

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, Oldbury Court Road, Fishponds, Bristol BS16 2JP (Fax 0117 975 0402; email: Kate.Fullbrook@uwe.ac.uk).

Romantic Orientalism

12-15 July 2002
Gregynog Conference Centre, Powys, Wales
Contact: Michael Franklin
Department of English
University of Wales
Aberystwyth
Dyfed SY23 3DY
Tel: 01970 621578
Email: mjf@aber.ac.uk

Jewish Women Writers and 20th Century British Culture

12 July 2002
Brunel University
Contact: Claire Tylee
English Department
Brunel University
London, UK
Email: claire.tylee@brunel.ac.uk or marilyn.burnside@brunel.ac.uk

Third Wave Feminism International Conference

23-25 July 2002
The Institute for Feminist Theory and Research
Contact: Dr Stacy Gillis
School of English
Queens Building
University of Exeter
Exeter, Devon EX4 4QH
Email: s.j.gillis@exeter.ac.uk

Places of Exchange: Magazines, Journals and Newspapers in British and Irish Culture, 1688-1945

25-27 July 2002
University of Glasgow
Contact: Professor Janet Todd
Department of English Literature
University of Glasgow
Glasgow GL12 8QQ
Email: j.todd@arts.gla.ac.uk

Theory Now: A Conference in memory of Antony Easthope

28-30 June 2002
Manchester Metropolitan University
Contact: Angelica Michelis
Department of English
Manchester Metropolitan University
Geoffrey Manton Building
Rosamond Street West
Manchester M15 6LL
Email: a.michelis@mmu.ac.uk

Adaptation, Costume, Heritage: Jane Austen and the Classic Novel from Text to Screen

8-10 July 2002
University of Southampton
Contact: Professor Cora Kaplan
English Department
University of Southampton
Highfield
Southampton SO17 1BJ
UK
Email: ach2002@soton.ac.uk

The 1830s

13-15 September 2002
University of Salford
Contact: Wendy Dodgson
European Studies Research Institute
University of Salford
Salford
Greater Manchester M5 4WT
Email: w.a.dodgson@salford.ac.uk or j.john@salford.ac.uk

Scotland, Ireland and the Romantic Aesthetic

5-7 July 2002
University of Aberdeen
Contact: Catherine Jones
Department of English
University of Aberdeen
King's College
Aberdeen AB24 2UB
Email: c.a.jones@abdn.ac.uk

Creativity, Culture and Environment

6-8 September 2002
University of Leeds
Bretton Hall Campus
Abstracts to arrive by 22 April 2002
Contact: Dr Terry Gifford
University of Leeds
Bretton Hall Campus
Wakefield WF4 4LG, UK.
Email: t.gifford@leeds.ac.uk

Homer: Receptions Ancient and Modern

Wednesday 1st May 2002
University of Bristol
Centre for the Classical Tradition
Contact: Professor David Hopkins
Department of English
University of Bristol
3/5 Woodland Road
Bristol BS8 1TB UK
e-mail: David.Hopkins@bristol.ac.uk

Radical Soul: Rewriting Religion

18 May 2002
Loughborough University
Contact: Dr John Schad
Department of English and Drama
Loughborough University
Loughborough LE11 3TU
Email: s.j.schad@lboro.ac.uk

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CCUE NEWS

COUNCIL for
COLLEGE
and UNIVERSITY
ENGLISH

“Language & Context”

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Editorial

CCUE is among the most thriving of HE subject associations: connected with a range of exciting projects in English, consulted on most of the initiatives which impinge on the lives of its members, and running two General Meetings each year, which have featured a sequence of brilliant plenary lectures. Perhaps the time has come to broadcast these achievements more loudly; hence the article on the facing page, and the rather worrying Postscript from our Treasurer about the difficulty of gathering the annual departmental subscriptions on time.

The word 'context' is hard to avoid these days in English Studies. It certainly figures centrally in the current specifications for the A levels in both Literature and Language, which is why collaboration between the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, Palgrave and CCUE has resulted in the volume on *Literature in Context* reviewed in this issue. But as Peter Smith points out in his review, the term 'context' itself is an ambiguous one, which can be invoked in terms of almost any literary-theoretical paradigm, as well as by literary biography, genre studies and English-within-Cultural-Studies. A number of these kinds of context are examined in the case studies that make up the book. Patricia Ingham's article "Context as Text" broadens out the topic into the arena of language study by arguing forcefully that the linguistic concept of 'context-dependent meaning' is highly relevant to the historical and ideological dimension of

studying literature. She also offers some thoughtful notes on the way film adaptations of classic texts might be approached in the classroom. Her more detailed exploration of such an approach, in *Invisible Writing and the Victorian Novel*, is reviewed in this issue by Joseph Bray. The other article, by Mick Short and Dawn Archer, combines three important topics: Stylistics, web-based leaning and the ILT's Teaching Fellowship Awards. (Mick's 2000 National Teaching Fellowship has allowed him to pursue this research into pedagogy.)

CCUE News 17 will take up two of these topics, by publishing short articles on: (a) English Lecturers' experience of the Institute for Teaching and Learning; (b) the ILT's own view of its role; and (c) the extent to which the QAA funding of teaching and learning activities and projects within Universities and Colleges has had a positive impact upon English Studies. Anyone with views on any of these topics is warmly invited to send material (deadline May 31 2002) to the usual address:

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University College Northampton, Northampton NN2 7AL
Telephone: 01604 735500 Ext: 2134
E-mail: chris.ringrose@northampton.ac.uk



What is the Council for College and University English and what does it do?

The CCUE Executive has prepared the following short description of the Council's role and objectives, for new members and old.

