Bulletin

Editorial

Professor Ben Knights, Director of the English Subject Centre.

I feel honoured and somewhat awed to inherit from Philip Martin the directorship of the English Subject Centre. Thanks to the tireless work of Philip and all the staff – and the goodwill invested in the Centre by the subject community – I inherit a Subject Centre in a thriving state. A phase of expansion has been followed by a phase of consolidation: the publication of a major report series, the signing of the contract with Palgrave for the 'Teaching the New English' book series, and in July the successful international conference 'The Condition of the Subject'. We are therefore now well-placed for a new phase of connection making. This is just as well, since it is already clear that all our knowledge and energy will be required in the contemporary HE moment. Readers of this bulletin scarcely need to be reminded of the salient features of either the international (Bologna) or national landscapes in which we are all working. Subject Centres are inevitably acutely conscious of the aftermath of the White Paper and the Roberts Review. More specifically, as a network we have a major role in shaping (and subsequently mediating) the changes arising from the report of the Teaching Quality Enhancement Committee (Cooke): the absorption over the next year of both LTSN and (probably) the ILTHE into the new HE Academy; and the emergence – under the English Funding Council – of 'Centres for Excellence in T&L', the nature of whose relationship to Subject Centres is still completely unclear.

Within this welter of policy initiatives and now-you-see-it-now-you-don't world of shape-changing agencies, we have somehow to hold onto our core tasks, aware as we do so of the changing nature of our student constituency and its expectations, and sensitive equally to the changing nature of the discipline itself. Coming from seven years as a head of department, I believe the priorities for the Subject Centre over the coming year must include: the development of work across the secondary/tertiary divide (appreciating the significance of Curriculum 2000, building on the increased levels of linguistic awareness at AS/A level, above all fostering dialogue between the tribes of sixth form and colleges and the tribe of university teachers); promoting the public understanding of English Studies; and helping colleagues to explore the pedagogic implications of the growth of Creative Writing programmes (including the role of hybrid forms of transformative writing and crossover criticism).

In his introduction to the very first English Subject Centre Newsletter, Philip Martin observed that 'the greatest resource available to English is the experience of the subject community itself' and dared to hope that the Subject Centre could be 'fired by some utopian enthusiasm too….' I would add that without that resource and that enthusiasm we are nothing. In all its diversity, subject English has always been characterised not simply by a commitment to pedagogy, but by the way in which the processes of learning and change – change at personal, social or even institutional levels – have been built into its very subject matter. The Subject Centre's role is to assist its community in understanding and building on the strengths that community so palpably possesses. In the end we will I hope be judged not by how successfully we played the game of institutional aggrandisement, but by how we fostered dialogue at all levels of our common project, and by our contribution to the survival and development of the subject. While we do as a team have plenty of ideas of our own, we shall be guided and our policy shaped by the needs of departments. As we embark on a fresh round of departmental visits, I look forward to meeting and talking to colleagues in all quarters of the UK so as to discuss with you ways in which the Subject Centre could support your work.

News and Information

'Events-Made-Easy' Courtesy of the English Subject Centre

If you have an idea for a teaching-related event which you would like to host in your department, the English Subject Centre may be able to help you to make it happen. We offer support for small-scale events or meetings by:

- paying for lunch and refreshments
- handling publicity, participant registration and packs/badges
- paying speakers' expenses (but not fees)

So all you have to do is:

- book a room
- organise the programme
- give recognition to the Subject Centre's support for the event

We also appreciate a brief report of about 300 words for our Newsletter.

The programme may consist of a traditional workshop with invited speakers, or a 'round-table' style seminar. Alternatively, you may simply wish to get together with colleagues from other institutions in your area to share experiences and ideas. If you want to run a workshop just for your department or institution on an issue of particular interest, then the English Subject Centre may be able to suggest specialists from its network of contacts across the UK.

Without being prescriptive, the following list may inspire an idea for an event:

Assessment

Teaching particular periods, themes or genres

Teaching in large groups

Work-based learning

Widening participation

Writing skills

Student recruitment and retention

Supervision of research students

Bridging from 'A' level to degree level

VLEs

We are happy to consider any format or topic at any time, so send us an outline of what you have in mind, (see the contacts panel) and we'll do our best to help realise it.

CETLs (Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning)

This initiative, announced in the Government White Paper 'The Future of Higher Education' last autumn, has been refined by HEFCE and will now enter its formal Consultation Stage which ends on 24 October 2003. The consultation document is at **www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/hefce/2003/03_36.htm** The English Subject Centre has responded to the consultation, expressing concerns about the potentially divisive effects of the CETLs upon the sharing of good practice in the discipline, the drain of time away from teaching in order to prepare bids, and the demoralising effect of failure in the bidding process. We have also raised questions about the role of the LTSN Subject Centres with respect to the CETLs.

The original Government idea of having 70 of these Centres, each funded at £500k and having bidding access to £2 million, has now been revised by HEFCE, and it is now proposing that there will be more than 70 Centres, funded at between £200k and £500k (and up to £2million capital). They are now to be project-based and awarded by means of a bidding system. It is proposed that the invitation to bid will be published in January 2004.

