
CCUE News

THE COUNCIL FOR COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY ENGLISH

“Going Public”

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Editorial

In *CCUE News 12* Catherine Belsey wrote about “The Public Understanding of English Studies” – an article which provoked some debate, including a session at the May 2000 AGM where ways of raising the public profile of the subject were mooted. In this issue, Simon Dentith and R J Ellis develop their idea of “the problem” underlying such a debate, arguing that “we have often failed, as a profession, to develop a publicly defensible rationale or justification for what we do”. Their article suggests that we are still “living off the Arnoldian fat... an unsustainable position”. It forms a combative companion-piece for Robert Eaglestone’s “Undoing English” (a play on words pointing to both the title of his own book on studying English and our borrowing of it for the last issue of *CCUE News*). He argues convincingly that much agonizing over the precise identity of ‘English’ as a discipline is misconceived: “That English has become so plural, so ‘undisciplinary’, is not something to worry about”. The third piece on this topic, Deborah Cartmell and Julian North’s report of their survey on “The Way Forward for English Studies”, charts an interesting shift between 1993 and 1999 in Heads of Departments’ sense of the direction in which the discipline is moving.

The publishers’ forum that follows addresses a number of practical day-to-day concerns of lecturers in English: the future of the monograph; the impact of the RAE on publishing; the end of the book as we know it (differing opinions here); monograph-printing-to-order; electronic publication of scholarly editions; the question of what academics are prepared to read and/or purchase. Thanks to Sophie Goldsworthy, Josie Dixon and Peter Robinson for writing up their talks from the May AGM at St Anne’s, Oxford.

It was at that AGM that Judy Simons gave her final report as Chair of CCUE, and received a very proper ovation. She has been a dynamic successor to David Punter (not an easy act to follow), and with her as Chair and Rick Rylance as Secretary the organization has taken the initiative in many areas of national policy, from the composition of the RAE Panel to subject benchmarking, ‘A’ level design to surveying the curriculum. The innovative approach to the management of the English Subject Centre was just one of the outcomes of Judy’s energy and leadership.

CCUE News 14 will take a new look at literary history and the history of the English language. I’d be happy to receive journals or books in that area (or others) for review. The deadline for Winter 2000/1 copy is November 30 2000; as usual, the address for contributions is:

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Judy Simons

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Chair's Annual Report 1999–2000

This has been a particularly active year for CCUE. As a subject association we aim to represent all Higher Education departments of English and our membership is based on departmental representation as opposed to individual subscription. Our mailing list includes 103 English departments and our meetings regularly attract an average of 100 delegates, a considerable advance on past years. This increased profile reflects the enhanced public face of the association and its activities.

In the oral report delivered at the OGM in December I alerted the membership to the changing nature of the association over the past three years and the way in which subject communities are now being actively involved in consultation processes and in decision-making by government agencies. The advantages of this approach are that as a subject community we are able to shape HE developments in the subject rather than merely react to government agendas. CCUE has played a central part in a number of recent initiatives, and has developed an effective public presence. At the same time the membership needs to recognise the increasing professionalisation of the role of the association and the implications for our position. We have a strong external profile but it is also important that we retain our academic integrity and independence in deciding which initiatives we take forward and how we act. I believe that this policy has been tested and proved successful this year in the following ways.

1. CCUE was heavily involved in consultation over the RAE and made vigorous representation to HEFCE about the management of the exercise. The new appointments to the RAE English panel were drawn almost exclusively from the proposals submitted by CCUE. In October we hosted a meeting at the British Academy for discussion with the chair of the panel, John Barnard, on the draft criteria for English. This was followed up with written recommendations to HEFCE, and we are pleased to note that the eventual published statement on criteria reflects members' concerns.

2. The QAA benchmark exercise drew heavily on CCUE's expertise, not just in the composition of the English benchmark group, which included several Executive members, but in its use of the data in CCUE's survey on the English curriculum published two years ago, and in utilising our networks. We circulated all member departments as part of an informal consultation process on the draft benchmark statement and the December meeting devoted a session to full discussion of the statement. The final statement, which is now published and was launched on 17 May, has taken into account all the points made by members.

3. At last year's AGM, there was heated discussion about the proposal from HEFCE regarding the establishment of Subject Centres to promote developments in learning and teaching. CCUE, alone amongst subject associations, took the view that we would not

evaluate or endorse competing bids for an English Subject Centre from member institutions. After a complicated process of negotiation with HEFCE, it has now been agreed that the Subject Centre for English will be managed by the subject community in a unique partnership operation. The Centre will be based in London at Royal Holloway, with an I.T. 'arm' in the Centre for Computing in the Humanities at King's College. There will be a management committee, chaired by CCUE and with four places reserved for CCUE nominees. The post of Centre Director will be an independent appointment, openly advertised, as will the posts of the two Project Officers. This was a hard-fought battle, and we are grateful to Royal Holloway for hosting the Centre and managing its finances in this partnership capacity. We expect the Centre to start functioning in September.

In addition to these three main activities which have occupied much of our attention and will impact significantly on HE development in the subject, we have continued to liaise with the QCA regarding the new curricula for A and A/S level English. We have responded to the SHEFC consultation paper on funding, and to the British Academy and AHRB on recommendations for research collections and library access for researchers, and on the use of the small research grants scheme. We have also maintained our links with other subject associations both in the UK and overseas, notably ESSE and the MLA. We continue to work with the Standing Council for Arts and Social Sciences (SCASS) and the Council for Deans of Arts and Humanities.

This is my third and final year as Chair of CCUE. I have been lucky in having the support of a strong Executive team. I should like to thank them all for their work on your behalf this year, and in particular Rick Rylance as Secretary, who has given exceptional service to the association.

CCUE has now established itself as a real voice in HE. I believe, however, that there are still new directions in which the association can develop. Catherine Belsey at the OGM spoke compellingly about the need for a greater public understanding of the Humanities, and I would hope that in future CCUE can take a lead in presenting our subject to a wider audience. There is also scope for extending our remit to help students and new entrants to the profession: hosting a postgraduate conference perhaps or sponsoring a prize for outstanding scholarship. It is a luxury granted to a retiring Chair to make these grand statements without any obligation to implement change. I am sure that the new Executive will have ideas of their own and I wish them every success in the future.

It has been a privilege to have chaired CCUE through such an exciting phase in its history.



Simon Dentith

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R.J. Ellis

The Nottingham Trent University



The Public Understanding of English Studies

Kate Belsey's recent intervention concerning the public understanding of English Studies must have provoked in many of us a mixture of agreement, disagreement and despair. Agreement, certainly: we have often been unsuccessful, as a profession, in making what we do widely approved or even understood. And it is certainly galling, given even a minimal commitment to English, to visit one's local Waterstone's and find there so much space devoted to, say, History, and so little devoted to literary or cultural criticism. But also some disagreement: English is increasingly the first 'foreign' language that people throughout the world choose to learn (as opposed to growing up needing to speak); this choice then leads on sometimes to an engagement with English literature, and hence sometimes to the reading of English criticism. The 'world's public' (albeit a well-educated/relatively privileged 'public') can in this sense sometimes end up at our door, reading what we've written. But we are also prepared to admit to despair: that these superficial symptoms, and Belsey's remedies (prizes for clarity, more public lectures, a Committee for the Public Understanding of English Studies) should be thought to address a UK problem which is much more fundamental than one of spin. And the problem is this: we have often failed, as a profession, to develop a publicly defensible rationale or justification for what we do, now that we have so thoroughly debunked the old Arnoldian and Leavisian underpinnings that sustained the critical enterprise in Universities for much of the twentieth century. So Kate Belsey's suggestions sound like nothing so much as the cries of a person in free fall after sawing off the branch on which they formerly sat.