CCUE's main aim is to represent the concerns, and to promote and defend the interests, of English in UK higher education. It also provides an independent forum for professional and scholarly debate. It is routinely consulted by official bodies such as the Arts and Humanities Research Board, the British Academy, the Higher Education Funding Councils, and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, and solicits the membership's views in compiling its responses to them. Membership is by institution, and the current annual subscription is £80. This is a brief summary of CCUE's main activities:

- Over the past decade CCUE has represented the subject influentially in important national developments such as the Dearing Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, the development of Quality Assurance and successive Research Assessment Exercises.
- Each year the Executive organises a one-day Ordinary General Meeting and a two-day Annual General Meeting. Recent speakers have included Gillian Beer, Catherine Belsey, Marilyn Butler, Deborah Cameron, Robert Crawford, Paul Muldoon, and Tom Paulin, as well as senior representatives from Universities UK, the AHRB, The British Academy and HEFCE. There have also been panel discussions on the Benchmarking Report for English, Teaching Creative Writing, the Future of the PhD in English, and How We Will Get Published in the Twenty-first Century. Registration fees for the OGM and AGM in 2001 were £28 and £65 respectively, inclusive of meals, with discounted rates for postgraduates.
- Members are eligible to seek nomination to the Executive Committee at elections held annually at the AGM. The Executive meets regularly throughout the year and its members are assigned particular areas of responsibility such as postgraduate matters and regional issues.
- *CCUE News*, edited by Chris Ringrose, is distributed to each member of staff in a subscribing department.
- CCUE, in partnership with Royal Holloway and Kings College London, contributed to the successful establishment of the Subject Centre for English under the direction of Philip Martin (who has a formal reporting relationship to CCUE and sits on its Executive).

While independent of the Subject Centre, CCUE, through its Executive and wider membership (at the OGM and AGM), encourages the subject community to contribute actively to the further development of the Subject Centre's impressive profile and programme of activities.

- Members of the Executive maintain strong links with such cognate organizations as the Council for University Deans in the Arts and Humanities (CUDAH), the Standing Conference on Arts and Social Sciences (SCASS), the European Society for the Study of English (ESSE), and the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE).
- The recently refurbished CCUE website, maintained by Robert Clark, contains an abundance of information relating to the subject community (www.ccue.ac.uk) and circulates information about conferences.
- CCUE offers support (financial or otherwise) for a small number of conferences each year that address professional and subject-related issues of broad interest to members.
- CCUE seeks actively to promote the public understanding of English through various initiatives.

A Postscript from the CCUE Treasurer

Although the present balance of the CCUE account is healthy as far as the immediate future is concerned, it is about £5000 down on last year. The principal reason for this is that only about half of our member institutions paid their subscription last year and about 10 of these rather late in the CCUE financial year which currently runs from November to November. If this trend were to continue, CCUE may not have enough funds to survive beyond three years. Members will have received their 2001-2002 invoices and are asked to pay promptly. Payment of outstanding 2000-2001 subscriptions would also be much appreciated; defaulting institutions have been sent an invoice/reminder. We sent the invoices out in the new calendar year, thinking that November was perhaps too near the end of term to impose on folks. We are exploring the idea of bringing the CCUE financial year in line with the academic year. That degree of tidiness might help us in restoring our operating base. Thanks to everyone for their co-operation, received and anticipated!

Linden Peach, Loughborough University, Treasurer, CCUE

Chair's Annual Report Spring 2002

Rick Rylance

Every year seems a busy year. In the troughs between RAEs and TQAs, the next waves loom, and new initiatives and old fears pile up. Public policy discussion in British higher education never seems to sleep just now – nor, maybe, does it ever seem quite awake. But CCUE has an important and settled role in these debates. As Judy Simons noted in last year's report, official bodies of all kinds routinely consult the Council, and, on the evidence of extensive membership, full attendance at Ordinary and Annual General Meetings, and the heavy responses we gain to our own consultations, CCUE has good reason to think itself an authentic voice for the profession. It is one that other disciplines may envy. Earlier this year, the Council had a letter from a senior British philosopher seeking our advice on effective ways of establishing a similar body in that discipline.

The major activities this year were as follows.

The Subject Centre for English has successfully been established at Royal Holloway under the direction of Philip Martin as a partnership between that university, CCUE and King's College, London. It is important to emphasise CCUE's unique role nationally in forming the agenda of the Centre and ensuring its responsiveness to the subject community. This year, CCUE has, in addition to its existing responsibilities, overseen the external scrutiny of the Centre's activities by Professor Kelvin Everest of the University of Liverpool.

CCUE has also been busy with other public bodies and issues. On research, the Council submitted a formal response to the HEFCE's 'Review of Research', a document that will shape future research policy and the conduct of assessment exercises. We also submitted a detailed, thorough response to the British Academy's 'Review of Graduate Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences' based upon a consultation among members conducted by Michael Rossington. Representatives from the Academy, and the new Chief Executive of the AHRB, addressed the OGM on research issues, and the Executive returned nominations to the AHRB when invited to propose members of its English Panels. The Council also submitted a strong response to HEFCE's consultation on the future of quality assurance in higher education, and Arthur Brown from QAA addressed the AGM on the forthcoming Academic Review of English.

In other areas, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) continues to consult the Council on the development of secondary provision in English and the National Curriculum Monitoring and Evaluation. Palgrave has published a collection on the theme of *Literature in Context*, edited and written largely by past and present members of the Executive. It is reviewed in this issue of *CCUE News*. In part, the volume responds to the new 'A' level syllabus and it carries an endorsement by a QCA Subject Officer for English.