Bids will need institutional sponsorship; institutions will be able to make a specified number of bids, (up to three, depending on their size), plus involvement in one cross-insitutional bid. Both thematic and subject-based bids are solicited, within this context.

HEFCE sees an important role for the LTSN Subject Centres and (subject to the outcome of the consultation period) will expect bids to have been discussed with the appropriate part of the new HE Academy, i.e., the LTSN Subject Centres, which will be a very significant part of the Academy.

(This item is based on one published by Palatine, the Subject Centre for the Performing Arts).

Reports and Articles

Curriculum 2000: a crisis in English studies?

Dr Carol Atherton of Bourne Grammar School, Lincolnshire considers the future of the English 'A' Level. This article is based on a paper given at 'The Condition of the Subject' conference in July 2003.

Three years ago, A-level English Literature seemed to be on the brink of a revolution. The new A-level specifications that were introduced under Curriculum 2000 were supposed to represent a decisive break with the subject's liberal-humanist past: one examiner went so far as to warn schools that their best candidates would fail if teachers continued to approach literature in 'conventional' ways. A-level English was to become increasingly rigorous, wide-ranging and critically aware, bridging the gap between school and university and equipping students for the demands of degree level study. These changes have sparked a series of debates about the nature of literary knowledge and the form and purpose of A-level English – touching on issues at the very heart of the discipline's identity.

The new specifications are based on subject criteria drawn up by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and implemented in differing ways by the various A-level awarding bodies. At first glance, these criteria seem relatively traditional: they stipulate that all candidates should study a minimum of eight set texts, including four published before 1900, and draw heavily on a familiar A-level canon. The biggest changes have been in the methodology of both literary study and assessment. There has been a drastic reduction, for instance, in unseen Practical Criticism (once the 'acid test' of a student's critical sensibility) and a greater emphasis on historical and critical contexts, in an attempt to introduce students to some of the theoretical principles current in the study of literature at degree level. And rumours of impressionistic marking have been countered by the introduction of five Assessment Objectives, which outline in a very specific manner the skills QCA considers essential to the study of English Literature. Students must express themselves clearly, respond to texts of different genres and periods, and demonstrate skills of close reading, an awareness of different critical interpretations and an understanding of the text's cultural and historical contexts.

This new version of English has had a mixed reception. Pamela Bickley, speaking at an English Association conference in April 2000, commented that the new specifications would allow 'far less scope for the "This poem makes me feel sad" school of literary criticism', offering a clear defence against charges of subjectivity. Yet many English teachers have felt intimidated by the level of critical sophistication that the Assessment Objectives seem to require, and have worried about whether gaps in their own subject knowledge mean that they risk 'failing' their students. Other detractors have questioned whether the specialist knowledge demanded by the new Assessment Objectives is appropriate to the needs and abilities of adolescent learners. Martin Blocksidge, writing on behalf of the Common English Forum, has pointed out that these objectives 'can cut across the natural learning and teaching processes of the subject', producing responses that are artificial and stilted. The English teacher Mike Craddock, meanwhile, has complained that the new specifications have increased the pressure on teachers 'to teach a certain kind of information, rather than inspire a deeper kind of understanding'.

It is clear that there is much concern about the experience of 'doing English' that the new specifications offer. In practical terms, financial pressures on school and colleges to increase numbers post-16 means that A-level groups contain a wide range of abilities and levels of enthusiasm: anecdotal reports indicate that some students struggle to apply contextual knowledge in meaningful ways, and that the theoretical demands of the new A-level are simply too great. Yet the debates about the new A-level
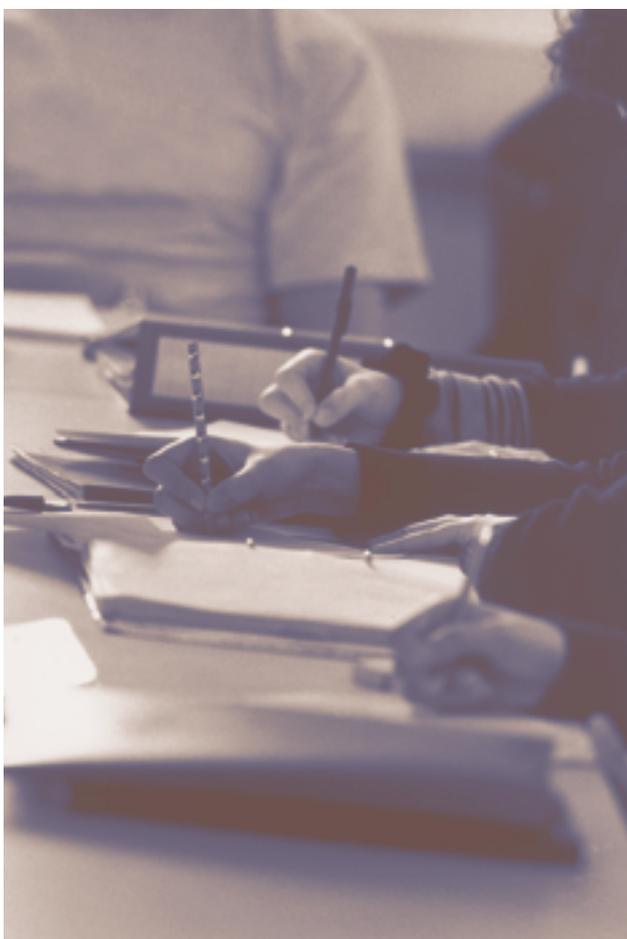
also involve a complex set of philosophical arguments about the kind of knowledge that English Literature represents, and about the precise orientation of this knowledge. Should English be directed towards the individual, in a process of personal exploration aimed at uncovering what Mike Craddock has described as 'meanings, dreams, identities, realities, truths of one sort or another that we care about and need'? Or should it focus on the acquisition of academic skills, acting as the point of entry to a specialist discipline?

