

WHAT IS THE ENGLISH SPEAKING WORLD TODAY? NEW PERSPECTIVES TO ENGLISH STUDIES

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I would in the first place like to thank Dr. Fente and the Organising Committee of this Conference, for offering me this opportunity of speaking at what we must surely regard as something of a historic occasion, celebrating as it does not only the foundation of our Spanish branch of the Anglo-American Association, but indeed the foundation of the first association of any kind of University English specialists in Spain. This long desired goal has been reached only some quarter century after the establishment of the first English Departments in our universities. From the two or three that emerged somewhat tentatively in the 1950s, there has been growth and proliferation all over the country. For those of us veterans in the field it is a real satisfaction to contemplate such expansion and to see how we can now assemble such a considerable body of specialists in English and American Studies as are gathered here today. But in that quarter century much has been happening elsewhere too. The British and American language and literature that we then set out to study has also been subjected to growth and change; there has been what one might call a shift in the balance of power, with the result that what we in our universities denominate as *Filología Inglesa* is yearly becoming more difficult to define and to encompass. While we may congratulate ourselves on the progress made in our Departments as regards the spread of British and American culture in Spain, we must also ask ourselves whether these two nations alone cover the whole picture of what the English language represents in the world today. Do we, in fact, need to open new windows on to wider seas beyond?.

Looking at England herself, the Old Country, source and fountainhead of all our studies, who can fail to observe vast changes in progress. Impregnable since Norman times, she finds herself invaded. First as a haven of European refugees from World War II, then in the post-war boom, under the effects of an inverted colonialism, England suddenly finds herself with some three and half million foreign-born citizens in her land. Today there are many boroughs of London and some of the northern cities where more than half the births registered are to mothers of non English origin, and while the total percentage of such foreign elements may not yet seem very large in the country as a whole, there is no doubt that the face of Britain is changing and her "new look" is a constant topic of debate in all the

media. During this same period, an even more significant flow of British and other Europeans has moved out to English-speaking countries other than the United States, while from the far-flung British Empire some 38 nations have emerged, all with an English-speaking tradition behind them. Thus England, the Motherland, is having to adjust to the idea that her language is increasingly becoming the property of speakers who are non-English, whose cultural heritage may be quite remote from England or of those who have carried the old traditions to remote lands overseas. The United States, with her long history of multinational immigrants, is quite accustomed to such a situation but even in that country certain shifts have been at work. Those who have visited there off and on during this same period cannot fail to observe a perceptible change where strong minority groups have brought pressure on what was, after all, an essentially Anglo-Saxon based culture. Between 1940 and 1970, I am told, that part of the United States population that identifies itself as of British origin fell from 40 to 23%, while a sharp rise in births to persons of Latin American background has led one observer to declare:

"At this present rate of increase (which can hardly be expected to continue) it is estimated that by the year 2000, some 75% of the people of this country will bear Latin surnames"¹.

Though one can hardly believe in such an extraordinary development, there are clear signs in America of a growing consciousness that the English language can no longer be considered solely in terms of the United States either. In one American book on language we read: "Citizens of the West must hear these new voices coming out of the Third World... for to apprehend that English is not just ours but the world's, affords an important perspective from which to view language, particularly for... (chauvinist) Americans"².

In view of this changing world panorama, it would perhaps be worth pausing a moment to consider the possible meanings of the words Anglo and American. Spanish students of English are early taught that their word *norteamericano* is to be translated into English simply as *American*, the rest of the American continents being relegated to a secondary plane. But even our word *norteamericano* rather loftily ignores a country that, when all is said and done, actually occupies the second largest land area of any in the world - I refer, of course to Canada - and also fails to take into account certain very small but by no means negligible English-speaking islands in the Atlantic and Caribbean which thus fall into a sort of No-Man's Land between North and South³. As regards the other half of our compound -Anglo-, this, according to Webster's Dictionary signifies: 1. of or belonging to England, 2. of English descent or culture, and 3. English or something else. Under the first definition, must we not include those many foreigners, now established citizens of England? Under the second can we deny all those inheritors of English descent or culture now in Canada, Australia and other parts of the English-speaking world? While under our third definition

