

Pious Peter has to pick a peck of pickled pepper: Notes towards British Studies*

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Certainly England for the English goes without saying:
it is the simple law of nature.

G. B. Shaw, *Saint Joan*

These words were spoken by the Chaplain in G.B. Shaw's *Saint Joan*, first produced in New York in 1923 and in London in 1924. Although Shaw abandoned the land of his birth, he was an Irishman who lived to witness one of the most powerful acts of resistance put on by his fellow countrymen in their attempt to break ties with England. A point Shaw seems to be implying here, but certainly not the Chaplain, is that if England for the English goes without saying, so Ireland for the Irish should go without saying (or, to put it in the context of the play, so France for the French should go without saying). But whether this is, from an English perspective, a simple law of nature in the case of Ireland and France is quite another matter. Amidst talk of Protestantism and Nationalism, which the Chaplain claims not to understand, he goes on: 'But this woman denies to England her legitimate conquests, given her by God because of her peculiar fitness to rule over less civilized races for their own good'. Issues such as these, among many others, are addressed by British Studies, or British Cultural Studies, which is, according to Alan Mountford, 'the study of contemporary British cultures, highlighting the pluralism of class,

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race, place, gender and generation; the evolving institutions of government and society, and the arts and media, and their production and interpretation'.¹

As my title suggests, I propose to give a brief introduction, hopefully not a tongue twister, to this area of study, by concentrating on some interpretations of its focus and direction gleaned from my reading and my experience, so kindly given me by the British Council, at the First Latin American Conference on British Studies in Caracas which revolved around the theme of 'Culture through Language and Literature: Britain Revisited'. I admit I arrived there with what Virginia Woolf would have called preconceptions and prejudices, which were assuaged, if not dismissed, as the Conference and my reading progressed. However, my aim is not to dwell upon the doubts, but solely to give a general and informative survey with some particular examples, thereby leaving subsequent discussion and the ironing out of the many wrinkles to you. That is the beauty of British Studies, 'by definition a project at the intersection of culture and society'.² Among other things, this rejuvenated area of study places greater emphasis on subjectivity and experience, and on the importance of learning language, literature and accompanying disciplines within a living cultural frame of reference. Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society* is one of the key background texts; culture is generally understood as 'a whole way of life, material, intellectual, and spiritual',³ which develops in response to the changes in the social, economic and political fabric of our lives. In this sense, Alan Mountford sustains: 'Efforts to define, delimit, to "enscope" as it were, such a diverse and far-ranging field will inevitably defy resolution'.⁴ Everyone has something to contribute and therefore other teaching/learning methods are encouraged from the start.

This does not mean to say that it defies definition. British Studies is not new (the North American Conference on British Studies was founded in New York over forty years ago) and, particularly if we command the language and

¹ Alan MOUNTFORD, 'Britain Revisited: The First 10 Years of British Study', in *LBSA Journal*, vol. 1, No. 1, edited by Maria Elisa CEVASCO and Patrick EARLY, The British Council, Latin American Region, October, 1996, p. 12.

² M. E. CEVASCO, 'British Studies at the University of Sao Paulo', in *LBSA Journal*, p. 17.

³ Cf. Raymond WILLIAMS, *Culture and Society 1780-1950*. Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1963, p. 16. Other key figures are E. P. Thompson, Stuart Hall and Richard Hoggart.

⁴ A. MOUNTFORD, 'Forward' to *British Studies Now: Anthology*, Issues 1-5, edited by Nick Wadham-Smith, London, British Council, 1995, p. 3. In his 'Preface', Nick Wadham-Smith states: 'This anthology has the principal aim of collecting the longer thematic articles from the first five issues [1992-1995] which deserve to be circulated more widely than dwindling backnumbers will allow'.

specialise in history, literature, the arts, the social sciences or linguistics we are bound to engage it: British Studies 'can exploit the resources of many disciplines'.⁵ With a little knowledge of the background, all of us can think of a working definition, which will generally depend, at least initially, on our area of specialisation and/or interest, but may well develop and even completely change direction as our understanding grows. To steal a line Patrick Early quoted from Derek Mahon's poem on the Irish Civil War: 'Even now a thought might grow'.⁶

What is new is the approach and the focus. 'British Studies has entered', as Wadham-Smith says, 'a new phase of increased activity [which] marks a transition from traditional cognitive modes of study to those which encourage a more active involvement of the learner'⁷ —and of the teacher, I might add. Susan Bassnett and Alan Mountford explain the problems arising from these 'traditional cognitive modes of study' and how they are being resolved:

