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The Future of English Studies – in Whose Hands?

Abstract
This essay advocates a change in approach to the study of literatures in English. This would entail a shift from the idea of such literatures as nationally circumscribed autonomous systems or a supra-national linguistic self-sufficient system predicated on an Anglophone cultural community to one that recognises the transnational character of all literature(s), which consequently should be placed, understood and studied in relation to a broader geo-cultural context. Obstacles to this in the English studies academic orthodoxy derive from the hegemonic status of the English language and Anglophone culture. From this position of power derives not only the fallacy of self-sufficiency mentioned previously but also factors that are responsible for a pervasive monoglossia. Key players in bringing about the transition advocated are not only exceptions to these circumstances within Anglophone academia, but also the extensive community of Anglicists from outside the Anglosphere. The latter's status as speakers of English by acquisition as well as of at least one other language, their "native" tongue, which positions them at once within, but with an external perspective on the Anglosphere, accords them credentials to implement the change advocated – not least because in a sense, by virtue of their situation they are already operating within the transnational, trans-linguistic paradigm advocated.

Keywords: Anglophone, Anglosphere, comparative literature, "English Studies", (literary) system, monoglossia, national, transnational.

My career in higher education has been, thankfully, unavoidably international. My full-time "stint" spanned almost forty years, spent mostly as a teacher and researcher in the UK but also in teaching posts in Spain and France. In that time, my geographical engagement with research spanned from Bulgaria to Cuba. Notwithstanding my retirement in 2017, my university affiliation continues – unexpectedly requiring on occasions as much investment of time and effort as before – in an honorary capacity.

During my decades of active service, I have had the pleasure and privilege to get to know and to work alongside many colleagues from departments of English Studies in universities beyond the UK. What these colleagues shared and share – to our common and mutual advantage, I would venture to suggest – with me, a specialist not in English like them but in Romance languages and comparative literature, is a relationship with languages and literatures that are not our "native" ones. This is not a gratuitous consideration. Writing on this auspicious occasion – the acknowl-

edgement and celebration of the achievements of an esteemed Bulgarian Anglicist of international standing – provided an opportunity and a pretext to affirm the singularly important role that "non-native" scholars of English Philology play in maintaining the dynamism, momentum and health of English Studies, namely bringing to the discipline an original inflection and a dimension of cultural diversity that the "native" Anglophone may not always nor automatically be so well placed to offer. There may have been a time when the English Studies orthodoxy within the Anglosphere[1] viewed their colleagues from outside this geo-cultural domain as exotic subordinates in the discipline's hierarchy. If this was ever the case, it certainly no longer is. But just in case this point needs to be reaffirmed, it may help to recast and reposition the credentials that conventionally have been deemed to underpin and have even been considered a prerequisite for conferral of (the right to profess) expertise in English Studies. These were/are individual linguistic competence and cultural experience predicated on the Anglosphere as a point of origin and belonging. Bearing these in mind, it may be opportune to hold in abeyance the terms "native" or "non-native" speaker, preferring instead the designations *assimilated* or *acquired* forms of Anglophone cultural identification respectively.

[1] The first use of this term in this essay is an appropriate moment to clarify its meaning for the purposes of the present discussion. For political scientists Andrew Mycock and Ben Wellings, the term Anglosphere, putatively synonymous with the English-speaking world but "incorporating the 'core states' of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States [. . .] encompasses an extensive, but ill-defined, Anglophonic community bonded by a shared language and associated forms of literature, culture, sport, media and familial ties." (Mycock and Wellings 42). In a useful though, in parts, understandably tendentious synthetic definition of of the Anglosphere, Michaela Gregoriou describes the Anglosphere as "consisting of the US, Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand" plus, lower in the hierarchy, former British colonies, that "has consolidated distinct national identities to form a single racial identity, founded on the common language of English and the implicit moral superiority of the "Anglo-Saxon" race." As regards the theme of the present discussion, Gregoriou notes "The rise of English as a global language directly feeds into the narrative of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism and affords English speakers undeniable political and economic privileges", although, as will be shown shortly, knowing only English now carries demonstrable disadvantages. Paraphrasing Kamau Braithwaite, Gregoriou summarises "how the educational system of most decolonized nations sustained the imperial language and celebrated English literary texts which held little relevance to the local communities receiving this education. In effect, the collective knowledge and memory of local history was diminished and replaced by colonial, English history. The imported literary conventions of English, which are inherently alien to communities of postcolonial settlement, became the most familiar, ultimately meshing with the local culture" (Gregoriou, "The Political and Literary Power of the Anglosphere"). In a sense, this process mirrors the Anglophone literary system's canon's process of "adoption" of non-Anglophone literature by consecration (often involving translation) as well as that system's self-sufficient imperviousness to non-Anglophone literatures, both of which will be discussed later.

