

SCIENCE UNDER SIEGE

*New Faces: Facing Europe in Crisis
Shakespeare's World
and Present Challenges
Erasmus+ Intensive Programme*

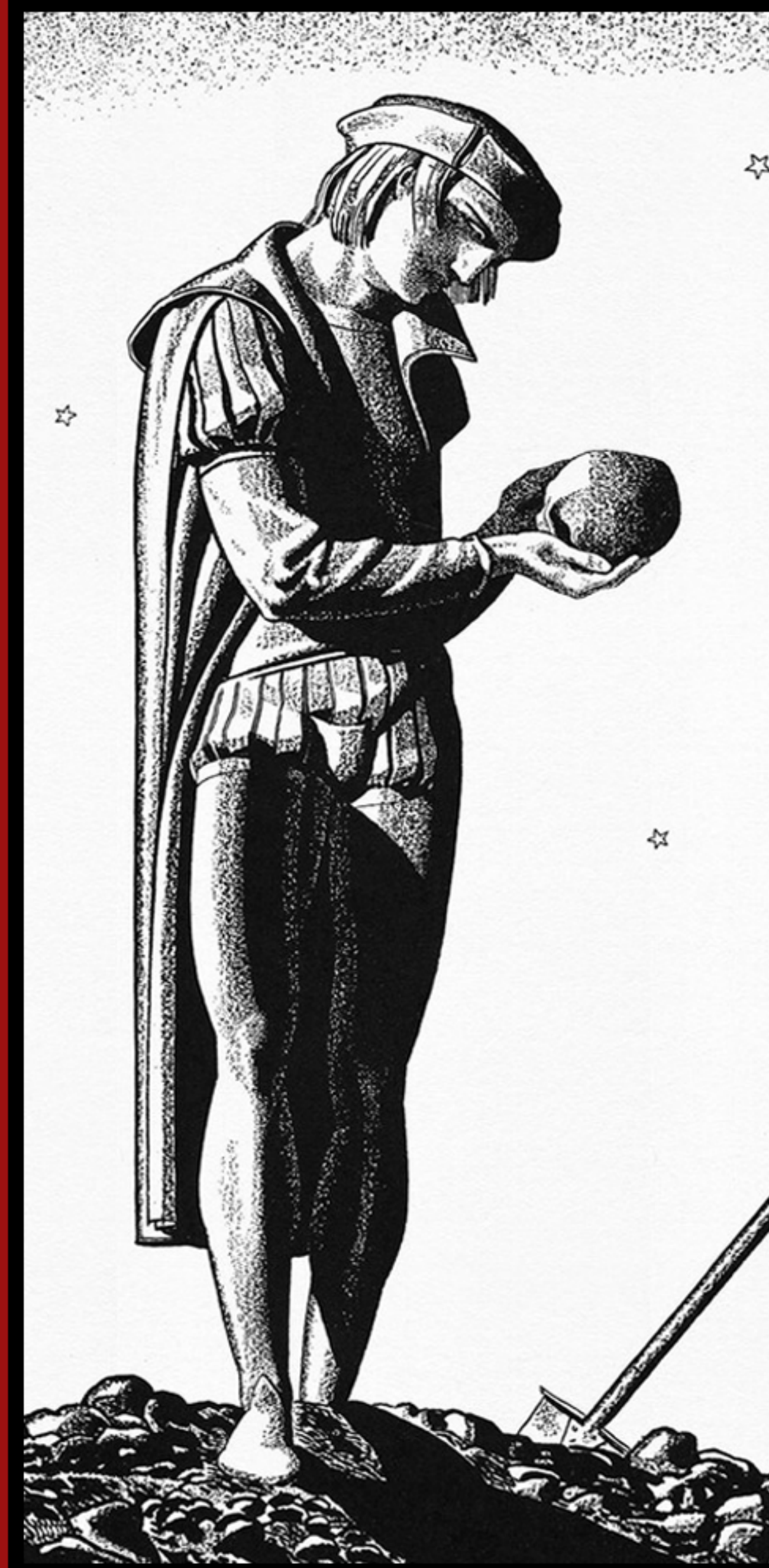
University of Szeged: Amira Aloui, Khanim Garayeva, Laura Mike, Elabe Mousavian, Arash Poorakbar, Alexandra Sebők, Réka Szarvas, Zsolt Tóth

Besmirching Academic Endeavour in Shakespeare's Time

As a result of the epistemological crisis of the constant negotiation of religious dogma and scientific inquiry, the figure of the scientist and/or the academic often comes to be portrayed in an antagonistic light in Early Modern drama. Hamlet, for example, is potent with words but hesitates to take action and, therefore, impotent with sword/s. He speaks daggers (III. 2. 381) and outwits everyone with his "words, words, words" (II. 2. 191). The play chronicles his oscillation between rhetoric and action, theory and praxis, philosophy and militarism. Yet, throughout the plot his scholarly disposition is identified as the source of his anguish and madness. In order for Hamlet to be able to *act*, he promises his father that he will "wipe away all trivial fond records, / All saws of books" (I. 5. 99-101) from his mind. The play, in this regard, portrays an intellectual crisis through its protagonist.

