ENGLISH STUDIES in TRANSITION

Papers from the ESSE Inaugural Conference

Edited by
Robert Clark and Piero Boitani

ROUTLEDGE

ENGLISH STUDIES IN TRANSITION

Papers from the ESSE Inaugural Conference

Edited by
Robert Clark and Piero Boitani

London and New York

First published 1993
by Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

Typeset in 10 on 12 point Bembo by
Intype Ltd, London
Printed in Great Britain by
T J Press (Padstow) Ltd, Cornwall

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

English Studies in Transition: Papers from
the ESSE Inaugural Conference
I. Clark, Robert
820.9

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Clark, Robert
English studies in transition : papers from the ESSE Inaugural Conference / Robert Clark.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
1. English literature—History and criticism—Congresses.
I. ESSE Inaugural Conference (1991: University of East Anglia)
II. Title.
PR7.C57 1993
820.9—dc20 92–40117

ISBN 0–415–09833–5

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Elleke Boehmer is a novelist and a Lecturer in English at the University of Leeds. Her publications include *Screens Against the Sky* (1990), *An Immaculate Figure* (1993) and a forthcoming Opus volume on colonial and post-colonial literature.

Terence Brown is a Lecturer in English at Trinity College, Dublin. He was elected a Fellow of the college in 1976 and appointed Associate Professor in 1981. His principal publications are *Louis MacNeice: Sceptical Vision* (1975), *Northern Voices: Poets from Ulster* (1975), *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History* (1981) and *Ireland's Literature: Selected Essays* (1988). He was a contributing editor to *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (1991). He has recently published an edition of James Joyce's *Dubliners* and is currently at work on a critical biography of the poet W.B. Yeats.

J. B. Bullen was formerly Junior Research Fellow at Balliol College, Oxford, and is now Reader in English Literature at Reading University. He has a long-standing interest in the relationship between literature and the visual arts, and has published on the writing of George Eliot, Dickens, Browning, Ruskin, Pater and many others in this field. He is author of *The Expressive Eye: Fiction and Perception in the Work of Thomas Hardy* (1986) *Post-Impressionism in England: The Critical Reception* (1988) and is editor of Roger Fry's *Vision and Design* (1981) and Clive Bell's *Art* (1987).

Marc De la Ruelle is a Lecturer in Translation Studies at the Provincial Instituut voor Hoger Onderwijs (PIHO) in Gent, Belgium.

Theo D'haen is Professor of English and American Literature at Leiden University. He has published *Text to Reader: A Communicative Approach to Fowles, Barth, Cortázar, and Boon* (1983), and books in Dutch on American literary history and postmodernism. He is series editor (together with Hans Bertens) of *Postmodern Studies*, co-editor of the ongoing loose-leaf *Post-War Literatures in English: A Lexicon of Contemporary Authors* (first

published 1988), and further has edited or co-edited volumes on English, American and Comparative Literature.

William Dodd teaches English Literature at the Faculty of Education (Arezzo), University of Siena. He has published various studies of Shakespeare plays (including *Measure for Measure, Richard II* and *All's Well That Ends Well*) and of twentieth-century poets (Eliot, Lawrence, Muir).

Juliette Dor is the head of the Medieval Language and Literature Department at the University of Liège. She teaches Medieval English Literature, the History of English Language, Comparative Grammar, Linguistics and Old Icelandic.

João Ferreira Duarte, a founding member of the Portuguese Association for Anglo-American Studies, is currently Associate Professor in the Faculty of Letters, University of Lisbon, where he has been teaching and doing research in the field of English Literature, Literary Theory and Comparative Literature.

Herbert Grabes is Professor of English and American Literature at the Justus-Leibig-Universität Giessen (Germany). He has published widely on Renaissance English literature, twentieth-century American literature and literary theory and is the author of *Fictitious Biographies: Vladimir Nabokov's English Novels* (1977); *Fiktion – Imitation – Ästhetik: Was ist Literatur?* (1981); *The Mutable Glass. Mirror-imagery in titles and texts of the Middle Ages and the English Renaissance* (1982); *Das englische Pamphlet I: 1521–1640* (1990); and is co-editor of *REAL (The Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature)*.

Adolphe Haberer is Professor of English Literature at the Université Lumière-Lyon 2. He is the author of *Louis MacNeice: l'homme et la poésie* (1986) and the editor of *De Joyce à Stoppard: écritures de la modernité* (1991). He has also published articles on Yeats, MacNeice, Dylan Thomas, Ted Hughes, Seamus Heaney and Derek Mahon.

Pilar Hidalgo is Professor of English at Málaga University. She is the author of several books and essays on British drama and fiction and has just completed *Women's Time* (forthcoming), a study of the connections between feminist theory and contemporary women's fiction.

