
The ESSE President's Column

Fernando Galván

This has been an ESSE conference year, and a very good conference it was: our 9th International Conference, held from 22-26 August at the University of Aarhus in Denmark. The location was splendid and the organization superb. I had the opportunity to address members at the opening event as well as at the General Assembly, and we naturally also had a meeting of the Executive and another meeting of the Board a couple of days before the conference started. I have been informed by the local organizers that nearly 500 delegates attended the conference. Many talked to me during those days and the general impression I received from them was one of great satisfaction with the academic quality of the plenary and parallel lectures, as well as of the papers in the seminars, the round tables and the posters. They were also very happy with the premises and with the organization as a whole, which provided plenty of time and opportunities to talk and to make personal and professional contacts, such an important facet of conferences like ours.

Since the setting for the conference was in Jutland, as I said in my opening speech we were unable to overlook the close links between Denmark and English language, literature and culture. In this respect, the organization at Aarhus was so efficient that many of the delegates had the chance to visit places of historic and legendary interest, not least among them Rosenholm Castle and Hamlet's grave some kilometres from Aarhus, while others were able to contemplate the "Grauballe Man", one of those bogland people immortalised by Seamus Heaney; and of course many visited "Den Gamle By" (the "old town", a museum of old buildings from around the country set up in the form of an old Danish market town). The conference dinner was held in a grand and beautiful University dining hall, which for some colleagues evoked the past glory of King Hrothgar's Heorot. It was a lively evening with the many conversations between friends over food and drinks crowned by the performance

of a short humorous play about Hamlet's plight, courtesy of a group of colleagues from the Aarhus Department of English. Those who attended our 9th Conference will surely not forget it very easily. Although I have naturally written to the organizers, thanking them for such a good job, I wish to publicly express the gratitude of ESSE in these pages, so that all members can learn about their success and our satisfaction.

At the General Assembly I had the pleasure to present Clare Brant of King's College, London with the 2008 ESSE Book Award in the field of Literatures in the English Language for her book *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture*, which had won the enthusiastic praise of the selection committee. You can read a short piece about this book written by the author herself in this issue of *The Messenger*. This was the second time we had presented our Book Awards, and unfortunately the numbers of books received for the prizes in English Language and Linguistics and in Cultural Studies in English were lower than for the first awards in 2006. Accordingly the Board, acting on the recommendations of the selection committees, decided that no award was to be given this time in those categories. I must, however, convey the deep interest of the ESSE Board in promoting these Awards, and all representatives of the Board have been mandated to pass word on to their national associations in order to encourage members to send their books for the next round of awards. We shall publish an announcement next year with further details and the deadline (1 February 2010), as this third presentation of the Awards will take place in 2010.

But the day after bidding farewell to Aarhus, planning commenced for our next Conference, in two years' time, in Turin. At the Board meeting in Aarhus we appointed the Academic Programme Committee (APC), formed by Giuseppina Cortese (Chair), Carlo Biagetta, Andreas Jucker, Liliane Louvel, Dominic

Rainsford and Marina Vitale. They have already started work and are now publishing a call for papers in this issue of *The Messenger*, so please make a note of deadlines and prepare your proposals for our 10th Conference in August 2010 in Turin. Northern Italy is obviously an attractive destination in itself, and the fact that the conference will be held in the last days of August will hopefully encourage many members to travel to Italy and combine the last few days of their holidays—perhaps even in the company of their families—with their conference work. The local organizing committee is already planning some attractive tours as well as inexpensive accommodation for whole families, which might encourage many to attend. It might also be relevant at this point to mention that in 2010 we shall be celebrating our 20th Anniversary, coinciding with our return for the first time in those twenty years to the country where ESSE held its first formal meeting, in Rome in 1990.