-English and something else- who is to be excluded? Let me give just two examples. In my childhood one frequently heard talk of the Anglo-Irish, meaning people of English origin settled in Ireland as opposed to the native Irish population. But Anglo-Irish literature quite early on was used to mean any literature written in Ireland in the English language as opposed to the Gaelic, and as such, even in an independent Irish Republic it has remained. When we look at the parallel term Anglo-Indian, once commonly used to describe Englishmen who lived and worked in India, such as, for example, Kipling, we find certain new developments. Recently in a London paper I noted this term, Anglo-Indian, used to describe an Indian married to an Englishwoman and now settled in England. We may observe, moreover, that Anglo-Indian Literature, originally meaning that written by Englishmen in India, was extended to mean any literature written in India in English as opposed to other languages; but in recent years a new term Indo-Anglian has also emerged to denominate Indian literature, written by Indians in English. My listeners will excuse me if I seem to insist over long on the point, but I do feel that such new distinctions are extremely significant as indicators that new nations are arising who regard the English language not merely as a British inheritance but as something of their own. English readers may have felt somewhat shocked a few years ago to learn that an American lexicographer was preparing a *Dictionary of Briticisms*, but now they have come to accept with certain resignation the apparition of other volumes dedicated to the language of Canada, Australia, South Africa, The West Indies and so on.

Not long ago I was looking at an interim statement issued by a large British Company setting out details of their sales round the world. This list was classified as Europe. The Americas and The Rest of the World. I assumed that the last item was expressed in this way because the sales in this "rest of the world" were not sufficiently large to justify breaking them down into individual continents and countries. In a sense our attitudes to English Studies in the university have followed a similar pattern. We have thought in terms of England, America (meaning the United States) and some vaguely defined "rest of the English-speaking world", feeling that this was not yet sufficiently large or sufficiently important to merit inclusion in a syllabus. Students of American language and literature are, however, well aware of how the process of winning recognition works. The United States were already firmly established as a large and prosperous nation some time before anyone deemed their language and literature as worthy of admission into academic circles in or out the country. Today we are so accustomed to the idea of devoting a fair part of our programs to American Studies, to relegating large areas of our libraries to American books and to having American lecturers on our staffs, that we tend to forget how new it all is. As recently as 1974, while on a visit to UCLA, I was interested to hear an American professor speak these following words:

"English has always theoretically been the first language of the USA population. Nevertheless, until after World War II, it was studied and maintained as a foreign language. By that I mean that the models were almost exclusively British, the history of the literature was British and the leaders in the field had all studied or done research in Britain. Until after World War II no major Department in the country was chaired by a scholar in American Literature and until today the M.L.A. of America has never had an Executive Secretary whose field of interest was not British or European"⁴.

If this was indeed the case in America, it was not surprising, I suppose, that when I was student at one of Britain's older seats of learning in the years following World War II, American Literature was completely ignored and, although some of Britain's new universities now have very outstanding Departments of American Studies, the English School of an ancient scholarly centre such as Cambridge, still would relegate American literature to an optional subject in the final year. In other words, we may say that it has taken the United States some three centuries since the first English settlement and one and a half since its independence to achieve stature and recognition in terms of having a language and literature in her own right, separate from the Mother Country. The US having reached that undisputed majority, the question we may now ask is, has the time come for other nations to be considered? Canada has a history of English exploration going back to 1497. It is now 190 years since the first British settlers arrived at Botany Bay in Australia, and it is 140 years since the famous Macaulay Minute of 1835 established the English language in India. Many African nations have been familiar with English as an administrative and cultural language for more than a century and, since World War II, on the five continents, English has become the common currency of international exchange on all fronts, economic, scientific, cultural and social alike.

In such a gathering as this it is hardly necessary to stress the importance of English as a world language. It is quite obvious that it has come nearer to the ideal of the long-sought universal tongue than any of the previous claimants, and though this may be initially attributable to first British and then United States dominance as world powers, we must not forget that its continuance in such a privileged position may ultimately depend on the degree to which it is accepted and used in that "rest of the world" to which I referred earlier on in this paper. We can no longer afford to regard the English literary productions of these new nations as mere picturesque or barbaric aberrations of the language of the Old Country, such as similar products from the United States were long regarded by many Britons and Americans in their day. In 1907, Henry James could still write of his fellow countrymen as being "conscious of being placed on the circumference of civilization rather than at the centre" but by 1974, the English poet and critic Stephen Spender is writing of America as the "caretaker of the European past". England he describes as "nationalistic, idiomatic, concretely, stubbornly provincial" which is "to place ourselves fiercely

on the periphery of the American centre"⁵. Is this an admission that Emerson was right when he wrote to Carlyle: "England, an old and exhausted country must one day be contented, like other parents, to be strong only in her children"? One of the lessons that our American Studies will teach us then is that centres and peripheries shift and change, that it is only a matter of time for new varieties of a language to become acceptable and for new world views, seen through them, to be regarded as worthy of our attention.