The question remains of how far a movement towards academic internationalisation that genuinely acknowledges and endorses the pan-national constituency of English Studies, has succeeded in establishing itself at a structural, pedagogical and epistemological level in the discipline; and, consequently, if one may legitimately continue to assume "English Studies" to merit the status of a discipline in its own right in its current form. To engage with this issue, it is helpful to go back to basics: how do readers understand literature?

Let us begin considering how readers for academic purposes accord to a literature, a set of works or an individual work meaning (sense and interpretation) and significance (importance, relevance and contribution). The question of context is relevant to these. How this is so may not become entirely clear or reveal its relevance until we explore a question cognate to, even overlapping with, significance: the matter of status. Because the status or standing of the literature, set of works or individual work implies significance in relation to or in the context of. At this point, therefore, it is necessary to ask how and to what extent, the object of study should be placed in a wider context. This begs the question of how to delimit or circumscribe a literature.

The National Paradigm

Considering the organisational principle and structure of school and university English departments, the idea of nation, or more precisely "the national", as an acceptable form of circumscription of a literary system, still holds sway. One might venture to suggest that the concept of a "macro-nation" – the Anglosphere – falls within the category of "nation": the politico-historical concept of nation is often reinforced by linguistic homogeneity or community. The concept of nation has proven amenable to cultural taxonomies as well: think back to Benedict Anderson's "imagined community" based on map, census and museum or the nineteenth-century biological concept of art-nation symbiosis that underpinned the application of social Darwinism to literature, giving rise to the contraposition of "Nordic", "Slavic" and "Latin" "races", themselves macro-nations of a fashion.

The national paradigm has survived challenges because in the first place, it is readily essentialised and embedded in the collective and individual psyche (belonging and genealogy, tradition, pride, patriotism); and secondly because it has currency as a functioning cultural construct – it "works" because it is an accepted and endorsed point of reference, in spite of such fallacies that may underpin it (See Hambrook, "Quoi qu'*elle* ne pousse . . ." 405).

Key to the persistence of the national paradigm is one of the concepts mentioned above: belonging. This concept carries with it certain rights or privileges, perhaps duties or expectations too, related to cultural ownership and custodianship. It is through belonging, therefore, that the national paradigm both fosters and feeds on a proprietorial notion of literature, by which I mean the premise that a literature and its readers – those characterised by assimilation – in some symbiotic inter-

penetration, "belong" to and "come from" a "home" nation. Proprietorial reading of literature determines meaning, significance, status and delimitation because it defines these in terms of a literature's origin as much as or, more likely, rather than its trajectory or, to use another term, its reception. Or, more precisely, when occasionally reception does happen to play a role in the formulation of this meaning, it may be in the guise of a mutually reinforcing collusion between the received and the receptor. This too is down to the national paradigm's presupposition of a privileged community of readers, to whose reading credentials readers from other communities – the *acquired* contexts – are invited or supposed to defer. One recent example of this has emerged in relation to the phenomenon of Brexlit – literature written about or prompted by Brexit. Seminal studies of the topic, such as Kristian Shaw's *Brexlit. British Literature and the European Project* or Dulcie Everitt's *Brexlit. The Problems of Englishness in Pre- and Post-Brexit Referendum Literature*, neither of which could be construed to be apologies for Brexit or partisan affirmations or rejections of British exceptionalism, nonetheless confine the Brexlit canon – yes, one has emerged – to works by British writers reacting to the political circumstance, no few of which can be placed in an Anglo-Eurosceptic literary tradition that can be traced back, in recent times, to the last century (Shaw 2021). By way of contrast, continental European explorations of the subject have revealed a "Euro-Brexlit" originating outside Britain but engaging, just as British Brexlit has done, with the consequences of the 2016 referendum and its aftermath. These comprise in the first place works about Brexit written in languages other than English by non-British writers (Beauvais, Macías Simavilla, Varvello, to list but three, written in French, Spanish and Italian respectively).[2] Next, there is Brexlit in English but authored by non-Britons *strictu sensu*, such as Gibraltarian M. G. Sanchez's *Gooseman*, and also narratives on Brexit within the genre of "migrature". Finally, let us not forget translations into other languages of British-authored Brexlit works.[3]

From a literary point of view, it stands to reason that a political phenomenon like Brexit should have a resonance and consequences beyond Britain – and why, indeed, any less in the rest of Europe than in the Anglosphere beyond the UK? Brexlit from beyond the UK challenges the credibility of the national and linguistic circum-

[2] Other works in French – just to take one example – on the theme of Brexit include Christian Jacques, *Les enquêtes de l'Inspecteur Higgins, tome 26: Brexit oblige* (XO Éditions, 2017), Baptiste Chouët, *Le Journal de Marianne, Septembre 2015 – Mai 2017* (Marabout, 2018), Laurent Seyer, *Ne jamais plus marcher seuls* (Finitude, 2020), Claire de Viron, *Pièce manquante* (Académia, 2022).