More widely, the Council has continued to take forward the issue of the public understanding of English along the lines discussed at last year's meetings. Discussions are underway for a sponsored prize for scholarship in English, and openings have been created by Judy Simons for pieces of topical concern in the national press. In collaboration with the British Academy and the Council for University Deans in Arts and Humanities (CUDAH), and in association with other bodies such as the Royal Society and the Council for Industry in Higher Education, CCUE will organise conferences on 'Literature and Medicine', and the 'The Humanities and Employment'. These will stress the importance of work in English to topics of wide public interest.

CCUE has sought to extend its involvement with other cognate organisations. Responding to an initiative from the English Association, the Council has, with the Institute for English Studies, the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE) and other bodies, been instrumental in establishing the Common English Forum. The Forum is a loosely federated group, with representatives from these and other bodies, brought together to discuss important matters relating to the future of the subject, especially the relationship between the study of English in secondary schools and higher education. It will continue to meet over the coming year. Liaison with the European Society for the Study of English (ESSE), the Standing Conference on Arts and Social Sciences (SCASS) and the Council for University Deans in the Art and Humanities (CUDAH) has been maintained.

Within CCUE, thanks to the good work of Robert Clark, a refurbished CCUE website was launched (www.ccue.ac.uk), and a proposal from the membership that CCUE should support conferences of general professional interest to the subject community has been adopted. (Details are available on the website and in a forthcoming issue of *CCUE News*.)

We might now look ahead. Among the issues looming will be: responses to the 2001 RAE, the start of the QAA academic review, the impact of the new 'A' and 'AS' level qualifications, the recruitment pressures faced by the subject nationally, the continuing impact of the 'vocational' or 'employment' lobby on higher education generally and the humanities in particular, the growing importance of the study of English language ... another busy year. Throughout the last I have enjoyed the support, willing endeavour and good humour of a fine Executive. In particular, I might single out the contribution of Daniel Lamont, who this year steps down as Treasurer after many years of willing, committed, generous and skilful service. He deserves our thanks.

Context as Text

Patricia Ingham

St Anne's College, Oxford



The revised curriculum for A and A/S Levels in English aims explicitly to strengthen the links between university English and the teaching of English in schools. For those who teach at university level this is welcome news. In discussing the new plans in an earlier *CCUE News*, Janet White of the QCA emphasizes two points. These are: the importance in the Literature course of knowledge of 'the contexts in which texts are produced'; and the necessity in the combined Literature and Language course of offering 'ways of reading and writing which really draw on the links between the two disciplines'. I believe that such links are self-evident since the key to the understanding of context in a wide sense is a knowledge of the mechanics of language. Through such an approach linguistic, cultural and historical contexts are revealed as not optional extras, distinct from some supposed 'literal' significance, but the cloth from which the texts are cut.

For the significance of any utterance/text, whether spoken or written, is, in a narrow sense, context-dependent. J. L. Austin and H.P. Grice long ago demonstrated that conversation works, when speakers co-operate, by implication on one side and inference on the other. Context of a physical kind plays a large part here. 'I haven't got a wine-glass' may be interpreted as a simple request for one if it is said in a restaurant to a waiter. If spoken in a kitchen by someone holding a bottle of wine in one hand and a tumbler in the other, it can be taken as a polite question or a mild apology. Similarly, 'Do you really want me to alter your face?' will be understood differently if it comes from a cosmetic surgeon rather than from a mugger in the street. The significance of the sentence requires the whole context to be known if it is to be understood.

At the same time, with any piece of language the meaning of each of its parts is determined by what frames them. Here too meaning is context-dependent. Linguistic context has two obvious aspects to be considered. The nature of the constituents of the utterance and the relationships between them. Recognition of the nature of constituents is already a step towards interpretation of a sentence or paragraph. Meaning is produced partly by whether, say, a sentence is active or passive in form, uses singular or plural verbs and nouns, present or past tenses, or even definite or indefinite articles. In each case a semantic difference results from the choices made by the speaker. For instance, the effect of the past tense forms given to Esther in Dickens's *Bleak House* and the present tense given to the omniscient narrator is not exhausted by a reference to past and present. The so-called present tense has a common omne-temporal use which provides a form for universal truths such as 'Man is mortal' or 'Two plus two makes four'. Esther's past tense on the other hand is time-bound and lacks the authority of the barrister-like voice of her co-narrator, attributing

power and authority to him, not to her. He can generalize on everything from the practices of politicians to the death of the sun; she can tell only her own narrow story.

The relationships between constituents in an utterance make up the more obvious parts of context, since they form a frame for each other. Though the structure appears superficially linear, this is misleading. In fact each sentence is a hierarchical web such as can be illustrated by the sentence 'I like rich old men and women'. This represents two different connecting webs, depending on who is old and who is rich. Yet syntax or sentence patterning is the factor most ignored by some who theorize literary language as if words were like beads on a thread. But an implicit knowledge of how syntax works belongs to any native speaker. English speakers can pick their way skilfully through the multiple meanings of a word like *sense* by taking account of each syntactic frame in which it is used. The meaning of Othello's cry at Desdemona's supposed infidelity, 'What *sense* had I of her stolen hours of lust?', will not be read as identical with the use in *Cymbeline* 'man's o'erlabour'd *sense* repairs itself by rest'. Not that syntax always works to disambiguate in this way. It can create calculated as well as uncalculated ambiguities. In *Measure for Measure*, Angelo after hinting at his wish to seduce an unwitting Isabella finds that she has failed to notice his innuendo which depends on the meanings 'understanding' and 'sexual desire' in 'Her *sense* pursues not mine'.

