BREXIT – perspectives from the English Association

Carol Atherton

Carol Atherton is Head of English at Spalding Grammar School, in Lincolnshire. Her book, *Defining Literary Criticism*, is published by Palgrave Macmillan.

I have spent the whole of my teaching career in south Lincolnshire, a part of the country with beautiful big skies but sometimes limited horizons. Twenty years ago, as a new recruit, I attended a course for NQTs (Newly Qualified Teachers) run by the local education authority's English advisor (remember those?) One of his key messages was that teachers in a rural county had a huge responsibility to challenge prejudice and open their students’ eyes to the world beyond their everyday lives.

It's a message that has stayed with me ever since, and it was all the more powerful in the run-up to the EU Referendum. The rich agricultural land of this part of the UK – land that owes its existence to a Dutchman, Cornelius Vermuyden, who drained the Fens in the seventeenth century – is heavily dependent on migrant labour. My school has many students from eastern Europe whose families have settled in this area in the years since the expansion of the EU in 2004. Not everyone has welcomed this. I lost count of the number of Leave posters I saw in the weeks before 23 June, some displayed on hoardings in the very same fields where workers from Lithuania and Bulgaria harvest crops and help to keep the local economy afloat. In my constituency – South Holland – 73.6% of voters opted to leave the EU. In neighbouring Boston, the vote for Leave was 75.6%.

Hearteningly, in our school’s mock Referendum, the vote was overwhelmingly in favour of Remain. I am glad about this on many levels, but most of all, because I hate the idea of any of my students being made to feel unwelcome in a part of the world that they have come to know as home. Locally, there has been an increase in race-related tension: thirty miles away, in Huntingdon, Polish families have received hate mail.

Nobody knows quite what the future will bring. What I do know, however, is that our role as educators is all the more important in a political landscape so riven by division and unrest, where public discourse has been dominated by cynical spin. We have a duty to make schools safe spaces for young people, to ensure that all our students are able to learn in an environment free from narrowmindedness and fear, and to model the kind of responsibility and integrity that they should be able to expect from those who lead them. As English teachers, we also have a duty – made all the more important now – to teach young people to look beyond surfaces, to read closely and critically and recognise when clever rhetoric is being used to manipulate them. We have a duty to make sure that the texts we teach encourage them to question and challenge, to rub the fur of complacency up the wrong way.

‘Be the change that you wish to see in the world’, exhorted Mahatma Gandhi. I think we can now say, in the aftermath of the EU Referendum, that we have to teach the change that we wish to see in the world – or in our country, or in our particular community. We owe it to our students, and to future generations, to do this.
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Gerald Dawe

Gerald Dawe is Professor of English and Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin and founder-director of the Oscar Wilde Centre at Trinity College.

Eighteen years ago the Good Friday Agreement, overwhelmingly endorsed by the people in Ireland, put paid to a very dark and bitter quarter of a century of violence and political acrimony that we have consigned to history as ‘the Troubles’. It’s hardly feasible to think today that in the late 1960s a democratic movement for civil rights would spiral out of control from street protest and popular demands for economic and cultural justice into a shocking conflict between terrorism and state force that would lead to the deaths of thousands of ordinary men, women and children. This story does not need to be rehearsed again save to make the simple point that behind the protracted discussions, arguments, debates and difficulties of the years since, the Good Friday Agreement has set a generation largely free from violence, both physical and verbal.

Now, following the UK Referendum, my fear is that this hard-won and costly political achievement may unravel at the behest of what has increasingly being seen as an incoherent, ill-conceived and, at times, nasty racist debate about Brexit.

At the heart of the debate before 23 June, there seemed to be a serious and potentially hugely damaging ignorance about what might happen in Ireland should the British electorate decide to leave the European Union. Listen to what the chairman of the ‘Vote Leave’ campaign had to say about the issue of frontier controls and custom checks - i.e. the international border that would be put in place between the EU and the UK, a border that would run across the northern counties of Ireland: Derry, Fermanagh, Tyrone, Armagh and Down/ Louth, Monaghan, Leitrim, Cavan and Donegal:

‘…checks would be needed along the Border to prevent illegal immigration. That could be stopped. There would have to be border controls, but not a prevention of genuine Irish coming in’.

There would be, I guess, forty or so crossing points - what used to be known as ‘unapproved roads’ - in the interface between Louth and Down. So do the maths and you can begin to see the farce this is all leading to, not to mention the phrase of ‘letting the genuine Irish coming in’. With my shillelagh under me arm, no doubt, and a twinkle in me eye. The lack of basic historical knowledge is baffling but clearly self-serving.

Another government campaigner for the Leave side reportedly said that Brexit might see ‘an end to the open border between the two parts of Ireland’, and was quoted as boldly stating:

‘If you’re worried about border controls and security…you couldn’t leave a back door without some kind either of checks there with any country, or assurances in relation to the checks that they’re conducting, obviously. Otherwise, everyone with ill will towards this country [UK] would go round that route.’ (Dominic Raab, interviewed on ‘Murnaghan’: Sky News)

‘Obviously’ isn’t really the word; it defies logic that anyone with a titter of wit would know that the border in Ireland has been for almost one hundred years a scar on the
body politic which we have only very recently started to heal with the balm of common sense and years of very hard work on the ground.