[3] Translations into French alone include Andrew Marr, *Un Homme d'influence* (Bragelonne, 2020), Clémentine Beauvais, *Brexit Romance* (Sarbacane, 2018), Ali Smith, *Automne* (Grasset 2019), Bruno Vincent, *Le Club des 5 – le Brexit* (Hachette pratique, 2019), John Le Carré, *Retour de service* (Seuil, 2020), Ian McEwan, *Le cafard* (Gallimard 2020), Jonathan Coe, *Le Coeur de l'Angleterre* (Gallimard 2021), Ian Rankin, *L'Inspecteur Rébus, no. 23 of 24* (Le Masque, 2021), Jonathan Coe, *Le Royaume désuni* (Gallimard 2022), Nick Hornby, *Tout comme toi* (10–18, 2023).

scription of British literature that has been referred to above. Among the questions it raises is this: can we put our uncritical trust in the assumption that *assimilation* is better than, somehow superior to *acquisition*. Just over a century ago, the Spanish writer José Martínez Ruiz, better known to many by his nom de plume *Azorín*, took issue with George Meredith's affirmation that the natives of a country are those best placed to understand its literature:

> Pero muchas veces es indispensable venir de fuera para ver las cosas que antes, teniéndolas constantemente ante los ojos, no veíamos. [. . .] Y muchas veces un extranjero que hace un juicio de impresión rápida, precipitada, sobre un pueblo, suele poner en él más esencia de ese pueblo – aunque el juicio esté lleno de errores, trabucaciones y negligencias- que cualquier natural del propio país, empapado de su arte, de su historia y de sus costumbres. (Martínez Ruiz 1971: 101–102)
> [Often it is only the perspective of the outsider that allows us to see things that, because they were constantly present, had become invisible to us. [. . .] And often a conclusion formulated by a foreigner – albeit one full of misconceptions, gross generalisations and oversights regarding a country on the basis of a hasty glance – captures the essence of that country better than the judgment of a native steeped in that country's art, history and customs.]

Almost a hundred years later, Els Andringa made a very similar point with fewer caveats than *Azorín* had felt compelled to include. Referring to Virginia Woolf's reception in the Low Countries, she wrote:

> The transfer of a foreign literary work into such a mutable and evolving cultural space with its many shifting subsystems constitutes a crucial part of any work's "career". [. . .] What is particularly fascinating to observe is how a work of literature sediments itself In such new environments, inspiring fresh evaluations that reflect on the receiving socio-cultural field, revealing as much about the aesthetic potential of the text as about the structures and processes s underlying the receiving socio-cultural field. (Andringa 2006: 202).

Is Literature an Inherently Transnational Phenomenon?

Both commentators cited above raise a crucial issue: could it be that literature is a transnational rather than a national phenomenon *anyway*, that is, not in an incidental way but actually, inherently and unavoidably so? Is a literary system fluid, predicated on expansion and contraction, rendering thereby any circumscription inevitably arbitrary and born of contingency? Should a transnational vision of literature rather than the national paradigm be the default position? This would have the advantage of allowing a more flexible, pluripermeable form of geo-cultural circumscription to be applied when expediency favoured delimitation (rather than engaging in delimita-

tion automatically, as a matter of course); one that could stand in the stead of a more or less fixed national boundary. Such flexible spaces – shall we call them cultural milieux? – could prove methodologically more compelling and apposite particularly when considering cultural phenomena that as a general characteristic involve trans-border permeability, but to varying degrees and with particular inflections at a local level. The so-called *Fin de siècle* is a prime example of this: reception studies attest to the fact that the new aesthetic "went global", with resonances far beyond the European context whence emerged many of its internationally acknowledged precursors and exponents.[4]

The Case of "English" Literature

It is time to consider how what we have discussed up until now has a bearing on "English literature" as a subject area or discipline.

A brief look at university websites suffices to confirm that acceptance of the national paradigm remains widespread and not just in English-speaking countries. The organisation of most European university philology units into national groups or pan-national linguistic ones: English departments frequently incorporate North American and other anglophone literatures – "literatures in English" – as well as British-English literature, just as, for example, "Spanish" departments almost always include Spanish-American or other "Spanish" literatures", including those in peninsular community languages (Basque, Catalan, Galician, etc.), often with the corresponding designation of such units as Hispanic Studies. Likewise French, with Francophone literatures.[5]

However, the case of "English" – although by no means unique – may be considered at least particular – or possibly particularly exaggerated – by virtue of the historical and persistent hegemonic status of Anglophone culture, in which linguistic power is of course implicit. This factor has implications for the delimitation of "English literature" and "Literatures in English".

An Autonomous System

One consequence of cultural hegemony is that the scholarly orthodoxy in the Anglosphere has been inclined to treat Anglophone literatures, and within this national literatures, as self-sufficient systems – or as autonomous systems within a macro-system that is self-sufficient. English literature's permeability to other literatures and

[4] For just one of many examples of this, see Guyaux.

