

PREFACE

On 15 and 16 January 1986 a two-day conference was held at the University of Groningen to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the inaugural lecture of the first university professor of English in the Netherlands, J. Beckering Vinckers. In 1876 the new Higher Education Act had opened the possibility of university chairs in the modern languages alongside the existing professorships in the Classical Languages and in Dutch, but it was only in the University of Groningen that this opportunity was seized. In 1878 the 25-year-old Barend Sijmons had begun teaching modern languages as *privaatdocent* (unpaid lecturer); he received a salary from the Groningen municipal authorities, who thus deserve credit for giving the first impetus to the study of modern languages. In 1881 Sijmons was appointed professor of Old Germanic, Sanskrit, Comparative Linguistics, German and English, and in 1884 the first chair of French was established, which at an earlier stage had been planned to subsume English as well. In 1885 a separate chair for English was founded, and in September 1885 the Crown appointed J. Beckering Vinckers professor of English Language and Literature. His inaugural lecture on 15 January 1886¹ marks the official start of the teaching of English in Dutch universities.

For more than a quarter of a century Groningen was the only Dutch university with a department of English Language and Literature. In 1912 the University of Amsterdam established a

1. The evidence as to the exact date of Beckering Vinckers' inaugural lecture is conflicting. The published text (Beckering Vinckers 1886) gives the 14th of January, which is also the date given in the account by the *Rector Magnificus* of the year 1885-1886 as we find it in the *Jaarboek der Rijks-Universiteit te Groningen* for that year (p. 24). On p. 45 of the same *Jaarboek*, however, the biographical notices on the professors appointed during that year give the 15th of January as the date of the lecture, and it is this date which is also given by Koops (1980:35).

chair of English, to which A.E.H. Swaen, then reader at Groningen, was appointed. The Catholic University of Nijmegen has had a department of English ever since its foundation in 1923. The Universities of Leiden and Utrecht and the Free University at Amsterdam set up English Departments in the 1950's.

Most of the six departments began with a single chair which covered the whole field of English studies. In Groningen there was for many years a readership in English literature, which was often held by scholars from Britain. In the great wave of expansion in the 1960's and early 1970's, most universities were able to increase the number of professorships of English to three or more, and the teaching staffs grew rapidly. However, in 1983 the universities, under government pressure, agreed on a scheme under which the number of chairs, and the size of the lecturing staffs, was to be much reduced. Each department of English now has two chairs, and some departments have additional professorships in specialised areas such as medieval studies or American literature.

Although the law has contained provisions for the teaching of English in the Dutch universities since 1876, it did not become possible until 1921 to obtain degrees in modern languages, and in practice the university departments trained students for the state examinations which conferred the qualification to teach in secondary schools. The circumstance that it was impossible to obtain a doctorate in English was for many years a source of frustration, and together with the absence in the early years of forceful personalities such as Sijmons and the first Groningen professor of French, Van Hamel, this may help to account for the fact that during their early years the contribution of the Dutch university departments of English to research was limited. Bülbring, who was professor of English at Groningen from 1893 to 1900, was, indeed, a prominent Anglo-Saxonist, but the work in contemporary English syntax for which this country was famous in the early decades of the present century was done outside the universities. H. Poutsma, the author of the monumental *Grammar of Late Modern English*, was a self-taught man who never held a university appointment or a university degree, although in 1932 the University of Amsterdam honoured him and itself by conferring an honorary doctorate upon him. E. Kruisinga, whose chief work, *A Handbook of Present-Day English*, went through five

editions between 1909 and 1932, read English at Groningen under Bülbring; he was a serious candidate for several vacant chairs, but every time another, and not always a better, man was preferred. It was only with the *Handbook of English Grammar* by R.W. Zandvoort, the professor of English at Groningen (first edition, 1945), that a major work on modern English syntax came from the hand of an incumbent of a Dutch university chair.