To retreat from this still delicately balanced issue because you are ensconced in the internal battles for the high ground of your political party and you like the sound of your own voice, is utterly foolhardy and irresponsible.

But Brexit isn’t about Ireland. Or wouldn’t be, where it not for the ‘special relationship’ between the various parts of these islands and not just Ireland and England. Indeed I’m not even sure if Brexit is not actually about a deepening sense, in mainstream English society, of disaffection with itself. The driving force behind Brexit is London-based power politics. What happens in Jonesborough or Forkhill or Pettigo is a very long way away. And that’s exactly the mistake that is now beginning to haunt us, following the referendum.

But there is also a very troubling element to the language of the debate in England. From an outsider’s point of view, I am shaken by the toxic and dangerous racist element that leading figures of the Leave side introduced into what should have been a lively and important democratic debate.

It staggers belief to think how phrases like ‘genuine Irish’ are used so casually or how the hugely publicised doubts about the racial origins of Barack Obama’s opinions on Brexit expressed by the ex-mayor of London, or his shameful comparison of EU bureaucrats with Hitler and the Nazi Third Reich’s decimation of Europe, could have been uttered in 2016. What would have played out if similar terms had been hurled about publicly in the hothouse of Northern Irish parliamentary debate is difficult to imagine.

But perhaps it is, from this distance, the lack of a robust civic leadership surrounding the referendum that has produced unforeseen circumstances - something which we will all have to deal with for years to come; and I’m not just talking about the murky aftermath of a resurrected border in Ireland.

The snide innuendoes of a ‘Little Englander’ nostalgia for imperial grandeur, mocked-up by so-called plain-speaking ordinary blokes who tell it like it is, needs to be challenged by mature and reasonable arguments. For, as we know, there are important matters at stake here - about security and immigration, integration and civil rights; but also about bureaucratic power and the deepening suspicions of a European elite as self-perpetuating. However, the maturity and experience that even a little history brings to the table would have helped, rather than all the bluff and bluster that the ‘Leave’ campaign left in its wake.

The Republic of Ireland joined up to Europe almost fifty years ago. If there is an alternative in the next fifty years for these islands, then spell it out. Let’s hear how we can do business differently, politically, economically, culturally.

I doubt there is such a rationale. But the one thing that has become obvious since the Referendum is that the Leave campaigners are still sounding strident, contradictory and ill-informed about what can and may happen now that their campaign has succeeded. When we repeat dangerous mistakes from the past, particularly in the way we address
each other, that - in anyone’s language - can spell disaster.

Martin Dodsworth

Martin Dodsworth is Professor Emeritus at Royal Holloway, University of London. He is a former Chair of Trustees of the English Association.

I voted to remain in the European Union, and was disappointed not to be on the winning side. I voted for the high ideal of European solidarity and the promotion of human rights, but not in the belief that all was well with the Union. The harsh treatment of Greece and the tardy and inadequate response to the refugee crisis, the unsavoury nature of the deal with Turkey on immigration and the hardly justifiable predominance of the Franco-German axis, the lack of British political will to participate forcefully in European affairs, all cast well-nigh impenetrable shadows over the Union and its future. So my disappointment was tempered by the thought that what might emerge from the Leave vote is a looser network of more effectively focused, more viable treaties throughout Europe.

It is fifteen years since I retired as an English teacher. I don't believe that the Union did much to help further the aims of my subject or my own personal objectives in the time that I was at work. The Erasmus scheme was a good idea, and many students benefited from it, but it was poorly administered and overseen. In my department, we never knew how many students would turn up until they had arrived; this created difficulties which neither the institution of which we were part nor the European administrators were prepared to address. European research money for the humanities was focused on international and interdisciplinary projects, largely marginal to work in English. Any grants for my research came from purely British sources. As far as I know (the Union, like the institutions of British higher education, is shrouded in mystery) no significant money was directed to the national institutional structures that supported me and could have made the high-sounding international projects meaningful. There were many better reasons for voting to remain than the Union's support for English studies.

The positive meanings of Europe for students of English continue to be: a great literature whose complex interrelationships remain a permanent challenge and delight; a common debt to Classical culture and, for better or worse, to Christianity; a tolerance of difference and otherness which not infrequently wins the day in literature and life; and more. Europe is a culture which we realize in our lives; it might also, and not incidentally, be embodied in a Union that worked better than the one we have. For me, as an academic, the high ideal of European humanism, represented by scholars such as Auerbach, Curtius, Praz and Spitzer, remains. I studied a year in Switzerland at the feet of James Smith of Fribourg, equally shrewd in his account of French and Spanish as of English literature. My late friend Gian Carlo Roscioni wrote good books on Carlo Emilio Gadda, Raymond Roussel, the authors of The Turkish Spy, and the Jesuit missions to China in the sixteenth century. We still have access to the European culture which these scholars represented; that is something, and it is not a little thing.
Duncan Forbes

Duncan Forbes is a poet and translator, former Head of English at Wycombe Abbey School and a Royal Literary Fund Fellow.