[5] One might also reflect on the role played in preserving the pan-national linguistic paradigm by organisational "strategic alliances": the pragmatic banding together according to the principle of "strength in numbers" of certain cognate or proximate language subjects either because some of them were traditionally considered "minority" languages or when diminishing recruitment threatened extinction. Units of "Slavic Studies" or "Romance languages" might be deemed to fall into this category within the range of European language studies.

susceptibility to their influence are thereby rendered invisible; they are disregarded or acknowledged only in a token fashion. Observers from outside this system, not least scholars who have embraced a comparative approach to literary studies, tend to regard this perspective as misguided and unhelpful. Back in 1979, stalwart of British comparatism Elinor Shaffer observed that "[a]lthough English literature has absorbed many foreign influences in the course of its long history, the emphasis on native tradition [. . .] has sometimes seemed to impede the recognition of foreign literature" (Shaffer, "Editor's Note", xv). Almost half a century later, Peter France, in a review of an English translation of Pascale Casanova's *La République mondiale des lettres*, remarks that the translation's "French and European perspective, and not least the evidence for the centrality of Paris, will be a valuable corrective to the tendency of English speakers to see English literature (or literature in English) as a self-sufficient system" (France 2004: 429).

When literary items from other systems *do* enter the Anglophone canon, it tends to happen through a process of appropriation, where grounds can be found to endorse their incorporation. One process of endorsement is translation into English, whereby foreign works become part of the Anglophone canon, by, as it were, adoption. In this case, the notion of literature as defined by its exogenous status is invoked only to be (or precisely in order to be) eradicated by the process of adoption. One might go as far to suggest that such works are not just adopted but culturally "orphaned", disconnected from their provenance and made English. Is this the point Thomas Docherty was making when in a discussion of the place of translation in the Anglophone literary system, he took issue with the assumption that "all linguistic difference can be rendered a matter of commensurability" and consequently "that the tacit translation of all difference into an unspoken English is the end of translation" (Docherty 2006: 29)?

Under such circumstances, a form of incorporation (in which translation plays a significant part) of the exogenous, based on *consecration* rather than *exploration*. By consecration, I refer to the predisposition of a literary system – in this case the Anglophone one – to equate reductively another cultural milieu's literary production only or predominantly with works or writers that it chooses to adopt and to effectively stick with or not revise this position. By exploration, I refer to the emergence of a curiosity or a will – one might even say a temptation – within a literary system to look beyond the consecrated cultural products or producers into another cultural milieu's hinterland.

An example of consecration can be found in the Anglosphere's discovery of the work of Jorge Luis Borges, in the wake of which the Argentinian writer became therein, and still to a significant degree remains the embodiment of fantastic writing in the Hispanic world, pretty much to the exclusion of other contenders. The perverse synecdoche of this disproportionate association or conflation, in the Anglosphere of Borges's work with Hispanic fantastic fiction as a whole amounts, in effect, to its consecration.

One factor in this process may be the Anglosphere's predisposition – with a good measure of presumptuous exceptionalism, some might suggest – to see itself as the geo-cultural cradle of fantastic writing and speculative fiction, thereby constraining the will to look for peers beyond its own frontiers. An example: the 2011 British Library exhibition *Science Fiction: but not as we know it*, deployed seminal international examples of sci-fi writing in an abundance and variety that should have been sufficient to challenge literature in English's assumption of majority shareholder status in the genre.[6] Notwithstanding this timely broadening of horizons, a review of this exhibition persistently foregrounded examples from the Anglophone domain, effectively relegating other cultural milieux to the genre's periphery (Luckhurst; for a response to the Anglocentrism displayed in the review in question, see Hambrook, "A Unipolar Universe").

Just as the opportunity afforded by the 2011 exhibition to adopt a more exploratory perspective in respect of non-English language speculative fiction went largely unheeded, so have hints from within the Anglosphere' s consecrated exogenous repertoire that the scope of Hispanic speculative writing extends beyond Borges been missed, overlooked or ignored. Consider in this regard the fortune of another Argentinian writer, Fin-de-siècle poet and early exponent of the fantastic, Leopoldo Lugones (1874–1938).

The Hispanic Fantastic: Leopoldo Lugones

Within the Hispanic cultural domain, Lugones Lugones's credentials as a practitioner of the fantastic have long been considered evident and compelling (See Pío del Corro; Pedro Luis Barcía's introduction to his anthology of Lugones's tales: Lugones, *Cuentos fantásticos*, 54; Pampa O. Arán). In his aforementioned introduction, Barcía claims that "[t]al vez no haya en la comunidad hispanohablante ninguna literatura que como la argentina pueda exhibir una tan firme tradición en el cultivo de la literatura fantástica" [Perhaps no literature from the Spanish-speaking world can demonstrate such a strong tradition of fantastic writing as Argentinian literature can] (Lugones, *Cuentos* fantásticos, 54), within which tradition, Barcía affirms, Lugones "constituye un hito capital, pues mantuvo el ejercicio de ella durante toda su vida" [Lugones is a cornerstone, because he practiced this mode of writing throughout his life] (Lugones, *Cuentos* 54). These pronouncements elevate in effect his fantastic writing to a status of, at the very least, a significant precursor.

