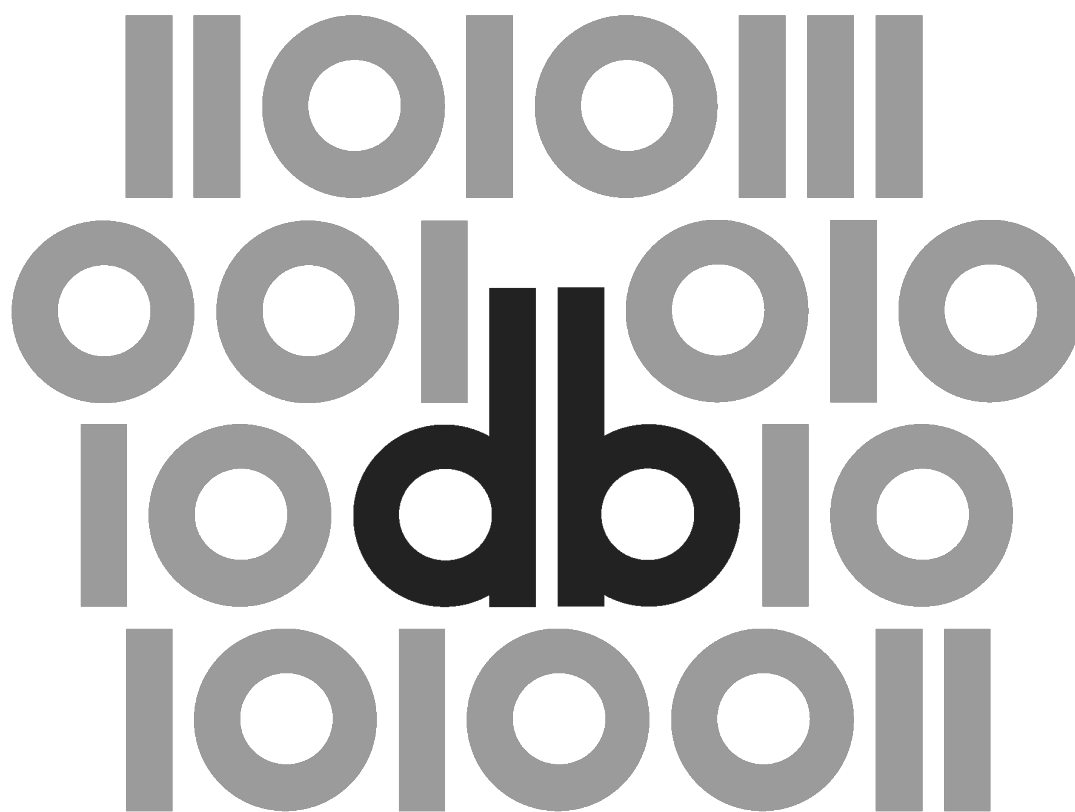


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Andrew Prescott előszava

It is a great honour to be asked to provide a foreword to the first Hungarian journal on Digital Humanities, *Digitális Bölcsészet*. The use of computational techniques by Hungarian scholars has a long and distinguished history. Indeed, it was at the University of Debrecen in July 1998 that the Association of Literary and Linguistic Computing inaugurated the most prestigious award for lifetime achievement in digital humanities, the Busa Prize, named after Father Roberto Busa, whose use of computers to create the *Index Thomisticus* is regarded as marking the foundation of digital humanities.

Father Busa was himself the first recipient of the Busa Prize and Busa's lecture at the University of Debrecen on the occasion of this award was characteristically playful and visionary. Busa declared that:

Computers, which God wanted His children to give themselves, mark the beginning of a new Era [...] . They should mark also, and promise, a new era in language knowledge, i.e. an enhancing of scientific quality, a leap of dimensions, a deepening, an enlarging of information about human expression.¹

For Busa, language and knowledge were profoundly intertwined, and computers, by transforming our ability to analyse language, also offered the prospect of an epistemological revolution. In an intriguing sally, Busa urged that computational methods should not be restricted to literary texts, but extended to film and sound:

Would it not be reasonable to process, also and in addition, e.g. the academic manuals or courses of any discipline from sciences to history, from journalism to film-making? Consider it.²

Busa described the commercial computing of 1998 as an ocean. If he were to return to Debrecen now, he would doubtless feel that the use of computers in humanities has also become an ocean. This inaugural issue of *Digitális Bölcsészet* illustrates the range and variety of current digital humanities and shows how Hungarian scholars active in this field match their peers elsewhere in the scale, range and inventiveness of their work.

Running through much of the humanities is a preoccupation with the analysis of primary cultural materials, ranging from novels, poems, newspapers, historical records and material artefacts to paintings, film, sculpture, music, television and increasingly born-digital media. What unites the digital humanities is a belief that, following Busa's lead, computational methods of different types can shed new light on the nature of these primary materials. These computational methods as they draw together these primary materials in new configurations can create new cross-disciplinary dialogues and, as Busa hoped, foster new forms of epistemological understanding.

¹ R. Busa, „Picture a Man: Busa Award Lecture, Debrecen, Hungary, 6 July 1998,” *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 14, no. 1. (1999): 5–9.

² Busa, „Picture a Man,” 8.

The essays in this volume reflect the extraordinary range of methods deployed by practitioners of the digital humanities. Historical and literary materials are reimagined as networks or geospatial entities. Distant readings subject some groups of texts to high-level analysis, while other projects exploit the ability of computers to grind text very finely. Formal computational techniques requiring collaboration with computer sciences jostle with social media. Scholars grapple with the new research techniques required to make use of born-digital materials such as web archives.

This can all be seen as very much in the spirit of Busa. In his 1998 Debrecen lecture, Busa urged humanities scholars to make use of all the possibilities of information technology. He cited an epigram of Plautus, translated as "Tis as you'd turn a stream upon your field; which if you do not, it will all run waste into the sea."³ In other words, if we don't use some of the water from the digital floods which surround us to cultivate our field, it will simply run into the ocean and be wasted.

In contemplating the current state of digital humanities, the variety of techniques and subject matter may seem bewildering. But the lack of rigid boundaries and set methods is a good thing. We are all now aware of how vast and varied the oceans of the digital world are. Digital humanities represent part of those oceans. The waters may be choppy, the currents bewildering and the navigational charts confusing, but the voyages open new horizons and point the way to new worlds.

This interconnection with the wider digital world is important. As our scholarship becomes increasingly absorbed in a digital environment, it is vital that we retain critical perspectives. The way in which we study humanities in a digital environment is profoundly different from humanities conducted in an old-fashioned library or archive. This is why digital humanities has in recent years, particularly in the United States, strongly intersected with wider critical debates about the cultural and social biases of knowledge.

These cultural discussions are important and vital because they help construct a critical understanding of the digital world where so much of our life nowadays take place. As recent scandals over abuse of data illustrate, the need to develop strong critical and ethical frameworks for our digital engagement is becoming increasingly pressing. When so much of our society and culture depend on the internet, the health of the internet is vital to us all.⁴

Digital humanities has an important role to play in creating a healthy digital culture and society. This first issue of *Digitális Bölcsészet* demonstrates that the digital humanities in Hungary has an important and distinctive contribution to make to these endeavours. I wish that this journal, which following Busa's metaphor I might compare to a small stream, will grow into a river, feeding into a mighty river of European digital humanities and thence flowing into a wider ocean of critical digital knowledge. I wish those undertaking this voyage every success.

Andrew Prescott

³ Busa, „Picture a Man,” 5.

⁴ <https://internethealthreport.org/>