The study of British Culture in universities outside Britain has traditionally meant learning about British life and institutions and/or civilization, mainly through factual information presented in lecture format and re-produced in examinations. Teaching in this area has been chiefly as 'background study' for undergraduates in literature departments [...] and designed to give students some information concerning the social, political and economic background to literary master-pieces so that they might understand the authors' purposes more clearly. However, there is often a problem relating historical information to the distinctive features of contemporary British culture and society.⁸

For these and many other reasons, the teaching of this kind of course has undergone, as Mountford says, 'rapid and radical development', principally, it

⁵ Nick WADHAM-SMITH, 'The end of "civilization": British Studies around the world', *British Studies in Brazil*, No. 1, Brazil, British Council, July, 1994, p. 2.

⁶ My thanks to Patrick Early, a British Council director in Brazil, not only for this quotation (which I wrote down at the time and have not been able to trace later), but also for his enthusiasm and critical approach. He and his team from different educational centres in Brazil were very stimulating as they 'took the bull by the horns' and had no hesitation in addressing the doubts and fears many Latin Americans might entertain when confronted with what many might consider yet another form of British (post-imperialism).

⁷ N. WADHAM-SMITH, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

⁸ Susan BASSNETT and Alan MOUNTFORD, *British Studies. Designing and developing programmes outside Britain*. London, British Council, 1993 (no page numbers given).

appears, on account of changes in approach to literary studies. These changes include shifts in the focus of literary study generally; for example, the move in Europe, Asia and Latin America 'towards seeing English literature as a component of a series of British literatures' and the 'growing awareness of other literatures in English', such as African, Caribbean, Asian, Australian and Canadian. Under this rubric, we might also place the growing trend towards locating English/British literatures in a European context. Another major change is the impact of new approaches to the study of literature 'arising from new critical theories' and new modes of study, such as gender studies, post-colonial studies and cultural studies, which contest 'the idea of an unchanging literary canon'; that is, a canon should be understood as 'a cultural product, [which] belongs to a time and a place', does not remain constant and 'is ideologically determined'.⁹ The study of 'background' thus becomes, when seen through the lens of cultural studies, part of a 'collective production': an obvious example would be a film.¹⁰ Students' 'creative awareness of youth and popular culture' has finally stimulated new student-centred teaching methods in literary study, which express an 'increased interest in the contemporary'; this should encourage changes in the teaching of the English language at university level. The final change Mountford mentions is the move 'towards combined studies and interdisciplinary approaches' in English departments.¹¹

The focus proposed by students of the English language and its literatures is now on difference in and between cultures and communities. Studies of eating

⁹ S. BASSNETT, 'Mythical Islanders, Mythical Heroes', 1995, p. 6. In this draft of the keynote lecture she delivered at the Caracas Conference, she argues that the 'history of English literature as a subject' is 'another fascinating area that properly belongs to British Studies'. Her lecture was published as 'Britannia's Heroes: Myths of Britain and British Studies', in *LABSA Journal*, pp. 32-39.

¹⁰ Cf. Antony EASTHOPE, *Literary into Cultural Studies*. London/New York, Routledge, 1991, particularly Part III 'Towards a new paradigm'.

¹¹ Cf. Alan Mountford's cited 'Britain Revisited: the First 10 Years of British Study' for a more detailed discussion of these changes. In his experience, the call for interdisciplinary approaches is perceived as 'a threat to the autonomy of departments and subject specialists' outside Britain. He proposes 'British style Cultural Studies' as a model of how to cross boundaries. In her discussion of the attempts of a group of six professors to introduce a British Studies component into the MA programme run by the English Department at the University of Sao Paulo, Maria Elisa Cevasco states: 'We do not think we have to be specialists in every topic that may arise in the discussions in the modules. [In this age of computer technology] we consider that the most fundamental aspect in our courses is not *what* gets taught, but *how* it gets taught'. M. E. CEVASCO, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