Lugones's status as a founding figure of Hispanic speculative fiction was only brought to the attention of the Anglosphere relatively recently, thanks to professional Hispanists – translators and scholars – working within the English-speaking academy. Lugones' *Strange Forces* (Translations from *Las fuerzas extranas* [1906]), *Selected Writings*, and the tale "Kábala práctica" (Hambrook "Practical Kabbala" – a translation of the short story preceded by a critical commentary), published in 2001,

[6] "Mode" might be a more appropriate term to use here.

2008, and 2014 respectively, foreground Lugones's achievement as an exponent of fantastic fiction for the benefit of English-speaking readers not only by virtue of translating examples of his early work in this genre but also by acknowledging that Lugones is generally credited with initiating the fantastic short story in Latin America (Lugones, *Selected Writings* xiv; Hambrook, "Practical Kabbala", 95–96). Yet for some time before these translations appeared, Lugones was waiting in the wings, just outside the frame of an Anglophone snapshot of World Literature's assembled dignitaries. A prominent literary figure throughout Latin America and one of the pillars of *modernismo*, the pan-Hispanic Fin-de-siècle literary revival, Lugones' literary pre-eminence had already been acknowledged by Hispanic writers – Octavio Paz and Borges himself – with whose work the English-speaking world had been acquainted for nearly half a century before the translations appeared. Paz acknowledged in 1954, in *Los hijos del limo,* (Paz, *Los hijos del limo*), translated into English as *Children of the Mire* (Paz 1974), that Lugones was the initiator of the second phase of Spanish American *modernismo* (*Los hijos del limo* 96), and, more pertinently, aligned the Argentinian writer with the Hispanic tradition of the fantastic through his interest in the occult (*Los hijos del limo* 95). Borges, for whom Lugones represented the Old Guard reviled by Argentina's Avant-Garde *ultraístas* and whose condemnation of Lugones on occasions bordered on deprecation, nevertheless ultimately acknowledged his predecessor's work to be a pillar of Argentinean literature (Borges 1955; Salazar Anglada 603, note 5). Even so, references to Lugones in English-language sources by or about Borges remain scarce. There is only one allusion in Richard Burgin's *Conversations with Jorge Luis Borges* – an explanation of Borges's early decision not to write about Lugones (Burgin 1973: 33). Allusions to Lugones in English translations of Paz are similarly infrequent.

The Universalisinö Tendency

The assumption that the English literary system is self-sufficient has been discussed above. Another, not unrelated consequence of hegemony that has come under critical scrutiny is the tendency among Anglophone critics and scholars to universalise the significance of English literature. Gregory Jusdanis declared in his study of Greek literature and modernity that "nothing is more deplorable than Anglocentric critics who know no other language save the current lingua franca and who presume their experience of the literary to be universal" (Jusdanis 1992: 2–3). Rüdiger Görner, for his part, notes in his review of Jane Goldman's *Modernism, 1910–1945. Image to Apocalypse*, affirms that "a meaningful definition of modernism must appreciate its essentially transnational and intercultural dimension. In that respect Jane Goldman's [. . .] approach is decidedly insular. [. . .] It would have been much more honest if the title of Goldman's study indicated that she is, in fact, mainly talking about Modernism in the Anglophone world" (Görner 2004: 420). Universalisation effectively means that Anglophone literature is taken to speak for all literature; what applies in

its case applies to "all literature". This could be described as a form of cultural myopia, the inability to see beyond or to relativise a particular set of cultural reference points. This consequence is exacerbated in those Anglophone countries where the education system assigns to the subject "English" the role of tutor and mentor in the literary education of students. If "English" is to continue to perform this role, the least one could hope for is that its enactors and agents are aware that the conflation of English literature with literature in general is a counterproductive fallacy and that literature(s) in English are only one manifestation of a far more extensive cultural phenomenon. A step in the right direction, albeit a modest although potentially transformational one, would be to ensure that the curriculum at all levels included the study of non-Anglophone literary texts even if they were in translation. In recent times, designers of English literature curricula have given reason to suspect that while they are going out of their way to diversify reading lists by including an increasingly wide selection of works from the vast repertoire of literatures written in English, they are doubling down on red lines when it comes to the inclusion of texts, even internationally acknowledged classics. that were not written in English.

This felony is compounded by the monolingualism prevalent in the Anglophone academy, a phenomenon accentuated by the decline in foreign-language learning in the Anglosphere, which has led to fewer and fewer English literature specialists possessing not just a sufficient command of a foreign language for modest professional use but even a smattering of a language other than English. Evidence for this "language deficit" surpasses the anecdotal.

Monoglossia

It goes without saying that a lack of familiarity with languages other than English restricts a reader's access to non-Anglophone literatures to works in English translation, the range, volume, selection, quality and perceived merits of which may vary considerably according to the source language or provenance of the work.[7] This has the effect of rendering other literatures invisible, thereby fostering the "domesticating illusion" of translation that is produced when translation into English is perceived, as noted above, as "the end of translation".

