel I could profit from the grant period also in other ways: I am currently working as an International Relations Officer at the University of Debrecen, and my experience in having been an international student and scholar helps a lot in my daily contact with visiting colleagues. In the US, I familiarized myself with several aspects of American higher education—in short, how universities work—and I have found this experience very useful in my present job. Moreover, I plan to build on it all through my future career, as I feel that my understanding of American higher education might help me also in dealing with its Hungarian counterpart. And, last but not least, I made a lot of friends, personal contacts, people who would welcome me back to the United States and whom I would be happy to meet in Hungary. This is, I am certain, something that the Fulbright Program is also about.

