Squaring the circle: academic and entertaining

Sometimes, less can be more. In ET’s twenty years of publication, this issue has the smallest number of contributions ever listed: seven titles in all, whereas traditionally there have been ten or more. It also has the usual number of pages (sixty-four), which means that some or all of the articles are way beyond our long-established norm. Yet at some point this had to happen.

It has always been part of its remit that English Today’s ‘articles’ or ‘papers’ (or whatever one might call them) should be global and varied. If one is inclined to see ET as a magazine (and certainly it began life as a magazine) its contents are primarily articles (even features), but if it is a journal its contents are (or have become) papers. Or, some have been more article-like and some more paper-like as the years have passed. Yet, whatever it may be or have been, our content has belonged in the sub-traditions of both English liberal studies and ‘liberal linguistics’ (but not quite ‘liberation linguistics’).

Whatever the reality, as a publication ET is hard to pigeon-hole. However, there has been, throughout its twenty years, a slow shift from the more eclectic and humanistic towards the more academic and technical, yet entirely as a consequence of submissions received, not editorial intent. If there is an editorial policy (or even ideology), I hope it has been ‘linguistic liberalism’.

ET has tended to be the creation of two kinds of people: regular readers who have also been contributors and (increasingly) scholars who are compellingly aware of what counts as a ‘publication’ in terms of prestige, promotion, and academic placement. The result has been a compromise in which a range of contributors worldwide has succeeded, variously and often ingeniously, in serving both the aims of linguistic (‘Anglistic’) scholarship in a general and generous sense and the needs and pressures of promotion and preference in academic life.

As a consequence, ‘The international review of the English language’ will keep trying to square this interesting circle. Thus, in the current issue we see various ways in which the interests and expectations of academe have blended with a wish that the presentation of research can be rhetorically resourceful (and even entertaining) while it meets to the full the conventions, necessities, and rigours of academic life.

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