Marlowe's Faustus is another paragon of the early modern ambiguities concerning science: his story is set into a framework of psychomachia, the forces of good and evil fighting for his soul. But at the same time, he is an ambitious scholar, the embodiment of the Renaissance individual striving for knowledge beyond conventional boundaries. The eerie scientist who transgresses the laws of society is an immensely popular figure even in today's popular culture (e.g., Doctor Moreau, Dexter, Hannibal Lecter).

Hamlet - detail (1936) by Rockwell Kent.
Source: theartstack.com



Campaign Against Academia

The Hungarian education system is facing a crisis due to the government's attack on its established institutions. Among other centres of knowledge, the Central European University (CEU) and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA) are under siege. The government's war is fuelled by a fear that intellectuals and institutions of critical thinking can challenge its authority. Thus, Hungarian society is being plunged into a new Middle Ages, and the strategies of fear-mongering and systematic othering take extreme and ridiculous forms, such as the government's claim that gender studies is not a science but a Marxist ideology. Such statements undermine the long-established international reputation of Hungarian science and scholars.

Despite considerable international backlash, the Hungarian government terminated the single gender studies MA programme running in the country in October 2018. Following that, negotiations about CEU's accreditation turned sour, resulting in CEU's partial relocation to Vienna. The most recent threat to academic freedom is the forceful defunding of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The Government has relocated 70% of the Academy's annual funds to the newly established Ministry of Innovation and Technology, leaving it vulnerable and dependent on project tenders even for day to day maintenance, let alone research. Furthermore, the system with which these tenders are being evaluated is enormously vague and non-transparent, allowing the Government to fund research aligned with its ideology and to emaciate that which isn't. The Academy and its recently formed Staff Forum are resisting the Government crusade against critical thought by organising demonstrations.

"To offer to the World the liberal Education of Women is to (...) set the whole world in a Flame. (...) I am very sensible it is an ill time to set on foot this Design: wherein not only Learning but Vertue it self is scorn'd and neglected, as pedantick things, fit only for the Vulgar. I know no better way to reform these Exorbitancies, than to perswade Women to (...) attempt higher things [that] will either reclaim the Men; or make them ashamed to claim the Sovereignty over such as are more Wise and Vertuous than themselves." - Bathsua Makin, An Essay To Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen, in Religion, Manners, Arts & Tongues. With An Answer to the Objections against this Way of Education.