When at its AGM in May 2000 CCUE, responding to Belsey, began to consider the idea of establishing a series of public lectures, or competitions with prizes (a species of annual 'Booker' for Lit. Crit.?) our feeling was that this would inevitably end up in a series of events safely sited in the golden triangle, most usually in London, rounding up the usual suspects and all too quickly meaning little or nothing to anyone outside academia. This does not mean that we are in the least committed to any return to Arnoldian pieties or Leavisite ferocities. It was certainly instructive, in the late eighties, at the height of the Thatcherite assault on the traditional sanctities of British life like the BBC, the Humanities, and common decency, to see so many of us retreat back under the cover of 'the best that has been known and thought in the world'. We have perhaps weathered that storm –

though to adopt a Leavisite vocabulary for a moment, the audit culture which its legacy has inevitably sometimes skewed what we do in a utilitarian or logico-Benthamite direction. But this means that now we are still living, as it were, off the Arnoldian fat; as far as the British public understanding of what we do is concerned, it's business as usual – albeit with the occasional scare about 'political correctness'. This is an unsustainable position – we agree with Belsey on this point – but it cannot be addressed by cosmetic measures.

Moreover, it's not a situation that has just crept up on us. Francis Mulhern's splendid book, *The Moment of Scrutiny*, published in the late 1970s, announced in its conclusion the necessity for a cultural politics possessing the same hegemonic ambitions as Leavis and his coadjutors – a point taken up by John Goode in an admiring review. And at various moments in the 1980s and 1990s, the profession has realised that we need to move beyond the critical phase in our relationship to our discipline, and subsume it under some more positive language or justification. But the fact is that we haven't done it, and without some such justification the kind of measures recommended by Kate Belsey are bound to provoke accusations, not of the 'Emperor's clothes' – for there the problem was a substantial body parading naked – but of the opposite, a fine suit of clothes with nothing underneath to hold it in shape.

It may be felt that we are exaggerating. Perhaps we all have a sense of where the value resides in what we do which we could readily translate into a public and defensible language. More specifically, it would perhaps be possible to draw on the very vocabularies of those positions in the name of which the critiques of our discipline have been mounted – though it may also be felt that the hegemonic reach of Althusserian anti-humanism has decidedly dwindled over the last twenty-five years from an already forlorn situation. But the outstanding success story of the last quarter of the twentieth century was undoubtedly feminism, and feminist critical practice has certainly managed to retain a connection between academic work and a wider political project that has been in some ways exemplary. The same is increasingly becoming true of the equally diverse body of postcolonial criticism and scholarship. And the same may eventually be equally true of gender issues. It is certainly the case that the impact of these transforming political and cultural movements has been to reconfigure

the canon in fundamental ways – students with English degrees are often now much more likely to have read *Beloved*, *Heart of Darkness* and *Goblin Market* than *The Prelude*, *Portrait of a Lady*, or *Paradise Lost*. And recent TV and film adaptations of novels and drama (perhaps as a consequence) have increasingly begun to show an awareness of how the existence in such texts of colonial and patriarchal discourses and/or opposition to these can be creatively foregrounded with interest. These shifts certainly allow us to defend our discipline in terms which have at least some contemporary currency, and the 1998 CCUE conference on ‘Difference and Diversity’ was an important indication of the possibilities in this direction.

However, it does not seem to us that these transformations in themselves allow us to provide the kind of rationale that is now required, for two reasons. The first is strategic or, to put it another way, concerns the rhetorical force of any possible account we might give of what we do. In brief, we cannot solely defend English because its practice is now feminist and/or postcolonialist, and alert to issues of class politics, ethnicity, and/or globalisation. We have to find, in addition, a position which allows us in good faith to defend the practice of English Studies in general terms whilst at the same time embracing that more inclusive cultural politics which has been the most benign result of the turmoils of the last thirty years. The second reason is that any such defence must be intrinsic to the discipline: in other words, any justification of our discipline which might equally apply to History or Classical Archaeology will be by definition inadequate. Which necessarily brings us to the place of literature in any account of what we do.

Go back to that Waterstone’s moment, that galling sense that we’re being outdone by History (what a coil of institutional and professional rivalries lie under that innocent-seeming comparison). There are certainly more books on those bookshop shelves devoted to the history of the Crimean War than there are to exegeses of *Maud*. But to make this point is to set up a false comparison. The real contrast is between the History section and the vast expanse of shelves devoted to literature, understood here to include all contemporary fiction, poetry and drama as well as the ‘classics’. It would certainly be a much more pressing cause for anxiety if literature (put the term under whatever degree of erasure that you feel it requires) were to be in danger of actual rather than simply philosophical rubbing out. It is impossible to imagine a compelling defence of literary and cultural studies which did not centrally defend literature and its cultural locations and ramifications as things worth studying.

So let us set out the desiderata for such a justification. It would certainly require an explicit awareness of the diverse constituencies of our students and the communities from which they are drawn. It would include an explication of (or it would intrinsically testify to) the value of disciplined engagement with the writing of the past. It would recognise the specificity of cultural forms. Most importantly, it would carry assent both within and outside the profession. Belsey’s own insistence upon the centrality of language in any account of the value of our discipline would be an essential element in such a rationale. And she is surely right on another point:

it would need to be readily comprehensible. Maybe such things cannot be called up to order, but need that peculiar combination of writer and historical moment that produced Arnold, Leavis or Raymond Williams. But our particular historical moment, with all its dangers and opportunities for literary and cultural studies, certainly requires us to try.

It is also worth noting the very different circumstances that govern these matters in Britain by comparison with the United States, even though the two countries might be thought to share the same paradigms of literary study. Despite our earlier reference to ‘political correctness’ (surely a phrase invented by the cultural right to delegitimise as many forms of cultural critique as possible), Britain has not been racked by the same culture wars that flared across American campuses in the eighties and nineties, though we have produced our own faint echoes. This means however that, for all the difficulties that might face us in Britain when seeking to articulate a convincing rationale for our subject, it is much easier to imagine their resolution on this side of the Atlantic. This is even so in a devolved state in which the national questions surrounding ‘English’ are likely to become increasingly pressing.

In the meantime, many of Kate Belsey’s proposals are doubtless welcome. We have already welcomed the proposition that our writing should seek to be clear and even attractive; for all of theory’s necessity, it cannot be claimed that its legacy has generated a critical idiom which encourages non-specialist readers. On the contrary, insofar as an induction into theory has become one of the rites of passage into the profession, the construction of a suitably defended specialist position is now one of the hallmarks of our writing – a point made with some force twenty years ago by Edward Said. This may be an inevitable symptom of our professionalisation, of which our own appeal to ‘the profession’ is itself symptomatic. But we suspect that not many of us would be happy to see our relationship to the wider culture understood in solely professional terms.

Let’s therefore turn to practical measures: CCUE should establish not a database of academics for the press to refer to but the other way around: a database of journalist contacts which academics can access when they think they have a point that the media might take up. Let’s switch from passive to active mode. Switch to thinking of things in this active mode, and it becomes easy to see how Belsey’s pertinent examples of recent *causes célèbres* could and would have been taken up by any one of the many English Studies academics able to comment (what exactly did Belsey mean when describing herself as sitting trying to think of someone articulate enough to contact, we wonder? The ESSE database is already up and about). Another classic example of how this would be productive might be dramatised here by suggesting how the controversy over Patricia Rozema’s 1999 film adaptation of *Mansfield Park* could have been taken up. The film has been criticized and praised for portraying in Fanny Price a paragon of modern free-spirited womanhood, for foregrounding vigorously a (post-)colonial dimension within the story, and for intimating that there might be a lesbian dimension to her relationship with Mary Crawford. This last point of controversy, of course, takes us back to the possibility of connecting literary studies to a wider cultural or gender politics.