habits, for example, can no longer rely on the staple national dietary stereotypes of fish and chips or tacos and beans, however delicious they may be: it locates them within a specific context as it questions and displaces them. It would be fun—and British Cultural Studies is supposed to be fun—to compare *Jane Eyre* (Charlotte Brontë), *Como agua para chocolate* (Laura Esquivel), the film *Babette's Feast* (based on a story by Isak Dinesen/Karen Blixen) and *Midnight's Children* (Salman Rushdie) from this perspective, which would lead to many other things. In this way, culture becomes a 'network of signifying systems'¹² that, Wadham-Smith argues, engages 'dynamic cultural processes as its object of study' rather than attempting 'to distill the cultural essence'.¹³ Of course, we should not forget that stereotypes, whether of countries, peoples or their customs, habits and eccentricities, are socio-cultural constructs, which have a history and are intimately linked to literature. Susan Bassnett cited, as one example, the opening of the 1982 Nobel Prize address by García Márquez in which he shows how the first Europeans travelling to the New World described what they saw, or thought they saw: 'cerdos con el ombligo en el lomo y unos pájaros sin patas [...] un engendro animal con cabeza y orejas de mula, cuerpo de camello, patas de ciervo y relincho de caballo'. As the travellers struggled 'to extend the frontiers of language to describe things they could not comprehend', so the myth of Latin America 'as a strange, distant, fantastical place developed and versions of that myth are still alive today'.¹⁴

Bearing all the above in mind, specialists in British Cultural Studies emphasise the interdependence between language, literature, culture and community. This includes the increasing interest in the study of contemporaneity—in all its aspects—which, blending the old and the new, focuses on student

¹² S. BASSNETT, 'Britannia's Heroes: Myths of Britain and British Studies', *op. cit.*, p. 33.

¹³ Nick Wadham-Smith mentions a number of social and economic changes that have made the 'United Kingdom' a 'more complex and therefore richer object of study: [...] the acknowledgement of multiculturalism and new patterns of ethnic and regional diversity, cultural integration with Europe; the succession of heavy "metal-bashing" industries by a new hi-tech service sector and the impact of this change on the class system; the examination of Britain's post-colonial identity and the decreasing likelihood of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales allowing themselves to be defined in terms of a purely English national identity'. N. WADHAM-SMITH, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁴ Susan Bassnett goes on to explain how García Márquez challenges the stereotype, in part by reminding us that "Europa venerable" as he ironically puts it, has no special claims to greater civilization than anywhere else. Even at the height of the European Renaissance, "los pacíficos Suizos de hoy, que nos deleitan con sus quesos mansos y sus relojes impávidos, ensangrentaron a Europa como soldados de fortunas". S. BASSNETT, 'Mythical Islanders, Mythical Heroes', pp. 9-10.

interests. Cultural studies, Easthope stresses, ‘must take the contemporary as its point of departure [...] in studying an object which is always changing’. He just cannot believe ‘that the poetry of Pound and Eliot, poetry of seventy years ago, is still widely taught by literary study as though it *were* contemporary’. This does not mean that one cannot study texts of the past, but, Easthope insists, they must be read, as cultural materialists would, ‘as contemporary as well as being historicised’.¹⁵ The Great Shakespeare Debate raging at the moment is a case in point. I summarise. Bassnett claims when talking about a subheading to an extended article in *The Observer* newspaper on the role of Shakespeare in the British educational system, that he is seen ‘as essential reading for all British teenagers’, as ‘a reactionary’ or as ‘a difficult writer’, whose use of language outwits teenagers.¹⁶ If Bassnett were giving a paper on Shakespeare or teaching him on a literature course, her priorities would be other. In the framework of a seminar on British Studies, however, the ‘emphasis should not be on the thematic structure of the plays, nor on the characterization nor on the history of performance, but rather on what Shakespeare signifies in British culture today and how the Great Shakespeare Debate came into being in the first place’.¹⁷

The ‘shift in focus’ from the civilisation-type course to this new development has chiefly been instigated, so I understand, by those viewing the United Kingdom of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (four nations, not one nation, even the terminology gets difficult here) from the outside. The definitions of Britain and Britishness must come from that external critical eye. Where they have come from inside, they stem, as Patrick Early explains, from leftwing thinkers who were —and are— interested in casting a critical

¹⁵ A. EASTHOPE, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

¹⁶ The headline read: *The Battle of the Bard* and the sub-paragraph ran as follows: ‘Is William Shakespeare at the centre of a conspiracy between John Major’s government and the House of Windsor to inculcate our children with right-wing values? Or does our William speak for all men, in all places and at all times?’ *The Observer*, August 23, 1993 as cited by Susan Bassnett in her essay ‘Britannia’s Heroes: Myths of Britain and British Studies’, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