Meanwhile life goes on. As you read these words, you will be well into the first semester of the academic year, with Christmas approaching fast and, of course, many papers and exams on your desk to mark. The Executive of ESSE is, as usual, trying to strengthen contacts with all national associations. We are making efforts to attend their meetings and conferences because, as I have already said several times, these are excellent occasions for reinforcing our links and making advances towards the future development of ESSE. On 18-20 September I was privileged to be a guest of the Slovenian Association for English Studies, which held its Second International Conference at the University of Maribor. Their splendid hospitality gave me the opportunity to enjoy a lively conference and make the acquaintance of many colleagues, not only from Slovenia (there were of course plenty), but also from the whole region. I noticed that this Slovenian conference was in fact a meeting point for many colleagues coming from Austria, Italy, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania, Romania, Bulgaria, and

Greece, but also from further away: Russia, Latvia, Turkey, Israel, Iran, and so forth. A few other colleagues also came from Western Europe (Germany, Britain, France or Portugal). I was talking with colleagues who work in countries where no national associations for English Studies have been formed yet, and was encouraging them to found such associations, with a view to later applying for ESSE membership, as that would naturally help them get more involved in professional matters across Europe. Good news from the Aarhus Board meeting in this connection is that the new Latvian Association for English Studies has been admitted to ESSE as of January 2009—so we are very pleased to welcome our Latvian friends back into ESSE.

All of us I think are fully conscious of some of the political and economic difficulties in countries that have recently emerged from a war, dictatorial regime, or some serious political conflict, and thus I need to make a special plea to colleagues in the central and eastern regions of Europe to do their best to help others in neighbouring countries to join ESSE's big family so that they also can benefit from membership. It is regrettable that eighteen years after the foundation of ESSE there are still English scholars living in relative isolation in several European countries, who have no national organization to join, or who do not know that such an association in fact exists in their countries. It is absolutely essential that such associations exist and be known to all because they constitute a forum where all higher education scholars in English can participate actively in promoting the study of English in those territories and enhancing their academic and professional careers. The ESSE Executive and the ESSE Board are very keen on pursuing this aim and will do our utmost to support initiatives of this sort. My New Year's wish for 2009 is for the continued expansion of the membership of ESSE in all corners of Europe. I shall, of course, continue to report on developments.



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The official journal of the European Society for the Study of English (ESSE)

Editors:

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Angela Locatelli, *Università Degli Studi di Bergamo, Italy*

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Editorial Notes, Password

My thanks once again to the many people who have contributed to this issue. The contents are as eclectic as ever, but there has been no change as yet in the under-representation of English language teaching and English linguistics. Over the past five years, by far the majority of the linguists whom I've appealed to for contributions have muttered darkly (I was about to write "into their beards"...) about a perceived "bias" in the focus of ESSE, and then have also succeeded in giving me the impression (accurate, no doubt!) that nothing will be forthcoming since an English linguist's working life is in some mysterious manner more fraught with tasks and pressures than that of his or her literary colleagues. In fact, of course, the "blame" (if blame there be) for the scarcity of such contributions can surely be placed with the editor himself, since the majority of contributions necessarily result from his soliciting rather than voluntary donation. It should also be remembered that the *Messenger* is primarily a newsletter, and it would take an especially proficient "newshound" to gather copy from wherever there may appear to be a scarcity.

Once again, my apologies: this Autumn issue will reach you late. The blame can, again, be placed with the editor, who has had to contend recently with an unwonted (and unwanted) "surge" in his own work and also with a home-based computer that threatened daily to cease functioning.

This issue will again be accessible on the ESSE web-site at <www.essenglish.org> for all recipients of the print version. The password is **DearJohn**.

John A Stotesbury
Joensuu, Finland

ESSE Positions

The Nominations Committee of the ESSE Board seeks nominations for the position of **President of ESSE**, which falls vacant in January 2010. The usual term of office is three years. Candidates, who should preferably have been involved in ESSE affairs, should obtain nominations from at least two national associations and should submit a short (2-3 page) CV.

The position of **Editor of *The European English Messenger*** will also fall vacant in January 2010, which means that the new editor will take over with the Spring 2010 edition of *The Messenger*. The usual term of office is three years. Candidates should submit a short (2-3 page) CV.

The elections for both positions will take place at the Board meeting in Szeged on 28-29 August 2009.

Final deadline for submission of nominations is 1 June 2009.

For informal discussion of the positions, and to submit nominations, please contact:

Smiljana Komar (Chair) <smiljana.komar@guest.arnes.si>

Risto Hiltunen <risto.hiltunene@utu.fi>

Alberto Lázaro <alberto.lazaro@uah.es>

ESSE BURSARIES for 2009

In 2009 ESSE will continue to offer TWO types of Bursaries:

1. A number of bursaries of up to 1500 euros each will be available for scholars in need of support to pursue a project or programmes of research leading to the writing of their PhD dissertation. (The age limit for this type of bursary is 40!)