And there are many of us who could have pertinently intervened, and might have done if actively encouraged to put ourselves forward in this way by CCUE, and given the mechanism (the database of journalists) to do this. We should also take up an idea advanced by one delegate at CCUE's 2000 AGM: CCUE should encourage conferences to establish at least one session consisting of papers/a paper aimed at a public beyond academia: a session laying out comprehensibly the significance of what is central at that conference, a session to which the press (local and/or national) and sixth formers had been invited and to which they were admitted free (this implying not only CCUE's encouragement but also its financial support). Our claim is, quite simply, that we are already having a considerable impact on how literary texts are being taken up and represented in the larger culture; what we need to do is be more effective at drawing this out into the open and speaking about it in an open, 'larger' manner, debating the strengths and weaknesses of such public, often commercial appropriations.

Finally we need to recognise that there is already a massive apparatus in place in which our activities are described and implicitly defended at length. We refer, of course, to that explosion of discourse which now surrounds all our teaching as a result of the audit culture or quality assurance systems that form such a striking characteristic of contemporary College and University life. We have all collaborated, with greater or lesser degrees of cynicism, in writing those aims and objectives, learning outcomes, and assessment criteria which purport neutrally to describe what we do but in fact massively direct it. Overwhelmingly such schemas privilege, in the jargon, 'skills'. Again we are at risk of exaggerating the dangers that face us, but it certainly is the case that we can end up in a position where we teach *Beloved* not because we wish students to engage with the historical experience of African-American slavery and how, personally, socially and narratively, that story might be passed on (and why and how passing on any story is fraught and complex), but because we can make the exercise of teaching the novel an opportunity for the inculcation of analytical skills. This triumph of means over ends is inevitable in a situation where we cannot defend our discipline in a vocabulary that persuasively speaks of its purposes in other than extrinsic terms.

Robert Eaglestone

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Undoing English

Like the 2000 Winter *CCUE News*, my book for students is called *Doing English*. I called it that for the sorts of pedagogic reasons any English teacher has in mind: to stress that reading literature doesn't just happen, that interpretation isn't neutral and so on. I wanted to show students that they do English and that English isn't done to them, although it sometimes seems like that. Predictably, the title became a hostage to fortune, as the book was on the receiving end of an apoplectic review article from Roger Knight, subtitled 'Doing English In'.¹ Reflecting on this passionate piece, and on other comments, I wondered if I should have called the book *Undoing English*, because it seems to me that much about English, and perhaps English itself, needs untying.

The knotty development of English

Many problems, like those of disciplinary identity, arise because different strands of ideas are woven together by chance or by history when they are not necessarily compatible. English, the discipline, is a case just like this: the result of the twisting together of lots of different threads. The history of this weaving has been told several times.² Arguably, it began in India, with the development of the teaching of English Literature as a tool of colonial power ('English as tool of British Power'). 'English' the discipline then spread back to the 'centre'

– an example of Bhabha's colonial 'time lag' – and became a way of establishing an 'Englishness' in the UK ('English as heritage'). This, in turn, became interwoven with a strand of 'Social Mission': English as a way of offering an education to (or, more cynically, a cultural standard to follow for) those not fit for the Classics ('English as emancipator, within limits'). To this was added philology: first, to provide philological fibre for what seemed a very subjective discipline ('English as the study of the history of the language'), then, later as part of linguistics ('English as the study of the use of the language'). Newbolt, and others – for whom an English teacher was "a missionary" and "literature is not just a subject for academic study, but one of the chief temples of the Human spirit, in which all should worship" – spun in a quasi-religious fibre, ('English as a religion'). English developed a claim to be a rigorous quasi-scientific subject in its own right ('English as a science of literature') at the same time as claiming that critics and students should develop a sensibility to evaluate and to order ('English as openness to life'). Moreover, English developed a clearly archival function ('English as curator of the museum of literature'). Later came the wish to teach political activism ('English as emancipator, without limits') and marxism ('English as revolutionary'); later still, a wish to address issues of gender, race, class and sexuality ('English as cultural politics').

Add to all these a belief in ‘self-fulfilment’ through literature (‘English as therapy’) and a strand of European thought, rejected by the tradition of analytic philosophy and originally mediated by film theory (‘English as Philosophy’) leaves the discipline as a confused Gordian knot. These fourteen threads (and I’m sure we could add many more, and subdivide each) are sometimes compatible, and sometimes not, but are all twisted onto each other to make one thing when they don’t necessarily have anything in common with each other.

Stringing us along

The question is – what do all these strands of English add up to? Harold Rosen aimed to answer this in 1981:

English... is the least subject like of subjects, the least susceptible to definition by reference to the accumulation of wisdom within a single academic discipline. No single set of informing ideas dominate its heartland. No one can confidently map its frontiers: it colonizes and is colonized. When we inspect the practices which cluster together uncomfortably under its banner, they appear so diverse, contradictory, arbitrary and random as to defy analysis and explanation. If, however, we interrogate and scrutinize this ‘chaos illumined by flashes of lightning’... we may perceive more meaning than meets the eye.³

There may have been some coherency in the subject in 1981 but there is none now. A lightning storm (or benchmarking exercise) would only reveal the huge range of what we actually do: some of us research and teach history, even if it is ‘cultural’ or ‘intellectual’ history; others study philosophy. Others do literary history and biography, or study the development of the book. English academics produce scholarly editions or teach pragmatics and stylistics or explain language change. Still others combine archaeology and palaeography to discuss the development of ideas in the Middle Ages. Even ‘theorists’ (unhappy name!) now have little in common with one another: a Lacanian need share nothing with a post-colonial theorist. Others still proceed with the endless task of making careful judgements and valuations, weighing phases and ordering the literature of past and present. And this is the barest sample of what English academics and graduate students actually do...

We can see this range again in documents that, for better or worse, both shape and reflect the discipline: in the RAE guidelines (“2.41.3 The Panel recognises that English includes a very broad range of approaches and is by its nature frequently interdisciplinary, and will take a broad view of what constitutes English”) or in the QAA Benchmarking documents (“The breadth of English means that any attempts at prescription should be avoided”).

Discussing this state of affairs, people seem to take up one of two positions. Some are pacifiers, trying to find the common denominator. For example, they argue that English is about reading texts or about critical thinking. But this doesn’t really tell us very much: after all, surely all Higher Education subjects – and especially those in the Arts or Humanities – are about looking at texts of

different sorts and surely all involve critical thinking. On the other side are the fierce sectarians who argue, for example, that English is about (say) value and judgement or (say) teaching the revolutionary imperative. This reduces the subject to the one strand that these sectarians claim is central. When these people lament the state of English, often what they mean is that their strand is not the dominant one, and that they wish it were. This situation reflects not only the inherent conflict and incommensurability between many of the different strands that make up English but also the fact that there is no ‘metalanguage’ of criticism, no one strand that explains and justifies all the other strands. (Was there ever such a ‘metalanguage’? If there once was, it certainly is dead now.)