But the role of context in meaning does not stop arbitrarily at sentence, paragraph or even text-level, though all these have a role to play in the production of meaning. As with conversation, physical facts that a passage alludes to are part of its significance. In Hardy's *The Woodlanders* there is a crisis when Grace Fitzpiers's expectation that a new divorce law will free her from a blatantly unfaithful husband proves unfounded. An understanding of this depends on the fact that the 1857 Divorce Act allowed a man to divorce his wife for a single act of adultery but required a woman to prove some aggravating additional cause such as cruelty, incest or bestiality. The information necessary at this level may also include a knowledge of the circumstances of publication. Norman Feltes has demonstrated how the physical insertion of the serial parts of Victorian novels into a periodical with a framework of surrounding advertisements for consumer goods and conventional illustrations affected what was read into them.

Underlying much recent literary interpretation, however, is a new understanding of the nature of language itself. As this developed in the twentieth century, it required readers to look beyond the text for it showed that language is not a transparent medium in which ideas can be readily transformed into words which reflect them. Rather it is a

social practice and a form of action which is necessarily loaded with the values, assumptions and concerns of the society that uses it. Each use of a particular language is a struggle between the individual and communal. At a given time the full understanding of any piece of writing depends on recognizing allusions to the prevailing social, political, legal, religious or other values and debates with which it engages. Consequently there is no reason to separate the language of a literary text from any other contemporary writing on such areas. All share a common and sometimes resistant medium.

This resistance can be illustrated from a scientific work like Darwin's *Origin of Species* or from a literary work like Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. The obstacles that faced Darwin have been forcefully pointed out by Gillian Beer. It is crucial to his account of evolution that it is a blind process, not a purposeful one. His theory was aptly described as 'the law of higgledy-piggledy'. Yet Darwin was obliged to describe evolutionary change in terms charged with ideas of agency and creation, carrying implications of a Creating Agent. Hardy struggled against similar constraints in the communal language when he added the subtitle 'A Pure Woman' to *Tess*. In attributing a high moral worth to his heroine, he seems to have felt obliged to use the then favoured adjective for indicating womanly virtue. This was unfortunate at a time when in writing of many kinds a woman's moral worth had as a *sine qua non* that she should be a virgin or a chaste wife. Critics were baffled when the epithet was applied to a woman who commits both fornication and adultery, as well as murder. Without a knowledge of the prevailing view with which Hardy takes issue, the full force of Hardy's use of 'pure' is lost. With such knowledge, the very accumulation of Tess's 'sins' takes on a force which is aggressive rather than defensive.

It is not that in the case of either Darwin or Hardy the recognition of what is at issue results in a clear-cut interpretation or the removal of ambiguity. On the contrary, attention to social practices and to other writing of the period in which a text was written reveals contradictions which can make for uncertainty. These contradictions particularly arise when an author challenges a dominant ideology which assumes, say, a creating God or a particular construction of femininity. As a result, feminists may privilege the significance of gender issues over those of class. Critics of another persuasion may reverse this order of importance. To put it briefly, readers have contexts as well as writers and may recontextualize accordingly. One effective way to introduce A Level students to the idea of recontextualizing is through presenting them with films of the 'classic' texts they have read.

When asked to consider how these films relate to their own context they can see the contemporary issues and views read into the original text. This is because film directors usually work on the basis that if they are dealing with great literature each narrative must contain timeless truths relevant to any period and therefore to the present. The director's self-imposed task therefore is to bring out this contemporary relevance.

This practice of recontextualizing the timeless core can be seen in two film versions of Hardy's *Tess*: that of Roman Polanski in 1978-9 and LWT's television version which appeared in 1998. Polanski made his film at a time following the sexual revolution of the late 1960s when he himself was in flight from a US sentence for sex with a minor. He strips away what he regards as superfluous Victorian clutter, including Alec's conversion, Angel Clare's clerical brothers and Tess's execution. This leaves as he sees it 'a very romantic and topical love story'. Accordingly he provides details of an extended affair between Alec and Tess. He emphasizes her participation by showing her drifting dreamily with her lover in a boat on a sunlit river; or, prettily dressed, trying on an expensive-looking bonnet bought by Alec. Polanski is in no doubt where the timeless core of the novel lies: 'The film', he says, 'is an accusation of the hypocrisy and injustice of that society, and by extension of any rigid and repressive society'.

The commercial TV version of *Tess*, twenty years later in 1998, presents the story as a 'romantic' one in which questions of sexual morality are erased in the interest of the 'essential' core story of a 'doomed love triangle'. To account for Alec's presence as part of the triangle, Tess confesses to Angel Clare that she felt attracted to Alec and in effect was not raped or exploited by him. Issues are secularized and the process is completed by a rewriting of the famous ironic comment "Justice" was done, and the President of the Immortals (in Aeschylean phrase) had ended his sport with Tess'. It now becomes: 'Justice was done. Mankind in its time honoured way had finished its sport with Tess.' Again, society's sexual repressiveness appears to be the issue. The reviewer's comment on this film captures at once the original context and the new context in a way that it is to be hoped students might do: 'The change not only robbed a generation of one of the bitterest cries of atheism in literature but turned Hardy into a woolly liberal bleating that we are all to blame'.

Patricia Ingham is General Editor of OUP's new series *Authors in Context* which deals in detail with individual authors in terms of the issues discussed above. She is also the author of *Hardy in Context*.