We are asked for our thoughts on the causes and consequences of the present discontent. The causes are likely to have been disaffection and disunity; what are the consequences likely to be? Disunity and disaffection.

Rightly or wrongly, some people presumably do not like to be or to feel patronised, disenfranchised, over-regulated, overruled, subsidised, impoverished, exploited, deceived, ignored, or federated, without their individual consent, and they vote accordingly when given the rare chance, whatever the consequences, seen or unforeseen, fortunate or calamitous. Hence the binary vote, first in Scotland and recently in the UK.

Recent events have further reminded us just how divisive, self-seeking, self-absorbed, mendacious and acrimonious politics and politicians can be. One abiding irony is that the June referendum was in part intended to settle differences within the Conservative Party.

So far, the most constructive, measured and comprehensive response I have yet read in relation to current circumstances has been the open letter by the philosopher A.C.Grayling given to all MPs on 1 July. He urges MPs to re-consider on our behalf the fateful and irrevocable triggering of Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty, which is recommended reading too.

Furthermore, a referendum is a very expensive opinion poll of sentiment on one day and not even an accurate one at that, as only 72.2% of those eligible voted. The referendum result is said to be advisory and not legally binding, although some politicians appear to act as if it were. Ideally, it is the role or duty of MPs to represent their own considered views, taking into account the interests of all their constituents and not just of those who voted LEAVE or indeed REMAIN. There is therefore the hope, the faint and fading hope, that in what is still said to be a representative democracy MPs will read and heed Grayling’s eloquent letter and act upon it. Alternatively, they may simply follow the dictates of their own best judgements and work, through a Parliamentary majority, to preserve the UK and remain in the EU.

The UK Parliament may see sense and vote wisely on our behalf without descending into petty party politics, but it didn’t over Iraq and may not now over the United Kingdom’s continued membership of the European Union. Neither Parliament, British or European, has an admirable recent record, particularly as managers of crises. So, in my view, the ‘causes … of the current discontent’ are multifarious and go back a long time and the likely consequences are similarly extensive, multifaceted and almost certainly expensive.
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NEVERENDUM

You find a complex question
and you simplify it so.
You call a referendum
and you make it YES or NO.
You think of an addendum
and you name it IN or OUT.
You disunite the kingdom
and you think it’s worth a shout.
You hector the electorate,
you posture, lie, deceive,
till many in the plebiscite
can doubt what you believe.
Then you ask them in a ballot
to vote REMAIN or LEAVE
and you’re left with one agendum
and with grievances to grieve.

Giovanni Iamartino
Giovanni Iamartino is Professor of English at the University of Milan and President of the Italian Association for English Studies. He convenes the EA’s Anglo-Italian Relations Special Interest Group.

As convenor of the English Association’s Anglo-Italian Relations Special Interest Group and in my capacity as current President of the Associazione Italiana di Anglistica (AIA) – the Italian Association for English Studies – I cannot help voicing my disquiet for, and expressing my disappointment with, the result of the June 23rd referendum.

Disquiet is widespread among the 600+ members of AIA and most Italian academics whose teaching and research has long brought them to view British universities and colleagues as their principal partners. I am thinking of Erasmus exchanges (last semester I had one British student in my History of English class and two in my Middle English Literature class, but more importantly over 30 of the students in my Department spent 6 or 9 months in Britain); of double degrees set up by British and Italian universities; of my dream of a joint PhD programme in Anglo-Italian studies, etc. All of these are bound to change as a result of Brexit: at worst, to be discontinued; at best, to be part of the UK’s renegotiations with the European Union. As to research, things will probably be even more difficult: of course British Universities will be denied access to European funding, but I wonder whether EU-funded research groups will be allowed to co-opt British scholars: that would be really deleterious for us. Or, as one of my colleagues in Milan put it a few days ago, “shall we need a visa to go and read in the British Library?”

Disquiet and disappointment, I wrote. The latter feeling is particularly deep in somebody like me, as I have long made the (past and present) history of the relations between Britain and Italy the main topic of my research. It is not difficult at all to see how continuous and substantial has been the giving and the taking between our two
nations since the Middle Ages: from Chaucer travelling to Italy and bringing back home both trade agreements and literary models, to the Tudors’ embracing the Renaissance and welcoming Italian Protestant refugees; from the British vogue for the Italian Opera in the 18th century, to the Italian adoration of Lord Byron and the role played by the works of Shakespeare and the English Romantics in the renewal of the Italian literary tradition; from the nearly 2000 Italian loanwords adopted by the English language in the course of its history, to the present-day rage for the language and all things English in Italy. Our languages, our literatures, our ideas and ideals have a lot in common – despite some peculiarities, as it should be. And this is true of the UK and Italy, as much as of the UK and Europe in general. John Florio – the great master of languages, translator and lexicographer of Elizabethan England – could describe English as “a language that wyl do you good in England but passe Dover, it is worth nothing” (Florio *His Firste Fruites*, London 1578). Florio was no prophet, of course; nor were those who, later in history, could boast of Britain’s ‘Splendid Isolation’: those days have long gone by, and English and Englishness are worth a lot, exactly because the nation was able to get involved in international affairs and play a leading role worldwide.

