

Special Feature

Forward

My congratulations to Kashish Madan and Anna-Rose Shack for taking on the 40th issue of “PG-English.” I set up the journal in 2000, at that time with a crude design on more limited software. The site was brought up to date technically by Alistair Brown around 2010. It has now become one of the oldest PG journals in any University, remaining a space in which postgraduate students can publish their emerging research and look for some feedback. I can recognise in the archive the names of people who first published here who have gone on to successful careers, both in academia and elsewhere. The “Forum” section still enables a kind of magazine of postgraduates’ experience and advice. The journal has long outgrown me and I look forward to the next twenty years and 40 issues.

Timothy Clark (English Studies, University of Durham)

It is great to see *Postgraduate English* reach its 40th issue. Running a journal like this takes a lot of work. In the short time I have been advisory editor, I have been impressed by the dedication of the postgraduate editors to providing a rigorous but supportive editorial process for PhD researchers often making their first foray into academic publishing. The high quality of the articles that appear in the journal is due in no small part to their efforts. Alistair Brown also plays a crucial role in managing the technical aspects of publication. The Department of English Studies at Durham is proud to house the longest-running journal of its kind in the field.

Martin Dubois (English Studies, Durham University)

Postgraduate English was [born on the web in 2000](#): a time when people browsing the web would Yahoo rather than Google, when a facebook was printed on paper, and twittering was for the birds. *Postgraduate English* arguably merits a small but significant footnote among the noughties internet pioneers in being (to our knowledge; we are happy to be corrected) the longest-running online journal for early-career English researchers.

At its foundation twenty years ago, *Postgraduate English* existed as a series of static pages, with articles painfully and manually marked up in HTML, and with minimal semantic metadata. In 2012, coming on board as Technical Editor, I transitioned the entire *Postgraduate English* archive onto the more advanced [Open Journal Systems](#) platform. This won’t, though, be the last such moment of evolution. Even now, in 2020, *Postgraduate English* still retains the legacy of material print, as articles are inscribed and fixed as typeset PDFs. But this does not allow for the recombinatorial demands of the digital today: we read on a variety of devices from mobile to laptops and want formatting to flow accordingly; users wish to remix, annotate, or comment on content. Reflecting these needs, *Postgraduate English* will no doubt need to change and look different a decade from now.

Yet despite incessant changes in the underpinning technology, two things stand out as constants.

The first is the ability of *Postgraduate English* to anticipate future developments and be at the cutting edge of early-career, open-access publishing. Not only was it one of the earliest such journals online, until recently articles included a public-facing comment from the peer reviewer – anticipating current developments in blog-based or open peer review. Up to 2012, *Postgraduate English* also included a [‘forum’](#) which, though static in nature, anticipated the burgeoning

postgraduate support communities now found on social media. When *Postgraduate English* moved to [Open Journal Systems](#), many older, static journals were facing a similar need so I wrote a workflow for the Public Knowledge Project that has subsequently aided the migration of other publications.

The second constant is the integrity and breadth of scholarship, reflecting the range of postgraduate research and indeed English as a discipline. The [first issue](#) included papers on postcolonialism, Cormac McCarthy, HIV/AIDS narratives; recent issues discuss world literature, climate change fiction, and the medical humanities. The shift to the new Open Journal Systems platform allows one to metricise the journal's quality – the number of views and downloads, citation counts, rejection rates – yet actually reading each issue, as I have as Technical Editor, conveys more than any numbers can the value that *Postgraduate English* has and continues to offer to the academic community.

That the journal was pioneering in 2000 is testament to the vision of its founder [Professor Timothy Clark](#). That it has continued to evolve and thrive over the subsequent 20 years is testament to the baton handed down through [generations of outstanding PhD student editors](#).

Alistair Brown (English Studies, Durham University)

Some former student editors share reflections on a series of questions to mark this 40th anniversary:

Kostas Boyiopoulos (2007, Issues 15 and 16)

What does *Postgraduate English* contribute to the scholarly community?