Investigating the Effectiveness of WWW-based Stylistics Teaching



Mick Short and Dawn Archer, Lancaster University

1. Introduction

Mick Short and Dawn Archer are currently developing an introductory WWW-based course for students interested in the stylistic analysis of literary texts.¹ The WWW-based course is based on an existing successful lecture-seminar course that has been taught to first year students at Lancaster University for some years. The eventual aim is to run an experiment, in Lancaster and elsewhere, using the two different versions of the course, in order to compare student responses and learning outcomes to WWW-based and more traditional teaching. The WWW-based course should be ready for the academic year 2002/3, when it will be pilot-tested in Lancaster. In the following year the major experiment will be run in Lancaster and other HE institutions in the UK and overseas. Colleagues in some other institutions have already 'signed up' to take part in the experiment, but Mick and Dawn are hoping that a few more stylistics teachers in other HE institutions will be interested in taking part in the experiment. This will involve providing the WWW-based and traditional lecture-seminar formats side-by-side to parallel groups of students, and monitoring both groups using a common set of methods. We hope, after the experiment has been run, to make the course available, free to all, on the web. But that depends on getting copyright clearance from authors and publishers for some of the texts we are using (this is proving to be a rather thorny and time-consuming issue). Anyone who is interested is invited to contact Mick and Dawn at the email addresses at the end of this article.

2. The traditional lecture-seminar version of the course

The present approach embodied in this course was originally conceived by Mick Short and Mike Breen (now Professor of Language Education at the University of Stirling) (see Breen and Short 1988 & Short and Breen 1988). Dan McIntyre currently runs the course with Mick. It was originally a 'long thin' course, running through the first year. Because of larger-scale changes to our curriculum it is now being run as a 'short fat' course, in one term. It has the following design features:

1. The main aim of the course is to enable students to read texts sensitively, and perform stylistic analysis on texts they are

encountering for the first time (in this sense it follows on from, and shares some assumptions with, the less analytical 'practical criticism' courses with which many will be familiar). All three literary genres (plus relevant comparisons with non-literary texts) are explored and a wide range of texts and textual extracts are used.

2. We assume that students beginning the course will have little, if any, knowledge of the formal and pragmatic properties of the English language, and of stylistic analysis (though increasingly some, but by no means all will have done some elementary English language work at school).
3. Students should interact with literary (and non-literary) texts from day 1 and in each week of the course.
4. Language description and analytical skills are not taught in 'blocks' (which previous students found indigestible), but are 'drip-fed' - i.e. introduced at the point they are needed to help describe a particular text or account for a particular issue being discussed.
5. Learning should be as 'hands-on' and interactive as possible, with students doing tasks individually and in small groups in both lectures and seminars.
6. Learning should be fun. Besides the acting out (by staff and students) of dramatic extracts etc., lectures have always involved 'silly' moments (e.g. games, jokes, illustrative comic sketches) to illustrate and reinforce points being made.
7. To hold learner interest, learning should be in digestible chunks and varied (and appropriate), in terms of texts, analytical methods and pedagogical approach, both within and across sessions.
8. The checksheet approach developed in Short (1996) is used extensively (and will also be used in the WWW-based version of the course).

3. The WWW-based version of the course

If the teaching experiment is to be able to compare like with like, we need to ensure that the course content and as many of the above design features as possible are present in the WWW-based version of the course. That said, the new format is bound to involve changes. Below we list some of the salient features of this version of the course (which provides very similar, but not identical, content compared with the version just described):

1. There is a heavy interest on students working with other students if possible, to help reproduce the 'social' element of traditional teaching. In the Lancaster version of the experiment, students will access the web site in small groups in workshops run in computer laboratories, as well as being able to 'log on' outside these class hours.
2. Students are continually involved in doing tasks on texts and related matters, and then comparing their conclusions with ours, via a variety of 'feedback' means (e.g. 'guess and test' and 'drag and drop' devices, or comparing an account of a text or text-part they have produced with one we have).
3. The electronic version of the course is divided into thirteen topics, several of which have two 'sessions'. Each page of each 'session' has a 'click-on' menu down the left-hand side of the screen, which indicates the other 'pages' in that session and some other elements (e.g. click-ons to a grammar website, a topic-contents summary, a glossary, and advice on reading). This structure has several purposes: (a) to signal to students that the course is similar to others they will be taking, (b) to indicate what we think is a sensible order for them to go through the web pages (though we know they will also 'go their own way') and (c) to aid navigation through what is, after all, a complex site. There is also a navigation bar at the top of each page with links to the contents page, the welcome and introduction pages, a course summary page and the course homepage).
4. The 'learning should be varied and fun' assumption is achieved through a number of means. The breaking up of the materials into a series of reasonably short web pages with interactive exercises on each page keeps our commitment to the idea that learning should be varied. Besides written material, there are audio and video-clips (e.g. of texts to be analysed and of discussions between Mick and Dawn of particular exercises). We also use cartoon presentations, variations in text colour, size and shape and appropriate moving visual effects. Most of the academic WWW-based courses we have seen so far have been very text-dominated and, of course, stylistic analysis also needs to be very text-dependent. But we are working hard to negate the 'boring set of lecture notes dumped on the web' effect.
5. Besides interactive links from one page to another within the website itself, there are also links to other sites (including sites about authors whose texts are being analysed and the University College London Internet Grammar site).
6. The finished site will have an on-line 'discussion room' where students (and staff) can ask questions and pose answers and also a self-assessment mechanism for students to practise stylistic analysis on three texts (one from each main literary genre) before doing their coursework assessment at the end of the course (which takes the form of a stylistic analysis of a chosen text). This self-assessment mechanism is based on extracts from the essays written by students on the 2000/2001 version of the course.