These two apparently conflicting philosophies are by no means mutually exclusive, but many commentaries on A-level English have chosen to treat them as such – arguing, for instance, that the study of historical and critical contexts is dull and stultifying, or that the introduction of theoretical questions and principles imposes a set of agendas that are alien to students' own interests and needs. Yet it is worth noting that other A-level subjects seem remarkably free from such anxieties. In History and Religious Studies, the need for an understanding of different critical and interpretive approaches is taken for granted. In English, however, concerns about the difficulties presented by secondary reading have led some awarding bodies to adopt a markedly cautious approach to such texts, diluting QCA's initial attempt to increase intellectual rigour: one board has stated that students can demonstrate a knowledge of different critical interpretations simply by referring to

discussions in class.

Clearly, debates about A-level English will continue. Recently, they have expanded to encompass the relationship between English in schools and at degree level, and the growing popularity of A-level English Language. Yet while these debates have been provoked by a particular set of government reforms, they also revisit a very old set of anxieties about the academic study of literature. QCA's desire to emphasise the study of historical and critical contexts – and therefore the knowledge of a certain body of information – can be seen as an extension of late nineteenth-century concerns about whether English Literature was difficult enough to be a 'proper' academic subject, epitomised by the belief that it involved little more than 'chatter about Shelley'. The reaction against this – the argument that A-level English should concern itself with students' moral and spiritual awareness, rather than the acquisition of knowledge – echoes a Leavisian desire for English to train 'free, unspecialised, general intelligence', in opposition to the 'desperate bored industry' of academic specialisation.

Consequently, A-level English Literature is currently being pulled in a number of different directions. Yet given the complex nature of English as an academic discipline, this is perhaps only to be expected. What remains to be seen is whether a consensus will ever be reached as to what function A-level English is expected to perform.

Teaching The New English

A Book Series published by Palgrave Macmillan and edited by the English Subject Centre

In July the English Subject Centre signed a contract with Palgrave Macmillan to publish an innovative book series devoted to the teaching of the English Curriculum at degree level. This series will address the different ways in which the subject now manifests itself in the university classroom, and in particular it will engage with innovation in the form of new areas of the curriculum, and more traditional areas that have been revised.

Each volume will cover a single curriculum area and draw together scholars working in different institutions and contexts. The English Subject Centre will act as the General Editor for the series with the new Director, Professor Ben Knights, taking the lead role. Palgrave plans to publish the first titles in the series in spring 2005. These will be:

• Curriculum and Practice — Teaching Theory
• Teaching, Technology, Textuality: approaches to new media in literary studies
• Shakespeare and his Contemporaries
• The Long Eighteenth Century
• Creative Writing
• Children's Literature

Volumes planned for later publication include: early modern women's writing, contemporary poetry, the gothic, science fiction, poetry and narrative, the short story, teaching holocaust literature, stylistics, teaching nineteenth century popular culture, crime narratives and African American women's writing.

If you would like further information about the series, please contact Jane Gawthrope or Ben Knights (see Contacts panel).

Wessex Parallel WebTexts: developing an on-line tutorial

Bella Millett of the English Department at the University of Southampton describes her experiences in developing an electronic learning resource.

The background

Wessex Parallel WebTexts (**http://www.soton.ac.uk/~wpwt/**) is an on-line anthology of teaching materials for Middle English literature which I have been developing since 1999. As a medievalist, I could see the advantages of creating a resource of this kind, even on a relatively small scale:

- On-line publication makes it possible to provide much more in the way of editorial resources than a normal student edition would include: multiple texts, translations, full glossaries, notes, and high-quality manuscript reproductions. The material can also be updated to take account of recent scholarship.

- In a subject-area where affordable editions are few, and not always kept in print, it ensures that students have cheap and reliable access to key texts; and it makes it easier to create a customized syllabus, not tied to the content of a single published anthology.

- It offers a genuine opportunity to link research and teaching; the website can both incorporate the results of research in an approachable form, and introduce undergraduates and postgraduates to research resources and methods.