2. A number of bursaries of up to 1500 euros each will be available for scholars already holding a doctorate or its equivalent and employed at Universities in Central and Eastern Europe who are in need of support to pursue a project or programme of research.

In both cases, winners are expected to make a short-term visit to a country where they identify an outstanding holding, collection, or other type of material relevant to their research. Conference participation is not supported by these bursaries; award winners may extend their visit at their own expense to attend a conference in the country concerned, but no part of the conference expenses will be covered by the bursary. Bursaries must be utilized and the study trips completed by the application deadline for the next year's bursaries, that is 1 March 2010. After completing the research trip, winners will be asked to send a financial report to the Treasurer of ESSE and a report about their results to both the Treasurer and the Chair of the Selection Committee.

Applicants for the first type of bursary are required to be members of their national associations affiliated to ESSE, except for those whose associations do not consider PhD students eligible as members; in this case, their supervisors or the department to which they are affiliated must be ESSE members.

Applicants for second type of bursaries must be registered members of their national associations affiliated to ESSE.

The deadline for applications for both types of Bursaries is 1 March 2009. Notification to the applicants should be sent (electronically) by 15 April. Applicants should send electronically to all three members of the Selection Committee:

- the completed application form downloadable from the website with sections on personal information, list of most important publications, research plan, and provisional budget proposal;
- a scanned or electronically generated letter issued by the president or the secretary of the appropriate national organization to certify the membership of the applicant (or his/her supervisor in Germany and the UK);
- for Type A bursaries, a letter of recommendation, sent directly via email to all three members of the Selection Committee by the supervisor of the PhD candidate.

SELECTION COMMITTEE

Prof. **Maria Georgieva**, Department of English and American Studies, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, 15 Tsar Osvoboditel blvd., 1504 Sofia, Bulgaria. E-mail: <mageorg@nlcv.net>.

Prof. **György Endre Szönyi** (Chair of Committee), Institute of English and American Studies, University of Szeged, H-6722 Szeged, Egyetem u. 2, Hungary. E-mail: <geszonyi@lit.u-szeged.hu>.

Prof. **Marcus Walsh**, School of English, University of Liverpool, Modern Language Building, Chatham Street, Liverpool L69 7ZR, UK. E-mail: <marcus.walsh@liv.ac.uk>.

ESSE BOOK AWARDS 2008

This year, no prizes were awarded for books published by ESSE members in the fields of “English language and linguistics” and “Cultural Studies in English”.

In the field of Literatures in the English language, the Board of ESSE were delighted to announce a winner from a strong short-list. The prize was awarded to **Clare Brant** of King’s College London for her book ***Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture***, published by Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

The award committee issued the following statement concerning the book:

“In her book *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Palgrave, Macmillan, 2006), Clare Brant offers an excellent survey of letter-writing as well as a profound, well-researched and documented study of the 18th-century British culture. Studying an impressive amount of letters, she explores varied epistolary techniques and shows what systematic attention to letters can reveal about the messages themselves, their authors, and those to whom they are addressed.

Moreover, through the medium of letter-writing, Brant has chosen an interesting lens to look at the 18th-century English literature and culture. Her study is not a mere exploration of epistolary forms, but a lively introduction into a fascinating epoch, with its specific manners and life-style. The author’s argument is engaging, bold and forceful, and its scope is really impressive.”

The next awards will be made in the year 2010 for books published in 2008 and 2009.

General Announcements

Routledge, Taylor & Francis are pleased to announce the launch of the **Routledge Annotated Bibliography of English Studies (Routledge ABES)**. Routledge ABES is a new guide to articles, books, monographs and online resources in English Literary Studies, suitable for university departments, libraries, researchers and students. For a free trial, please sign up at: <www.routledgeabes.com>. Sign up for eUpdates at <www.informaworld.com/eupdates>.

Oxford University Press is producing a multi-volume edition of the **Works of Robert Burns**, edited from the University of Glasgow under the general editorship of Professor Gerry Carruthers. There will be several sessions on the edition at conferences in 2009, and a formal launch at “**Robert Burns 1759-2009**”, a three-day conference at the University of Glasgow, 15-17 January 2009. For further information, see <www.glasgow.ac.uk/robertburnsstudies> and <www.gla.ac.uk/departments/scottishliterature>.