4. The Teaching Experiment

Mick and Dawn will be allowing students who do the traditional course in January-March 2002 to have access to the materials so far produced (more than half the web site will be available) in order to get initial feedback. The pilot test will be conducted in Lancaster only in the academic year 2002/3, and the main experiment, in Lancaster and

elsewhere, will be run in 2003/4. Although the Lancaster students will be first year students taught in one term, there is no requirement that this should automatically be the case in other institutions.

Different contexts may require different timings, formats and administrative arrangements. However, it will be important to discuss possible variations with Mick and Dawn in order to make sure that the arrangements put in place are appropriate and will enable a reasonable comparison between the two modes of delivery.

Besides the WWW-based version of the course, collaborators will be given a master set of handouts to use in the lecture-seminar version of the course and videotapes of the lectures on the 2001/2 version of the course, so that they can have a flavour of the approach we use. The monitoring of student and staff reactions to the two different versions of the course will be conducted via questionnaires, tape-recorded interviews and tape-recorded focus group sessions (conducted at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the course).

Those who want to collaborate in the experiment will be allowed access to the website straight away, so that they can monitor development and give comments on it. They will be able to run the WWW-based course in their institutions during the experiment (and hopefully thereafter, though we are still trying to clear copyright issues with respect to some of the texts we want to use on the site).

Collaborators will also be given sample questionnaires and lists of questions and prompts to use in the tape-recorded data-collection sessions. We will also have an on-line discussion group for collaborators to use, as well as direct email contact with us.

Concluding Remarks

We are very interested in hearing from anyone wishing to take part in the experiment. We have already talked through our plans and demonstrated our web site at LTSN sessions for Modern Languages and Linguistics, at the Poetics and Linguistics Association (PALA) conferences in London (August 2000) and Budapest (April 2001), and elsewhere. We hope to give those interested an opportunity to try out as much of the site as we have developed by then at the PALA 2002 conference in Birmingham (4-6 April 2002).

Notes

1. Mick is using the prize money from his 2000 National Teaching Fellowship Scheme fellowship (sponsored by the Institute for Learning and Teaching) to finance the development of the web site and pilot-test the educational experiment.

References M. P. Breen, M. P. and Mick Short (1988) 'Alternative Approaches in Teaching Stylistics to Beginners', *Parlance* 1, 2, 29-48.

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Comments to Mick Short (m.short@lancaster.ac.uk) and Dawn Archer (d.archer@lancaster.ac.uk), Department of Linguistics and Modern English Language, Lancaster University.

Book Review

Peter J Smith, Nottingham Trent University

Rick Rylance and Judy Simons, eds, *Literature in Context* (Houndmills, Hants: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 244 + xxix. £35.00, ISBN 0-333-80390-6 (hb); £10.99, ISBN 0-333-80391-4 (pb).

With a Foreword by Janet White (of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) and citing Rylance's own report for the QCA on the new GCE Advanced Subsidiary and Advanced Level Specifications (xxiii-iv), this collection of essays is ostensibly targeted at Sixth Formers. White's rather bland formulation that the new qualifications should stress 'a wider sense of the scope of literary study ... what was going on politically, socially, culturally, at the time the text was written' (vii) masks a series of huge theoretical issues which continue to carve up the topography of the literary landscape into a range of different critical terrains. Rylance and Simons's introduction which asks the question 'Why study the context of literature?' (xv) is, in places, avowedly Marxist: 'Writers can never isolate themselves from the political issues which shape their cultures, and texts are unavoidably products of the ideologies of their age' (xxvii). Yet elsewhere, their aspirations sound distinctly Arnoldian: 'the function of contextual criticism at the present time is surely [note the Leavis-like conscription of that 'surely'] to spotlight the relationship between textual detail and the surrounding range of factors which bear upon the creation and understanding of its significance' (xxiii). This mission is not just about the formulation of a Zeitgeist, but is imbued with a humanist / humane aim: 'It is the privilege of literature and other art forms that they allow such open, reflective, exploratory access to the rich, human world of others' (xxi).

So far, so good, but in what does this relationship between textuality and contextuality consist? Unsurprisingly, different contributors have different ideas. For Heather Glen, the alacrity with which the 'Brontë story' (107) arose in Haworth – Mrs Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* appearing only four years after the novelist's death – gives *Jane Eyre* a context stemming from the author's biography. Vincent Gillespie uses the published essays and interviews of Harold Pinter to explicate contextually the playwright's work (surprisingly, since Pinter is notoriously and mischievously devious), while Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is contextualised by Linden Peach in terms of the author's being doubly displaced from the dominant culture by being both female and black. Thus the conception of context shared by these three essays is author-centred.

For Thomas Healy and Nigel Wood, on the other hand, the genre of the particular text is at least as important as the biography of its author. Healy notes how the intimacy of Renaissance lyric poetry both in terms of its subject matter (the verse of Wyatt or Donne apostrophising an albeit fictional mistress) and its circulation in manuscript among a *cognoscenti* appears 'to resist [an] external context' (46). *Gulliver's Travels* is a satire, insists Wood, and 'Satire is often designed to work immediately upon the world, to accomplish something at the time rather than to stand as a monument for the future' (64). Then again, for Catherine Belsey, context is in the eye of the beholder as she argues that the work metamorphoses with its



changing cultural situation: 'Readers have understood Shakespeare in different ways at distinct historical moments in the light of their own cultural perspectives' (35). Judy Simons echoes this as she unblushingly describes the new populist cinematic context for Jane Austen's novels: 'students and general readers alike are turning eagerly to Austen's work with expectations of ... What precisely? Men in tight trousers? Smouldering glances and repressed passion? Vistas of stately homes with armies of servants to match?' (92).