For lots of people, especially in the intellectual unravelling and ravellings of the last twenty or thirty years, the lack of a central strand running throughout English as a discipline has seemed to be important. And, indeed, it seems reasonable for people who have been educated in English – not to mention those who teach it – to expect it to be *something*, to have a core. It’s certainly hard to write critical guides or create benchmarks or develop A-level curricula for a discipline that isn’t a discipline. But I don’t think that this lack of a core matters. That English has become so plural, so ‘undisciplinatory’, is not something to worry about.

Threaded together

We don’t have to worry unduly about this lack of coherency in the discipline of English for at least three reasons. First, this lack exists in other (better funded) disciplines with no ill effects. In physics, for example, there are at least three sorts of physicists: theoretical physicists (who think up hypotheses), experimental physicists (who test the hypotheses) and mechanical physicists (who design the equipment on which the experiments happen). They have different journals, conferences, training habits and so on: but all are happy to be physicists, and receive public esteem for the same reason. And it’s not the case that each deals with the same object: not only do different branches of physics cross-divide these categories, but as I’ve said, each has different objects of interest (hypotheses, testing, designing machines). The point is not that we should split on the same lines, of course, but that other disciplines are not cohesive either and don’t seem to have difficulties with this: in fact, it is a source of strength.

And this is the second reason why we don’t have to worry. When Wittgenstein was wrestling with the question of what numbers are, he wrote:

Why do we call something a ‘number’? Well, perhaps because, it has a direct relationship with several things that have hitherto been called number; and this can be said to give it an indirect relationship to other things we call the same name. And we extend our concept of number as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres.⁴

For ‘number’, read ‘English’. There is a very strong tradition of ‘English’ in British HE: UCAS figures show that 47,420 people applied for around 30,000 places to study English in 1999, making it far and away the most popular of the Arts and Humanities. In higher education, only Business Management, Computer Science and Law have more applicants. Being made of different fibres may make it hard – or impossible – to write critical guides for the whole subject, but it does make it a much stronger subject, institutionally speaking, not least because it makes it more open to change.

And all the time there are more fibres being twisted on: new strands to English. For example, there is going to be more and more creative writing, either in its own right or (*pace* Rob Pope *et al*) as creative critical rewriting. Already the number of Creative Writing courses has expanded, from two MAs in the 1970s to over 40 courses now. In general, A-level students love it and HE students want it and expect it. Creative writing and creative critical rewriting, done well, teaches students not only how to write but how to read acutely. There is going to be more and more crossover between Media Studies and English (witness the rise of ‘Shakespeare on Film’ courses). If A-levels are any guide, there will be more students expecting and wanting to study language in its own right, and with the critical tools to do so, either through Language A-level, or through the increasingly popular Language and Literature A-level. There will be more diverse interdisciplinary work: of course, some strands have always been interdisciplinary – medieval studies, for example – but this is set to expand and raises the question of whether the majority of universities are able, institutionally, to cope with this. And finally (a boring prediction) there will be more pedagogical material delivered electronically, if this can be as stimulating as a good seminar. New technologies will raise new questions of form with which we will have to engage.

The third, final reason that should stop us worrying is this: “[E]very discipline... is, as Nietzsche saw most clearly, constituted by what it forbids its practitioners to do” wrote Hayden White.⁵ Where a discipline is too constricted, it dies, unable to change with the movement of the times, evolving intellectual ideas and the thoughtless flow of the Higher Education market place. (Something like this has happened to Anglo-American analytic philosophy: something like this is, unfortunately, currently happening to Modern Languages in the UK). But what binds English? Literature is that which “gives in principle the power to say everything, to break free of the rules” Derrida said in an interview.⁶ Surely it’s right and sensible that a discipline that responds to literature (“in principle the power to say anything”) allows its practitioners the same scope and forbids them nothing?

1 Roger Knight, “‘Excitement’ and Amnesia: Doing English In”, *The Use of English*, Spring 2000, pp. 159-169.

2 Some of the leading texts are: Chris Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism, 1848-1932* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983); Brian Doyle, *English and Englishness* (London: Routledge, 1989); Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Muse Unchained* (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1958); Bernard Bergonzi, *Exploding English: Criticism, Theory and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); *Writing Englishness 1900-1950*, eds. Judy Giles and Tim Middleton (London: Routledge, 1995); *The Origins of Literary Studies in America*, eds. Gerald Graff and Michael Warner (London: Routledge, 1989); Gary Day, ed., *The British Critical Tradition: A Re-evaluation* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993); D. J. Palmer, *The Rise of English Studies* (London: Oxford University Press/Hull University Press, 1965); Peter Widdowson (ed.), *Rereading English* (London: Methuen, 1982). There is also a website on the ‘History of English Studies’ at <http://humanitas.ucsb.edu/users/raley/englstud.html>

3 Harold Rosen, *Neither Bleak House or Liberty Hall: English in the Curriculum* (Institute of Education: London, 1981) p. 5.

4 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963 ed.) p. 32e.

5 Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 126.

6 Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992) p. 37.



Deborah Cartmell and Julian North

De Montfort University



The Way Forward for English Studies

In 1993, we conducted a survey asking heads of department about the outlook for English Studies (*THES* 17.12.93). The consensus view in response to the question, 'How do you see the future of English Studies?' was diversification, the subject expanding to take in relatively new options such as cultural/media studies. There were remarks too regarding the need to widen the canon of literary authors and texts studied on undergraduate courses and a desire to be less rigid in terms of the discipline and more responsive to students' demands. Cicely Palser Havelly, from the Open University took the view in 1993 that the outlook for English was '...a lot healthier than it might have been a decade or so ago when elitist tendencies in literary theory threatened self-destruction of the subject. Not that we don't teach theorized courses at the OU. but we have learnt (the hard way) that we can't ignore student numbers'.

The trend towards diversification was very much in evidence in the Council for College and University English Report on *The English Curriculum: Diversity and Standards* (1997) which, as its title suggests, presented a picture of a healthy balance between diversity, on the one hand and national standards on the other. Most respondents were opposed to the introduction of a common core to the English curriculum and favoured diversity (for instance, in the range of options offered after the foundation year, and opportunities for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary work). However, the report emphasized the underlying consensus over standards: 'the diversity of the curriculum in English in HE masks significant agreement on the definition of the core skills and threshold standards expected of English undergraduates'.

This summer we sent out a questionnaire to heads of English departments asking what they regarded as the way forward for the subject. Their replies indicated a continuing optimism about English. Diversity is still the buzz word, and several institutions are putting this into practice by restructuring their degree courses to allow for more options and for more interdisciplinary study. However, Cedric Brown, Head of Department of English, University of Reading, thought that where more traditional English departments, such as his own, were now restructuring with a view to increasing the diversity of options offered, new universities were doing so with a view to establishing a more traditional sense of core provision. Despite the general opposition to a core curriculum reported by CCUE in 1997, the very

fact that so many English departments are in the process of restructuring their curricula may itself suggest a neurosis about what constitutes 'standards'. Moreover, there seems to be recognition across the board in 1999 that students need training in writing and critical skills that in former years they may have been assumed to bring with them at the start of their university careers. Indeed, CCUE 1997 revealed a nationwide trend towards the implementation of strikingly similar foundational first year courses in English. Certainly, one area in which interest seems to be growing, and which could be a way both to widen provision and to improve standards, is the use of IT in teaching and learning in English degree courses (in 1997 only 9% of respondents to the CCUE survey used computer-assisted learning in their core teaching).