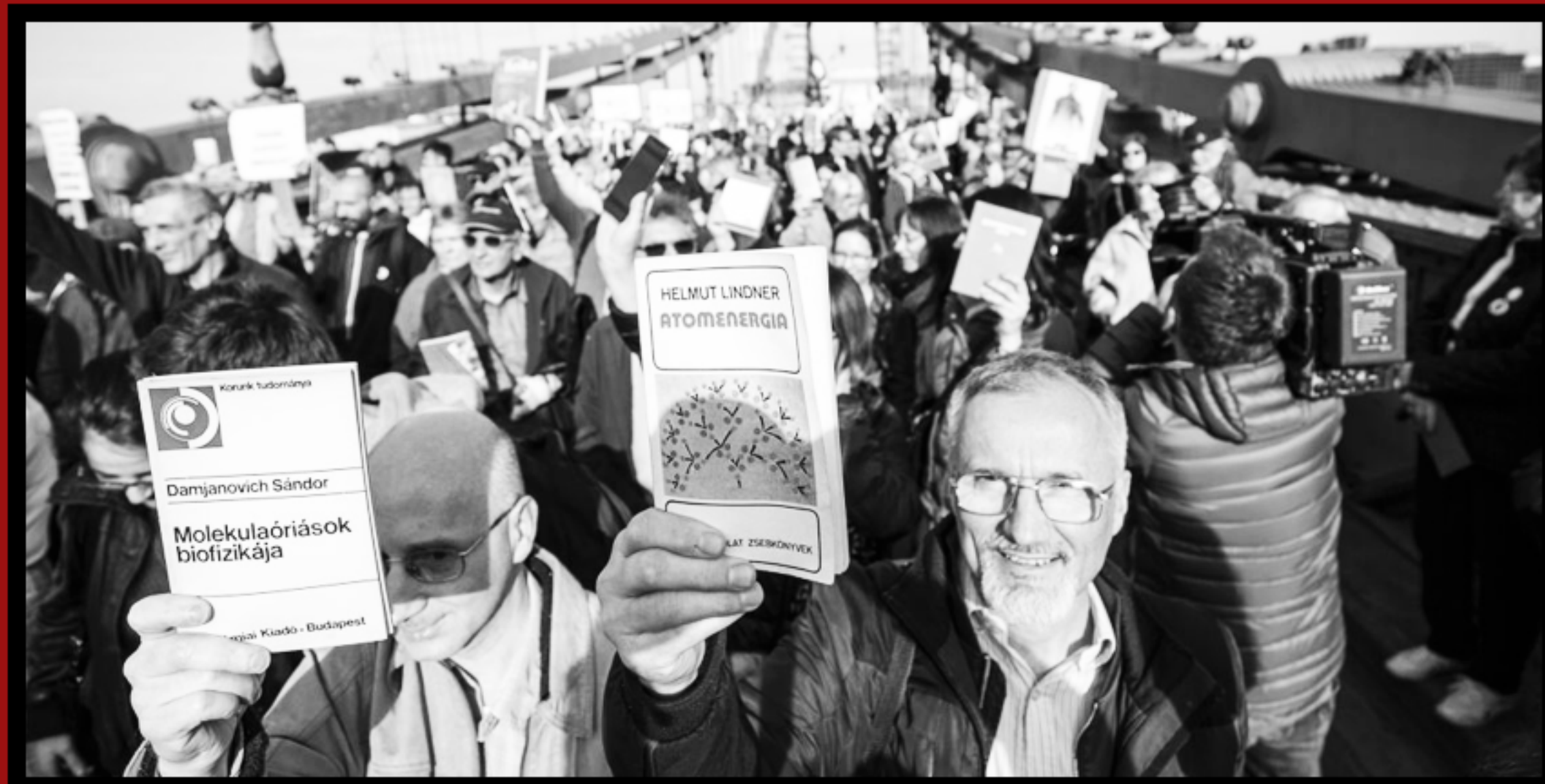


Fighting Back: Parents and Academics for Education

Parents, teachers and students are all concerned about our shared future and aren't afraid to show it. The Hungarian Network of Academics (Oktatói Hálózat) is an autonomous organisation of lecturers and researchers active in higher education. According to their mission statement, their aim is to preserve the achievements and values of Hungarian higher education and research, which they feel are threatened by "the government's improvisatory, centralising and dictatorial educational policy". Among the values to be protected is the freedom of education and research as well as equal opportunities for students in higher education.

Starting in 2014, they have been organising a series of debates about the future of Hungarian intellectuals, the most recent of which focused on the attacks against the Central European University. Their members regularly participate in marches and protests, including supporting the employees of the Hungarian Academy of Science as well as the researchers of gender studies. In a country where the government threatens knowledge and knowledge-producing institutions, the Hungarian Network of Academics actively promotes discussion and critical thinking, and fights against fearmongering, which relies on the ignorance and apathy of the public.

You can't make something out of nothing: universities depend on primary and secondary schools to prepare their students for their advanced studies, so the problems in primary and secondary education affect higher education as well. The Parental Voice (Szülői Hang) organisation provides a platform for parents of students and draws attention to crucial problems in secondary education, including the serious teacher shortage, class sizes above the legal limit, the low quality of foreign language education that makes language certification (and thus, soon higher education itself) inaccessible for many students, and more. In their latest campaign, parents are protesting and counteracting the government's plan to enforce the government-approved list of textbooks instead of textbooks chosen by the professionals teaching their children.



*People protesting against the government's measures and in favour of the Academia's independence and freedom of thought, in general. As a symbolic gesture, they raise scientific books above their heads to reinforce the breadth and importance of scientific inquiry.
Photo by botost. Source: 444.hu*

Sources

- Marlowe, Christopher. 1991. *Doctor Faustus*. Edited by Michael Keefer. Peterborough: Broadview P.
- Makin, Bathsua. 1673. *An Essay To Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen, in Religion, Manners, Arts & Tongues. With An Answer to the Objections against this Way of Education*.
- Milton, John. 1644. *Aeropagitica*.
- Oktatói Hálózat.
- Shakespeare, William. 1980. *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. Edited by Willard Farnham. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Szabó, András Péter. 08 Feb 2019. 'Greetings from the sinking boat of Hungarian academia'. *Index*, translated by Zoltán Kovács.
- Szülői Hang.
- Walker, Shaun. 25 Oct 2018. 'University founded by George Soros 'forced out' of Hungary'. *The Guardian*.
- Wilson, Lesley. 06 Sep 2018. 'State control over academic freedom in Hungary threatens all universities'. *The Guardian*.
- Zgut, Edit. 11 Feb 2019. 'Orbán's Next Victim: the Hungarian Science Academy'. *Visegrad Insight*.



*Doctor Faustus conjures
Mephistopheles, from the 1620
publication of the play.
Source: magnoliabox.com*

Follow up...

Unfortunately, the crisis of academic freedom is not confined to Hungary alone. In case you want to know more about this global phenomenon, we have collected some links of websites for you to browse:



*"Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue
freely according to conscience, above all liberties."
John Milton, Aeropagitica*