In what I teach and research, my ultimate goal is to highlight what we – as Italians, as Englishmen, as Europeans – have in common and what distinguishes us: in a way, our common roots on the one hand, and the many and various fruits grown in the different types of soil on the other hand. When I tell my students about Anglo-Saxon England, I remind them that, when Charlemagne set up his Schola Palatina, he did not recruit qualified staff from Rome or Paris only, he also wanted Alcuin of York. As academics, we know that culture and knowledge have no boundaries, they never had and will never have. It is not a matter of leaving or remaining, it is a matter of being.

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**Ben Knights**

*Ben Knights is Professor Emeritus at Teeside University, and a Visiting Professor at University College London Institute of Education.*

Brexit ... what to say? and so little time to say it in. With all the usual reservations about the EU, this seems to me a terrifying step back into a kind of wanton ignorance and insularity. (My mood not improved by the experience of canvassing round Durham. Not that the whole debacle can be attributed to the post-industrial working class - the SUV* classes played their part as well. I note that ‘English’ has been locked in combat with *The Daily Mail* since at least 1919 when Ezra Pound wrote an excoriating piece about it!)

But about the subject. I do think that ‘English’ has always been hampered or constrained (as well as advantaged) by sharing a name with a nation and a language. It has frequently become the focus of beliefs (about heritage, and about language) of which Michael Gove is only a recent, if topical, example. All the more important, then, that we emphasise in every possible forum the cross-cultural and international scope of the subject and its curricula from if not the beginning at least since the 1920s. While I’m on my soapbox, I shall fly a flag for the necessary ‘cross-border’ work (political, intellectual, pedagogic) in the subject and across its larger family: between universities and schools – and between Literature, Language, and Creative Writing.

*SUVs: ‘Sports utility vehicles’ – also known as ‘Chelsea Tractors’. European Research Council*
Maria Socorro Suarez Lafuente

*Maria Suárez Lafuente is Professor of English in the Department of English Philology at the University of Oviedo.*

I must say that in the [Department of English Philology at Oviedo University](https://www.uniovi.es/en/)' we are flabbergasted by the Brexit. We never thought the Leave campaign would win in the end. It is not that we are afraid it will mean harder times for our students (white and college-educated) now in UK, unless the Brexit is implemented with laws hindering “foreigners” to work and live there. There will be, though, an important change in the next few years: the end of Erasmus Exchange students, which worked so well for the maturing and mutual understanding of young people, both in Oviedo and the many UK universities we have agreements with.

This said, what worries me right away is the immediate loss of prestige of our British friends in Asturias in the eyes of the population. They have been living here for ages, speak our language and help to enrich our region in many ways, and now there are voices that speak of them as being arrogant and not wanting refugees in their country while they bask in the sun here.

As a teacher of Contemporary British Literature there is something else that worries me. For the last decade or so, our students have been choosing Postcolonial Literature (which I also teach) as the subject for their MA and PhD theses. They find that more appealing than “wasp literature from the metropolis”. I have always tried to foment the close reading of UK writers, but I foresee that this is going to be even more difficult now. I will be able to tell you if this is so towards the end of next academic year.

Hermione Lee

*Professor Dame Hermione Lee is President of Wolfson College, Oxford, and Director of the Oxford Centre for Life Writing*

In my literary work, writing biography and critical books, I have had always had a great interest in writers who feel drawn to Europe and have spent much of their time there. For Elizabeth Bowen, there was always a pull between Ireland, England and the continent. For Willa Cather, Nebraskan novelist, the fascination of cultural interrelations between the New World and Eastern Europe, Spain, and France, was paramount. Edith Wharton, Gilded Age New Yorker, was passionate about English and Italian culture and spent most of her life in France, dedicating herself to the cause of France in the First World War. Virginia Woolf's Englishness was enriched by her interest in French art and fiction and Russian literature. Three of Penelope Fitzgerald's greatest novels were set in Russia, Germany and Italy. Currently I am writing the life of the playwright Tom Stoppard, whose early life was shaped by his wartime emigration.
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from Czechoslovakia to Singapore, India, and then to England. In all these very different writers, the crossing of borders, the exchange of cultures, and the value of intellectual openness and interconnections, has been of the utmost importance.

In my present job, as President of Wolfson College in Oxford, I am at the head of an international graduate college, with 600 students from all over the world, and a number of colleagues and Research Fellows from Europe. Wolfson was founded, by Isaiah Berlin, himself an immigrant to England from Eastern Europe, as an egalitarian, tolerant, liberal and open-minded institution dedicated to pluralism and the free exchange of ideas. I have lost count of the number of times, in the last few days, that my colleagues and students, many of whom have made their working lives as academics in this country, have referred to Wolfson as a ‘safe space’ in a country which has suddenly come to seem to them less welcoming than before. It is shameful that they should feel that that is the case.