Frank Kermode is King Edward VII Professor of English Literature at the University of Cambridge. His most recent works include *An Appetite for Poetry* (1989).

Ingrid Kuczynski is Senior Lecturer at Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg.

Jean-Jacques Lecercle is Professor of English at the University of Nanterre. He is the author of *Philosophy Through the Looking Glass* (1985), *Frankenstein: Mythe et philosophie* (1987) and *The Violence of Language* (1991).

Agostino Lombardo is Professor of English at Rome University 'La Sapienza' and a member of the Accademia dei Lincei. He has published widely on English and American literature and is now engaged in the translation of the complete dramatic works of Shakespeare for Feltcinelli Editore. Among his translations for the theatre is that of *The Tempest* (1978) for Giorgio Strehler.

Donatella Pallotti is a Lecturer in English Language and Literature at the University of Florence. In the field of linguistic criticism she has published a study concerning the interpersonal function of language in poetry, *Weaving Words: A Linguistic Reading of Poetry* (1990).

Jina Politi, formerly a Fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge, is currently Professor of English Literature, Department of English, Aristotle University, Thessaloniki, Greece. She is the author of *The Novel and its Presuppositions: Changes in the Conceptual Structure of Novels in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (1976) and of various articles on English, Greek and Comparative Literature.

Gareth Reeves, Senior Lecturer in English at Durham University, is the author of *T. S. Eliot: A Virgilian Poet* (1989), *Auden, MacNeice, Spender: The Thirties Poetry* with Michael O'Neill (1992) and of two books of poetry, *Real Stories* (1984) and *Listening In* (1993).

Elizabeth Sakellaridou is Associate Professor of Modern English Drama at the Department of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. Her publications include *Pinter's Female Portraits* (1988) and articles on feminist theory and criticism and modern drama.

Catherine Sandbach-Dahlström is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the Department of English, Stockholm University. She is the author of *Be Good Sweet Maid: Charlotte Yonge's Domestic Fiction: A Study in Dogmatic Purpose and Fictional Form* (1984) and several articles on feminist criticism and theory.

Max Saunders is a Lecturer in English at King's College, London. He

edited the Ford Madox Ford special double issue of *Agenda* (Winter 1989–Spring 1990), and has written a new critical biography of Ford (forthcoming).

Alan Sinfield is Professor of English in the School of Cultural and Community Studies at the University of Sussex. His recent publications include *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* (1989) and *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (1992).

Maria Stella formerly worked at Rome University as a Researcher in the English Studies Department, and is now Associate Professor of English (Language and Literature) at the Instituto Universitario Orientale in Naples. Her publications include books on Cesare Pavese, Ted Hughes and Thomas Hardy and articles on English nineteenth- and twentieth-century poets and novelists. Her translations into Italian include the poetry of Ted Hughes.

Claus Uhlig holds the Chair of English and American Studies at the University of Marburg, Germany. Apart from articles on Renaissance literature and literary theory, his publications include *Traditionelle Denkformen in Shakepeares tragischer Kunst* (1967), *Hofkritik im England des Mittelalters und der Renaissance* (1973), *Chaucer und die Armut* (1974), with Ludwig Borinski, *Literatur der Renaissance* (1975) and *Theorie der Literarhistorie: Prinzipien und Paradigmen* (1982).

Anita Weston is a *lettrice* in English Language at the University of Perugia. She also works for Italian radio, interviewing writers, directors and other prominent figures in Italian cultural life, and as a translator; a selection of her translations of works by contemporary poets in English, including Harrison, was recently published in an Italian anthology.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The publishers should like to acknowledge the following for kindly granting permission to reproduce these materials: Faber & Faber Ltd. and Farrar, Straus & Giraux, Inc. for extracts from *Station Island* and *Field Work* by Seamus Heaney; Blackstaff Press for extracts from 'The Y.C.V.s and the Ulster Division' in *The Collected Poems of John Hewitt* (1991) and *The Road to the Somme* by Philip Orr (1987); Secker & Warburg Ltd. for extracts from Michael Longley, *Poems 1963–1983* © Michael Longley 1969, 1973, 1976, 1985, 1991; David Higham Associates for 'The Force that through the Green Fuse drives the Flower' from Dylan Thomas, *The Poems*, J.M. Dent (1971) and extracts from Dylan Thomas, *The Collected Letters*, Paladin (1987); Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* © Editions du Seuil (1966).

Every effort has been made to obtain permission to reproduce copyright material. If any proper acknowledgement has not been made, or permission not received, we would invite copyright holders to inform us of the oversight.

