

## The Poetics and Linguistics Association (PALA)

*Katie Wales and Mick Short*

The Poetics and Linguistics Association (PALA) was formally established in 1980 at the University of Nottingham, England, its first meeting. The Association was the result of informal discussions held at a Linguistics Association of Great Britain meeting the previous year, when a group of stylisticians led by Mick Short (Lancaster), and including the author of this chapter, felt frustrated by the lack of a positive outlet for their interests within LAGB itself. Influential figures in the field of stylistics at the time were canvassed for their (enthusiastic) support, including Geoffrey Leech (Lancaster), Henry Widdowson (Institute of Education, London), John Sinclair (Birmingham) and Ron Carter (Nottingham). The first Chair was Roger Fowler (UEA). The constitution was first approved at the then Sheffield City Polytechnic (Sheffield Hallam) in 1983.

PALA Chairs after Roger Fowler (1981–4), elected for 3–4-year periods, were Vimala Herman (Lancaster), Ron Carter, Mick Short, Katie Wales (Royal Holloway University of London), Tony Bex (Kent) and, currently Willie van Peer (Munich) (2000–), our first chair from outside the UK. The PALA committee consists of chair, secretary, treasurer, publicity officer/membership secretary, newsletter editor, publications officer and website manager. The editor of the Association's journal, *Language and Literature*, is a member ex officio. The Association aims to have committee membership from at least two different countries: currently Brazil (Sonia Zyngier, Rio de Janeiro, secretary), Germany (chair), Scotland (Cathy Emmott, Glasgow, treasurer) represent countries outside England.

According to its Constitution, PALA is 'an international, non-political and independent organization which aims to cover and represent the interests of those who work in stylistics, poetics, and associated fields of language and linguistics'. PALA members hated being 'pigeon-holed', and still hate it. Either 'linguists' or 'literary critics' were acceptable in their individual fields at the time of PALA's foundation, but scholars with interests which tried to bridge the 'lang.–lit.' divide were effectively sidelined. We all believed valuable insights could be gained into the workings and effects of literature through linguistic and stylistic analysis that avoided the impressionism of much of the work of literary critics. Moreover, we were not keen on being labeled 'formal' linguists, and attempts at a 'transformational' (TG) stylistics by James Thorne (Edinburgh) and Roger Fowler on this side of the Atlantic never really took root.

We also aimed from the start at being anti-'formal' in the sense that we encouraged good humour, informality and friendliness rather than competitiveness. Over the years, the Association has become a valuable meeting-place for scholars, and also postgraduates, of like minds, who have felt free to talk excitedly about their research interests without fear of derision or denigration. Even today, teaching posts specifically labeled 'stylistics' or 'language/literature' are rare, in British academe at least, although PALA founder member Mick Short holds a Chair in English Language and Literature at Lancaster, Sylvia Adamson a Chair in English Language and Literary History at Manchester, and Peter Verdonk a Chair in Stylistics at Amsterdam.

The aim of the Association, reflected in its broad name, and also the title of its journal (*Language and Literature*), is essentially interdisciplinary, and over the years it has taken under its wing a wide range of special interests, including relevance theory, Bakhtinian theory, cognitive linguistics, schema theory and critical discourse analysis (CDA). Findings from

disciplines such as psychology and sociology find their way into members' work. Mirroring the trends in stylistics itself, publications by our members have displayed over the years an ever-expanding awareness of reader-response and discourse-contexts. Areas of particular attention at the annual conferences also include metrics, rhetoric, feminist criticism, translation studies, text linguistics, genre analysis, empirical studies of literature, narratology and pedagogical approaches to the teaching of literature in the EFL classroom. Members from around the world (currently just over 300 in 49 countries) teach not only in English and Linguistics departments, but also in Education, Media and Cultural Studies. Again, because of their interdisciplinary interests, crossing the boundaries of subjects, PALA provides a useful forum for members in these departments. At conferences in recent years, indeed, there has been a welcome increase in the number of papers on film and media topics.

At the annual conference, the AGM is held, there are invited keynote or plenary speakers (who may or may not be PALA members), and there is usually a conference 'theme'. Sessions are a mix of lectures, seminars, workshops and 'round table' discussions. Conference venues generally alternate between the UK and Europe; however, there was a conference in Potchefstroom, South Africa, in 1999 (the proceedings of which, *Discourses of War and Conflict*, are being published). PALA 2000 was held at Goldsmiths College London (on stylistics in the new millennium); PALA 2001 ('Textual Secrets') will be held in Budapest; 2002 in Birmingham ('The Writer's Craft, the Culture's Technology') in conjunction with the International Association for Literary Semantics; and 2003 in Istanbul. Special PALA t-shirts are on sale at these annual events. Postgraduate students, and those members not in full-time employment, can apply to the treasurer for a modest bursary to help them attend these conferences. As from 2000, members whose national economies make it difficult for them to attend, can also apply. Preference is normally given to anyone presenting a paper. In general, postgraduate students are encouraged to offer papers at the annual conference. Questioners are encouraged not to be destructive, but constructive, and to offer guidance outside the sessions.