In order to be healthy, a language must be in a constant state of flux, growth and change, undergoing frequent transfusions of life-giving blood if it is not to stagnate and die. Contemplating the great expansion of English over the face of the earth and its many new uses in new contexts by new speakers, we must surely feel that this is enrichment, even as Spanish was enriched in her American colonies and the language of England acquired extraordinary wealth in the United States. "every language" George Steiner has written, "crystallizes the inner history, the specific world-view of the Volk or Nation"⁶. But what when that language is carried overseas to new backgrounds and new climes? The world view from a suburban garden in the Home Counties cannot be that of a glass and chromium apartment in Manhattan, or that of the great lakes of Canada, the stark aridity of the Australian bush, the tropical verdure of a Nigerian jungle or the hot sandstone of an Indian plain. If the English language is to "crystallize the inner history" and become a fit vehicle of expression for such multiple needs, it must be immensely flexible not to break under the burden. And indeed it has already proved itself to be so marvellously capable. Long ago in the soft, damp climate of Ireland it caught something of the mood and rhythm of Gaelic, giving rise to Irish English, a delicate instrument of exceptional literary potential. In multiracial America it acquired splendid brilliance and vigor; is there any reason to suppose that it may not do the same in other regions of the world?

It is not uncommon today, on both sides of the Atlantic, to hear voices raised in alarm at what are regarded as dangerous and corrupting deviations from the norms of Standard British or American. "There is a danger that the proliferating English of the periphery may obscure the descriptive picture of the centre of our language", writes the New Zealand born General Editor of the Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary, looking with special alarm at the very vocal and politically-minded linguistic minorities in America who insist that "their language and construction be accepted into the educational system to the detriment of the language"⁷. While we sympathize with the lexicographer and the teacher on this point, we cannot accept the view as regards literature, thinking, for example, that with such a norm our much loved Southwestern Yarnspinners, not to mention the most delightful of all American classics -*Huckleberry Finn*- would never have seen the light of day. Thus when we hear remarks about the 'un-Englishness' of Indian writing in English, we should also listen to the great Indian novelist R.K. Narayan when he says 'we are not

attempting to write Anglo-Saxon English. The English language is now undergoing a process of Indianization in the same manner as it adopted American citizenship a century ago". Similarly many African writers who are now using English as their medium of artistic creation would share the view expressed by the remarkable Nigerian author Chinua Achebe when he writes: "The African writer should aim at fashioning out an English that is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience"⁸. While the well-known South African writer, Nadine Gordimer, writes of Achebe as a "master of the colonial master's tongue, splendidly appropriating it to interpret his country's and people's past"⁹. These writers I have mentioned belong, of course, to cultural heritages that are non-English, but even authors coming from an entirely English based background, such as Australia, are sometimes criticised, even by their fellow-countrymen, for straying from the norms of Standard English. Such is the case of Patrick White, who has been much mauled by his critics for such crimes as 'dislocated syntax', 'awkward and un-English' uses of relative pronouns, and so on, (How would Henry James stand up to a similar scrutiny of his placement of adverbs?) But, as one of White's acuter commentators, Barry Argyle, has very well written: "one of the great pleasures in reading English from a 'foreign' country in which literature is written in English, is the recognition that the language can be made to convey experience which is foreign to the reader"¹⁰.

On the other hand one can also find those who are critical of what they consider to be a stick-in-the-mud attitude on the Home Front. Professor R.B. Le Page in his book *The National Language Question* speaks of the reactions of an Englishman returning home after a time overseas. "The Englishmen who stay at home strike him as parochial and insular and alarmed because they feel their way of life is being threatened by the influx of immigrants from tropical countries"¹¹. For Le Page varieties of English and cultural diversity are paramount. From our point of view as Spaniards, and therefore outsiders on the English language and literature scene, there is really no reason why we should need to take sides in such disputes. We are free to take up the English language and literature wherever and however it may manifest itself. Can we not equally enjoy what Stephen Spender would call the "studied provincialism" which has always been one of the strengths of England, and at the same time more exotic riches from overseas? These, incidentally, will often lead us to interesting literary crossroads where our two cultures may meet, as, for example, when Derek Walcott, a West Indian writer from Santa Lucia, bases his play *The Joker of Seville* (1975) on Tirso de Molina, or when the fine Australian poet, James McAulay chooses the Spanish exploration of the Pacific as the subject of his modern epic, *Captain Quiros*.