Clare Lees

Clare Lees is Professor of Medieval Literature and History of the Language at King’s College, London

On June 23, I voted in South London and, a couple of hours later, flew to Dusseldorf, where the Modern Languages Association of America (MLA) was holding its first international Symposium on the subject of ‘Other Europes’. In Germany, I joined a by no means unusual international community committed to exploring the idea of Europe in its many manifestations; across time, place and discipline. I flew back three days later to London and to the momentous and unfolding implications of Brexit for the global and European discipline that is English Studies. On returning, my community, my world seemed diminished.

I am deeply grateful to the MLA and to our hosts in Dusseldorf for their welcome, their hospitality and for their commitment to the study of the Humanities without borders. Indeed, in the last several months, I have travelled to workshops in Paris and Copenhagen, to conferences in the US and Leeds as well as Germany, and to meetings in Bristol as well as Philadelphia. Ours is truly an international discipline, and an English Studies in the UK facing an uncertain and more precariously funded future will need to work hard to continue to participate in this world of shared knowledge, learning and teaching.

Mine is the perspective of an academic and a medievalist thoroughly aware of the European Research Council’s contribution to the research of my own discipline. If this research funding diminishes, the field will shrink accordingly. I worry far more, however, about our students, postgraduates and Early Career Academics, whose talent, potential and achievements anchor not only their future but ours. The 2017 conference on ‘English: Shared Futures’ seems an even more urgent opportunity to explore just what it is we now share.
It’s late on 3 July. I am listening to Radio 5 live, and the midnight news comes on. To my surprise, the first item mentions academics. The BBC is leading with a story, just released, about the intervention by Mishcon de Reya into the EU referendum result. This law firm is acting ‘on behalf of a group of businessmen and academics’ to establish that because the referendum is purely advisory, withdrawal must be activated by an Act of Parliament. Since a majority of MPs favours Remain, they could vote not to activate Article 50, and Brexit would fail. I go to the Daily Telegraph and the Guardian sites. Both have the story, and each describes the activators as anonymous. Days later, they are still called that. Nobody – including the BBC – has established who these ‘academics’ are (lawyers, probably; with a crowd of Vice-Chancellors worried about money, theirs’ and others’?) This is a telling reminder of the marginal place that academics occupy in British culture today: for the story died almost as soon as it appeared. By 6 July, the Times was reporting that Mishcon represented ‘up to 1000 clients’, unspecified. Nobody, really, is interested in us.

My own attempt to take part in the EU discussion was not exactly successful. I got into the audience of a debate between Remain and Leave that the BBC in Plymouth set up for local broadcast. I submitted a question that asked about young people (meaning students) in Europe in the case of Brexit; that was prescient, but not accepted. Scandalously, the producer chose to begin with a question about immigration, so that the true EU topic, free movement of people, was scarcely discussed. For two seconds I can be seen responding to an absurd remark by a Tory MP with a despairing facepalm. Others have tried to take part: one university friend wrote scathingly to a local MP who argued that we should all ‘work together’. Another wrote a fine piece on why Leave happened; I put it on Facebook, and it was read in four countries. This was all worthwhile, but the number of readers was tiny. Academics are marginal to public discussion, except when specialist topics arise: Chilcot yes, EU no.

As I write this, the Russell Group reports that it is ‘especially concerned by reports of increasing xenophobic incidents’ on campus, directed at students and staff. This must mean that academics’ 98 per cent support for Remain has been noticed, and that racist attacks are a consequence. The Times gives examples from Cambridge and Manchester. This is part of a widespread increase across the country since 24 June. Such aggressive self-legitimation is troubling, for it displays the over-confidence that a tiny referendum majority of 3.8 per cent has caused. My own view is that such a result is not decisive, and that Brexiter who assert ‘democratically’ that it must be accepted and even worked for, are mistaken. A significant amount of impartial and nuanced information was available in the House of Commons library, but it emerged online only if MPs and MEPs chose to use it. This source, Briefing Paper 07213, is self-described as ‘an unbiased document produced for MPs regardless of political affiliation or view on Europe’, but its contents never reached the electorate in any substantial way. (My thanks to Mark Fitzsimons for this.) I should very much like to see a legal challenge, not least to prevent any new Prime Minister using the absurdity of the royal prerogative to activate Article 50.
One Brexit academic who has plenty of opportunity to put his views forward is Frank Furedi, the sociologist who is now emeritus at Kent. He writes for the online journal *Spiked*, and in January argued persuasively against the practice of no-platforming in universities. That was the right kind of partisanship. But he gives academic Remainers no understanding. In recent months, he wrote on 7 June, ‘I have not encountered a single academic who has anything but contempt for the misguided fools planning to vote for Brexit’. This after lectures and debates in Amsterdam, Bratislava, Brussels, Budapest and London (O Lucky Man!). Furedi was once a Trotskyist, but describes himself now as a humanist. He is also an anecdotist. ‘At one of my talks a young English academic quietly pulled me aside and told me that she agreed with the views I had expressed. Her whispering confirmed my fear that, for a significant section of academia, supporting Brexit is the equivalent of committing a hate crime.’ Of course! One sees it every day . . . .