The development of the website

I began with a week's training in website creation and a copy of Microsoft FrontPage; later I invested in my own copy of Adobe Photoshop (which I've found an essential tool for image processing and design). The design of the website was deliberately simple, partly because of the limitations of my own technical skills, partly because I wanted it to be as widely accessible as possible. The only large files are the colour reproductions of manuscripts, where quality of reproduction has to be the first priority. I have recently redesigned the site (though the redecoration process is not yet complete) to bring its appearance and navigational conventions up to date; it now looks rather more elegant and is easier to use, but has kept its essential minimalism. The next stage will be a thorough updating (now considerably overdue) and further expansion of the content.

The problem of resources

The advantages of on-line publication described above have their price. There is a tendency among those who run universities to assume that websites are not resource-intensive: they can be created after an afternoon's training, no special equipment or external design input is required, technical support is unnecessary, no time need be budgeted for content provision, and maintenance and updating are carried out by benevolent pixies. There are also external problems, particularly the problem of copyright: if libraries can be persuaded to allow on-line reproduction of their manuscripts, they are likely to charge substantial copyright fees (often renewable every couple of years), and may not allow them to be reproduced on unpassworded websites (which is why Wessex Parallel WebTexts, which is open-access on principle, does not include reproductions of manuscripts from the Bodleian Library). More generally, where there are sources of finance, they tend to be one-off grants; it's hard to persuade grant-awarding bodies that a website is for life, not just for Christmas, and may require a continuing commitment of resources for maintenance and development.

I was fortunate to have the opportunity of an excellent one-week training course in website creation (together with a lot of unofficial support) from an expert in the University's Centre for Learning and Teaching; and a small grant from the University helped supplement my own financial resources in the initial development of the website. The main problem I encountered was in clearing the time for content provision. As a Blackboard salesman once said at a session I attended on virtual learning environments, 'these things eat up your time like candy'; although on-line publication makes it possible to produce much fuller teaching materials for student use than would otherwise be possible, the production and maintenance of on-line resources is very labour-intensive, and hard to reconcile with current academic workloads. The teaching time bought out by the English Subject Centre grant for the project described here was largely cancelled out by heavy administrative commitments, which meant that the project overran its time-limit and had to be completed over the summer vacation.

The English Subject Centre Project and its context

Most of the Wessex Parallel WebTexts site is dedicated to full-scale editions of Middle English lyrics, particularly the important early-C14 collection in London, British Library, Harley MS 2253, and annotated translations of some longer Middle English works, including *The Owl and the Nightingale*, *The Land of Cockaygne*, and *Winner and Waster*. However, it also includes some background material for use in teaching. For two years, I have been using the webpage 'What is a *contrafactum*?' (**http://www.soton.ac.uk/~wpwt/notes/contraf.htm**) as

an on-line teaching resource for my final-year undergraduate course on England and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance. This encouraged students to examine the possible relationships between religious and secular lyrics set to the same tune. The students were given printouts of the texts and translations of two sets of lyrics paired in this way, and used the additional on-line material, which offered an explanation of the concept, specific illustrations, and fuller editions of the lyrics discussed, for pre-class preparation and as the basis for seminar discussion.

The on-line tutorial on *mouvance* I have just created, with the help of an English Subject Centre grant (**http://www.soton.ac.uk/~wpwt/mouvance/mouvance. htm**) develops this approach further, offering a more complex and fully-documented assignment suitable for use at postgraduate level. It includes a 5,000-word essay on the concept of *mouvance*, the term used by the French scholar Paul Zumthor to describe 'the essential mobility of the medieval text', and its implications for textual criticism; a bibliography; full editions of six related early Middle English lyrics which illustrate the kind of textual variation Zumthor describes, with information on their manuscript context and (where available) reproductions of the MSS themselves; plain texts of all six lyrics – for easier comparison – on a single-page Microsoft Word document for printing out; and a short introduction to the lyrics, including questions to help focus pre-class preparation and in-class discussion.

The tutorial, however, has a research as well as a teaching function; its editions of the six different lyric texts, separate but interlinked, offer a practical example of the on-line 'multidimensional editing' which Zumthor's successor, Bernard Cerquiglini, argued was the appropriate method of dealing with this kind of textual variation (as opposed to the more traditional methods of producing an edition based on a single manuscript text, or, alternatively, a 'critical text' drawing on the evidence of the manuscripts in an attempt to reconstruct the hypothetical 'author's original'). It also provides an accessible overview of an approach to textual criticism which has been given less attention than it deserves by most English scholars.

Project implementation

Because the project has only recently been completed, there has been no opportunity yet to gather feedback from students; but the tutorial has already been given a preliminary trial as a basis for seminar discussion in our postgraduate Research Skills course, and will be used next year in an MA course on 'Writing in the Middle Ages', where I should be able to use written work based on it as a way of checking its effectiveness more thoroughly. The undergraduate response to Wessex Parallel WebTexts in the past has been very positive, and I hope that this more ambitious project will make the site more useful at postgraduate level.