Daniel Candel, a lecturer at the Department of English and American Literature, Universidad de Alcalá, is pleased to announce the opening of a new website at <<http://www.literarycrit.com>> devoted to an innovatory system of online guidance in **literary analysis** designed especially for undergraduates in English literary studies.

Università degli Studi di Torino, Italia
Dipartimento di Scienze del Linguaggio e di Letterature Moderne e Comparate
AIA (Associazione Italiana di Anglistica)
Città di Torino
Fondazione CRT

look forward to welcoming you to

ESSE 10 CONFERENCE
TORINO
Tuesday 24 – Saturday 28 August 2010

**CALL FOR SEMINARS, ROUND TABLES, LECTURES AND
POSTER SESSIONS**

ESSE members are invited to submit proposals for seminars and round tables on topics related to our fields of study: English Language, Literatures in English, and Cultural Studies (broadly defined). National Associations are invited to nominate potential lecturers. Proposals may be submitted directly to the Academic Programme Committee (APC, see address below) or through the Presidents or representatives of the National Associations, who will in due course forward them to the APC.

ESSE 10 Programme Format

SEMINARS

Proposals for seminars on specialised topics within our field should be submitted jointly by two ESSE members, preferably from two different National Associations. The degree of international appeal will be one of the selection criteria used by the APC. Proposals will not be entertained if they come from two people in the same institution. In exceptional cases the APC may permit one of the two convenors not to be an ESSE member (e.g. because they come from outside Europe), if it is argued that their presence is especially important for the seminar. Seminar proposals must include the names, affiliations and addresses of the convenors and a 100-word description of the topic. Unlike round tables, seminars are not pre-constituted events and will therefore be included within the APC's future call for papers, although convenors may take an active role in approaching potential participants. The seminar format is intended to encourage lively participation on the part both of speakers and of members of the audience. For this reason, papers will be orally presented in no longer than 15 minutes rather than read. Reduced versions of the papers will be circulated beforehand among participants. Further directions will follow in the call for papers. **NB: proposals for individual papers should NOT be submitted at this stage.**

ROUND TABLES

The aim of round tables is to present topics and problems currently seen as shaping the nature of the discipline. At a round table a pre-constituted panel discusses issues of fairly general scholarly or

professional interest in front of (and subsequently with) an audience. In other words, round tables are not sequences of papers but debate sessions. Proposals should include a 100-word description of the topic and the names and affiliations of at least three participants (including the convenor), who must be drawn from more than one national association. The maximum number of speakers will be five.

LECTURES

A number of distinguished keynote speakers, including at least one representing each of the three main fields covered by ESSE (English Language, Literatures in English, and Cultural Studies), will give plenary lectures by direct invitation of the organisers. In addition, there will be approximately 10 sub-plenary or parallel lectures given by ESSE members nominated by their national associations. These lectures are expected to have a wide appeal and to reflect recent developments in scholarship in one of the three areas mentioned above. They will be fifty minutes in length. National associations should forward a description of their nominee's proposed topic together with a brief summary of his or her CV. Each national association can propose up to three lecturers, each of them in one of the three main fields mentioned above, so that the APC can have a wide range of options for the final selection.

POSTER SESSIONS

A small number of poster sessions will be devoted to research-in-progress and project presentations. The aim is to provide additional opportunities for feedback and personal contacts. Further details will appear in a future issue of the *Messenger*, together with the call for papers.

NOTA BENE: The organisers of ESSE 10 are especially interested in receiving proposals for seminars and round tables on the implementation of the Bologna Process in European Higher Education. Thus, methodological presentations and discussions of action research and good practice in the three areas of teaching covered by ESSE scholars will be welcome. The aim of these proposals should be to provide opportunities for debate on first, second and third cycle didactic innovation in the process of adjustment to Bologna, from the perspective of different academic traditions/contexts and their respective *modus operandi*.

DEADLINES

For Lectures (nomination by national organizations): 1 March 2009

For Seminars and Round Tables (proposals from prospective convenors): 14 May 2009

ACADEMIC PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

Professor Giuseppina Cortese (University of Turin) (chair)

Professor Carlo M. Bajetta (Université de la Vallée d'Aoste)

Professor Andreas H. Jucker (University of Zürich)

Professor Liliane Louvel (University of Poitiers)

Professor Dominic Rainsford (University of Aarhus)

Professor Marina Vitale (University of Naples "L'Orientale")

PROPOSALS SHOULD BE SENT BY E-MAIL OR REGULAR MAIL TO:

ESSE-10

Dipartimento di Scienze del Linguaggio, Letterature Moderne e Compare

Università di Torino

Via S. Ottavio 20

10124 Torino

Italy

Email: esse.proposals@unito.it

TURIN UNIVERSITY

The University has been closely involved in Turin's history since its inception in 1404, sharing the city's successes, adversities and growth, and has always been open to, and active in, European cultural exchange.