For Roger Webster, a useful context for the novels of Thomas Hardy is provided by Hardy's interest in French Impressionism as well as his passion for the painting of J M W Turner (141) while Elisabeth Jay contextualises *Middlemarch* against the 'history of women's education' (120). Surprisingly late in the book, Peter Widdowson (in his sensitive contribution on Graham Swift) highlights the etymological imbrication of text and context (both descending from similar Latin verbs *textere*, 'to weave' and *contextere*, 'to weave together') so that 'we might say the terms are inseparable: text is "woven in with" its context, just as context is "weaved [sic.] together" with text' (210). For David Punter, writing on *The Songs of Innocence and Experience*, the context is much more material in the 'pictures, designs, patterns [which appear in Blake's engravings] – to call them "illustrations" would be too simple for it is clear in some cases that the full "meaning" cannot be discovered without looking at how the visual material supplements, comments on, even changes the feeling of the poetry' (81).

While the various contributors attempt to define context(s) in their various ways, Rick Rylance, in a fine essay on Sylvia Plath and the Cold War which reads her 'notoriously distressing' (172) verse against the context of 'the military and political tension which hollows out meaning and betrays certainties in a world on the edge of a new kind of holocaust' (181), is incisively alert to the way in which the study of context all too easily offers only a red herring: 'There is [...] a danger, in the study of literary context, that too close a correlation between text and context will result in the oversimple conversion of the former into the latter because there are few exact, direct correlations between a literary work and its historical and social circumstances' (180). Yet, as though to offer a counter-example to this tendency to weld too closely one to the other, Martin Coyle is insouciantly untroubled by failing to find the contextual passage which he was seeking: 'my intention had been to take *Richard II* [...] and link it with Elizabeth's famous remark in which she compared herself to Richard II. [...] However, I could not find the speech in which she does that' (23). This self-deprecating indifference must be a hoax – it took me three minutes to find the passage in Peter Ure's Arden II edition of the play (lix) – hardly an obscure source! Coyle seems unashamed about this admission of research incompetence, reminding us four pages later,

'I began this discussion by noting that I could not find Elizabeth's speech about Richard II' (27). The consequence, that any context is as good as any other, gives the lie to Rylance's anxiety about text being imprisoned in context.

Both in their identification of what (con)text is, and even in their sense of the contiguity between one and the other, then, these critics are wildly divergent, prioritising different elements of the literary experience – author or reader, historical background at the moment of composition or consumption, genre, sister art forms (painting, engraving or film), etymology, contemporary texts or literary movements. Most obviously, and most woodenly, Stephen Knight subdivides his essay on *The Canterbury Tales* with sections on 'History', 'Religion', 'Society', 'Literature' and 'Language' claiming that 'it is necessary to look at specific aspects and different areas of Chaucer's treatment of his context – or rather, his contexts' (3) as though Chaucer's world and experience could be neatly subdivided into the above headings.

Of course, this study of contextuality arises out of the theoretical refutation of canonicity which originates in New Historicism. Just as the divide between history (factual) and literature (fictional) is erased by the recognition that, as Simons puts it, 'History is after all merely another fiction, a narrative interpretation of events from a particular viewpoint' (100), so too is the prioritisation of the Literary text over the non-literary text which 'might include materials as diverse as popular songs, newspaper articles, medical treatises, paintings, sermons, political tracts and scientific papers' (xxii). In the same way that New Historicism demolishes periodisation in History, so it inevitably denies the anteriority (and thus superiority) of Literature over other forms of text. That being the case, one is struck by the canonicity of the texts chosen for discussion. Only two American writers (both twentieth century) appear; there is only one non-white writer and none of the essays engages with non-heterosexual contexts. Of course, the editors' hands may well have been tied by the conservatism of the examining boards and the staid nature of the syllabus, but if change is to happen in school, shouldn't it be fostered or at least encouraged by the Council for College and University English, whose present Chair and former Chair (Rylance and Simons) note the collaborative nature of their endeavour with QCA in 'the overall development of the national curriculum and framework of qualifications at secondary level' (ix)? Educational institutions, be they schools or universities, are just another of the many contexts in which the textuality of Literature ought to flourish.

Notice of Iris Murdoch Special Issue

Modern Fiction Studies 47.3 (Fall 2001)

This special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* centers on the work of the philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch (1919-1999). The issue was given immediate impetus by Murdoch's recent death after struggling for several years with Alzheimer's disease, as so movingly documented by John Bayley in his memoir, *Elegy for Iris*. More than just a tribute, however, the issue is intended to help take the measure of Murdoch's achievement and influence in the second half of the twentieth century and beyond.

Contributions to the issue focus on the nature, sources, and implications of Murdoch's fictional practice. Yet in exploring the themes and techniques of Murdoch's novels, the contributors also broach many of the ethical and aesthetic issues that exercised this prolific and polymathic fictionalist over the course of her long career. Thus, besides offering detailed readings of a number of Murdoch's fictions, the issue's six new essays reveal multiple, systematic interconnections between Murdoch's oeuvre and developments in the literary, philosophical, and cultural contexts in which she lived and wrote. The capstone of the issue is a previously unpublished interview with Murdoch.

Featured essays include Michael Levenson's "Iris Murdoch: The Philosophic Fifties and The Bell," Bran Nicol's "Philosophy's Dangerous Pupil: Murdoch, Derrida, and the Tension between Literature and Philosophy," and Katherine Weese's "Feminist Uses of the Fantastic in Murdoch's *The Sea, the Sea*." Further, Alison E. Denham, the current holder of Murdoch's Fellowship in Philosophy at St. Anne's College in Oxford University, reassesses Murdoch's novelistic achievements in light of Murdoch's own work in the area of moral philosophy.