Putting the Sex back into Poetry

Vicki Bertram, Senior Lecturer in English at Nottingham Trent University, argues that gender issues should be given greater prominence in the teaching of poetry.

I read the recent articles in English Subject Newsletters on teaching poetry with interest (Issue 2, Stephen Regan; Issue 5, Leo D'Agostino). I was disappointed that neither raised what, to me, are fundamental issues about the significance of sex in the reading (and writing) of poetry. In school, teachers stress the importance of personal response within literary studies. But when it comes to the study of poetry at university, subjectivity becomes a dirty word. Academic poetry criticism is an almost entirely masculine affair. Characterised by a style and critical approach that conceals the scholar's subjectivity, such criticism takes pains to avoid getting ensnared in affect, or emotion – which might surprise general readers who invariably associate poetry with precisely that. The recent vogue for theoretical approaches has made this espousal of apparent impersonality even easier to adopt. Could it be that there is some connection between the overwhelmingly masculine ethos of academic poetry criticism, and its continuing marginalisation and neglect of women poets' work?

It's a curious fact that, outside the academy, women form the overwhelming majority of both readers and writers of poetry. In 1997 Arts Council research noted that women were twice as likely to read, write and buy poetry as men. Women poets sell; women poets are popular. Carol Ann Duffy's collection *The World's Wife* sold in the kind of numbers usually reserved for fiction or biography. Walk into any good bookstore, and you can choose from two or three anthologies of 'women's poetry'.

However, when you look at who's who in the institutions that matter to poetry – publishers, small magazines, universities - whose role it is to promote the genre, you'll find virtually no women. Poetry editors at the few publishing houses that still commission new work are all male; almost all the magazine editors and literary critics who specialise in poetry are too.

Academic poetry critics rarely discuss anything as straightforward as content. They offer tokenistic inclusion of women – usually one chapter in a collection of seven or eight essays. In the 1990s, such a chapter would make feminism its focus, with the result that it appeared as though women poets were only interested and interesting in relation to feminism. More recently, now that the F word is 'missing, presumed dead', there has been a shift of emphasis. You'll still only find one chapter, but now it will be devoted not to a group but to an individual, and there will be no mention of the fact of her sex. She is just like all the others, she is a poet.

Does this matter? I think it does. Back in 1986, in a now-famous essay, 'The Woman Poet: her dilemma', Irish poet Eavan Boland claimed that the task facing women poets was to resist the simplifying temptations of feminism and seek instead to 'humanize femininity'. Easy to say, not so easy to do, as the reception afforded her own poetry demonstrates. (Boland is famous as a 'woman poet' who writes about women's lives. Find an example of a man poet who is described in comparable ways. Men poets write of universal matters.) Lyric poetry is preoccupied with versions of selfhood. Humanist conceptions of the self (which have shaped our notions of the literary subject) are determinedly masculine. This means that women face particular problems when they attempt to create a self that conveys aspects of experience or perspectives allied to female subjectivity. Many find it difficult to establish sufficiently authoritative female subjects within a tradition that treats femaleness as aberrant, and views this very specificity as signalling the limits of its relevance. Such attitudes make it extremely hard to create a female lyric voice whose authority is accepted as transcending its femaleness to speak of general insights or truths. So it is not possible to 'humanize femininity' because humanism predicates a masculine subject as the norm. As a result, criticism that ignores the poet's sex also erases the complexity of a gendered relationship to lyric tradition.

Relationships between poets and universities have been growing stronger over the last twenty years. Universities are beginning to act as patrons, offering residencies, teaching and support on a formal or informal basis. This has been the case in the US for a long time, but it is a new development here, and it is likely to have far-reaching consequences. These relationships are mutually beneficial. English departments gain kudos (and research points) by being able to include published writers on their lists of 'research-active' staff. Poets do some teaching, in exchange for the holy grail of a regular, guaranteed income. This means that academic poetry critics' personal networks and individual tastes will become even more influential – not simply reflected in the criticism that gets published, but in the allocation of jobs.

Feminism and Poetry

Of course, and thank goodness, there are also feminist literary critics working on women poets. They've produced some extraordinarily important work. But there appears to be little, if any, connection or dialogue between these critics and the 'mainstream' critics described above, the ones who wield influence and power in the poetry world.

If relationships between feminists and the poetry world are virtually non-existent, relations between feminism and

poetry have problems of a different nature. Even when feminist activity was at its height, in the late 1980s, there were few women poets in Britain happy to be publicly associated with the term. Many were uncomfortable about the constraints or prescriptions that a political agenda might impose upon their creative energies. Today's emerging women poets privately admit their determination to avoid being associated with the category 'women's poetry', which is seen as an unfashionable ghetto for ageing, out-of-touch, strident eccentrics. In the establishment's view serious poets are simply poets; poetry transcends sex, race and sexuality. (It doesn't, of course. Gregory Woods writes about homosexual desire; Tony Harrison writes about class alienation.) But ambitious, hard-working women poets want to win the establishment's respect; that is the way to get on. Associating oneself with feminism is not.