Unfamiliarity with literatures in other languages diminishes any reader's repertoire of external reference points and points of comparison, but it also underpins assumptions and attitudes that subvert otherwise worthy endeavours. Thus "World literature" may fall into being an Anglo-centric project in disguise: it is curious, bizarre even, that in the index of David Damrosch's quasi-seminal *How to Read*

[7] I should clarify here that I do not intend to demean the work of translators but rather to signal the lack of quality control over the range of translations, original or resurrected, that the proliferation of publication platforms, particularly electronic ones, has brought into circulation. Monolingual readers are obviously less well placed than those with adequate foreign-language knowledge to evaluate the accuracy and quality of this growing repertoire.

World Literature (Damrosch 2009) over seventy of the works of "world literature" listed are English language, in contrast to nineteen Francophone and six Hispanic. Warnings have also been issued against a tendency in postcolonial studies, be it unwittingly or deliberately self-seeking in career terms, to exorcise post-imperial angst by jumping on a bandwagon that risks confusing tokenistic excoriation of one's own and one's peers' Eurocentrism – "colonialism-bashing" – with considered reflexion and a spirit of redress, in such a way as to undermine the integrity of genuine decolonising endeavours. Monika Albrecht warned of this over a decade ago (Albrecht 2013: 47). On an institutional level, eagerness to publish in English, endorsed by the apparent convenience of so doing because of the language's presumed prestige and reach, erodes linguistic diversity in research and scholarship by ushering in a hierarchical consecration of Anglophone publishing culture and practice. How do we reconcile the fact of hegemonic English with the reality of a multilingual world?

Non-anecdotal evidence of the academic, cultural, professional and personal downsides of Anglophone monoglossia was garnered most recently in the early years of the new millennium, when a series of national-level studies across the Anglosphere formulated concerns regarding what was described as a "language deficit": the inability to work in a language other than English. In the UK, the *Language Matters* report produced by research consultants RAND Europe in conjunction with the British Academy in 2009 identified several negative consequences for personal and professional opportunity of UK born and educated researchers not possessing language skills. These included the restriction of "research to (a) reliance on the available English translations of the relevant primary and secondary sources in other languages; and/or to (b) selection of research topics that avoid the need for non-English language material"; reduced ability "to participate in international research projects as researchers and/or supervisors; or to engage in other international research activities (conferences, publication in other languages, etc.)"; and increasing difficulty "to compete for research posts and research funding, both in UK universities and elsewhere" (British Academy, *Language Matters*, xviii). Shortly before, similar concerns had been expressed elsewhere in the international Anglophone community. In the United States, Daniel Yankelovich emphasised "the need to understand other cultures and languages" as one of five imperatives to which higher education should respond in the following ten years if it was to remain relevant. "Our whole culture", Yankelovich wrote, "must become less ethnocentric, less patronizing, less ignorant of others, less Manichaean in judging other cultures, and more at home with the rest of the world" (Modern Languages Association, "Foreign Languages and Higher Education"). In Australia Professor John Clark made a plea that "[t]he serious mismatch be recognized between our by now thoroughly multicultural soci-

ety and the structure of our undergraduate degrees, which do very little to encourage students to acquire foreign language skills."[8]

The crux of the matter was expressed with admirable concision a few years later by Australian Professor Jo lo Bianco, when, in the British Academy's report *Born Global. Summary of Interim Findings*, he was cited as declaring that "[t]here are two disadvantages in global language arrangements: one is not knowing English; and the other is knowing only English." (British Academy, *Born Global*), an assessment echoed in the same year by Professor Nigel Vincent in a blog entry with the self-explanatory title, "Why English isn't enough" (Vincent 2024).

The situation has not improved noticeably, at least in the UK, over the past ten to fifteen years, although some remain modestly optimistic. Vicky Gough, a Schools Advisor for the British Council, reported at the beginning of 2023 that while still approximately two thirds of the UK's population only speak English and "many say they don't feel the need to learn another language" because "[t]here is a common perception that 'English is enough' as it's a global 'lingua franca'", no fewer than 1.5 million British children are growing up bilingual and the Department of Education (at the time) was investing significantly in strategies to increase the number of schoolchildren taking a language at GCSE from approximately half to 90% by 2025. What is more, the results of a UK-wide survey of 3000 people revealed not only growing awareness that the rest of the world does not speak English as a matter of course and that knowing only English could be a disadvantage, but also (and consequently) regret on the part of respondents that they did not learn a language or take more seriously the opportunity to do so when they had the chance (Gough 2004). Ten months later in November 2023, Scott McDonald, Chief Executive of the British Council, reported that the British Council Language Trends England 2023 Survey still uncovered a "language deficit", particularly in compulsory education (up to the age of 18), but pinned his hopes on the recent formation of the National Consortium for Languages Education (McDonald 2023).