When in 1921 it had at last become possible to obtain a doctorate in English, many seized the opportunity. It must be admitted, however, that not all doctoral dissertations published in the inter-war period were of an equally high standard. In more recent years, the study of contemporary English has remained a prominent concern in our universities (see the contribution by F.G.A.M. Aarts in this volume); but literature, medieval studies and historical linguistics now attract a larger number of researchers. Today most of the research carried on in this country in English language and literature takes place in the universities.²

In the 1970's and 1980's it became customary for those who lecture in English in the Dutch universities to meet annually in three specialist one-day symposia, on Medieval Literature and Historical Linguistics, Post-medieval Literature and Contemporary Linguistics. The medievalist gathering, which has the longest history of the three, is also attended by colleagues from Belgium. At these informal conferences members read and discuss papers dealing with research in progress, and keep each other informed on developments in their field.

For the occasion of the Centenary these three annual symposia were combined so as to make possible a festive two-day conference. The conference met in three sections, corresponding to the three annual symposia; in addition, there were plenary lectures by four prominent British scholars, who had been invited by the British Council.

The conference was opened on the 15th of January by Her Britannic Majesty's Ambassador in the Netherlands, Mr J.W.D. Margetson CMG, in the presence of the Queen's Commissioner in

2. For a fuller account of the history of English studies in the Netherlands see Storms (1983) and Van Essen (1983).

the Province of Groningen, Mr H.J. Vonhoff, the Burgomaster of the City of Groningen, Mr A.A.M.F. Staatsen, Alderman R. Zunderdorp, the chairman of the *College van Bestuur* of the University of Groningen, Dr J. Borgman, the *Rector Magnificus*, Professor E. Bleumink and the Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Letters, Professor A. Sassen.

The festive character of the conference was underlined by a dinner on the evening of the 15th of January, by a performance of the specially written play *From the Ivory Towers* by the Groningen University Theatrical Society GUTS, and by the concluding cocktail party hosted by the Representative of the British Council in Amsterdam, Mr W.E. Moss OBE.

Many thanks are due to the British Council, to the City of Groningen, the *College van Bestuur* and the Faculty of Letters of the University of Groningen, the *Groninger Universiteitsfonds*, the Nederlandse Gasunie and to Wolters-Noordhoff Publishing Company for their generous financial support.

The present volume is intended to be a record of the scholarly part of the conference. It contains the text of the lectures given by three of the British visiting speakers and of fourteen of the fifteen papers read by members of the six university departments of English in the Netherlands. The paper read by Dr A.A. MacDonald, then of the University of Nijmegen, and now Professor of English Language and Medieval English Literature in the University of Groningen, on "The Old New World: A Problem of History and Philology" will, for practical reasons, be published elsewhere. The text of the lecture by Professor Richard Hoggart of Goldsmiths' College, London, and of the forum discussion on the place of English studies in Dutch society, which was held under the chairmanship of Professor A.J. Fry of the Free University at Amsterdam, will likewise be published separately. The papers read by Professor Aarts, Dr Bakker, Dr Denison, Dr Hannay, Dr Peereboom, Mrs Tiekens and Dr Westerweel have previously been published in the 1986/4 issue of the *Dutch Quarterly Review* and are here reprinted without change.

The volume opens with the lecture given by Professor Douglas Gray of the University of Oxford, immediately following the opening address by the British Ambassador, on "Chaucer and

Gentillesse", in which he discusses one of the central concepts in Chaucer's work, above all in *Troilus and Criseyde* and in many of the *Canterbury Tales*.

Dr Walter Nash, of the University of Nottingham, then treats some of the vagaries of the language employed by modern journalists and politicians.

Professor Inga-Stina Ewbank of the University of Leeds deals with the impact of feminist criticism on our reading of Victorian novels, especially Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*.

The papers contributed by academics at Dutch universities are headed by that of Professor Flor Aarts, who presents a critical review of the Dutch contribution to the study of English syntax, with special attention to R.W. Zandvoort's *Handbook of English Grammar* and what came after it.