Writing after the result, Furedi is jubilant. This has been a ‘Revolt of the Others’, of the excluded, of those held in contempt by the system: ‘The referendum provided a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the others to revolt’ (30 June). I am including him here partly because he quotes from Disraeli’s 1845 novel *Sibyl; or, The Two Nations*: “Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who […] are ordered by different manners and are not governed by the same laws.” Today is similar but different: ‘The principal line of division now is one of culture’, between those who ‘affirm’ national sovereignty, and – this remark is astonishing – ‘those who embrace a cosmopolitan outlook that is self-consciously detached from Britain’s historic or traditional legacies.’ That, presumably, describes the academic Remainers.

I’ll do a little autobiography here, for I must be an academic Brexiter’s bad dream. I have been several times to Romania in recent years, and last year a book came out of that experience, edited with Daniela Rogobete from the University of Craiova; she is, among much else, Will Self’s translator. I have taught and spoken at conferences in Poland; I am on the editorial board of *Inquis*, a new online journal for post-graduate research in Turkey, and I have researched and taught in Spain. All these connections arose more or less by chance. I did not go out to ‘embrace a cosmopolitan outlook’; I do not think I could detach myself from Britain’s legacies if I wanted to: that would surely make researching English Literature a little difficult. English teaching and research today are unavoidably rooted in European legacies and contexts. Furedi’s peculiar fiction runs alongside his refusal to acknowledge that there is racism and xenophobia among some of the British working class.

At the moment I’m doing technical work on two books by John Rodden, the foremost US critic of George Orwell; he has an unrivalled knowledge of the way politically active literary intellectuals such as Lionel Trilling and Irving Howe were investigated by the FBI from the 1930s onwards, and of the persecution of academics and writers in Germany before and after the Second World War. Given Orwell’s importance to Rodden’s work, I was interested to find an apposite report in the *New York Times*, which sent a reporter to Wigan with Orwell’s *The Road to Wigan Pier* in mind (5 July). Under the heading ‘Anger, Loss and Class Resentments’, Andrew Higgins interviewed Labour voter Colin Hewlett, 61, whose income has fallen drastically, and who has been forced to move to insecure zero hours from a full-time contract: “It’s basically slave labor”, he says. Hewlett has suffered, and his vote for Brexit is a direct consequence. He believes that workers arriving from the former communist countries means employers
need no longer offer full-time contracts, or pay more than the minimum wage. Higgins gently points out that only 2.9 per cent of Wigan’s workers were born outside Britain, whilst the town’s 5 per cent unemployment is ‘slightly below the national level and half the rate in European countries that use the Euro’.

What is occurring here is ‘a working class of the mind’. This striking phrase comes from the authors of the recent British Social Attitudes report from the National Centre for Social Research. ‘Actual’ manual and routine workers are at 25 per cent, whilst 60 per cent regard themselves as working class. It was the persistence, or resurgence, of this inward self-identification that caused so many Labour people to vote for Brexit.

We are now talking about states of mind in a cultural situation. This is a familiar area for literary studies. Frank Furedi believes that if Freud were still around ‘he would diagnose their [high-cultural Remainers’] approach to the EU debate as a big displacement activity’: the political anxiety of these deplorable people is sublimated in their contempt for others. Remarkably, the same idea occurred to a more relevant commentator, the economist Paul Mason, who explains the current anger and backstabbing amongst Tory and Labour alike as ‘displacement behaviour for what they should be doing; which is governing the country and shaping a coherent negotiating pitch with Brussels’ (Guardian G2, 5 July). He starts from the Mishcon de Reya legal intervention and dismisses it as anti-democratic and dangerous. You should not ‘ditch democracy because you cannot persuade the other side’. I don’t accept that, of course, because the majority was too small and the campaign full of lies.

Mason, like Furedi, is a former Trotskyist; he now describes himself as a radical social democrat. From that experience he retains a valuable idea: ideology. This is a concept I first encountered as an undergraduate at Birmingham, and Stuart Hall’s teaching remains with me: Antonio Gramsci still matters. For Mason the success of Brexit was ideological. He knew they had won when he heard the Sheffield result: he studied there, it has two universities, and graduates have stayed in the city. ‘But in places like this, leave got into the mindspace of a middle class that we assumed would be endemically pro-EU. Brexit…achieved what…Gramsci called “ideological hegemony”.’ Material circumstances shaped a state of mind that became dominant. To say so puts us back in the seminar room. Academic thinking understands, but it does not influence. We must go on knowing our place.

Maria Nikolajeva and Morag Styles

Maria Nikolajeva and Morag Styles are Professor and Professor Emeritus respectively in the Faculty of Education in the University of Cambridge. They co-chair the English Association’s Children’s Literature Special Interest Group.