CONTENTS

Part II Textual studies

INTRODUCTION

Robert Clark and Piero Boitani

The Inaugural Conference of the European Society for the Study of English was held at the University of East Anglia, Norwich on 4–8 September 1991. It was the culmination of two years' planning by European scholars committed to the study of the many cultures, languages and literatures denominated by the word 'English' around the world, and to the development of a learned society whose purpose is both to foster and address the new understandings of English which are emerging in the context of European political and economic integration. The scope of the conference could have been restricted by calling for papers on a specifically European theme, but it was decided that such a strategy risked defeating the conference's aim to provide a general assembly for the profession in Europe, and implying that ESSE's concerns were comparativist or Eurocentric in a narrow sense. ESSE was established in the conviction that the past and future sense of the word 'English' is to be discovered within the word 'Europe' and that even a British study of a British writer will in future carry the inflection of this political geography. Many members of ESSE will be interested in intercultural comparison, but this is by no means ESSE's only or principal constituency. Europe is too vast and various a resource for such restriction and ESSE's task is to enable all constituencies engaged in English studies in Europe to develop their scholarly interests.

Recognizing that all European studies of English are the concern of ESSE, the Inaugural Conference sought to reflect the diversity of current activity in Europe and allow this diversity to establish a sense of the profession's common ground. The conference was organized around forty sections devoted to areas of specialist research in language, literature and cultural studies. Over three hundred papers were delivered, of which over one hundred were submitted for consideration to the editors of this volume. In keeping with the general orientation of the conference, the papers have been selected to reflect the range offered, with quality being the single overriding factor. The editors, however, followed no brief to print something from every section, or from every contributing nation (although, in the event, the latter is in fact the case). Rather they included

what seemed to them to speak valuably about the chosen topic. The choice of topic and manner of approach became important only in that a published volume needs to justify its costs by interesting a wide range of readers; accordingly, and at times with regret, some contributions of considerable merit were excluded because they were too specialized to be of a wide appeal. Other papers which we might have wished to publish were already promised elsewhere. Working within these considerations, the editors arrived at a selection which provides a valuable cross-section of what was heard at the conference, and makes for a volume of a kind more variegated than has been usual in recent British publishing. The publishers of the volume are to be warmly thanked for their generosity in bringing it to the market at a time when budgets are tightly controlled. By this act they set the seal on an already considerable support for the development of European conceptions of English which began, for us, with their enthusiastic backing for ESSE when it was but a gleam in the eyes of a scattered band of optimists, and carried on to their generous help with the Inaugural Conference itself. In this history the far-sightedness of Janice Price, Routledge's Editorial Vice-President, and of David Croom, Managing Director, deserves public record – even risking seeming immodesty in a book published by their own house – the more especially since Routledge has also taken the lead in making a handsome donation of works for use in English studies to libraries in the new democracies of eastern Europe. Humanists work to create a largeness of vision, and it is a salutary thing when publishers who must obey the logic of the marketplace can see wide and far even while regarding the balance sheet.

To militate against the tendency of a large and many-stranded conference to affirm specialist separations rather than collective identities, a series of plenary and parallel lectures was offered that sought to address topics of general note. These lectures were the most probable candidates for inclusion in this volume and those by Sir Frank Kermode, Alan Sinfield, Jina Politi, Agostini Lombardo, Terence Brown, Pilar Hidalgo and Jean-Jacques Lecercle were offered in this part of the conference. In the sections devoted to specific literary periods or themes, there were, however, also essays of general relevance; hence the arrangement of this volume into sections roughly divided into theoretical papers and those more directly concerned with specific literary texts.

The theory section opens with the keynote lecture by Sir Frank Kermode which raised issues central to English studies – the question of how far traditional canons are repositories for long-lived value, and how far constructed by explicit or unacknowledged political agendas. To Sir Frank's traditionalist view, Alan Sinfield's lecture provided an unintended but nonetheless apposite counterpoint by adumbrating a politically engaged critique that works against oppressive normalizations, specifically at this moment of sexual identity. In her lecture Jina Politi essayed a

ground as ancient as Alan Sinfield's, the topos of inexpressibility in which language says what it cannot speak, and revealed the benefit that English scholarship can derive from the skills of rhetorical analysis which flourish today in modern Greece and Rome. Again fortuitously, Jean-Jacques Lecercle provided a counterpoint by deploying that highly tuned modern French skill – a rationalism fascinated with the absurd and surreal – to probe the ability of Lewis Carroll's language to wear a sensible mask while communicating nonsense. Crossing other frontiers, Herbert Grabes brought Kant to bear on Saussure and Derrida, and showed how the structuralist and deconstructionist use of spatial metaphors effectively conceals the role of temporal succession in the creation of meaning. By returning to Kant's transcendental understanding of time as succession, the interaction of successivity and simultaneity is restored to the Saussurean model and the basis laid for a communicative theory that can better account for the dynamism of linguistic systems.