Dr Mike Hannay examines the underlying principles of comma placement in written English, and highlights some of the major differences between English and Dutch habits of punctuation.

Mr Jan Posthumus discusses shortened forms of English loanwords in Dutch, and points out some interesting differences between the two languages in the use of ellipsis and clipped forms.

Dr Frits Stuurman contrasts, from the viewpoint of current syntactic theory, traditional and modern approaches to the verb *ought* and finds that it must be regarded as tenseless.

Dr Frits Beukema and Dr Ron Verheijen also contribute a paper on modern English syntax. Working within the conceptual framework of Government and Binding theory, they explore and develop a suggestion by Richard Kayne that particle constructions can be analysed as involving small clauses.

Two papers deal with aspects of historical linguistics. Dr David Denison, of the University of Manchester, but in 1986 on an exchange visit to the University of Amsterdam, argues that word order in Old English is governed by a complex of often mutually conflicting factors.

Dr Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade, dealing with the use of negative *do* in 18th-century prose, finds that usage is far from being uniform or stable, and that certain phenomena must be attributed to the influence of Dr Johnson.

Medieval English literature is the subject of two further papers. Dr Henk Aertsen examines the role of dialect words in both

alliterating and non-alliterating positions in Middle English alliterative poetry.

Mr Henk Dragstra broaches the question of what is distinctively modern in modern Chaucer criticism, and attempts to describe the state of Chaucer criticism today.

Post-medieval English literature is represented by three papers. Dr Bart Westerweel's paper explores the relevance of the iconography of the virtue of Prudence and of the representation of time for an interpretation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

Dr John Peereboom deals with the memoirs of the 18th-century nobleman and courtier Lord Hervey, and examines the contrast between the historical figure and the persona he assumes as a writer.

Dr Jos Blom studies the novels of George Gissing from a straightforwardly literary point of view rather than treating them as historical or psychological documents.

Finally, two papers deal with American literature. Dr Jan Bakker addresses the problem of Emily Dickinson's self-imposed seclusion, and suggests that we may find the key to this in her poems on the problems of suffering and death.

Dr Hans Bertens deals with the rejection by some contemporary American novelists of all pretence at representing reality or describing the world.

In their totality these fourteen papers form a cross-section of the variety of research interests pursued in the six Dutch university departments of English. It is true, the days of Kruisinga, Poutsma and Zandvoort, when Dutch scholars led the way in the study of English grammar, are over; we now occupy a much more modest position in the international community of students of English, and to many of us the situation of English studies in the Netherlands may even be a source of disquiet. Yet a conference such as this has expressed a confidence that Dutch Anglicists can hold their own in the world, and that we need not view the future of English studies in the Netherlands with unrelieved gloom.

Meanwhile, what the future will hold for English studies in this country remains to be seen. Until recently most of our graduates found employment as teachers in secondary schools, but owing to government-imposed budgetary cuts and a declining birth rate, prospects of a classroom career have become, at least for the

immediate future, much reduced. Under the new law governing the universities, which was introduced in 1982, only a small proportion of graduates in English will be able to obtain a qualification to teach. The others will have to find employment in areas where hitherto only few graduates in English have been active, and it is too early to predict how successful they will be. The number of students, which boomed in the 1960's and early 1970's, has now fallen considerably, and a further reduction is not impossible. Some faculties of Letters have set up generalist arts courses alongside the traditional courses in the individual languages, and the departments find themselves facing more heterogeneous classes than they have ever been accustomed to. Many have their fears as to the standards of both teaching and research in the future.

Yet there is also good reason to have confidence in the resilience of humane studies, and to face the future without undue anxiety. The Centenary Conference has not only been a celebration of the achievements of the past and a stocktaking of where we stand at present, but above all a manifestation of our confidence in the future of English studies in our Dutch universities.

Gerrit Bunt.