Rather than the often consumer-driven responses of 1993 as typified by the comments of the head of English at the Open University, the mood has shifted from what students *want* to what students *need*. The survey shows that even those at the top of the table express a need to address the problem of poor writing skills, something which, perhaps six years ago, would be admitted only by those at the very bottom. Our concern is that the commitment to national standards and to diversity may be in conflict with each other, and indeed a commitment to diversification alongside a recognition of the need to improve standards may be too tall an order. One of our respondents even suggested that the way forward for English might be a four-year degree, although this shows little regard for the increasing economic problems facing students today.

To the questions, 'What changes (if any) do you envisage making in the future?' and 'What do you, as Head of Department, think is the way forward for English?', the following responses were among those received:

Nicholas Shrimpton, Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford

(For the College): none (unless forced by financial circumstances to retreat from tutorial teaching) (For the Faculty): significant syllabus revision (with... optionality for period papers). (The way forward is) to continue, thoughtfully and attentively, to teach and study the world's richest (and still growing) body of literature, paying serious but sceptical attention to successive critical fads and fashions.

Howard Jackson, University of Central England

We have this year undertaken a major review and restructuring of the course. We hope to add an 'English and Literary Computing' route. (The way forward is) to emphasize the general educational benefits of Humanities courses in Higher Education over and against the trend to view Higher Education as 'training'.

Claire Lamont, University of Newcastle

Doubling our short modules; increasing use of IT (email has been a wonderful way of contacting students both individually and by class). (The way forward is) first thing, don't lose your nerve. Although the RAE is vital don't let it distort every other aspect of departmental activity. Remember that the coming together of a reader/viewer and a text is an important value, and is actually quite cheap, even if everything isn't.

David Denison, University of Manchester

Better bibliography back-up (using www., etc). New teaching approaches, e.g. problem-based learning.

Jonathan Bate, University of Liverpool

Building up postcolonial. (The way forward is) Reality: a teaching mill. Ideal: passion, engagement, thought, dialogue.

David Lindley, University of Leeds

(The way forward is) an increasingly implicit recognition of the very different kinds of study possible under the name of English.

Peter Heaney, Staffordshire University

Developing a greater variety of assessment modes, giving attention to the needs of students (especially writing skills). (The way forward is) making the most of considerable staff strengths in research and teaching – taking care that research is not pursued at the expense of teaching.

Tony Davies, University of Birmingham

(a) Develop new and existing interdisciplinary research activity in e.g. Medieval Studies, Renaissance Studies, Modernism. (b) Continue to build international links, which currently include collaborative arrangements with universities in Japan, Singapore and Germany. (The way forward is): (a) for English language, to embrace the indigenous and international varieties of English(es), and the new technologies (Corpus Research) and social situations (Forensic Linguistics) of language research and teaching. (b) for English Literature to take on its full responsibility as a form (perhaps *the* form) of Cultural Studies, as that important (and Birmingham-born) discipline reverts increasingly to a more traditional kind of social science.

Jago Morrison, Leeds Metropolitan University

Expansion of the research and teaching staff, widening of option choices, broadening of postgraduate provision. The position of English as a subject seems to be extremely strong. However, there is a

need to sustain the quality of provision in the post-1992 sector through more equitable distribution of research and teaching development funding. Maintenance of English: established cross-disciplinary strengths are crucial to maintaining its 'flagship' position within the Arts and Humanities.

Cedric Brown, University of Reading

At undergraduate level, there will be a complete new syllabus organisation from 2002. MA courses will be revisited at the same time. (The way forward): unanswerable question: are we thinking of research projects, postgraduate courses, cross-disciplinary or cross-institutional initiative, or MA and BA courses? English is a constantly growing and changing *family* of pursuits...

Janet Beer, Manchester Metropolitan University

We will be developing English and Creative Writing, English and Philosophy, and American Literature as joint honours programmes. (The way forward): to remain a broad church.

David Robb, University of Dundee

(The way forward): A completion of the gradual assimilation of theoretical approaches into the teaching of the subject at all levels, though possibly with a re-affirmation of the centrality of reading skills of the traditional type.

Helen Phillips, University of Glamorgan

Increased period coverage in literature from c.1350 to c.1750. Greater development, by English staff and the University, in the areas of International English teaching (The way forward): On the national academic scene English ought to be in a position now to enjoy a level of prestige and power appropriate to its importance. English Departments, it seems, will continue to attract well-qualified students in high numbers and many departments, assuming global economics remain favourable, have a strong continuing future in International English teaching. Increasingly sophisticated approaches to the International English area are likely to be one development of the next decade. The economic importance for the UK of the cultural 'industries' and of global English language education for the UK may strengthen perception of our graduates' employability. English departments have emerged since the eighties with a considerable consensus over a subject containing enormous variety. This sense of a community of the subject nationally and the rising prestige of CCUE and the AHRB should help to keep departments and research strong.

Peter Womack, University of East Anglia

Certainly at postgraduate level, and perhaps at undergraduate level too, we envisage extending our critical-creative interests so that they're more international and not so particularly 'English and American'. (The way forward): to cherish and celebrate the resources of the English language and English writing communities, so as, for example, to mistrust weaselly expressions like 'the way forward for English'.



Book, Screen & Electronic Paper in the 21st Century: Three publishers' views



*(i) Josie Dixon
Director of the
Academic Division,
Macmillan Press Ltd*

To declare my hand at the outset and give some context for what follows, I should explain that I have recently taken up the directorship of the Academic Division at Macmillan Press, which publishes across the humanities and social sciences, having previously worked for eleven years on the literature list at Cambridge University Press. Although literary studies does of course offer some particular publishing challenges and opportunities I think it is worth looking at that larger picture, because so many factors are common to these disciplines. I arrived at Macmillan at a time of significant new developments on various fronts; we are implementing a number of strategic changes to our academic publishing programme, at the core of which is a commitment to significantly greater selectivity, and more proactive commissioning of titles that are less specialist in focus. So, what is the background to those developments?

There has been much agonising in recent years about the future of the monograph. A few years ago the Association of American University Presses held a conference entitled 'The Scholarly Monograph in Crisis: or, how can I get tenure if you won't publish my book?' The dilemma might be rephrased in this country as 'how can I survive the RAE if you won't publish my book?' – the pressures may be different, but the problem is essentially the same, summing up the way in which academic publishing has become uncomfortably instrumental in the career structure and funding mechanisms of the profession. On this model, the monograph's chief function is to serve the needs of its authors rather than its readers, and is at risk of becoming a vehicle for scholarly prestige or a counter in the funding game, rather than a means of disseminating ideas to an audience (let alone addressing the needs of its readership).

A senior and experienced series editor from the US asked me recently, 'Isn't the point of academic publishing that it's somehow removed from the marketplace?' Well, yes and no. The print runs and profit thresholds may be radically different from trade publishing, but the challenge of publishing scholarly books that are very close to the margins of viability is precisely that it is a matter of survival to stay on the right side of the threshold between a commercially sustainable activity and one that makes a loss. Moreover, while American university presses are directly or indirectly subsidised operations, their British counterparts are not only obliged to fend for themselves

but increasingly expected to make money for their parent university. This has certainly narrowed the gap between university presses and commercial academic publishers, with Oxford and Cambridge universities effectively acting as the shareholders for their presses. Our challenge as academic publishers is always to reconcile the different sets of interests that cross on our desks: to find creative ways to serve the different parts of the academic community – scholars, teachers, students and libraries – at the same time as ensuring the health and sustainability of our own business.