There is a long tradition of English Studies at the University of Turin and today the University places great importance on the studying and learning of English Language, English Literature and Domain-specific English. The discipline of English Studies in Turin has made a major contribution to the national and international research scene with an excellent record of publications, following the tradition set by ESSE's first President, Professor Piero Boitani. Turin's list of Hon. Causa Laureates within the field of English Studies is also worthy of note, as they include Salman Rushdie, Harold Pinter (who received the Nobel Prize three years later), Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka, and the linguist Dell Hymes.

Conference venues and accommodation will be within walking distance of the main downtown monuments: the Royal Palace, Palazzo Madama, the Cathedral (where the Holy Shroud is kept), Palazzo Carignano, the Egyptian Museum, the National Cinema Museum. With the Mole Antonelliana, the symbol of Turin, soaring right above the conference venues, the Olympic City of Turin is ready to host ESSE 2010.

Further details about the city, the University and conference can be found at the official conference website: <[http://www. unito.it/esse2010](http://www.unito.it/esse2010)>

THE EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF ENGLISH STUDIES

CALL FOR PAPERS

CALL FOR TOPICS

**THE EDITORS WELCOME
CONTRIBUTIONS FOR VOLUME 14
&
TOPICS FOR VOLUME 15**

Relaunched with a strongly committed and proactive world-class publisher in 2006, *EJES* continues its highly successful policy of commissioning specialists to edit topic-based issues. The journal manifests its 'European' character by publishing peer-reviewed research of international quality on the topic in hand from a range of disciplinary viewpoints and academic traditions, thereby promoting interdisciplinary discussion on matters of cultural and intellectual concern across the fields of English Studies. *EJES* is read by a large and ever-widening scholarly public in Europe and beyond, both in paper and, increasingly, electronic form. Back issues are also available to subscribing institutions via the EBSCO service.

EJES was rated by the European Science Foundation's initial Reference Index for the Humanities as category 'B' – that is to say 'with a good reputation among researchers of the field in different countries'; with the help of contributors, editors and readers, it aspires to recognition in the future as having 'a very strong reputation' (category 'A').

Proposals are welcome both for contributions to commissioned topics and for new topics to be commissioned. In the first place, a **call for papers for new issue on 'Cultural Histories'** (to be published in 2010) is announced below. Likewise, **suggestions for topics are invited for volume 15** (to be published in 2011).

The general editors are happy to explore possible ideas with colleagues who are interested in developing proposals for special issues. Issues may be guest edited by one individual or by two or three, as the proponents wish. Full support is provided by the general editors throughout the process of putting an issue together. Please ensure that your proposal demonstrates how it advances the ambitions of the journal for a distinctive 'European' approach to English Studies. For further details regarding the journal's Aims and Scopes and its Editorial Policy, visit the ESSE website, or feel free to contact any of the general editors.

Potential contributors and guest editors should note that, in order to ensure fairness in the selection of articles and to guarantee the quality of the material published by the journal, proposals for submissions are subject to peer review, as are the final version of submitted articles.

For further information regarding *EJES* more generally, including special subscription rates, visit the Taylor & Francis website.

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Forthcoming issues

2008

12.3: *Reading the Modernist Past*, eds H  l  ne Aji & Helen M. Dennis.

2009

13.1: *Travelling Concepts*, eds Birgit Neumann & Frederik Tygstrup

13.2: *Intercultural Negotiations*, ed. Ian MacKenzie

13.3: *The Rhetoric of National Character*, eds Ton Hoenselaars and Joep Leerssen

2010

(Proposals for these issues were due in October, but it is worth contacting the editors to see if they are still considering submissions.)