¹⁷ Among the questions Bassnett suggests we need to ask are: Why did Shakespeare become ‘so important to educationalists in the 1980s, the decade of Thatcherism, and why in the same period [did] the Shakespeare industry, the marketing of Shakespeare for tourists, [become] such big business?’ Why have ‘so many public figures, including the Prime Minister (who left school at 16) and Prince Charles made public statements about the need for working class boys on inner city housing estates to study Shakespeare?’ Why are ‘some intellectuals of the left [...] so violently opposed to this view and want to see Shakespeare removed from the schools curriculum altogether?’ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

eye at their own country. For example, in light of 'the role that politicians in the nineteenth century compelled [Shakespeare] to play as both an icon of Englishness and an example of the supremacy of European cultures', post-colonial (Indian) scholars, as Bassnett argues, simply cannot 'see him as an "innocent" portrayer of great human emotions'. 'On one side of the political divide in contemporary Britain', she goes on to say, 'that role has never been questioned and is still taken for granted, but on the other side it is being very seriously questioned and Shakespeare has become problematic as a result'.¹⁸ Thus, Bassnett shows how fruitful and interesting these different readings may prove to be.

Many other changes, such as the break-up of the former Soviet Union, the re-mapping of Eastern Europe, the growth in influence of the European Union and international trading groups, have, as Alan Mountford continually stresses, added to this renewed interest in British Studies. A recent number of *The Economist* published several letters concerning the future of the nation-state. In one entitled 'Things Fall Apart', J. Roger Morton anticipates that those 'that are not inherently part of the global superpowers will evolve towards national units where language, ethnicity and cultural values provide the base for a nation's administration'.¹⁹ This reflects the prevailing concern for language, ethnicity and cultural values echoed by Bassnett and Mountford, when addressing needs and audiences:

As links with European social and economic institutions have assumed new importance, the role and importance of English can only grow. So too will the need for a closer understanding of Britain—its social and political fabric, its evolving institutions, the arts, particularly writing, and the media—in the context of politics and commercial opportunity on the one hand and teacher education on the other.²⁰

We must not forget what Marylyn Robertson calls both 'Ugly Sister and Cinderella—language'.²¹ A common interest in the teaching and learning of English as a second language is one of the cornerstones of British Studies:

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁹ J. Roger MORTON, 'Things Fall Apart', in *The Economist*. London, January 20-26, 1996, p. 8.

²⁰ S. BASSNETT and A. MOUNTFORD, *op. cit.*

²¹ Marylyn ROBERTSON, 'The Naughty In-Between', or 'work on language and literature, and where they meet', *British Studies Now*, Issue 4, edited by Nick Wadham-Smith, London, The British Council, August, 1994, p. 8. This article discusses the

'language itself, together with dialect and accent, is so fundamental to the construction of individual and social identity', Bassnett and Mountford argue, 'that it should be central to the concerns of a British (Cultural) Studies programme'.²² And, in our context, language 'plays a crucial role not only in the construction of culture, but in the emergence of cultural change'.²³ To those who might have doubts, Salman Rushdie writes in his essay 'Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist': 'I don't think it is always necessary to take up the anti-colonial —or is it post-colonial?— cudgels against English. What seems to me to be happening is that those peoples who were once colonized by the language are now rapidly remaking it, domesticating it, becoming more and more relaxed about the way they use it [and] are carving out large territories for themselves within its frontiers'.²⁴ We must remember, as Rushdie concludes: 'The English language ceased to be the sole possession of the English some time ago. Perhaps "Commonwealth literature" was invented to delay the day when we rough beasts actually slouch into Bethlehem. In which case, it's time to admit that the centre cannot hold'.²⁵ Why is it that W.B. Yeats so often springs to mind?

British Studies, intent on deconstructing this centre and its stereotypes, takes two directions. The first of these is an interdisciplinary analysis of British life and culture and the second is a comparative approach. When speaking of the former, Helio Augusto Monteiro Filho from Brazil considers it provincial: 'Experience has shown that the definition of British Studies only in terms of Great Britain is ethnocentric and myopic'. Insisting on the 'questionable providence' of Great Britain as a 'kind of "promised land" to others 'has long seemed to be a fruitless practice'.²⁶ Take, for instance, the case of Media Studies. This is stimulating and exciting, but general discussion at the Conference revealed that both teachers and students found it very hard work, especially when working with limited resources —as well as having to listen to 'living language' in its regional variations on radio or screen. Another

writer's experiences of 'establishing a democracy of disciplines' in workshops in Columbia and Cuba. The feature of this issue is Latin America and it contains several interesting articles on the pros and cons of British Studies in Latin America.

²² S. BASSNETT and A. MOUNTFORD, *op. cit.*

²³ Carol KRAMSCH, 'The Cultural Component of Language Teaching', in *British Studies Now*, Issue 8. London, British Council, January, 1997, p. 4.