The decision for the UK to leave Europe has been a body blow for those of us who care about what children read and the discipline of English, as well as so much more besides. The Children’s Literature Special Interest Group within the English Association brings together writers, illustrators, scholars, teachers and promoters of children’s literature. One of our goals is to make sure that children in the UK have access to diverse literature of the highest quality, including, of course, European literature, and that the curriculum in schools and universities reflect the richness of international literature. In addition,
we strive to promote exchanges and collaborations with scholars and teachers across the world and our relationship with Europe has been particularly fertile in that respect. We fear that some of the progress we have made in these domains may be at risk post Brexit.

In their post-Brexit statements, UK universities' Vice-Chancellors promise that European employees and current students will not be affected by the UK leaving the European Union. This may sound reassuring but nobody can at this point guarantee any security for these categories of EU citizens and nobody has a full picture of the scope of consequences. Although universities will want to continue working harmoniously with their European employees and job security should not be at risk, unintended outcomes of this unfortunate decision could increase insecurity at all levels of the academic community. Whatever happens, European citizens in the UK will inevitably feel vulnerable and cautious. Some may decide to resign and return to their countries.

It is likely that European scholars will have less incentive to apply for jobs in the UK. In the field of children's literature, a vast generation change is imminent as several senior academics in the UK have recently retired or will be retiring in the coming few years. If the pool of applicants for their replacement is less attractive to European scholars (who are significant in the potential pool) of children’s literature, there is a possibility that the competition will be too tame to attract scholars capable of leading research in the international arena, and thereby attracting a sustainable body of students. There is a further risk that if the quality of applicants is not judged to be of first class calibre, the positions might be withdrawn, since children's literature has never been given priority in academic contexts and often has to fight to maintain its place in academic life, despite its popularity with students. Current European doctoral students who will be on the job market within a few years are more likely to go back to their countries rather than contribute to research in the UK. Visiting scholars from Europe who contribute so much to children's literature research communities may no longer feel so welcome. ERASMUS exchange programmes with the UK may also be at risk. Whatever the ultimate outcome, uncertainty will dog those bilateral and multilateral research projects that operate on EU research funding, for some time.

One of the prominent features of the successful masters course on children’s literature at the University of Cambridge (and many other such courses in the UK), that we are so proud of and emphasise in our publicity, is its international nature. At least half of our students come from overseas, many of them European. If they no longer feel welcome and do not apply, we will not merely lose income in tuition fees. We will lose diversity, we will lose the reading experience these students bring with them and we will lose the multiplicity of critical perspectives.

This also brings us to children's literature publishing and promotion. The proportion of translated children's books brought out by UK publishers has always been meagre, never going above 2%. This trend, however, was ever thus before Brexit. If the National Curriculum, in whatever form it develops, explicitly or implicitly (as it already does) discourages teachers from using international / European books in classrooms, British children will have less classroom exposure to some of the finest children's books: Emil and the Detectives, Pippi Longstocking, the Moomin books, The Neverending Story, Heidi; of books by Jostein Gaarder, Guus Kuijer and Timothee de Fombelle, not to mention dozens of outstanding picture books. Indeed some of the most exciting and
original published today are coming out of Europe. Some publishers, such as Pushkin Press, whose mission is to make the best European children's books available for British children, may have to give up.

We are deeply concerned about the Brexit decision as we are in danger of losing so many advantages of being part of the European Union. However, one of the few positive things to come out of the Brexit decision is the almost unanimous cry of horror and shame from the literary and educational community in Britain. There will be institutional glitches to follow, no doubt, as decades of legal connections are disentangled but we must fight to ensure that harmonious relationships among academics across Europe are maintained. It is also important to remember that most informed people in the UK value our links with the intellectual culture of our European partners, and treasure the academic, scientific, educational and social collaborations that have been forged. Let us add our voices most strongly to theirs and fight for our profound belief that we can be proud nationalists who also see ourselves as Europeans and internationalists.

Mario Petrucci

Mario Petrucci is a poet, broadcaster and freelance creative writing tutor. He is a Royal Literary Fund Fellow.

Whether people feel they're on the margins of language and its benefits, or on the fringes of collective/political action and its benefits, marginalisation (if it goes on for too long) will tend to reduce us all to oppositional words of few syllables. Yes. No. Leave. Remain. The Brexit 'debate' (which was very rarely - in what I heard in the public domain at least - any kind of real or generous conversation) should never have been allowed to become so simplistic, should never have been reduced to such limited language. Our language in moments of crisis betrays who we really are. The choice of language around Brexit spoke unintentional volumes. Eloquence is about words, true; but it's also about action. Europe and the UK have long been insufficiently wise in both. I say: let's now be careful, and generous, in what we say next - and do next. Also in how we say and do it, because the politics of language and the language of politics are ever entwined. Language is a form of action - and action has to it, at least in some ways, a kind of language.