14.1: *Beyond Trauma: The Uses of the Past in XXI-Century Europe*, eds Jacek Gutorow, Jerzy Jarniewicz & David Kennedy

14.2: *Crime Narratives: Crossing Cultures and Disciplines*, eds Maurizio Ascari & Heather Worthington

CALL FOR PAPERS

European Journal of English Studies, Vol. 14, Issue 3

CULTURAL HISTORIES

Guest Editors: Fran  ois Poirier & Logie Barrow

This issue aims to engage with the diversity of European approaches to the historical study of culture in English-speaking countries.

Given that our understanding of English-speaking cultures depends on our own cultural position, scholars of Anglophone culture are confronted by a dilemma. We find ourselves caught between the Scylla of imposing on the object of study notions that are relevant only to the societies in which we live and practise ourselves; or the Charybdis of simply importing notions developed within English-speaking societies. In order to avoid these dangers, we need to develop our critical comparative methodologies.

At the same time, although 'cultural studies', with its wide range of meanings, is now accepted as part of English studies, different views exist regarding the place of history in the discipline. This diversity of approaches is the product of the long and complex relationship between the several cultures across Europe, on the one hand, and the United Kingdom, Ireland, later the United States, and later still the British Commonwealth, on the other.

How, then, can different approaches to cultural and social history, especially in a comparative or intercultural perspective, illuminate our understanding of English-speaking cultures in any of their various dimensions, including the linguistic and the aesthetic? Contributors are requested in their papers to include an explicit discussion of their approach to comparative or intercultural cultural history alongside an in-depth case-study.

Detailed proposals (500-1,000 words) for articles of c. 5,000 words, as well as all inquiries regarding this issue, should be sent to both guest editors: François Poirier at <francois.poirier@univ-paris13.fr> and Logie Barrow at <logie@gmx.net>. The deadline for proposals is 31 January 2009, with delivery of completed essays by 15 December 2009. The issue will appear in 2010.

ESSE is proud to announce the publication of:

European English Studies: Contributions towards the History of a Discipline, vol. II

Edited by Renate Haas and Balz Engler
Leicester: The English Association for ESSE, 2008

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Preface; **Northern Europe:** Sweden - *Ishrat Lindblad*; Finland - *Päivi Pahta*; Lithuania - *Jone Grigaliuniene*

Central Europe: Switzerland - *Balz Engler*; Germany - *Renate Haas*; Hungary - *Aladár Sarbu*

South-Eastern Europe: Macedonia - *Ekaterina Babamova*; Greece - *Ruth Parkin-Gounelas*; Cyprus - *Stephanos Stephanides and Dionysis Goutsos*

Eastern Europe: Ukraine - *Isabella Buniyatova, Olga Vorobyova and Natalya Vysotska*; Russia - *Tatiana Dobrosklonskaya*; Armenia - *Seda Gasparyan and Gayane Muradyan*

European Perspectives: Concluding Remarks - *Renate Haas*

Contributors; Index

From the review of vol. I (2000), by Richard Utz in *Prolepsis*: “[T]his collection of essays is an important step toward a critical understanding of a multitude of institutional histories in English studies. It aptly showcases foundational periods as well as current developments and depicts the fascinatingly diverse canvas of a discipline constantly adapting to external conditions while — at the same time — actively transforming those external conditions through the study of language and literature at institutions of higher learning as well as through various forms of academic and extra-academic communication.”

Copies of Volumes I and II can be ordered by sending an e-mail with the information below to <tim.caudery@hum.au.dk>

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Dark Matter, Big Books and ESSE prizes

Clare Brant (King's College London, UK)

Clare Brant is the author of *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan 2006). She has co-edited three essay collections and published numerous articles on literature, culture and gender. She is co-Director of the Centre for Life-Writing Research at King's College London, where she also convenes an MA in Eighteenth-Century Studies. She won the ESSE Book Award for 2008 in the Literature section.

One of the little-known effects of winning an ESSE prize is that you find yourself smiling for whole days at a time. Now wreathed in laurels as well as smiles in the wake of accepting the ESSE Book Award 2008, I respond happily to the Editor's invitation to 'write something'. Entrusted with a freedom to write more or less about what I please, I promised to publicize the ESSE prizes themselves. In two of the three categories this year, cultural studies and language and linguistics, submissions were low. How peculiar! As gift horses go, the ESSE prizes are Lipizzaners! The literature category flourishes; every one of my fellow nominees added to the lustre of the prize by writing a book of distinction. The honour felt enormous: an international prize from one of the broadest and most cutting-edge associations in the field. It also chimed for me politically with an interest in being European. After the Aarhus conference, I found myself sitting in an Italian restaurant in Denmark with scholars of ten different nationalities (and a dozen expertises) whose conversation was illuminating, especially on the politics of language. It was a humbling and hopeful instance of how knowledge need have no frontiers.