Postgraduate English is a pioneering enterprise, one of the first Literature journals ever produced by the postgraduate community. What makes it stand out is a combination of two factors: the rigorous peer-review process and its free accessibility. When I served as editor more than a decade ago it was a joy to have a sizeable editorial advisory board of an impressive roster of junior and senior academics on standby, one that even rivals those of well-established journals. Researchers around the world benefit from high-calibre essays that cover a wide range of themes and periods. One of the many advantages of *Postgraduate English* is that it is a hotbed of enduring ideas: the work of doctoral researchers it showcases often turns out to be the spark and keynote of their lifelong research path.

What was the most rewarding aspect of editing *Postgraduate English*?

Being well-organised and constantly on top of things was of paramount importance in editing *Postgraduate English* successfully. I could claim that the most satisfying moment of editing the journal was when an issue comprising at least three articles in the main section came out without substantial delay. Although there was a sense of achievement and even relief when an issue went out into the world, the most exciting aspect of editing the journal lay in the small breakthrough steps. It was rewarding when I could find the right specialist to send a submitted essay to (not always an easy task); when a reviewer with a heavy workload returned their report promptly; and especially when there was a positive response.

Madeleine Callaghan (2008, Issues 17 and 18)

Who is your favourite literary character and why?

So many characters cling to you and whisper to you all your life, but Becky Sharp delights me for being no guide and I imagine she'd have no time for me. Her gleeful calculation, her disregard of the rules, her refusal to live the life meted out to her by reason of the snobberies of nineteenth century England, stick in the mind as you sneer, smirk, and smile at her progress. Her amorality means you don't long to meet her, and she does what great literary characters do, which is seeming to live, perhaps all the more vibrantly, than you can in your own life. From chucking her dictionary out of the carriage after suffering her snooty schooling (of sorts) to feigning her loves for her profit rather than her sentiment, she's Cleopatra without finer feeling, Juliet from the wrong side of the tracks, and Beatrice perverted into being the wrong kind of avatar for an innocent. For Becky loves doing what Becky wants and she never deviates from her own agenda. Thank God for the Becky Sharps rather than the Jane Eyres of this world!

Shane Collins (2008, Issues 17 and 18)

Who is your favourite literary character and why?

I once played Ferdinand in a student production of *The Tempest* and will never forget Caliban dropping down on top of me from the rafters. I love the different shapes and sizes Caliban can take and when I see *The Tempest* I am always waiting to see what type of Caliban will turn up.

What is your fondest memory of being an English student?

I didn't have a clear sense of where my research was taking me, but I enjoyed it, and on reflection that time and freedom to wander and develop was the making of me. So, my fondest memories are of time shared with other students doing the same thing, working on *Postgraduate English* and other journals, organising readings, and sharing ideas.

Sarah Lohmann (2015, Issues 30 and 31)

What does *Postgraduate English* contribute to the scholarly community?

I think it's so important to give postgraduate students the chance to gain experience with either having their work published or working on the editorial side of this process – it's a great opportunity for them to hone skills that will be useful in their immediate future, and it's also fantastic for the scholarly community to end up with a sample of high-quality postgraduate work that reflects a variety of eras and specialisms within the field of English literature.

Who is your favourite literary character and why?

Jane Eyre, definitely! She values her freedom and personal integrity above everything else on her personal journey, but also forms deep friendships and learns from others along the way. The

result is a compelling personality that makes Jane come alive on the page in a very unusual way - Charlotte Brontë is a wonderfully talented writer.

I'm very glad that *Postgraduate English* has made it to its 40th anniversary, and I wish it all the best for the future!

Arya Aryan (2016, Issues 32 and 33)

What is your fondest memory of being an English student?

One of my fondest memories is when Professor Waugh, who was my supervisor during my doctoral research, replied very positively to my PhD proposal. She was very encouraging when I reached out to her, and I was eventually offered a place at Durham.

What was the most rewarding aspect of editing *Postgraduate English*?

There were many new things to learn while I was a co-editor of *Postgraduate English*, and I believe learning is always rewarding in itself. It also felt great to get worthy papers online!