During the period immediately following World War II, when, as we have seen, United States culture finally came into its own, the newer English-speaking countries were suffering from the same sort of growing pains that had afflicted America all through the nineteenth centu-

ry. Anxious to break away from their British mentors, they still lacked confidence and were given to what the Australians graphically describe as a "Cultural Cringe". Professor Vincent Buckley of the University of Melbourne recently summed up the situation of his fellow-writers of that time with these words: they were, he says, "swamped by the products of British presses, and the university literature Departments, in which they naturally hoped to find allies, even admirers, were filled with mockers"¹². But things have been changing fast over the past two decades, particularly on the Australian literary scene, as more and more universities both there and in Europe are coming to agree with Professor Brian Elliott when he writes in a Melbourne newspaper: "As an academic subject Australian literature is by no means a second rate study suitable only for second rate and colonial minds".

A great stimulus to such thinking has indeed been coming lately, not only from the countries of origin, but also from European Universities, where during the past twenty years there has been a growing interest in what is variously denominated as Commonwealth Studies, or World Literature in English, Third World Studies, etc... Pioneer in the field was, curiously, a small country with no colonial pretensions which, in its day, let us remember, was also an important contributor to pioneer work in English Grammar. I refer to Denmark, and, in this particular case, to the University of Aarhus, where Commonwealth Studies were initiated as far back as 1956. Now owners of the most considerable library in the field in all Europe, this university includes such studies as a compulsory subject for its 900 students of English, has four teachers devoted exclusively to the discipline and, I am informed by its prime mover, Prof. Anna Rutherford, to date some 35 M.A. theses have been written on this English-speaking world outside Great Britain and the United States. In France at least ten universities include such studies, notable among them being the University of Toulouse which also has achieved a considerably library. In Italy one must mention the work of the University of Venice, recently hosts of the Australian Studies Conference, and in Belgium that of the University of Liege. In England we may recall that the *Review of Commonwealth Studies* was founded at Leeds in 1960, and work is also being done on African and Caribbean Studies at Kent and Australia at Exeter. In Scotland, the new university of Stirling, within its general international policy, is giving considerable importance to the theme. From Germany also comes news of growing interest in universities such as Tübingen, Frankfurt and Wuppertal, and in general we may note the increasing frequency with which scholarly papers and journals devote space to writing from the formerly unheard of "rest of the world".

As regards Spain, we, of course, are late-comers on the scene, just as before we were late-comers in establishing English and American Studies. However, that does not imply that we may not make an important contribution in the future, if we wish. With a great

colonial history behind her, leaving one of the world's most important languages in its wake, Spain should be peculiarly fitted to appreciate the intrepid spirit which led British explorers to new lands, coming into contact with new races and cultures and gradually building up new means of expression and new life-styles out of old elements transported from the Homeland. Such, at least, has been our assumption this year in the University of Barcelona where we are initiating a course setting out to study bilaterally the early exploration and settlement of America, on the one hand, and of Australia and New Zealand on the other. This linking up of Atlantic and Pacific will lead in the future, we hope, to wider studies bringing in Africa and Asia, thereby increasing our knowledge and understanding of the world at large.

To what extent such studies will prosper will depend, of course, on the degree of support obtained from our colleagues, from university authorities and from the countries concerned. English Studies in general were for long time the cinderellas of our Faculties of Arts in Spain, much overshadowed by older, more established disciplines. As those here present today well know, it has not been easy for us to win recognition, it is still not easy for us to win recognition for American Studies as an important discipline in its own right, and it will clearly be even more difficult for such a new concept as World Studies in English to prevail. Yet I feel it can and should be done if we wish to keep pace with what is being achieved in the rest of Europe and what is happening in the rest of the world. If, as I mentioned earlier on, this "rest of the world" seemed at one time of little importance in English Studies, now our problem will rather be how to cope with such a large field wherein academics are already having to specialize in African, West Indian, Australian or other such studies.

