

Emir Z. Muhić
University of Banja Luka
Faculty of Philology
English Department

CONFERENCE ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERARY STUDIES

BACK TO BASICS: EMBRACING THE GRAIN

'Twas ever thus, unfortunately—the higher humanity is in a technological hierarchy, the more we present with an age-long predilection for the exploitation of the fair-use classes in the humanities. It is no doubt an almost incurable affliction and a curious case of the confounded transposition of what is meritorious to what is meretricious. In the words of the ever-topical W. H. Auden: “Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone, prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone, silence the pianos and with muffled drum. Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.” However, the immensity of loss and grief echoed in *Funeral Blues* is rooted in our feeble moral and ethical fibre eminently in the face of a dehumanizing device of our own making, viz. AI. The phenome of artificial intelligence has captured the imagination of many an author, and they all seem to have been ensnared in the endless loop of fear and a sense of futile inevitability. In the *Dune* book series, Frank Herbert essentially propounds the notion of thinking machines intent on eradicating mankind and sounds a clarion call: “Thou shalt not make a machine in the likeness of a human mind”. Yet, the fictional characters in the books did, and now, so have we. Intriguingly, the same trope is found in Isaac Asimov’s *Foundation* oeuvre, and of course reimaged, repurposed and rebooted countless times for television and cinema screens for entertainment purposes and heftily lucrative ends. The *Matrix* films and the *Terminator* franchise are well-thumbed examples, but have they been instructive, or mildly thought-provoking, or simply discarded as cheap-thrills staple diet of contrived pap? It seems we are quickly beginning to glean the answer. This brings us to an allegory: *Agnes and Simplicity* (or the *Importance of Being Basic*). There one was a beautifully minded and inquisitive girl by the name of Agnes, who wanted to know in a word everything. So, her parents,

busy with the cut and thrust of the daily grind, got Agnes a friend, Simplicity, an AI life-navigator. Incidentally, Agnes was especially interested in language and literature, for some reason far beyond anyone's comprehension, and she had many, many questions. So, one day, Agnes asked Simplicity to trawl the deep of the worldwide web and find an interesting amuse-bouche on Visual materials in the EFL classroom at university. Simplicity was simply stumped as it could not find anything of the sort, but Agnes, being a diligently good student did come across an excellent paper authored by Maja Mandić, and they both learnt a great deal about student perceptions and opinions on the use of visual materials in the EFL classroom. The next time, Agnes was ablaze with curiosity about how the ever-changing world required new vocabulary for humans to understand certain concepts that had existed for a longer period of time but had never been labelled and she added another prompt nudging Simplicity to come up with translation strategies towards culture-specific elements in a novel. Surprisingly, Simplicity came empty-screened, yet again, but Agnes never gave up and retrieved all she needed to slake her thirst in the brilliant papers written by Neira Lojić and Milica Vuković. It should come as no surprise by now that Agnes kept on asking but Simplicity was of very little use, especially when it came to the topic of coloured-based Anglicisms and English as a lingua franca in Chinese language teaching. Fortunately, a group of researchers, Sonja Stanković, Ljiljana Stević, Anja Mudrenović, Bojana Pavlović, on the one hand and Jasmina Miljković and Jelena Šajinović Novaković on the other came the quick rescue and saved the learning day. Both Agnes and Simplicity realized that her friendship hit a dead end and the bond was both tottering and de trop, so Agnes thank Simplicity for their time together, because after all, Simplicity was a great note-keeper, whose talents might come in handy down the line, and who knows, Simplicity may well be on track to becoming Complexity, and that will be a turn-up for the books. Agnes decided to explore the finer points of linguistics and literature all on her own. On her travels, she daydreamed about metonymical expressions and ESP for art students, determiners and how learners from different linguistic backgrounds come to terms with what many deem a conundrum. She also wondered whether the human mind was at all ready for a cyber-parasocial relationship and how humans conceptualize happiness by dint of language. Authors Anela Mulahmetović Ibrišimović, Jelena Brkić, Tonina Ibrulj, Ivana Zovko-Bošnjak, Božica Jović and Emir Muhić kept her on an even keel and steady course.

All these scholars' writings ultimately come from a deeply personal perspective accessible only to human neurons. True discovery and scholarship stem from concerted efforts and scientific endeavours such as the 2024 CELLS 6 conference

convened in Banja Luka. This special edition is dedicated to all the authors whose hard work has not gone unnoticed and the University of Banja Luka English Department celebrating thirty years of excellence in teaching and researching English studies at university. We remain faithfully committed to our students, profession, cause and calling. In closing, we will go back to basics, embrace the grain and batton down the hatches to ward off any and all adversity through human-grade ingenuity, inspiration and inimitable creativity. The Bard inspired Maggie O'Farrell to write *Hamnet*, and she in turn stirred Chloé Zhao into action to direct the eponymous film giving me the underpinnings for *Agnes and Simplicity*. The intertextual story goes on and for a fleeting moment back to John Keats and his indelible lines:

When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain,
Before high-pilèd books, in character,
Hold like rich garners the full ripened grain;
When I behold, upon the night's starred face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love—then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.