However, apart from the fact that the same holds true for academics, there is nothing to prevent any of us reading as feminists. Speaking of 'feminist poems' has always been problematic: the aims of feminism are clear-cut in a way the aims of a poem can rarely said to be. But feminist readings are as capable as any others of acknowledging the complex nature of poetic language. It is with reading that issues of gender surface most interestingly, and it is as readers that we address our students, implicitly urging them to follow our own example. We should stop excising the emotional component of our reading experiences, stop pretending our opinions about poems are transparent, simply 'there', in the poem.

For lyric poetry elicits particular modes of reading, and invites specific kinds of relationship between reader and text which have, to date, been ignored by critics. Reading lyric poetry is a peculiarly intimate process; it stages an encounter between three subjectivities: that of poet, poem and reader. It is this encounter that warrants attention; it is here that gender – and other facets of identity, such as sexual orientation, class position, ethnicity – play their crucial parts.

The reader's role is curiously paradoxical. On the one hand, poetry offers more space for the reader's interpretation than other forms of writing. Reading a poem is rather like diving into a swimming pool, where reading prose is more like swimming lengths. Even the shape of lines on the page implies this emphasis on verticality and depth. There is no lead-in, no temporal, spatial, semantic frame. Since the meanings of words derive in part from their context, with a poem the field is wide open. That freedom is signalled by the space on the page: all that room and ambiguity, the openness of poetry, where language is freed from the constraints of grammatical or semantic meaning, where images can hang, can be brought alongside one another or not, as the reader determines. This indicates considerable freedom.

But, on the other hand, the reader is plunged in a particularly intense way into the poem's experience: effectively dropped into the poem's world, with no preparation. S/he is therefore in thrall to the poet's creation to a much more intense degree than is the case with prose writing. There is little or no scene-setting, rarely much sense of location in time or place. There is no space outside the poem's voice.

The heart of the reading experience lies in what happens between reader and text. In other words, it is not the critic who produces an interpretation; it is the interaction between critic and poem that creates the experience of a poem. The most thoughtful poetry criticism acknowledges this complex, subjective interplay, and the way in which it demands that the whole of the reader engages in the process. Often, it is poets themselves who seem better at doing this than academics: Vicki Feaver and Deryn Rees-Jones stand out as superb examples. But my crucial point is this: once the subjectivity involved in any reading act is admitted, the relevance of gender to poetry critique becomes incontrovertible.

So that is why academic poetry criticism takes such care to avoid subjectivity – or, more accurately, to conceal it. 'Poets needs must be / or men or women, more's the pity.' So wrote Elizabeth Barrett Browning one hundred and fifty years ago, in *Aurora Leigh*. Likewise, readers must be 'or men or women'. And until we admit this, and make something good out of it, enriching critical discussion of the poetry available to us, we shall continue to give our students the message that personal response might have been okay in the schoolroom but, in the more rarefied and powerful world of universities, we are all masculine subjects really.

(Vicki Bertram is presenting a paper based on this article at a one-day event entitled 'Studying Poetry' at the University of Hertfordshire on the 28th November. See page 10 for further details. Her book *Gendering Poetry: Women and Men Poets in Late Twentieth Century Britain* will be published by Rivers Oram Pandora later this Autumn.)

ARIES Reborn

Christian Kay and Jean Anderson, of the STELLA Project, University of Glasgow, report on the rebirth of ARIES.

ARIES is a self-access computing package offering support in mastering problem areas of English spelling and punctuation. It was first produced in 1996 with a grant designed to make academics more entrepreneurial – we were supposed to sell it to businesses to solve their recurrent worries about the prose-writing abilities of their staff. We didn't have much success in this area, through lack of time rather than lack of entrepreneurship, but the package proved useful to our students and those of other HEIs which invested in it.

The other recurrent dream behind the funding was that electronic materials would reduce the need for expensive human teachers. When student essays revealed an inability to employ any punctuation mark other than the comma, the writers could be advised to work their way through the package, returning only if it failed to answer their questions. At the same time, ARIES attempted some subliminal grammar teaching, since the authors believed that a lack of understanding of grammatical structures often underlay poor punctuation.

In the end, it wasn't the teachers who were threatened with obsolescence but the package itself. It was written in a programme called Toolbook, which offered an amazing array of bells and whistles for the time, but had the disadvantage of having to be distributed along with the package. Similar disadvantages applied to any earthbound software, so the obvious solution was to put ARIES on the web. This, however, would require substantial rewriting and therefore money.

Here the English Subject Centre came to the rescue, without requiring us to be either entrepreneurial or obsolescent. We merely had to produce something which would be "of benefit to the subject community as well as having a positive influence on teaching and learning in the host department(s)". A Departmental Project grant enabled us to employ a programmer to do the necessary rewriting.

Lateral thinking was required. The time available was short, and not all the attractive features of the original package could be reproduced. This applied especially to online versions of the interactive exercises and their accompanying illustrations. (In the original version, the illustrations had sometimes driven the text, with frantic emails from the programmer saying things like "I can't find a picture of a coconut, but there's a lovely one of a giraffe".) In the new version there is less variety of format, but a greater consistency of both exercise type and appearance across the five units. We hope that this will make the package easier to use.

