This seminal collection of essays aims at overviewing the state of the art and mapping the prospects of English studies in Germany, as they have evolved from the traditional philological paradigm into a proliferation of approaches that reflect some distinctive features of postmodern scholarship. Nevertheless, the broad framework of dominant trends turns what might have been a national case study into a wide-range scrutiny of the status of English in the European context of Modern Humanities. Furthermore, the volume indirectly illuminates the mission and role of universities, now that educational patterns are challenged by a purely utilitarian rationale that subordinates scientific qualification to the demands of the job market.

The first group of essays discusses the close links between philology and historical linguistics, namely in Medieval and Renaissance studies. In fact, the pre-Shakespearean heritage is now on the brink of exclusion from the academic canon that overtly favours the contemporary age at the expense of earlier periods where familiarity with diachronic varieties of English is required. However, the time seems ripe for a new philological turn, in alliance with recent computer technologies that can widen the scope of future research. In the long term, this will trigger a reassessment of hermeneutical and exegetical procedures as well as a new awareness of the historical process that shaped the declining Middle Ages against the alterity of the emerging Renaissance. Similarly, in optimistic terms, scholars may fill important niches in the highly competitive field of Shakespearean criticism if only they concentrate on reception studies, which have the double effect of producing internationally relevant contributions and simultaneously increasing the visibility of national target cultures.

In the second part, emphasis shifts to the discussion of theoretical issues and practical problems deriving from the unprecedented expansion of English studies at the turn of the century, probably as a result of the
way in which relational models have been assimilated as an interface between several areas. In fact, recent developments have shaped English into an academic mega-discipline that covers anglophone literatures, cultural studies of past and present issues, audio-visual paraphernalia and digital media, together with discourses deriving from age, class, ethnicity, gender, and environmental concerns. Faced with an all-encompassing concept of English studies, academics currently attempt to square the circle and accommodate disparate sub-disciplines under the same umbrella, while checking centrifugal forces and fragmentation of the field by fostering some sense of unity in diversity. The next decades will witness if the integrity of English studies is compatible with recent extensions or will be preserved after incorporating them into the mainstream of scholarship. In the meantime, both the editors and authors of this volume are to be congratulated on their outstanding contributions to a professional discussion of momentous problems and feasible solutions.

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