Yet in spite of these modest lights on the horizon, major obstacles remain. Depleted modern foreign language provision in schools has consequences further down the line: the fewer students who finish secondary education with a foreign language qualification, the more modest the pool of future graduates with the wherewithal to become foreign-language teachers and researchers. As Scott McDonald observes,

> This deficit has further implications. While the interest in modern foreign languages wanes in schools, so docs the capacity for leaching languages. With fewer people taking languages in school, fewer people go on to study a language at university. This results in fewer people, from a broad range of back-

[8] Unfortunately, the electronic record of this source is no longer accessible, or has eluded my persistent attempts to find it again. I am therefore obliged to hope that readers will, in good faith, accept it as genuine.

> grounds going into the professions where language skills arc key – such as teaching, diplomacy, and business. (McDonald 2023)

A relevant detail not mentioned here is that this deficit also thins the ranks of English specialists-to-be with the skills and motivation to engage with non-Anglophone literatures; the very people, in effect, who could help to render English Studies more geo-culturally permeable and lay the foundations for transition to the more transnational or "comparative" model of English, and indeed literary studies, that I will describe in the next section of this essay.

A Transnational Model

We have now considered the cultural and linguistic obstacles facing the internationalisation of English studies. To break the deadlock of monolingualism, modern languages learning to a level of professional scholarly competence must be not just incentivised but normalised. But what of the organisational, structural, pedagogical and curricular challenges that are faced? To tackle these, I would advocate the adoption of a transnational model, not just for the study of literatures in English but for literary studies in general; a model that places the object of study – author, movement, work, corpus of work etc. – in relation to comparable elements in a context broader than the one with which that object has been conventionally associated. This would entail (a) accepting that literature is an inherently transnational phenomenon; (b) that the national – or the pan-national linguistic- paradigm is a relativist construct that must be recognised as such and epistemologically transcended even in its invocation – its long history and indeed its current persistence as currency in scholarly discourse behoves us to take it into account, not least in order to critique it or to call it into question; and (c) that the exceptionalist and proprietorial view that literature's meaning is determined first and foremost by provenance should be set aside in favour of understanding it through its comparison in relation to and its reception in (relation to) a broader context.

It follows that the way of studying literature should also embody and embrace these precepts. The implementation of this epistemological reconfiguration would require a methodological shift, whereby literatures – for Anglophones, in English – (a) were as a matter of course located in a broader geo-cultural context than the Anglosphere; (b) were considered in relation to and in terms of their relationship to this broader context, (c) were considered in regard to a broader context of meaning and significance.

At first sight it might be assumed that these requirements could be met by placing the work of Shakespeare and other Elizabethan dramatists in relation to, say, European neo-classical drama and the Spanish Golden Age; or by extending due acknowledgement the role of non-Anglophone European Romantics' (re)discovery of Shakespeare in helping to reinforce the Bard's pre-eminent status in the

English-speaking literary world; or by considering the eighteenth-century British picaresque in relation to Spanish and German antecedents, or nineteenth-century British realism in relation to the wider European "movement" of that name in the context of the rise of the novel during that period. This would be a step in the right direction, with due reservation about the Eurocentric, canonical character of the examples furnished: reconfiguration of this kind would have to seek to avoid falling into a process of hegemonically-skewed canonisation.

This, in effect, is what *comparative literature* does, strives to do and has the tools to do. Comparative literature effectively casts literature as world phenomenon – this is not the same as "World Literature" – acknowledging that while there can be good reasons for studying the particularities and peculiarities of one literature, there is no justification to make this the model for studying literature, even if scholars have been adept at conjuring up pretexts to do so. And even if the practicalities of acquiring the required level of foreign-language proficiency for advanced study favoured retaining a model of academic organisation based on "philologies", the grip of the national paradigm could be loosened, facilitating closer collaboration and support between different language-based units in such a way as to facilitate student – and staff – access to the broader geo-cultural contexts in relation to which their more particular perspectives could be considered. In this way, the balance would shift from exclusive specialisation towards cross-fertilization, beginning at institutional level and expanding beyond national frontiers. This would place Anglicists operating outside the Anglosphere on the same footing as their counterparts based within it. This leads us to consider which constituencies would be best placed to facilitate the transition advocated in this discussion.

The Future of English Studies – in Whose Hands?

There does exist a constituency within the Anglophone academia who might, if called upon or of their own volition, take the initiative to implement the reform advocated in this discussion. Specialists in comparative literature in the Anglophone academy, sometimes based in units shared with English Studies, who have the wherewithal to place literatures in English in relation to different ones, might well respond to the call, not least because they are doing something along these lines already.

In addition to these "insiders", one should not overlook the casualties of rationalization: specialists in non-Anglophone literatures who were invited or were ushered into or chose to join English departments through force of circumstance. Unusual though it may seem at first sight to accord significance to this constituency, they are not to be dismissed. Because of their background, they may have already been instrumental in pioneering a paradigm shift through the establishment of non-Anglophone footholds in their local curriculum by advocating the study of texts in translation. Speaking from my own experience, after transfer to an English department following the decline and dissolution of a once prestigious school of

foreign languages, I negotiated with the coordinator of the American Literature provision the inclusion of several Spanish-American texts, on the grounds not only of giving the programme a unique selling point but also that it was quite legitimate not to equate "American" literature with the literature(s) of the United States.