²⁴ Salman RUSHDIE, 'Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist', in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. London, Granta Books, 1992, p. 65.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

²⁶ Helio Augusto MONTEIRO FILHO, 'British Studies: The State of Play', in *British Studies Now*, Issue 4, p. 8.

drawback is that despite the initial enthusiasm in interdisciplinary study, 'in times of stress' as Tony Dunn puts it, 'you fall back on early training', and he has observed 'a retrenchment into traditional disciplines within Studies degrees'.²⁷ But if one begins at secondary school level with this concept of interdisciplinarity, this presumably will be the 'early training' one will fall back on. (British Studies courses are recommended for secondary and tertiary education and there are some postgraduate degrees in Eastern Europe). Monteiro Filho espouses the latter —the comparative approach— as being the most appropriate in a Latin American context. Studies of such topics as race relations, immigration and the role of women in society should, in his opinion, 'emphasise, to the extent possible, that a British-Brazilian cultural relationship can be characterised by cultural cross-fertilisation rather than by cultural absorption'.²⁸ He suggests that British Council officers should take advantage of the relations between Latin American countries and Great Britain despite institutional resistance. An outcome of this initiative was the motion that we vote for the foundation of a Latin American British Studies Association (LABSA) at the Conference in Caracas. The motion was carried, though not unanimously. The first number of its journal, published in October 1996 and edited by Patrick Early and Maria Elisa Cevasco, 'draws heavily, but not exclusively, on the proceedings' of this conference.²⁹

Martin Montgomery from the University of Strathclyde sees the directions taken in British Studies in a different light. In his much-cited article 'Institutions and Discourse', he poses the problem of the link between these two approaches. He opens by stating:

Approaches within British Studies may be viewed as occupying positions on a continuum between two poles. At one end, Britain is considered in terms of its key institutions of law, education, government, religion and so on, these being apprehended in terms of fact, statistic, history and function [i.e. the traditions of German 'landeskunde' and the French 'civilisation']. At the other end ... are a number of approaches inspired by anthropology and cultural analysis which aim to investigate less tangible areas of social life

²⁷ Tony DUNN, 'The "British" in British Studies', in *British Studies Now*, Issue 4, p. 11.

²⁸ H. A. MONTEIRO FILHO, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

²⁹ The next number will map some of the issues concerning TV, film and new media and will also be published by the Brazilian team. Contributions should be sent through the British Council internal mail via the local British Council office and a style sheet is available upon request.

such as youth culture or Scottishness. [...] I do not wish to push this dichotomy too hard, but there is a sense in which the latter ('culturalist') approach more exactly coincides with the practice of researching contemporary British culture 'within' Britain (or an anglophone context), whereas the former approach —the 'institutionalist' approach— is the one more likely to be adopted abroad in a non-anglophone context.³⁰

One can see that this might well be the case, but my experience in Caracas, when I attended a language class and chatted to the head of the English Department at the Central University and to a professor from the Pedagogical University, gave me a very different impression. As teachers of language, translation and literature, they are all aware of the need to combine both approaches and develop what Alan Pulverness has termed 'an agenda for intercultural learning'.³¹ Towards the end of his article, Montgomery writes:

[...] we lack at present a principled way of rationalising the links between the two approaches especially in a way appropriate to the situation of the learner in the non-anglophone context. [...] The key, here, is language itself, seen particularly from a sociolinguistic perspective [...]³²

One is tempted to ask, as Adrienne Rich does throughout her 'Notes Toward a Politics of Location': who are we?³³ The Latin Americans, so far as I heard and witnessed, seem to be finding a way of 'rationalising the links between the two approaches'. Talks given by participants from Venezuela and Brazil made this point particularly well. Montgomery confronts the issues of language because it often provides the curriculum context for British Studies outside Britain —*i.e.* in a non-anglophone environment it provides the institutional rationalisation for engaging in British Studies— and, if 'understood as a sociolinguistic or sociocultural phenomenon, [it] can also bridge the gap between the study of institutions [...], and the culturalist study of social differences and identities'.³⁴ In 'British Studies: Bienvenidas', Nila Mendoza

³⁰ Martin MONTGOMERY, 'Institutions and Discourse', in *British Studies Now: Anthology*, Issues 1-5, p. 25.

³¹ Alan PULVERNESS, 'English as a Foreign Culture: ELT and British Cultural Studies', in *British Studies Now*, Issue 6. London, British Council, July, 1995, p. 14.