The Institute for Historical Research ran a conference last December entitled 'Is the Monograph Dead?' which addressed many of the same issues as those raised a few years earlier by the AAUP. It brought together representatives of various different sectors directly or indirectly involved in the economy of academic publishing – funding bodies, authors, series editors, publishers and those involved in implementing the RAE. The only missing link – but I think a crucial one – was the librarians, whose purchasing decisions put them squarely on the frontline and interface between supply and demand. The problems we face in monograph publishing can, I think, best be understood as an imbalance between supply and demand – always a precarious equilibrium to maintain, but one which is being pushed further out of kilter by the RAE.

The cynic's view of monograph publishing is that it's a sector where the producers are also the consumers (clearly not the case in, say, textbook or trade publishing), but where people produce what they're not prepared to consume. With a little more refinement, it's perhaps fairer to say that academics are increasingly under pressure to produce what their own university libraries are now unable to pay for. Looking back over a good 20 year's worth of falling print runs, it's tempting to say 'twas ever thus – as a former colleague of mine liked to put it, the monograph, like the Habsburg empire, was always already in decline. But it's very clear that we're reaching a real crunch point, where it's no longer possible for us as publishers to keep revising our thresholds of viability. It is only by dint of a substantial drop in real terms in our production costs – the result of new technologies and the sheer desperation of many of our suppliers to stay in business – that specialised monograph publishing has survived so long, in the face of cuts to library funding, rising numbers of books competing for those diminishing funds, and the recent instability of key overseas markets, notably in the Far East. (It is sobering to note that the Japanese sales can constitute some 15% of the total print run for a monograph in literary studies – even more for a heavy-duty textual edition – and have thus played a crucial part in shoring up the viability of specialist academic publishing in this field.) Another key factor has been the increasing diversion of library funding away from

books in favour of journals. While there is certainly still a market for the broader and more saleable research topics, it is hard not to question in this context whether the monograph is still the best vehicle for disseminating the more specialised research, when a well-established journal in the field has a circulation several times the realistic print run for the same work in book form.

The RAE, meanwhile, is clearly pulling in the opposite direction. If not as obviously as the tenure system in the US, it has nevertheless contributed to making book publication the major yardstick in the humanities and social sciences. It also tends to privilege rapid production over the long-gestated work of research, with the result that publishers are being offered ever more of the kinds of books that are increasingly hard to sell – those on smaller topics, and collections of essays, including conference volumes. As everyone who reads this will no doubt be aware, the RAE is also posing intense difficulties in terms of timing. As the cut-off date approaches, the disproportionate influx of typescripts delivered results in huge pressure on publishers' staff, resources and even cashflow, bottlenecks in scheduling, and a glut of publications all appearing at a time when there will be no additional purchasing budgets or review space to accommodate them. On average, all these books will come off worse. However hard academic publishers try to resist, we inevitably find ourselves cast in the role of service industry to the RAE, as to the tenure system. From this vantage point, it is hard not to conclude from the flood of last-minute submissions that quality is being impaired in the very attempt to measure it.

If there is another RAE, I hope it will recognise that market conditions play a large part in determining the viability of monographs, and that some of the finest research may no longer find an outlet in this form and is more effectively published in journals. I hope it will also recognise the influential contribution of the most innovative textbooks (currently being discussed under the rubric of 'intellectual added value') and of the most cutting-edge reference works. I think there is more scope here than is often credited for a level of creative synthesis and originality, which can help to define and stimulate new directions in the discipline. On Macmillan's list, I might point to *The New Grove Dictionary of Music*, *The Dictionary of Art* and *The New Palgrave: A Dictionary of Economics* (the last of which included major articles by all but one living Nobel Prize winners) as the kind of landmark reference works which have become definitive resources in their field. These kinds of projects emphatically do not represent any kind of dumbing down, but they do cater to a level of demand which no longer exists for research in monograph form.

I hope there will always be a place on academic publishers' lists for the most significant contributions to research (for which the monograph has so far been the traditional vehicle) – it seems to me a core activity which keeps us in touch with the cutting edge – but we have to recognise the larger question of *whether* and *in what form* there will remain a market for it.

That gives me my cue to say something about electronic publishing. I mentioned that Macmillan is undergoing some significant (and I think very exciting) changes at present. In addition to the imminent formation of e-Grove, we are setting up within the larger Macmillan

group an online publishing services unit which will be a resource to pool electronic production and marketing expertise from various parts of the business, making them available for all aspects of our publishing, from academic, reference and trade books to journals, including *Nature* and other scientific periodicals where online delivery is already far advanced. Within Macmillan Press we have an online monograph project under way: the pilot project in economics has been up on our website free of charge for some time, and a much broader range of humanities and social sciences monographs will be made available online in the coming year. There are lots of questions still to be answered in determining the models for selling monographs online, whether to individuals, libraries, networks or consortia, but it's clear that the only way to tackle the problems is to get your feet wet. It is an exciting project, but I think it's wise to be cautious in our expectations for instant solutions to the problems I have outlined, and to recognise that there are not yet many existing models for genuinely profitable electronic publishing at the specialist academic level without large elements of subsidised funding.

Finally, I was asked to say something from the publisher's viewpoint about the relationship between academic and popular audiences. Kate Belsey raised some interesting issues in her piece in the last *CCUE News*, and it's always welcome to hear new commitments to making the discipline accessible beyond its immediate constituency. However, it's undoubtedly true that literary studies has traditionally had far less success in negotiating the academic-trade crossover than, say, history – I think it's no accident that the more popularly successful and media-friendly academics coming out of English departments (Lisa Jardine springs most easily to mind) tend to be those writing cultural history rather than literary criticism. There is a market phenomenon here as much as a tendency in the discipline itself, and it's worth noting that the potential for trade crossover has always been far greater in the USA than in this country, let alone overseas markets (hence the 'boutique publishing' of trade highlights on the lists of American university presses). Beyond that, it seems to me that the biggest successes in this mode are almost invariably linked to the profile of the author. The best-selling literary-critical titles I have had a hand in publishing – and I mean those selling in five figures or more – have been by creative writers such as Umberto Eco and Wole Soyinka. Some of the most popular were backlist golden oldies like C.S. Lewis – clearly on a different planet from literary studies today. It is a great challenge to try to achieve that for a new generation, but I think it will involve bucking a trend in the market. From the publishing viewpoint, it seems to me that in literary studies there are more clearly attainable rewards in reaching larger sectors of the academic market – graduates, undergraduates, teachers and public as well as university libraries – than in chasing the (un)holy grail of mass-market sales.

(ii) *Peter Robinson*
De Montfort University

I have a tiny claim to call myself a publisher but no claim at all to call myself a 'leading publisher'. However, I have achieved a rare distinction in electronic publishing. I have been responsible for *two* scholarly CD-ROMs: *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* four years ago, and in the last few weeks, the *General Prologue*. Most scholars who are flushed with the excitement of Tony Blair's latest encomium to the internet into trying their hands at electronic publication, produce one prototype, write one article, attend one conference, and then return to their usual pursuits of marking essays and writing books. A few die-hards last the extreme distance and produce, six years later, an electronic *Beowulf* or *Piers Plowman*. So far as I know, we are the only scholars who have actually produced two electronic publications. Why is this? Surely, the world is so enraptured with the electronic medium that publishers queue to market what we electronic scholars produce, and academics queue to buy it. Here is myth one: electronic publishing is fantastically profitable. We all know it costs only a few pence to copy a CD-ROM. So when a publisher charges £10, a hundred pounds, £30,000 for a CD-ROM, they must be making a fortune. Wrong. Where are the electronic publishers of yesteryear, those who were going to break the mould of academic publishing? Dorling Kindersley lost *Star Wars*; Chadwyck-Healey, the king of them all, is gone; electronic publications departments in traditional publishers have been scaled down or closed. There are no electronic publishers left to queue, alas. And the reason is rather simple: academics have not queued to buy electronic publications. You could give many reasons for this. Maybe publishers have been too greedy, and have priced their electronic products too high; maybe it is the culture of the internet, where everyone expects someone else to pay. But the truth is, ten years into the supposed electronic publishing revolution, traditional publishers continue to thrive, or at least continue to complain as they always have; more printed books are being published than ever before; we continue to read books and journals in print, and those of us who work purely to produce electronic scholarship are even more of a minority than we were a few years ago. If you hoped that I might say that the answer to how we will get published in the 21st century is that everyone will get published electronically, I am sorry to disappoint you.