Last but not least are specialists in Anglophone literatures in English departments who by whatever means, possess or have acquired the augmentative "beyond-Anglophone" credentials consistent with the proposed reform's requirements.

It is possible, however, that the constituencies mentioned above lack the critical mass, not to mention the backing – be it down to obliviousness, indifference or opposition – from within the Anglosphere's "English Studies" community, particularly its more orthodox wing, to achieve reform beyond tweaking the status-quo. In terms of critical mass, the largest and potentially most influential constituency comprises Anglicists from outside the Anglosphere. Characterised predominantly, albeit not exclusively – bilingualism, bi-cultural heritage or immersion might be considered exceptions – by acquisition, this constituency occupies a cultural position that is *in relation to* rather than *within* the (*assimilated*) Anglophone domain. Furthermore, by virtue of being able to bring to bear (or bringing to bear as a matter of course) on matters literary its own cultural perspective(s) in addition to its acquired Anglicisation, it could be deemed inherently transnational in its outlook and consequently, comparative.

One might venture to suggest, therefore, that the future of English Studies could be in the hands of colleagues such as these as much as of any other community. In the first place, they are part, as already indicated, of a sizeable international community, the not-so-thin end of which wedge are the communities of English departments in educational establishments and the membership of academic associations such as ESSE (with nearly 7500 members from 33 countries, only two of which – the UK and Ireland – could be defined as "English-speaking") and which extends through communities of users – speakers and learners – of English to the estimated 1.5 billion people who claim to have some knowledge of English. What is more, they can claim with confidence to be at the more proficient end of the scale of users of English, with levels of expertise and competence that professionally put them on a par with the *assimilated* community. It is therefore no longer possible for the assimilated Anglophone community to claim, at least without due reflection, ownership and the right to custodianship of the English language and its culture, even if it aspires to do so on the back of hegemony. Non-Anglosphere Anglicists, for their part, are unencumbered – or less likely to be encumbered – by the assumption – the proprietorial fallacy, as I am inclined to refer to it – on the part of "natives" that they enjoy as a matter of course some kind of edge because English is "their" language and culture.

Secondly, non-Anglosphere Anglicists' dual or multiple linguistic and cultural skills sets mean that they are ahead of the growing awareness, as alluded to above,

that even in a world in which English is the first language of international communication, knowing only English is not enough. Moreover, by virtue of knowing – and most likely having as their "native" or language of principal use – a language other than English, they are automatically immune to the consequences of the "language deficit" that besets Anglophone monoglots and inhibits opportunity. By virtue of their multicultural situation, they can, in principle at least, place literatures in English within and in relation to other linguistic and cultural contexts. Consequently, their reading practices are already transnational and comparative.[9] Examples of this in practice can be found in the research of Anglicists working on travel writing, an area of enquiry in which Professor Ludmilla Kostova has chosen to specialise.

Conclusion

If asked to provide a concise synthesis of the of the dialectic described and discussed in this essay, I would choose a term, now established and still current, from Anglophone literary history: "Victorian fin-de-siècle". It comprises on the one hand "fin-de-siècle", a non-English noun phrase used across linguistic borders to refer to a phenomenon characterised by transnational and transcultural permeability and transaction that implicitly acknowledges that a literary system's circumscription is contingent because that system will always be understood in relation to broader context. On the other hand, the geo-culturally specific adjectival prefix "Victorian" seeks to delimit the expansive noun phrase, enfolding it unequivocally in Britishness. Is the relationship between these two components based on conciliation or antagonism? Currently, a pervasive monolingual Anglocentrism leaves both unreconciled. But we live in an age where the hegemony of the Anglosphere is subject to scrutiny and challenge to an extent that its authority cannot be taken as given – if, that is, it ever was.

So, is English Studies in the Anglosphere hamstrung by a lack of prospector spirit? Surely where *some* gold – as in the case of Borges – is found, there may be more? Does a prevailing *monolinguoculturalism* not only hinder "English-only" readers from following up of their own volition interests in other – non-Anglophone – literatures but also prevent it from even occurring to them to do so? Is trying to compensate by expanding the notion of "Writing in English" a solution or a delusion? After all, this shoal can only be trawled for so long before the nets sag and rip under the weight of contradiction and anomaly, as the arbitrary criterion of language comes up against the cultural diversity and complexity of milieux that render the designation of "Anglophone" gratuitous. Maybe it is time to redraw the geo-cultural map and do "English Studies" the favour of freeing it from the yoke of Anglo-exceptionalism: could not the Anglosphere itself be *под игото*?

[9] The only members of this constituency who might be reluctant to buy into a comparative and transnational model for English studies are those who might be referred to as "Anglo-Groupies", Anglicists of the acquired variety in thrall to the current English Studies orthodoxy, with which they might collude to reinforce the hegemonic cultural status quo.

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