But members of ESSE are surely very familiar with the catalysts of conferences, so I write instead about something perhaps fewer academics have experienced: writing a big book. *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* is 'my big book on letters', a default description in which size isn't everything but does count for something. It didn't start out that way. I had written a perfectly normal thesis (on the nature of eighteenth-century familiar correspondence, epistolary fiction and the

curious relations between them) and one reader for a university press suggested the scope would need to be bigger to make a publishable monograph. Fair comment: I was young and impressionable and I took it to heart. Too much. Twenty years later, with a cast of thousands, the book appeared.

There is a tragic-comic version of my big book's publication history which will make a satirical chapter of my memoirs; full revelation of names and dastardly deeds had better wait till then. One of the challenges I faced was that very little work had been done on eighteenth-century letters as a genre: there simply wasn't a map. We knew things about epistolary fiction and personal correspondence; we didn't have a sense of non-fictional letters, or indeed whether fiction and non-fiction were helpful distinctions. Few academics were interested. I struggled with how best to organise my research. There was so much to read! When I began, the way to find books, besides printed bibliographies, was through library catalogues. My library was the Bodleian in Oxford. Its catalogues were a hundred fold, heavy folios in which handwritten paper slips were pasted. I worked my way through them, following trails as assiduously as a spaniel and with about as much sense of direction. Catalogues led me to books which I ordered up in armfuls. Eighteenth-century texts came cosseted in complex boxes of grey cardboard. Some days were like Christmas: I'd collect a towering pile of grey boxes, wobble dangerously to my favourite seat, settle in, unwrap, read for hours. Some kinds of letters cover multiple subjects; it can be difficult to summarise them. A system of note-taking emerged, involving paper, pen and ink. The

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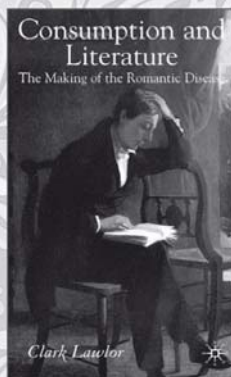
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Bodleian still provides an inkwell, now sidelined in a corner; I stuck with handwriting long after others introduced their clickety-clickety-clickety-click laptops. Some days were full of serendipities, like pamphlets bound luckily together; some days were unhappily overwhelmed by the sheer volume of materials I would have to read to grasp even an outline of a whole. Can you represent icebergs by their tips? Yes. Can you represent the tip of an iceberg by an ice cube? No. It turned out that the organisation of knowledge had a history – one day I read with relief and some amusement of how early modern scholars had also felt overwhelmed by voluminousness, and that devices such as indexes and encyclopaedias came about in part to solve a crisis of information overload. It was hard to establish a scale of knowledge too – what was important? How could you tell? I became sympathetic to Casaubon in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, a character who labours on a great unfinished work, the key to all mythologies, which everyone

else mocks because they can see, and he cannot, that the enterprise is simply impossible. Casaubon's longing for completeness and for arrangement seemed entirely understandable to me; I reimagined a novel in which a hero scholar does indeed find a key to all mythologies, and confounds all the doubters and detractors. In the meantime I lived in the library like a knight from Malory, wearily journeying through thickets and forests in quest of an elusive grail.

Then electronic forms of cataloguing appeared. A succession of acronyms – ESTC, ECCO – will look bland in the history of knowledge, but they revolutionised recall. With the help of the Eighteenth-Century Short Title catalogue, I could find epistolary texts faster. The Eighteenth-Century Collections Online meant one could sit at home and read them – although by the time it appeared I'd established a rhythm for grey boxes, and indeed felt a twinge of pain that others could now find the same materials with infinitely more speed and ease. I felt a second wave of reservations about