While we had no doubt of the continuing need for the three punctuation units, we wondered about the need for spelling units in these days of spell-checkers. Student essays are often free of spelling errors, though emails and exam scripts may tell a different story. However, we feel that students of English ought to be able to spell the words of their language and have some understanding of the fact that English spelling is less random than may at first appear. We therefore included both a basic spelling unit and a reference unit, where some of the judgements of 1996 about whether spellings (such as 'judgment') were British or American had to be revised. Recently one of our testers reported from Malaysia that the British or American spelling section will be one of the most useful for colleagues teaching English there.

The package has proved useful not only to students of English but to students generally, with particularly strong pleas for help coming from colleagues in Engineering and Modern Languages. The latter also worry about students' lack of grammatical understanding, and in order to address this problem we have produced the LILT Project (Language into Languages Teaching) aimed at inculcating linguistic concepts essential to any kind of language learning. It is available at **http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/SESLL/EngLang/LILT/1st.htm**

The moral of this story is to look out for your software – it may have a short shelf-life. Technical problems apart, yesterday's software may look distinctly old-fashioned to the sophisticated eyes of modern users. At the STELLA project we are also revising early packages in English Grammar and Old English, for eventual web distribution. Our earliest package of all, The Basics of English Metre, which really has reduced teaching input, languishes in a DOS programme from 1988, useable for perhaps one more year but distinctly looking its age. More cheerfully, our experience with ARIES has shown that rescue is possible.

http://scottishcorpus.ac.uk/aries
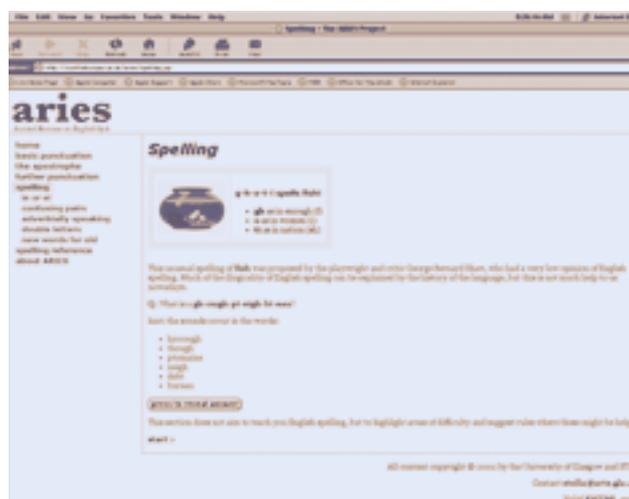
Forthcoming Events Organised by the English Subject Centre

Irish Studies in the Curriculum
November 7th 2003
Senate House, University of London

This symposium is being co-hosted with the British Association for Irish Studies and the Institute of English Studies. It will give delegates the opportunity to reflect on approaches to, and strategies for, the delivery of curricula or curricula elements which focus on representations of Ireland and Irishness. Speakers include: *Patrick O'Sullivan, University of Bradford; Lucia Boldrini and Derval Tubridy, Goldsmiths, University of London; Siobhán Holland, English Subject Centre; Aidan Arrowsmith, Staffordshire University; Jayne Steel, University of Lancaster and Daragh Minogue, St. Mary's College.*

Studying Poetry
November 28th 2003
University of Hertfordshire

This event will consider the practical problems involved in teaching poetry, together with a review of recent and current practice. The day will incorporate a range of literary periods and poetic genres, including questions of canonicity, creative writing and ICT.

Access and Widening Participation
December 3rd 2003
Senate House, University of London

This event will consider various aspects of Access and Widening Participation, with particular emphasis on the English Subject Centre's publication: *The Good Practice Guide on AWP.*

New Initiatives in English and Technology
December 4th 2003
University of Glasgow

This event will focus on the results of recently completed projects that utilise technology in the teaching of English. Participants will be given hands-on experience of these projects and be invited to participate in a discussion about the issues raised when technology is applied to teaching in this area. This day has been scheduled to complement the event dealing with online discussion which will take place the following day.

Enhancing Online Discussion
December 5th 2003
University of Glasgow

This roundtable event will provide an opportunity for those who are currently using online messageboards, discussion forums etc to gain a deeper understanding of how they can be used to enhance 'campus-based' learning. Attendees will be invited to share examples of best practice. If you would like to participate or suggest a topic for inclusion please contact Brett Lucas (see Contacts panel on back cover).

Independent Learning Symposium
January 17th 2004
Sheffield Hallam University

This symposium will introduce the learning materials developed by Sheffield Hallam University as part of a project developing independent learning in English Studies..

For further details and a registration form see: **http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk/events/future/index.htm** or use the Contacts Panel on the back cover.

National Teaching Fellowship Scheme

Nine of the existing National Teaching Fellows work in or stem from the discipline of English, and their projects are in the process of feeding into the way the subject is taught.