It is, or it ought to be, a commonplace about revolutions that they do not revolt in the way we expected. Ten years ago, we were told that printed books might die, scholarly journals would go completely electronic, monographs would all be published electronically. None of this has happened. Yet, some things have changed. Almost without our noticing, monolithic printed works of reference have disappeared. The *OED* will never again be printed in full; nor will the *Britannica*, nor the catalogues of any major library. There is, I think, a kind of rule here. If the printed book is larger than a personal computer, then it has been replaced by the computer. But almost all the books we use every day as academics, all the monographs, all the standard student editions, all the journals, all these are safely smaller than a personal

computer. Maybe as computers continue to shrink, more and more books will disappear, to be replaced by the computer. But even if they do, the signs are that the computer will only replace the book when it looks like a book, feels like a book, smells like a book: every year, the smart fellows at MIT claim to have invented something they call electronic paper, or Mr Gates's minions design a new computer display which looks just like – well, would you believe it, paper.

Business as usual, then. We academics might use word processors, and our publishers might use fancy computer typesetting. But we will write just the same books, discuss them with the same people at the same publishers (usually, graduates of the better universities), and they will be read by the same academics who have always read them. If there is a difference, it is the distressing (to some!) tendency of grant bodies to give disproportionate sums of money to people who are on good terms with their computers. Worthless research with a computer is no better than worthless research without it, and a good deal more expensive. However, there are areas where electronic methods do make a difference, where they have opened up new areas of research and modes of publication never before possible. One such area is the world I inhabit, of scholarly editions. Large-scale editions of major authors can easily become larger than personal computers, and so pass my test of being likely candidates for full electrification. However, one could argue that these scholarly editions are the pursuit of a despised minority.

I have been suggesting so far that the impact of electronic methods on our profession is rather less than one might have thought. For less, read 'different'. Imagine a world where you can look at every page of every book and of every manuscript written or published before 1900: further, you can look at these on your computer (which you can fold up and put in your pocket) anytime, anywhere. All your students, all your colleagues, can do exactly the same. Imagine too that as well as traditional refereed print publication you have a host of what one might call grey publication possibilities, in various forms of electronic self or cooperative publication. The paradigm of our profession, rightly or wrongly, has been the lonely pursuit of knowledge, expressed in the single-authored monograph. In the world of infinitely available information, everyone has access to everything: knowledge is shared, collaborative and transparent, at least in theory. To concentrate on electronic publishing, as if this represents the total impact information technology will have on us, misses the point. What we do is going to be changed far more pervasively than just the substitution of one form of publication by another. When the barbarians are in the streets, in your house, in your bedroom, under your bed – and very soon, in your bed too – it is little use complaining that they are at the gates.

(iii) Sophie Goldsworthy
Commissioning Editor for Literature
Oxford University Press

You will all have read articles in the *Times Higher* and elsewhere about the ‘death of the monograph’ in the face of commercial pressures. Who is writing monographs? It is quite clear to me that a very high percentage – possibly as high as 90% – of literary scholars in the UK and elsewhere are currently engaged in researching and/or writing something that could be classed as a monograph. As far as I can tell from my vantage point at OUP, more rather than fewer monographs are being written. Fewer and fewer institutions see themselves as primarily teaching universities; fewer individual scholars have the luxury of publishing just one book in their career. The RAE has increased the pressure on all academics to stretch that article into a book, or knock those conference papers into something resembling a collection.

Young scholars are also facing an increasingly hostile publishing climate, being under great pressure to publish their doctoral theses, while administrative overload leaves them without the time necessary to realize the full potential of the thesis. As a publisher, one sometimes has a crisis of confidence, and asks oneself ‘does anyone actually read the hundreds of books that I publish each year?’ To try and answer this question, we have recently undertaken an informal survey, asking academics what they read and how they read it.

It was abundantly clear from the survey that academics spend as much time as they can afford looking at research-related books. They will open and dip into perhaps thousands of titles in any one calendar year. They will have on the shelves of their office perhaps a couple of hundred volumes, and they will read cover to cover just a few books – perhaps 20. Monographs are being written, and they are certainly being used, if not read cover to cover. So is there a problem? From where I am standing, there is certainly a problem. OUP has always and almost certainly will always publish research books. Worldwide, we publish about 920 new academic books in the humanities and social sciences each year, of which about 410 are published from the UK office (with perhaps 310 from the US, and 200 from other OUP offices, particularly India). The Literature list is one of the largest in the department, publishing between 75 and 100 titles each year. Of these, a good 60-70% are monographs.

But some fairly crude analysis of sales figures shows that the average first-year sale for literature monographs has fallen by 33% in the last 10 years. Changes in the way in which English literature is studied in the UK over the past two decades have resulted in fewer and fewer undergraduates likely to follow courses taking them chronologically through an agreed canon of literature. These changes have had profound consequences for academic publishing. A diversity of courses means a fracturing of the potential market. We have been reasonably fortunate in publishing so far in that as the sales figures have dropped, so have the costs of producing the physical book (in real terms). But we have stretched that just about as far as it can go.

We cannot afford for the sales to drop any further. If they do, a whole branch of our publishing will begin to lose money in a substantial way.

So the monograph itself is alive and kicking, but the publication of that work by conventional routes is struggling. The monograph as a genre is a victim of its own success and the pressures of the RAE. So many monographs are being published that each individual title sells fewer copies. Any single academic is probably reading a similar number of titles as would have been read by his or her predecessor. But each individual title is being read by fewer people. Add to the equation the level of academic salaries, and the pressure on library budgets, with journals and electronic products competing for ever-dwindling resources, and it becomes abundantly clear why we are selling fewer copies of the books we publish.

What is to be done? There are three obvious options. The first is out of my hands as a publisher. 1. Academics could stop writing up their archival research in book form. They could use journals, or email discussion groups or some other medium that is yet to be invented to disseminate their ideas. I can’t see this happening without a massive change of tack from those in charge of assessment and funding.

That means we have to look at the other two options, both of which are in the hands of publishers. 2. At the moment, a good publisher adds value to any text in a number of ways: screening quality by peer review; copy-editing; design – internal and external; marketing; distribution; warehousing. One simple way to cut our costs and keep monograph publishing viable would be stop adding some or all of this value. The resulting loss in quality would probably reduce sales, but the cost of adding this value is very high, and I’m sure we could retain enough sales to cover the more simple costs we would incur.

3. The third option is to publish only those books for which we can genuinely afford to add value – only those ‘monographs’ for which the sales expectations are rather higher than average.