To round out the opening section of this volume, Theo D'haen welcomes British postmodernism into Europe by suggesting that the way recent British fiction has been read as fundamentally traditional, realist and moral reflects a desire to cling to ideas of British imperial decline and the mentality of 'Little England', rather than recognize the vital and experimental qualities of recent British writing. In an essay that illuminates the background of this approach, Marc De la Ruelle contrasts the philosophical conceptualization of culture in continental Europe to the construction of English cultural studies on Arnoldian precedents as the upholding of a literate moral experience to shield against alienating modernity. Contemporary British critics thus find themselves seen through continental eyes clinging dear to a belief in their own failure to be modern as a shibboleth of who the British are. Meanwhile history carries Britain towards the shoals of postmodernity and the embrace, deathly or reinvigorating, of continental European abstraction, scientific scholarship and theoretical literary experimentalism. Perhaps Mrs Thatcher's Bruges speech marked the apogee and downfall of the 'Little England' paradigm – certainly it ended the Prime Minister's career, and inspired some Britons to link hands in ESSE with their fellow Anglicists across the Channel. Four years later the Treaty of Maastricht signalled that the British were at last prepared to enter common cause with their neighbours. Henceforth it may be that it will no longer be assumed that the natural mode of comparison is between British and North American culture – the paradigmatic orientation of criticism in the 1950s – but that Anglicists should recognize the identity of concern and technique between British and other European writing.

In readings of specific texts our process of selection tends in this direction. A German scholar living in what was not long ago called 'the East' examines how British travellers constructed their ideas of other Europeans

in the eighteenth century; a German scholar living in 'the West' explores how historiography became bound up with nationalist frames of reference in the Renaissance; an Italian scholar considers how Shakespeare translates into the theatrical conventions of another language; three British critics consider how English and Irish writers have made use of continental example in developing their own conceptions of their work. This interest in European cultural interchange is to be expected at a conference of a European society, but in the selection of essays presented here transculturalism appears to have become an abiding and unifying concern. Taking transculturalism into its most specific British form, a Briton teaching in Rome explores through Tony Harrison's engagement with classical culture how Britishness involves using a language that marginalizes the vast majority of British peoples. Other critics complement this perspective by concerning themselves with understandings which diverge from the presumptions of heterosexual masculinity and modest femininity that 'Britishness' constitutionally connotes. Elleke Boehmer explores English as a vehicle for nationalism in modern African fiction; and Terence Brown rediscovers a Great War that Irishmen could scarcely admit to having fought side by side with soldiers whom other Irishmen saw as an occupying colonial army.

To discover such intrinsic connections in the essays selected is in part a function of the process of editing a volume such as this, and in part an indication that as Europe draws together, and as the modern international economy undermines the concepts of self and nation that were constructed for an earlier phase, the problematics of self, region and nation press differentially on all our lives. The task of building a 'Europe' worth inhabiting necessitates a conscious address to these problematics. But the ground that draws these essays together is not so much intrinsic as external, the political significance of their coming from so many different places to address with skill the whole field of English studies. Their appearance in this volume underlines the fact that valuable writing about John Donne or modern feminist theatre in the English language can as well be produced in Italy or Greece as in the United Kingdom, Ireland or the United States of America. That non-native critics can do valuable work always receives recognition from scholars, even while nativist mythologies continue to support the prejudice that someone born to a language understands it better than someone with bicultural or multicultural understanding. Logic is, of course, all the other way: those who know other cultures in depth should have the greater advantage, but the fact that in general natives rarely understand their own cultures as well as those who have studied them from the outside tends only to be recognized when 'civilized' social scientists visit 'the savages', not when one of the *barbaros* writes about us. This same logic applies whether the barbarian is from Greece or from Newcastle, for all assumptions of native superiority in cultural understand-

ing mask the fact that the natives are not a whole people and the identity of those entitled to define a culture is always carefully controlled. The dominant view habitually passes for an authentic and total account. The risk of admitting that Athens, Thessaloniki and Newcastle can comment with as much authority as London or Oxford, is that then so might the Irish or Scottish or Welsh or Caribbean, and the centre will not hold. As we saw in the Bruges speech, all cultures become nervous when boundaries are redrawn, especially those which base their power in the segmentation of class and region. The boundaries of English studies are never stable, but the revision which began in Norwich in 1991 promises a healthy destabilization and a transformation of the discipline beyond all recognition which will take generations to accomplish. It will no doubt one day be seen in retrospect as an aspect of the growth of an entirely new discipline – European cultural studies. Those most committed to ESSE will carry on the invention of this discipline as the conferences continue through Bordeaux in 1993, Glasgow in 1995 and beyond. It is to be hoped that further conference publications will chart and augment this common enterprise in the construction of the European community of nations.