³² M. MONTGOMERY, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

³³ A. RICH, 'Notes Toward a Politics of Location', in *Blood, Bread and Poetry. Selected Prose. 1979-1985*. London, Virago Press, 1987 (1986: W. W. Norton & Co. Inc.), pp. 210-231.

³⁴ M. MONTGOMERY, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

de Hopkins discusses what English means for the Venezuelan applied linguists and language teachers — ‘much more than a means of communication’ — and hails Montgomery’s article, which, in her opinion, ‘gives all of us hope not only for a forum which reduces the distance between “institutional” and “culturalist” approaches to British Studies [...] but also for an instrument by means of which we enrich our personal lives as well as expand our profession’.³⁵ One way language teachers are probably achieving this is, as Claire Kramsch suggests, by elaborating a ‘critical foreign language pedagogy focused on the process of enunciation’. In her opinion, this has ‘the potential both of revealing the codes under which speakers in cross-cultural encounters operate, and of constructing something different and hybrid from these cross-cultural encounters’. A ‘third space’, as Bhabha calls it, inhabited by teachers and learners alike: instead of seeking to bridge differences, it seeks to create ‘a dialogic context in which the vital necessity to continue the dialogue ensures a mutual base to explore the sometimes irreducible differences between people’s values and attitudes’.³⁶ It is clear that British (Cultural) Studies can give us all kinds of new ideas for teaching and learning, so long as we succeed in moving from ‘the clean air of meaning and textuality and theory [as practised in and for the academic institution] to the something nasty down below’³⁷ and recognise that ‘studying cultures of the past must necessarily be a plurivocal experience, and history must be much more than one (usually white, usually male, usually middle class) voice telling us things he thinks we ought to know’.³⁸

John Drew, who works in Hungary, gives us a word of warning: ‘It is one thing to show that the materials of British [Cultural] Studies are multi-cultural

³⁵ Nila Mendoza de HOPKINS, ‘British Studies: Bienvenidas’, in *British Studies Now*, Issue 4, p. 6.

³⁶ C. KRAMSCH, *op. cit.*, p. 6. She cites H.K. Bhabha’s ‘Post-colonial authority and post-modern guilt’ from L. Grossberg, Nelson, and P. Treichler, eds., *Cultural Studies*. Routledge, London, 1992, p. 58.

³⁷ Stuart HALL, ‘Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies’ (in *Cultural Studies*, edited by Lawrence Grossberg *et al.*, London, Routledge, 1992, p. 278) and cited by Sérgio Luiz Prado Bellei in his fascinating article on ‘British Cultural Studies at USFC: A Personal Report’, in *LBSA Journal*, p. 20. He sustains that for Hall the ‘clean air of theory’ means theory deprived ‘of its worldly function and aimed at the development of theoretical *fluency* marked by elegance rather than the power of intervention in the world. Theory in cultural studies, in its shift to “the something nasty down below”, should thus be always a form [...] of knowledge (rather than fluency) to be both appropriated and criticized in terms of its worldly vocation and its power to lead to social change’.

³⁸ S. BASSNETT, ‘Britannia’s Heroes: Myths of Britain and British Studies’, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

and multi-disciplinary; but it is equally important to demonstrate that, to be truly realised, diverse perspectives demand not only special materials but a special methodology: namely, a seminar, or similar gathering in which a plurality of views can best be aired and shared'.³⁹ Of course, it will prove difficult to decide upon the most appropriate methodology for each teaching/learning context and to find the most suitable materials. However, Prado Bellei is very concerned about the concept of methodology *per se*. Living, as he says, well, almost says, in an academic 'paradise of methodological approaches' where '[m]ethodology seems to be a magic, sacred word', he fears what will happen when an anti-methodological area reaches 'the land of methodology'. He warns that 'it may well become methodological in a very narrow way, again dispensing with criticism'.⁴⁰ When designing a syllabus, Bassnett and Mountford suggest that we bear in mind the need for a *balanced* position between:

[...] the presentation of Britain as a museum society, with thatched cottages, heritage poets and a view of the world still rooted in the nineteenth century, a stereotype still all too prevalent outside Britain [and] an overly critical approach that presents an image of Britain as a post-imperial society in decline.⁴¹

One methodological approach favoured by British Studies teachers is the thematic workshop, using materials from different literary genres and other sources. Bassnett, among others, shows how fundamental poetry is to the study of any culture because, for example, of the 'short length of poems' and their 'use of language, especially ambiguity that takes us straight to the heart of things'.⁴² We can all think of themes for workshops, but when doing so we should remember that all cultural products are equally important: literature is only one means of observing how a society/culture/community constructs meaning.

