

# Introduction

Like any publication, *PEER English* has undergone a number of changes since its inception in 2006. There have been the usual fluctuations in personnel, with Ben Parsons taking over management from Chris Louttit in 2008, before handing on editorial duties to Barbara Cooke and Michael Jolliffe in recent years. These shifts have in turn brought inevitable changes in format and focus: *PEER* migrated to an online platform in 2013, and from 2012 began to introduce irregular themed issues, on the pattern of conference proceedings. Yet even despite these modifications, the basic contours of *PEER* have remained firmly in place. The journal has in fact shown a remarkable fidelity to the basic principles on which it was founded. In the first place, it has always placed emphasis on the sheer variety of literary study. Taken as a whole, the contents of the journal have ranged over a formidable territory: its articles have looked at every conceivable period and form of literature, from the late classical to the contemporary, and from canonical figures to emerging and lesser-known writers; it has also made forays into some of the shadowy side-streets of written culture, publishing work on graphic novels, film adaptations, autobiographies, and popular journalism. Likewise, it has throughout its existence served as a means by which early career academics can circulate their work. What Chris Louttit wrote in its first issue is still relevant today, as much of the most exciting and path-breaking analysis continues to be carried out by young researchers; yet this group is all too often underserved in terms of formal publication, a situation that the journal has sought to rectify, if only in part. Finally, *PEER* has from the beginning recognised the importance of teaching in the academic enterprise, especially for tutors and lecturers at the onset of their careers. Every issue has allowed pedagogy to rub shoulders with specialist research, rather than relegating it to the level of secondary or auxiliary duty.

The contents of this issue continue to honour these commitments. They reflect the wide reach of *PEER*, and confirm it as a platform for the best new writing in English literature criticism and pedagogy across time periods and disciplinary boundaries. Our first contribution cuts directly across these lines, bringing contemporary and Romantic cultures into dialogue with one another. In ‘Exile at Home’, Yun Pei performs a detailed close reading of William Wordsworth’s ‘Home at Grasmere’ (1814) in order to probe the ambivalence of the writing act, and negotiate the paradox presented by ‘homecoming’, for the orphaned poet. Pei interweaves 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> century critical thought on the figure and condition of the exile with reflections on Wordsworth’s deliberate departures (or ‘self-banishments’) from his literary heritage to contextualise the hard-fought reconciliation between writing, self and home with which the poem ends.

The English countryside remains an object of desire in ‘Must England’s Beauty Perish?’. Here, Jeremy Diaper studies the interwar magazine the *Criterion* – a publication well known to T.S. Eliot scholars – and shifts the critical focus from Eliot’s editorship of the title to its definitive contribution to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century ruralist thought. Diaper gives particular consideration to the *Criterion*’s review pages, both providing as he does so a timely re-evaluation of forgotten, often anonymous review writers and confronting the disquieting connection between fascism and the bucolic with which this period is associated.

In “‘Let’s take a walk’”: Frank O’Hara the *Flâneur*’, we move with Susannah Evans from rural England to urban America. Evans draws a continuity between Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin’s classic characterisation of the detached, aimless European *flâneur* and his more dynamic, socially involved incarnation in O’Hara’s work. Like Pei, Evans is concerned with the poet’s examination of the writing process, and its synergy with his lived experience;

where Pei reads writing for Wordsworth as a psychic struggle between deconstructing and re-making the self, Evans finds a creativity in O'Hara which is inextricably bound up with mobility, of being constantly on the move.

PEER's commitment to pedagogical research is represented in this issue through Richard Razvan Vytنيorgu's report on the postgraduate workshop, 'The Future of the English PhD'. The workshop, part of the AHRC and British Library initiative 'The Academic Book of the Future', examined live issues in English Literature and Creative Writing PhD research through conversations themed around: the role of Higher Education in society; creative-critical synergies in English studies; disciplinary challenges posed by the Research Exercise Framework (REF); and the role played by academic publishers and institutional bodies in steering innovation in English. Throughout, Vytنيorgu emphasises the debt the ethos of the workshop – and his own research practice – owes to the pioneering U.S. educationalist Louise Rosenblatt (1904-2005).

The last word in this issue is given, fittingly enough, to a study of rhetoric and ineffability. In 'A Note on the Nashe Problem', Tommi Kakko revisits the reputation of Elizabethan satirist Thomas Nashe and argues, through a re-evaluation of *Anatomy of Absurdity* and *The Unfortunate Traveller*, that what has been read as 'fumbling' or inept in Nashe's prose is in fact a conscious and iconoclastic engagement with the instability of both language and the concepts that language attempts to frame. Nashe, argues Kakko, sought to challenge his audience and failed only insofar as his innovations 'simply went too far too soon'.

Like Kakko, we at PEER believe that innovation and adventure are to be rewarded and are delighted to publish five essays in literary criticism and pedagogy that celebrate the wide, interdisciplinary reach of emerging and mid-career English scholars.

Barbara Cooke and Ben Parsons

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