digital resources because their promotion of keywords paradoxically limits research. Casaubon would now be tracking keywords of all mythologies, and unlocking less thereby. Keywords lead you towards some materials but also away from others. Nonetheless, digital resources helped and meanwhile I had at last found an organising principle. Some very good work on character appeared and gave me a frame for epistolary identities. One problem with letters is that they have lots of humanity – they're written by people to people, and often use very human materials. I did not think however that humanity alone could explain what letters did. We had moved into a turbulent time in literary criticism, coinciding with the arrival of critical theory in British universities. Theorists were demonised by some, worshipped by others, misunderstood by many and unread by most of their opponents. Epistolary theory became a topic du jour, or at least there was a book on it. I found that as hard going as advanced algebra, and kept hunting for post-structuralist ideas to leaven humanism. Concepts of discourse, of genre, of communication theory, joined the grey boxes. When people asked me what I was working on and I said letters, the commonest response was 'Oh, whose?' 'Everyone's', I replied. It proved a conversation stopper. But I was finding the most interesting letters were written by unknowns and by people in disguises. Much literature promotes authors as commodities, but a letter-writer is not quite the same thing as an author. 'Character' offered a way to discuss how people write in letters, and in versatile ways. Of the thousands of letters I read in print and in manuscript (many of which didn't make it into the book), one of the most memorable was a note in pencil. It was an unsigned assignation note written by the radical politician and womaniser, John Wilkes. *Meet me on the bridge at 4*, it said. The disproportion between its literariness (very little) and its eloquence (enormous) was to some extent bridged by an idea of character: Wilkes here was writing as a lover.

The final chapter, on writing as a Christian, involved material I had put off; it became my

favourite. It discussed religion, a subject initially not much to my taste and daunting again in the abstruseness of its theology, the ferocity of its disputes and the allusiveness of its practice. One of the letter-writers I wanted to write about wrote one hundred volumes of letters. There was no index. Six months' reading later, I felt wrecked. In working on letters in legal cases I had come across material full of pain for protagonists and painful to read even at my safe remove. In the eighteenth century, so many people were hanged for such little infractions and such shaky grounds. But the suffering of believers was if anything even greater in its emotional pain. Somewhat to my surprise, psychoanalysis proved helpful. It had a set of tools for dealing with deep hurt and trauma; it was also capable of being non-judgmental and compassionate. It joined my other methodological tools including close reading, historicism and feminism, and provided a final arc on a learning curve, in making me analyse my own psychoanalytic relations to my materials.

Maybe everyone who writes a book knows there are ghost books within it: the encoding of the author's story, a narrative of growth and doubts, a history of decisions, exclusions and accidents, an invisible story of the times in which it was written. We keep acknowledgements as a piece of paratext because we want a place to acknowledge the labours of authorship and the aid of others in helping us overcome paralysis, fear and exhaustion. Sometimes authors will confide what a sweat it all was, how terrified they were, a vulnerability that continues through the process of being reviewed and not being reviewed. Gloriously, a prize rescues one from thorns of doubt, in particular the fear that years of research were spent to little purpose or no profit. When my book was finally published, the publishers printed it on pages with narrow margins. A paper-saving exercise saved money, but I mourned the cramped look and a sense that it turned length into density and not to the benefit of the reader. Then somebody said to me, of course nobody has time now to read big books. Really? With more academic books imitating the brief attention spans of web pages,

are big books dinosaurs? Are readers of big books an endangered species too? Two Research Assessment Exercises took place while I laboured on my book. For both, I had to divert attention to short projects I could complete in the allotted time. Sometimes less is more; often less is less. Angela Carter remarked it was transgressive for women to write big fat books; are scholars also cinched into size zero outfits?

A little after the ESSE prize ceremony, an experiment was readied at the CERN reactor in Switzerland. Scientists planned on sending two waves of particles on a collision course round the great underground ring; when those waves met, a big bang would be enacted and we might finally know what makes up dark matter. The theory of supersymmetry was to be tested: according to this theory, every particle in the universe has a slightly overweight and

invisible twin. Something in that description sounded familiar to me. When you are writing a big book and it is not yet published, it exists like dark matter – heavy and invisible. Publication makes it real, but it is recognition that compensates for the drag of having lived with its invisible weightiness. Thereafter, there may well be new black holes in one's universe, but dark matter feels transformed, newly creative. I have no idea if other prize winners feel comparably – one is meant to be anodyne in receipt of honours, to say thank you how marvellous and no more. But for me the ESSE Book Award vindicated a long project, arduous and joyous, and it invites reflection on how and why. I hope that in 2010 when the awards are next bestowed, there will be winners in all categories who will find their own dark matter transformed, and more authors of big books to bask as I do now.