

BORDER LINES

According to a tradition dating from 1479, English universities award honorary degrees to distinguished people. It's never been quite clear why. But it's assumed that both parties benefit.

On 21 March 1992, senior members of the University of Cambridge gathered to decide its annual awards. It should have been a formality – no candidate had been opposed for twenty-nine years. But the name Jacques Derrida was on the list. Four of the dons ritually declared *non placet* ("not contented"). They were Dr Henry Erskine-Hill, Reader in Literary History; Ian Jack, Professor of English Literature; David Hugh Mellor, Professor of Philosophy; Raymond Ian Page, Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon. And they forced the University to arrange a ballot.

