

The Editor's Fence: A Golden Anniversary

FIFTY YEARS: that is far more than half of a lifetime for most people. In the world of academic journals, five decades of publication is old age, perhaps more. And to think that Oscar Wilde didn't have much good to say about old age, Lord Henry quipping ("amazed sometimes" at his "own sincerity") that the "tragedy of old age is not that one is old, but that one is young." If Oscar were here for *ELT*'s golden anniversary, gently settling into the status of seniority, shall we say, he'd have to offer something less sincere but equally amazing, since no other writer has more copy in our little magazine than Mr. Oscar Wilde.

What accounts for this longevity? People, more people than I could ever thank. Hal Gerber, founding editor, and his colleagues at Purdue University had an original, interesting idea. "Indifference," he reflected, "to a considerable quantity of what seemed to me important, if not always great, literature was rather superficially justified." They helped changed that. They started a journal with their own resources, typed the first issues on stencils, mimeographed the pages, and collated them on Hal and Helga Gerber's kitchen table, all sealed with an old-fashioned sturdy staple-stitch binding. It was a point of gathering and discussion for friends; soon fifty subscribers became one hundred, two hundred, more. In time the intimate circle widened to people in over forty countries interested in reading and writing about those who wrote between the grand Victorians and the anxious moderns.

Marcus Aurelius, a contemporary in all ages, said that while we may "shrink from change" we know that nothing "can come into being without it." *ELT* changed. Its very appearance offers a study in miniature of the changes in print technology during the last half century: the mimeograph, photo-offset printing, desktop publishing composition, direct-to-plate printing, and most recently online "printing," available to small- and medium-sized libraries through MetaPress, to research libraries through ProjectMUSE, and to others through ProQuest—that gathering around the kitchen table in 1957 now encompassing well over 1,000 friends who read the print and online versions.

In substance the scope of coverage also changed. I initiated a much larger section of book reviews that includes major figures, such as Joyce, Woolf, and Yeats. Each issue has a greater page count. In the

twenty-five volumes I have edited, approximately 1,300 books have been reviewed, in addition to over 300 articles published.

However, the founding philosophy at the heart of the journal remains unchanged. We continue to feature scholarship on authors from turn-of-the-century Britain, the so-called “minor” writers, who provided innovations in aesthetic theory, in the short story, poetry, and the novel. *ELT* remains independent, and the personal touch that Gerber insisted upon is no shibboleth. Without the members of the Advisory Board who generously share their expertise and time, there would be no journal. Still, it is the editor who must be in attendance daily, managing the business side of publishing, fielding the correspondence and the inquiries from librarians, working with authors, making the final decisions about what will be published. Those judgments are in error at times, but you know who is responsible.

I started planning volume fifty over a year ago. One main theme was to solicit articles from well-known scholars in the 1880–1920 era: Professors Ledger and Eltis in the present issue, for example. In numbers two–four you’ll find, among others you recognize, Professors Brantlinger, Herz, Higgins, Mitchell, Scheick, and Weintraub. I’m pleased, too, that old friends of *ELT* have contributed book reviews: Professors Harris, Orel, and Schweik in this issue. The other theme was to keep the transom open for unsolicited articles to work their way through the vetting process. From its earliest days to the present, *ELT* has taken special satisfaction in publishing those who are new or recent to the field. They are published side by side with their senior colleagues. It all comes together for you to read and think about.

So the first issue of volume fifty is in print—in your hands, on the screen at your university, college, or public library. Many sincere thanks to those who have served or continue to serve on the Advisory Board; to the book reviewers who critique and engage in dialogue with new ideas in new books; to all the authors who have worked with me all these years; to the artists who have contributed original drawings for so little remuneration; to those who have patiently suffered my letters of rejection; to the steadfastness of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro; and my most special thanks to the novelists, poets, and short story writers in our MFA program who have faithfully served as editorial assistants, helping me with the essential duties of bringing this journal to print.

As to the future of *ELT*, all I can say is that volume fifty-one, 2008, is under way.