Book Review

Joe Bray, University of Stirling

Patrica Ingham, *Invisible Writing and the Victorian Novel: Readings in Language and Ideology*. (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000) pp186. ISBN 07190 52017 (hb); 07190 52025 (pb).

How exactly should the critic study the language of literary texts? How should she make a link between linguistic forms and the overarching meanings of the text? This question, in its various forms, has haunted stylisticians and others concerned with the language of literature both since Stanley Fish's influential attack "What Is Stylistics and Why Are They Saying Such Terrible Things About It?" (1973) and, indeed, before it. Fish objects to the absence in stylistics 'of any constraint on the way in which one moves from description to interpretation, with the result that any interpretation one puts forward is arbitrary.' He criticises the 'leap' stylisticians characteristically make between 'the data' and 'a specification of their value.'¹ Patricia Ingham promises to bridge the gap between description and interpretation in the opening section of *Invisible Writing and the Victorian Novel*. Complaining that too many treatments of language in literary works have either focused on 'vocabulary/lexis' (1) or drifted away from 'the working of specific linguistic features' (6), Ingham announces her intention to concentrate on 'aspects of language involved in the structuring of sentences, what may be called its mechanics' (2). This will involve 'not merely sentence patterns but include matters such as tense, mood and modality' (9). Studying such 'submerged features of language' in detail will lead, according to Ingham, 'into a revealing awareness of nuances of meaning in the novels discussed' (10), which include *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*, *The Mill on the Floss* and *Daniel Deronda*, *Vanity Fair* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Her emphasis on the need for 'precise linguistic analysis' (7) of these texts in order to uncover meaning left this particular reader eager for more.

What Ingham actually delivers in the chapters that follow is, however, something different. A general topic in language is put alongside a particular novel. Each is a starting-point for a thematic insight into that novel. Thus the prevalence of questions in *Vanity Fair* leads to a consideration of its 'dubitative' modality and the fact that 'all reports and judgements are provisional and subject to doubt' (21), while the alternation between past and present tenses in *The Mill on the Floss* broadens into a discussion of the conflict between stasis and change in Maggie's development and the novel as a whole. Similarly, 'forms of future reference in English' (64) prompt Ingham to consider how Gwendolen gradually learns 'the difference between commanding, wishing, intending, and predicting' (87) in *Daniel Deronda*, while the deictic contrasts between the two narrators of *Bleak House* initiate a reading of Esther's lack of authority and her 'perception of a gap where a self might be' (101). The final two chapters take negation as their topic: *Tess's* frequent use of negatives is a starting-point for Ingham's argument that the novel 'is structured on an attempt to transform a negative 'impure' into 'pure' (121), while the negatives in *Little Dorrit* are linked to the themes of 'non-existence, rejection, refusal to comply, and denial' (146).

In each case the linguistic topic acts as a springboard for an interpretative leap to the wider themes and concerns of the novel.



If there are a lot of questions then the novel must be about questioning; if there are a lot of negatives then it must be about negating. The merits of this way of proceeding (which I have of course crudely over-simplified) are open to debate; what cannot be denied is that there is a disappointing lack of the 'precise linguistic analysis' promised. Several times it seems about to appear, before being cruelly whisked away at the last moment. To give one example: in her perceptive discussion of the place of Esther's narrative in *Bleak House*, Ingham claims that she tries to construct a sense of self by searching for 'the true self of a narrating 'I'' (99). At this point I was hoping for some precise analysis of the ambiguities and tensions of Esther's first-person narration in the novel, perhaps revealing the impossibility of such a thing as 'the true self of a narrating 'I''. Instead the next two sentences are 'Like Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, she is parentless, penniless and statusless. The work of construction is difficult; she has no place within a family that would offer a nominal identity' (99). Again the move is from a linguistic topic of potential interest to a thematic conclusion. What is missing is the concrete 'work of construction' which would build a bridge between form and meaning, and at least begin to fill in the gap to which Fish and other critics of stylistics have objected.

This is not to deny the astuteness of Ingham's observations on her chosen novels. Each is discussed lucidly and thoughtfully, with excellent use made of nineteenth-century reviews and other evidence of their initial reception. Ingham is particularly strong on the group of themes she places under the heading 'ideology', as she shows how each novel debates issues of gender, social class and, in some cases, race. I especially enjoyed the sections on Victorian notions of 'manliness' as applied to the male characters in *The Mill on the Floss* (58-62), and on the representation of Jews in the world of *Daniel Deronda* (76-89). The final chapter on *Little Dorrit* is especially sharp on Arthur's 'negative self construction' as 'Nobody' (149), and on the contradictions and disruptions within *Little Dorrit*/ Amy. In fact each chapter seems to pick up momentum once the linguistic topic has been got out the way; one can sense Ingham's relief as she hurries on to the concerns which clearly interest her more. *Invisible Writing and the Victorian Novel* is aimed at undergraduates, A-level students and their teachers, and is perfectly geared to those who have an enthusiasm both for language and the nineteenth-century novel. The linguistic topics are introduced with clarity and brevity, and the discussions they spark are accessible and illuminating. Any reader of this book will learn something about both the structures of the English language and the meanings of the Victorian novels selected. Only those who worry about the connection between the two will be left with a nagging voice in their heads whispering those troublesome words 'Fish' and 'mechanics.'

¹ Stanley Fish, "What Is Stylistics and Why Are They Saying Such Terrible Things About It?" (1973), reprinted in Jean Jacques Weber (ed) *The Stylistics Reader: From Roman Jakobson to the Present* (London: Arnold, 1996), 94-116. 96, 95.