Relatively experienced PALA members have found the conferences useful for testing out ideas that have resulted in monographs for major publishers such as Longman and Routledge. Indeed, a major and profitable link in the 1980s and 1990s, the initiative of the then chair Ron Carter, was between PALA and Routledge for the latter's 'Interface' book series. Authors who were also PALA members earned a modest fee for PALA on publication, and PALA was also duly acknowledged on the cover. However, it has to be stressed that PALA has always had as one of its main aims the encouragement of new scholars to the field, whether postgraduates or teachers at the foot of the career ladder. To this end there is, firstly, an annual Longman Prize funded by Longman/Pearson Education for the best paper by a postgraduate student at the annual conference. This is adjudicated by the chair and secretary, and the prize is £100-worth of Longman books. Prize-winners are encouraged to submit their paper to either the Occasional Papers series, or to *Language and Literature*. The series was established as a 'work in progress' or 'working papers' for any PALA member to contribute to. The papers now have an ISSN number, are free of charge, and are edited by the publications officer. Abstracts are available on the PALA website. Secondly, the Association itself funds an annual prize, the PALA prize, for the best article by a student or scholar new to the profession that is published in its journal *Language and Literature* each year. The winner receives full membership of PALA (i.e. including a subscription to the journal), and registration fees for the following conference.

There is now also a regional PALA, founded in Japan in early 1999 by a member of the journal's editorial board, Masanori Toyota (Kyoto), and aiming to provide a local network for the promotion of stylistics, and a forum for young researchers who cannot afford to travel to the 'main' annual conferences. Its second conference was held in Tokyo in May 2000. After the UK, there are more PALA members in Japan than in any other country.

Until 1992 the Association also produced an in-house journal called *Parlance*, which ran for

3 years, with 2 issues per year, and was edited by Mick Short. Then in 1992 the international refereed journal *Language and Literature* was established, the joint initiative of Mick Short (Lancaster) and Katie Wales (London), with Longman as its publisher and, at 3 issues a year, the first UK-published journal in stylistics. (At the time there were few specific journal outlets for work in stylistics: its main competitor was the US-published *Language and Style*, with a 'waiting list' for publication of several years.) Mick Short was *Language and Literature's* first editor, Katie Wales assistant editor and Tony Bex the reviews editor. It has an international editorial board, including Geoffrey Leech, Monika Fludernik (Freiburg), Sara Mills (Sheffield Hallam), Henry Widdowson (Vienna), Donald Freeman (California) and Dan Shen (Peking), who all take an active part in reading mss.

Longman relinquished all their journals activity in 1996, and *Language and Literature* was taken over by SAGE, its current publisher, which makes all its journals available electronically as well as in their conventional printed form. After Mick Short voluntarily stepped down, Katie Wales became editor in 1996 (now at the University of Leeds), and Paul Simpson (Belfast) assistant editor. Cathy Emmott became joint assistant editor in 1999. The number of pages was increased in 1998; and the number of issues moved from 3 to 4 in 2000 (with a total extent of 384 pages per annum). In 2001 Geoff Hall (Swansea) replaced Tony Bex as reviews editor. Now all 4 countries of the UK are on the editorial team.

The journal encourages 'Notes and Discussion' as well as articles, reviews and review articles. Articles are submitted by academics from all over the world; no special priority is given to PALA members in publication, although many do see the journal as a valuable means of publishing their work, especially their PALA conference papers. The themes of papers included for publication are eclectic, matching the interests of the Association itself, and topical debates. Other literatures are discussed (e.g. Latin, Icelandic, French), as well as English, and articles of a theoretical (linguistic or critical) as well as historical perspective are welcomed, in addition to the regular articles offering textual analysis of either literary texts or non-literary discourse types. Important discussions in recent years have been on critical discourse analysis (Widdowson vs. Norman Fairclough [Lancaster]); relevance stylistics (Keith Green [Sheffield Hallam] vs. Adrian Pilkington et al. [Royal Holloway]); and the objectivity/scientificity of stylistics (Ray Mackay [Edinburgh] vs. Short, Simpson, Freeman and van Peer). The last issue of each year contains not only the conventional 'List of Books Received' for the year, but also a regular article surveying the year's work in stylistics (by Geoff Hall). Special issues with guest editors are welcomed, but they are subject to the same external review. These have included issues on relevance theory and style (ed. Adrian Pilkington), and feminist criticism and the media (ed. Sara Mills). Special issues in 2000–01 focus on computer-assisted literary dialect study (ed. W. Kretschmar, Georgia, USA), metaphor identification (ed. Gerard Steen), and science fiction (ed. Peter Stockwell, Nottingham).

In 2001 PALA comes of age. There are plans for a publicity drive in North America, in the hopes of a major recruitment of young scholars from this region, and a conference within the next 5 years. More regional PALAs are likely, and more SIG seminars. Trends and theories will come and go, but as long as there are scholars whose interests embrace both literary and non-literary texts, diverse discourses or media, who are also sociable and supportive of young scholars, PALA can give them a home.

*'<http://www.pala.lancs.ac.uk>*