I have been talking indiscriminately about cultural studies, British Cultural Studies and British Studies. Although this is neither the time nor the place to discuss this issue in any depth, I cannot ignore it completely. It appears from both the literature and my interpretation of it that the new approach to British Studies has emerged from the development of cultural studies —no longer

³⁹ John DREW, 'The Invention of British Studies: Multiple Perspectives', in *British Studies Now: Anthology*, Issues 1-5, p. 16.

⁴⁰ Sérgio Luiz PRADO BELLEI, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁴¹ S. BASSNETT and A. MOUNTFORD, *op. cit.*

⁴² S. BASSNETT, 'Mythical Islanders, Mythical Heroes', p. 14.

capitalised as it was in the past. Richard Johnson defines cultural studies as: '[...] about the historical forms of consciousness or subjectivity, or the subjective forms by which we live or the subjective side of social relations'.⁴³

This field of study arose out of a need to make sense of the changing face of England in the aftermath of the Second World War and 'sees culture as plurivocal and as process, as a shifting mass of signs rather than a single entity that can be easily categorized and examined'.⁴⁴ It tends to defy labels and resists answers, preferring instead to ask questions. The starting point, as Bassnett goes on to say, 'was a challenge to "culture" perceived as "high Culture"' and the initial focus was on class, 'on reconstituting the concept of culture to include working class, oral culture and to revise assumptions about history'. Later on came the study of ethnicity, race and gender, 'but always from within a British (primarily English) context'. British Studies is 'another stage in that development' and 'is linked to three distinctive developments', which are, in a nutshell:

1. The changing nature of British society, which has led to an increased fragmentation of the idea of "Britishness";
2. The expansion of the English language world-wide, and the recognition that different varieties of English reflect completely different cultures.
3. Cultural Studies and British imperialism shared one thing in common: 'both started and ended with Englishness as a priority. But today, in this post-colonial period, as Salman Rushdie puts it, the Empire has started to write back to the centre and cultural studies has started to address the question of globalization and the inter-relatedness' of cultures simultaneously with their individual specificities'.

Easthope agrees with other specialists in the field when he states that after the publication of Williams's *Culture and Society* 'the study of popular culture developed rapidly, first at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (founded in 1964)'.⁴⁵ Cultural studies 'emerged in Britain by laying stress on the other side of the kind of opposition set out by F.R. Leavis in

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 14. Bassnett quotes from Richard Johnson's, 'The story so far: and further transformations?', in David Punter, ed., *Introduction to Contemporary Cultural Studies*. Longman, 1986. It is interesting to note that the field of cultural studies is generally not capitalised, whereas that of British Cultural Studies is.

⁴⁴ S. BASSNETT, 'Britannia's Heroes: Myths of Britain and British Studies', *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁴⁵ A. EASTHOPE, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture'.⁴⁶ It took off by 'foregrounding social and historical determination and basing analysis [of popular texts] on a sociological or Marxist model'.⁴⁷ Since then, however, the opposition between the "subjective" domain of literature and this "objective" analysis has slowly been breached, so that 'cultural studies has advanced into the supposedly subjective realm of literary studies and reclaimed analysis of the text for itself'.⁴⁸ The new paradigm he proposes permits the common analysis of so-called canonical and popular texts. Common analysis indeed, we might imagine F.R. Leavis saying, upon hearing that (British) Cultural Studies draws its material, in part, from the mass media ('the horror'), which aroused 'the cheapest emotional responses' in his opinion: 'Films, newspapers, publicity in all forms, commercially-catered fiction —all offer satisfaction at the lowest level'.⁴⁹

When attempting to organise my notes for this report, I happened to be re-reading *Saint Joan* and England was playing France in the Five Nations Rugby Championship. The referee was Irish (this is not a rhetorical trick: it is the plain and simple truth). Clad in his green referee shirt, G.B.S., as he was known, wrote a witty and intelligent historical and political play that not only questions the values of men and women and the lengths to which they will go to uphold their beliefs, but also, among many other things, the power of religious conflict and nationalist sentiment to divide even before the introduction of Protestantism and Nationalism as such. As Shaw says in his Preface:

The Reformation, which Joan had unconsciously anticipated, kept the questions which rose in her case burning up to our own day (you can see plenty of the burnt houses still in Ireland), with the result that Joan has remained the subject of anti-Clerical lies, of specifically Protestant lies, and of Roman Catholic evasions of her unconscious Protestantism. The truth sticks in our throats with all the sauces it is served with: it will never go down until we take it without any sauce at all.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁴⁷ *Idem.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.