The National Teaching Fellowship Scheme is part of an overall programme to raise the status of learning and teaching in Higher Education. It was set up by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) in Northern Ireland and is managed by the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. The high profile scheme celebrates excellence in teaching by recognising individuals who are outstanding as teachers and promoters of learning.

It would be exciting were there to be further English-based NTFs in the next round. Nominations are made by indvidual institutions, and the Scheme is currently being expanded and modified in line with the recent White Paper on education. Further details of the revised scheme for 2004 are promised on the NTFS site (**http://www.ntfs.ac.uk/**) during the autumn.

Departmental Development Projects

Several more of the projects which we have sponsored in departments have been completed over the summer, and the reports are available on our website via www.english.ltsn.ac.uk/projects/deptprojects/index.htm

Teaching Creative Writing at Undergraduate Level: Why, How and Does it Work?

Steve May, Bath Spa University College

This project arose from Steve May's wish to explore attempts to describe Creative Writing in the same terms as more conventional academic disciplines. His report provides an informal set of benchmarks derived from current practice and is useful to anyone reviewing or designing a programme in creative writing. It is not an exhaustive survey of provision, but draws together and clarifies both the variations and shared features of courses across the spectrum.

Foundational Writing Skills

Derek Alsop, Chester College of Higher Education

This report is about a pilot scheme project offering special writing skills support to level one undergraduates in English at Chester College. The scheme provided two different types of provision to support level one students in developing better writing skills: generic provision, provided through a weekly class open to any student who wished to 'sign up' each week; and targeted provision, provided through one-to-one tutorial support. The report describes how the schemes were established and received. It will be of interest to anyone considering establishing a similar scheme.

Reading Dossiers/Study Logs/Learning Journals: Research into Best Practice

Steve Ellis, University of Birmingham

This project looked at the pedagogic benefits and value of reading dossiers as a means of assessment in English degrees based on their introduction to a second year module at the University of Birmingham. The report considers the history and development of the project, the types of document considered, assessment issues, student and staff responses and a bibliography on the topic. Anyone considering implementing reading dossiers in their own department will benefit from the experience at Birmingham it describes.

The Condition of the Subject – first The Bag, then the Pen, now The Video!

Both those who attended and those who missed our conference 'The Condition of the Subject' in July may be interested to know that video presentations of the plenary papers are now available via our website **(http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk/intconf/plenary/index.htm)** This makes it possible to view Catherine Belsey's 'Towards Cultural Criticism', Jonathan Bate's 'In Defence of Gradgrind', Ato Quayson's 'Notes on a Postcolonial Pedagogy' and Elaine Showalter's 'The Future of English in the American University' from the comfort of your own desk. (Because of the size of the files, viewing over a dial-up connection from home is not recommended).

The conference, held at Senate House, University of London, focussed on the pedagogy and conception of English in academic practice. It was a resounding success, with 170 delegates, many from overseas. In addition to the five plenary papers, there were three panel sessions and 84 papers delivered through 40 parallel sessions. The next issue of our Newsletter will give a full report of the conference and contain papers from it. Philip Martin, the former Director of the English Subject Centre, is currently editing a volume based upon the conference.
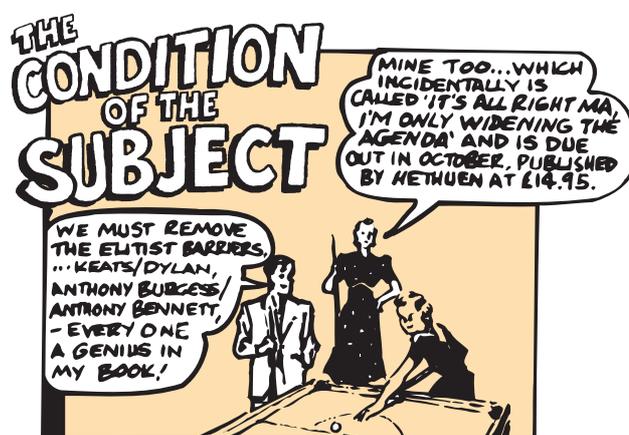
Area Studies Network

The Area Studies Network is a discussion list for teachers of all disciplines teaching on Area Studies and other interdisciplinary programmes. To join the list fill in the online form at **http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgibin/wa.exe?SUBED1 =area-studies-network&A=1** or contact John Canning j.canning@soton.ac.uk. The list supports the Area Studies Project of which the English Subject Centre is a partner.

Dr Siobhán Holland departs...

Siobhán Holland, our Project Officer for Academic Liaison, who together with Philip Martin was a founding member of staff of the Subject Centre, is leaving us in December to take up a post at St Mary's College (a College of the University of Surrey) in west London. Siobhán's ideas and enthusiasm will be missed by the Subject Centre, and by the many colleagues in the discipline to whom she has offered support and advice on all manner of teaching issues over the last three years. We wish her well in her future career. Siobhán is pictured on the far left below followed, from left to right, by other members of the Subject Centre team: Christie Carson, Carol Eckersley, Jane Gawthrope, Ben Knights, Petrina Farrington and Brett Lucas.

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