

Introduction

Autor(en): **Robinson, Alan**

Objektyp: **Preface**

Zeitschrift: **SPELL : Swiss papers in English language and literature**

Band (Jahr): **15 (2002)**

PDF erstellt am: **17.07.2024**

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Introduction

The essays in this volume were first presented as papers at an international symposium on Globalisation held by the Swiss Association of University Teachers of English at the University of St. Gallen in June 2001. They draw together literary and linguistic approaches and combine analyses of our late-capitalist world with a historical perspective on what is all too frequently regarded as an exclusively modern phenomenon.

The assumption underlying the conference was that globalisation manifests itself in three linked, perhaps indivisible forms: the global economy, global communication systems, and global mass culture. The upsurge in Western countries of neoliberal ideologies, together with international agreements to enable the free flow of capital and industrial (less so agricultural) goods, have favoured global trade on an unprecedented scale. In what are arguably forms of neo-colonialism, technological innovations and lower transportation and communication costs permit Western multinational companies to locate relatively unskilled production or financial services centres in low-wage countries, and more lucrative technological and marketing activities back home. The Internet speeds up the flow of information, making markets more responsive and "efficient," in a process that will accelerate as virtual marketplaces and online exchanges proliferate. The development of global communications and marketing networks (the Internet, satellite and cable TV, the film and music industries) is also fostering the evolution of English-based, principally American mass culture into a global culture. English is becoming *the* language of the Westernised world, albeit in increasingly hybrid forms and contexts. The implications of these developments for English studies are considerable, as the essays in this volume suggest.

The volume begins by offering historical contexts in which current developments can be located. In an essay which combines a historical survey with illustrative discussion of the work of Amitav Ghosh, John Thieme traces how the former concentration on national literary traditions has come to be supplanted by an emphasis on international cross-currents. Utilising the metaphors of the melting pot, the mosaic and the patchwork quilt, he characterises various forms assumed by literary globalisation, dwelling on the

ambiguities of the Net and the Web. Richard Waswo's essay – a compact cultural history of the origins, transmission and periodic redefinitions of what has been understood by "Europe" – concentrates several of the themes of this selection of papers: the instrumentalisation of cultural myths to serve the interest of *Realpolitik*; the long association of commercial and cultural globalisation; and the piquancy that, after so many frustrated attempts to draw Europe together, the symbolic medium that unites the continent in 2002 is a common currency.

In contrast to the present ubiquity of English as a *lingua franca*, Margaret Bridges recalls the difficulties encountered by late-medieval, monolingual English travellers in communicating with "strangers" from other regions and countries. Focusing on situations of semi-communication, or strategies devised to overcome imperfect communication, she proposes elements of a linguistic history of the subaltern and examines the role of language in negotiating individual and collective identity. Werner Senn analyses some of the rhetorical strategies employed by English poets from the late sixteenth to the early twentieth century to celebrate, and legitimise, England's commercial and imperial expansion. Having instanced examples from the late eighteenth century onwards of an intermittent counter-discourse, his essay concludes with a discussion of Derek Walcott's deconstruction of imperial myths and European master narratives.

The remainder of the volume is devoted to contemporary culture and to the challenges posed by global English(es). Therese Steffen begins her essay by outlining some defining features of globalisation and, more specifically, of today's globalised artistic culture. To exemplify what is involved in what she terms "a hybrid transnational visual art," Steffen explicates two recent works by the Afro-American artist Kara Walker, which provide a subversive commentary on the cultural traditions enshrined in the spaces in which they were exhibited: the Vienna State Opera, and the Beyeler Foundation.

In his digest of worldwide uses and usages of English, Tom McArthur uses the parameters of size, distribution and "gravitational pull" to construct a tentative framework in which to analyse the expansion of English, and comments on the current debates concerning World Standard English, Euro-English and English as a *lingua franca*. Andreas Fischer investigates lexicographical practice in exclusive and inclusive dictionaries of English, and in learner's dictionaries aimed at a worldwide audience, identifying differences between British and American lexicography and outlining what would be required of a truly global dictionary. Sarah Chevalier's survey of naming patterns in urban Australia reveals tendencies towards assimilation

and acculturation rather than the preservation of ethnic diversity, and suggests that “globalisation” is evident in Australia largely in the form of American popular culture. Finally, using examples of politeness phenomena from Kenyan English, Paul Skandera highlights some unsuspected pitfalls encountered in dialogues between first-language and second-language speakers of English and thus the potential for cross-cultural miscommunication and the creation of cultural stereotypes.

St. Gallen, April 2002

Alan Robinson