⁴⁹ Quoted by John Carey in his *The Intellectuals and the Masses. Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia 1880-1939*. London/Boston, Faber and Faber, 1992, p. 7. He reminds us that when T. S. Eliot was surveying the cultural scene in 1938, he maintained that the effect of daily or Sunday newspapers on their readers was to 'affirm them as a complacent, prejudiced and unthinking mass' (*Criterion*, xvii, p. 688).

⁵⁰ G. B. SHAW, 'Preface', to *op. cit.*, p. 40.

Through an exploration of the literary and historical distortions surrounding the story of Joan of Arc, he examines mad dogs, fools and Englishmen⁵¹ and the English language as a social, historical, political and literary phenomenon during a period of particular turmoil in Anglo-Irish relations—all in the very particular circumstances of his writing, convictions and times, of course. The words spoken by Brother Martin Ladvenu upon Joan's canonisation seem to echo Shaw's concern: 'a great lie is silenced for ever; and a great wrong is set right before all men'.⁵² At a time when the configurations of gender were changing dramatically, Shaw draws attention to the systems determining patriarchal mentality. To return to our "museum piece", the misguided Chaplain, who condemns Joan so wholeheartedly:

But I know as a matter of plain commonsense that the woman is a rebel; and that is enough for me. She rebels against Nature by wearing man's clothes, and fighting. She rebels against The Church by usurping the divine authority of the Pope. She rebels against God by her damnable league with Satan and his evil spirits against our army. And all these rebellions are only excuses for her great rebellion against England. That is not to be endured.⁵³

Not least of these is, as we can see, the nature/culture debate. The Inquisitor asks—almost pleads—Joan: 'for the last time, will you put off that impudent attire and dress as becomes your sex?'⁵⁴ Joan refuses and gives her reason: 'Why, yes: what can be plainer commonsense? I was a soldier living among soldiers. I am a prisoner guarded by soldiers. If I were to dress as a woman they would think of me as a woman; and then what would become of me?'⁵⁵

'Commonsense' versus 'commonsense': it seems that 'Pious Peter will', as the Page says earlier, 'have to pick a peck of pickled pepper'.⁵⁶ There is no doubt that this play provides a fascinating backdrop for a British Studies course that could entertain a plurality of perspectives. If nothing else, it is a fruitful

⁵¹ Cf. G. B. SHAW, *op. cit.*, Scene VI, p. 141. Here the Chaplain, a foil for many of Shaw's most caustic comments, speaks of the soldier who gave Joan a cross: 'Thank God he was an Englishman! I might have done it; but I did not: I am a coward, a mad dog, a fool. But he was an Englishman too'.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Epilogue, p. 145.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Scene IV, p. 100.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Scene VI, p. 131.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

source for an exploration of images and constructs of masculinity, which, 'is a useful way forward in British Studies, for questions of gender and nation and the symbolic representation of the state are intimately linked'.⁵⁷ Above all, we should remember what Patrick Early begs us to: 'Literary study remains more necessary than ever to the understanding of those British cultures [and Latin American cultures, I would add] which are our subject. Literary study means study of original texts'.⁵⁸

Incidentally, France won that Rugby match. And, since writing this talk (January 1996), we all know how the Anglo-Irish time-bomb has quite literally exploded once more, leaving, this time, 'burnt houses' in Docklands, the Aldwych and elsewhere.

The acknowledgement of multiculturalism made explicit in this study of the contemporary is questioned by Henry Louis Gates Jr. who perceives it as having 'certain imperial tendencies': 'We are told it is concerned with the representation of difference—but whose differences? which differences?'⁵⁹ Of course, his fear is that behind this term lies another, which it frequently takes the place of: multiracialism. The only points I wish to make here are that Professor Gates's questions make us aware that we must take each person's politics of location into account and should—fortunately—never expect to reach agreement on terms and emphasis in this area of study.

⁵⁷ S. BASSNETT, 'Mythical Islanders, Mythical Heroes', p. 11.

⁵⁸ Patrick EARLY, 'British Studies and literature', in *British Studies in Brazil*, No. 1, p. 2. This collection of edited papers were originally presented at a colloquium entitled 'British Studies: the Way Forward' hosted by the Cultura Inglesa, Sao Paulo in May 1994.

⁵⁹ 'Beyond the Culture Wars: Identities in Dialogue', in *Profession 93*. The Modern Language Association of America, United States of America.