Which will OUP (or indeed any academic publisher) choose? Number one is out of our control. There is actually no way OUP wants to take the route offered by number two and stop offering the value we currently add. We trade on our quality – in terms of content, but also in terms of the physical product, the distribution, the sales, the reviews. This leaves option three. To some extent every publisher uses option three, declining academically respectable books on very specialized subjects for example. But there is a limit to the extent to which a university press could, and indeed should do this. In the end a university press should be reflecting the academic community it serves. Push option three to its limits and all we will have are books on Shakespeare!

I seem to have written myself into an impossible position – none of the options that are available are really options at all. Things might move a little in all three areas, but in the end this fine-tuning will not resolve the problem.

I think there is a solution. I'm not exactly sure what form it will take, but I'm convinced that the electronic revolution holds the answer. We are all experimenting with the internet, and we are all a little unsure about which direction to go in and how quickly the technology will move, but each year that passes gives us more electronic options. Ask almost any scholar if they are prepared to read on screen, and the answer will be no. It hurts their eyes, it makes their backs ache, and they can't stick a finger and thumb between pages in the way they can with a conventional book. Nobody knows if this is a physical problem or a psychological one. I must confess that it surprises me that academics confess to finding computers so user-unfriendly when I think how hard many of them will work in the archives, reading medieval script in another language for example. There you really are talking about eye-strain and back ache. But fundamentally I agree. The book remains the best-designed object for sustained reading. However, I think we need to be a bit more flexible in our approach. What academics are thinking of when they say that they are not prepared to read on screen, is the activity of reading a book cover to cover.

But what about all the other ways that monographs are used: searching the index for key words, skimming through to get a sense of what is covered, stopping to read only small sections in detail, looking up something one is already familiar with, and so on. Does all (or indeed any?) of this activity actually require a physical copy of the book? In fact, in some cases the activity can be more effectively performed electronically. If, and this is a big if, OUP were to make its entire list available electronically, and libraries were to subscribe to hold this electronic archive on their intranet for their own academics to use, we could revolutionize the way you all read (or rather, use) monographs. Rather than go to the library and find the book you want is missing, you could guarantee that it would be available electronically – and probably to more than one user at a time. When you want to look something up, and know just where to look for it, but don't have a copy of the book on your shelf, you could save yourself a trip to the library.

When you are not sure whether or not something is going to be useful, you could skim through it looking at contents, index, introduction, etc. before deciding whether you need a copy. There are numerous ways in which an electronic archive of a library could be beneficial, and 'reading' on screen an improvement on reading a physical copy. Of course, there will still be times when you do need to read a book from cover to cover. Or you want it for a train journey, or to sit by the fire with... Then you request that your library buy a physical copy from the publisher for you in the usual way.

You might be thinking that all this sounds great from the point of view of academics, but what's in it for the publishers? Surely something along the lines I'm proposing would cut down the overall sales of the books? Yes, it might. But it might do the opposite. It might be an easy way of getting scholars to realize that they do need to read something which they would otherwise overlook.

OUP has recently set up what we are calling our Reading Room. This is a part of our web site where we make available a sample chapter of every new book we publish. This is intended to give the academic a chance to look at the book in more detail and help their decision about purchasing. In more than half the cases we find that looking at a sample chapter has a positive influence on sales of the book. Even if sales of printed books were reduced by their electronic availability, we could charge the libraries a subscription for access to the database. This subscription would have to be balanced against the cost of lost sales and the cost of maintaining the website, but that ought not to be too difficult.

In the longer run, I anticipate that print technology will change. When an academic decides he or she wants to see a physical copy of a book for themselves, instead of the library ordering a copy from the publisher, they will pay to download the file, and then take it round to the local printers (Presto Print or whatever it might be), and get them to print one copy of the book and bind it for them on the spot. Machines already exist that can do this. The quality of the end product is improving all the time and the cost is slowly coming down. It is a very real possibility.

This system of printing individual copies on demand, at the geographical location of the demand, would save publishers the enormous costs of warehousing and distribution, and so would enable us to publish viably work that sells in far smaller quantities than we can currently afford to sustain, without losing any of the value that we currently add, and – a real bonus – to keep it in print almost indefinitely.

The physical book – which we all agree is a beautifully designed object – stays. It is not going to be replaced by the electronic book. But it is going to be used alongside it. It will be a partnership, not a competition. And this partnership will, I hope, allow academic publishers to continue to reflect the interests of the academic community in the future, even if the RAE and other forces combine to ensure that that does mean publishing more monographs.



Upcoming

If you would like your conference or day school listed in *CCUE NEWS* please send information regarding the event to Kate Fullbrook, Associate Dean, Faculty of Humanities, University of the West of England, St Matthias, Oldbury Court Road, Fishponds, Bristol BS16 2JP (Fax: 0117 975 0402; e-mail: Kate.Fullbrook@uwe.ac.uk).

Voyages Out, Voyages Home: Eleventh Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf

13-16 June 2001
University of Wales, Bangor
Contact: Michael Whitworth
University of Wales, Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 2DG
email: woolf@bangor.ac.uk
<http://www.bangor.ac.uk/english/woolf.html>

After the Middle Ages: Modern Responses to Medieval Texts

18 November 2000
Cardiff University
Contact: Carl Phelpstead, ENCAP
Cardiff University, PO Box 94
Colum Drive, Cardiff CF10 3XB
Tel: 029 20 874 245 email: phelpsteadc@cf.ac.uk

Commemorating Mary Robinson, 1758-1800

23 September 2000
University of Warwick
Contact: Jacqueline Labbe
Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies
University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL
Tel: 024 7657 3092 Fax: 024 7652 4750
email: j.m.labbe@warwick.ac.uk

Writing Europe 2001: Migrant Cartographies: Cultural Travellers and New Literatures

University of Leiden/University of Amsterdam
Contact: Dr Daniela Merolla
ALW, University of Leiden
Van Wijkplaats 2, 2300 RA Leiden
The Netherlands
email: Merolla@Rullet.LeidenUniv.nl

Symbiosis: Anglo-American Literary Relations: Endless Renovation

1-12 July 2001
College of St Mark and St John
Contact: Eldred Herrington
Symbiosis 2001
College of St Mark and St John
Derriford Road, Plymouth PL6 8BH
email: symbiosis2001@hotmail.com

John Dryden: Poet, Classicist, Translator: A Tercentenary Conference

7-9 July 2000
University of Bristol
Contact: Debra Blackmore-Squires
Department of English
University of Bristol
3/5 Woodland Road, Bristol BS8 1TB
email: D.J.Blackmore-Squires@bris.ac.uk

Suffrage City! Women's Suffrage and Cultural Representation

11 November 2000
University of Wolverhampton
Contact: Dr Rosie Miles
University of Wolverhampton
Dudley Campus
Castle View, Dudley DY1 3HR
Tel: 01902 323479 email: R.Miles@wlv.ac.uk

Victorian Literary Cultures and the Visual Arts

18 November 2000
University of Hertfordshire
Contact: Dr Andrew Maunder
Faculty of Humanities
University of Hertfordshire
Wall Hall, Aldenham
Watford WD2 8AT
Tel: +44 (0) 1727 286541 email: a.c.maunder@herts.ac.uk

Anglo-Continental Relations in the Sixteenth Century

7-9 September 2000
University of Newcastle
Contact: Mike Pincombe
Department of English
University of Newcastle
Newcastle Upon Tyne
Tel: 0191 2227621 Fax: 0191 2228708
email: m.j.pincombe@ncl.ac.uk

"The Word in the Word": Religion and the Novel

11 November 2000
University of Reading
Contact: Dr Tom Woodman
Department of English
PO Box 218
University of Reading
Whiteknights
Reading RG6 6AA
email: T.M.Woodman@reading.ac.uk