That is our situation today. But what of tomorrow? Having made this brief outline of the last quarter century, what can we say about the next 25 years? Will we be justified in urging our universities to invest money and our students to invest time in the new approaches I have described? Can we expect the flowering of English language and Literature in the new countries to equal the great flowering of America of the past 100 years? Or, as some people think, has the English Language reached that breaking point that once overcame Latin. Will English be able to carry all this multinational and multicultural load that it is now supporting, and is it even desirable that it should do so? To all these questions there have been many answers. Some observers regard the steady advance of English as a universal language with optimism, others with alarm. In an interesting Survey of today's world language scene, televised by the BBC last April, George Steiner spoke with some misgivings about American English as a great Bulldozers destroying a great multitude of native tongues while cutting out the road more efficient communication and mutual understanding¹³. On the other hand, contemplating the great upsurge of aggressive nationalisms so

prevalents in the world today, others would not find it unreasonable to think that, at least in those countries where English is competing with other tongues, its strength might well decline, obliging us to orientate our new English studies finally in terms of comparative literature. In Canada there is, after all, an active French culture and literature growing alongside the English; in South Africa, the original three languages of creative writing, English, Afrikaans and Xhosa, have now increased through apartheid policy, to seven. In India, strong pressure is being brought to bear so that English should be supplanted by Hindi. Nigeria, one of the richest sources of Afro-Anglian writing, may well develop other important vernacular tongues such as Yoruba, Ibo or Hausa. To those who, like Steiner, cherish the multiplicity of tongues, this would, presumeably, be a happy turn of events, even if it did mean a reduction in world communication.

Each and every human tongue is a distinct window on to the world looking through it, the native speaker enters an emotional and spiritual space, a framework of memory, a promontory on tomorrow, which no other window in the great house of Babel quite matches. Thus, every language mirrors and generates a possible world, an alternative reality.

These were the colorful words used by Steiner to end his T.V. program, but hearing them one could not help recalling that he himself is one of those many foreigners who has adopted the English language as his most effective medium of communication with the world, and who has enlivened it with his own peculiar outside view.

It is for this precise reason that I feel confident that there are great potentials in this particular language, both for the "foreigner" who adopts it and the native speaker who develops it under alien skies. So, leaving aside the past twenty-five years that we have surveyed in this paper and looking to the future, I feel that we may forecast, if not an expansion, at least a maintenance of the huge status and fascinating variety which the English language at present enjoys. After the next twenty-five years, having, let us hope, safely turned the corner into the twenty-first century, it will not be for us but for others to take stock again and to decide what the new perspectives in English Studies may be.

NOTES

1. Professor John Fisher, University of Tennessee, at the IAUPE Conference. Los Angeles, August, 1974.
2. Bailey, R. and Robinson, J.: *Varieties of Present Day English*. Macmillan, New York, 1973.
3. It must, however, be admitted that the Supplement of the O.E.D. (1972) does include Canada under the label North Amer.
4. see Fisher above.
5. Spender, Stephen: *Love-Hate Relations*, Hamish Hamilton. London, 1974.
6. Steiner, George: *Extraterritorial*, Faber. London, 1972.
7. I am indebted to Professor Bernard Hickey of the University of Venice for drawing my attention to these remarks of Burchfield's.
8. Achebe, Chinua: "The African Writer and the English Language", see T.L.S. Oct. 17, 1975.
9. Gordimer, Nadine: "At the Crossroads of Culture" T.L.S. as above.
10. Argyle, Barry: *Patrick White*. Writers and Critics. Oliver Boyd, London, 1967.
11. Le Page, R.B. : *The National Language Question*. O.U.P. 1964.
12. Buckley, Vincent: "Australian Poetry. National and International" paper read at the Simposio della Letteratura Australiana negli anni '50. Venice, March 1977.
13. Steiner, George: "The Tongues of Men" BBC 2 Survey of world languages. Televised in England, April, 1977.
14. In a paper entitled "On the Definition of English Literature" presented at the IAUPE Conference, Poznan, August, 1977, Prof. Albert Gerard (Liege) foresaw the new nationalistic outlook in Third World cultures, leading to a recession of English-language literature which would then become "auxiliary to the concept of multilingual national literatures, and our traditional approaches will be replaced by methods and techniques derived from Comparative Literature". Prof. Gerard was, I think, speaking particularly of Africa.