Most reasonable people demand separation only when they feel profoundly excluded. Clearly, large swaths of people in the United Kingdom felt so, and had become angry that their experience and priorities had remained largely unspoken. It's interesting to note that even the term 'Brexit' explicitly fails to include Northern Ireland. There will always be some degree of bigotry and xenophobia in the UK, no doubt, as there is in all nations; but I simply refuse to believe that over half of the generally wonderful people I've met in this country are bigots and xenophobes. My refusal may itself oversimplify some aspects of reality; but clearly, with Brexit, there's culpability on both 'sides'. We conducted (mostly) a divisive debate with divided language in a divided nation, offering only divisive options. Now we're shocked at a divisive outcome! It's ironic that many are seeking appropriate language to express how they feel over the split from Europe, now taking their turn to feel angry and wronged. But all these separations had, in many
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ways, already gestated prior to the referendum. The referendum could give birth only to what had been conceived.

Meanwhile, language isn't just about speaking and expressing; it's also about listening. We know from gender studies (if nothing else) that there's usually a complex and ingrained history of power and prejudice behind who is and isn't heard. As a nation, as a Union, we failed to listen adequately to all. Moreover, we all know from experience that heatedly insisting on 'Yes-or-No' answers is often a risky way to conduct a conversation. I'm an inveterate European who lives for poetry, who works for the expansion and inclusion of language(s); but I have to accept that the option (and now apparent choice) of Brexit had (and still has) many sides to it. I hope we won't slide into another low syllable-count discourse centred on 'Right' and 'Wrong', on which side to blame. There was a collective journey to that single word 'Leave' that many of us must now more fully acknowledge. It could have been a journey of many universal words, of many possible meanings, a journey that might have led us to a more plural and unifying outcome. Instead, the nation was offered just two words, and we should never have been brought to that.

Stan Smith

Stan Smith is Professor Emeritus of Nottingham Trent University. He is a Trustee of the English Association.

It would be easy to demonise the Leave vote, and a temptation we have not always avoided. But we have to recognise that these are not all, or in the majority, fools, dupes and racists. They speak out of the communities we came from, in South Lancs and South Yorkshire and, though we have not asked, it seems likely, on the demographics of it, that most of the people in our communities back there will have voted for Leave, just as the vast majority of the communities in which we now live and move voted to remain. The stand-up comedian Russell Kane reported on Question Time that his working-class family in Essex almost to a person voted for Brexit, and these were not racist yobs but tradesmen and artisans, carpenters, plumbers, small builders, who felt that their whole world had been sidelined and dismissed by the Eurocentric, cosmopolitan elites who dominate the media and the public domain in general.

This is a large part of the problem. And it is not simply a question of young v. old, as would be evident if you'd seen the composition of our Labour Remain teams out on the streets of Nottingham. My younger son, whose lack of academic qualifications (and twenty years as a single parent bringing up two boys – one of whom got a place at Oxford) have obliged him to work with a series of zero hour contracts in working-class areas of Stafford, was almost the only Remainer among the people around him, mainly people below 40 and mostly in their late teens and twenties. He reported that he had grown sick of the number of conversations that began 'I'm not a racist, but...'. If more than the 36% of the young reported to have voted had actually done so, it's not clear that they would all have broken for Remain. Robert Graves used to like citing the economic strategy of the Channel Islands, based essentially on taking in each other's washing. I think that this is largely what our British and European (and North American) cultural elites have been doing for many years. We bear a considerable
responsibility for staying within our comfort zones and lazily assuming that our internationalist, metropolitan world-view is self-evidently correct and bound to be shared by those unenlightened ones in the sticks who have seen very little evidence of the advantages afforded by the European Union. The advantages are there, of course, but they are not evident in the same way to a steel worker in Scunthorpe as to an academic cruising the conference capitals of Europe. Margaret Thatcher was fond of quoting Chesterton's 'we are the people of England, that never have spoken yet.' Well, they have spoken now, and it is way beyond time that our political, cultural and intellectual elites sought to re-engage with them.

As to those relatively culturally privileged circles in which we move, in many senses I think we deserve what we have got. But then I think of my partner's Anglo-French niece, a highly regarded mid-career academic in international relations at a Russell Group university, who is deeply anxious for her future and that of many of her friends, and is now considering the option of dual nationality on the basis of her mother's English origin; and I think of my older son's Spanish partner, a young woman who has worked for 20 years in London and California in marketing and branding, who does not know what is going to happen to her, given Theresa May's assertion that the status of EU citizens working in the UK will have to be part of the negotiations with the EU. I think of my grand-daughters, soon to go to university, for whom Europe has always been simply a larger and familiar canvas on which to inscribe their destinies. I think, too, of all those personal as well as academic friendships we have built up over the years throughout Europe, friends and colleagues before whom I feel wholeheartedly ashamed for the narrow jingoism and little Englandism we have heard from Brexit politicians and advocates.

Jenny Stevens

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One of the Times Educational Supplement’s many post-Brexit tweets captured the bewildering political fall-out of the referendum result: 'So, to recap: no shadow education secretary. Education secretary likely to be rather busy with … other concerns in the near future.' As the internecine wrangling of Westminster grows increasingly involved and bloody, it might be tempting to take solace in the fact that the education reform agenda will have slipped down the list of political priorities. Yet while a holiday from governmental interference might have some appeal, not least in allowing for a much needed period of calm and consolidation, the economic and cultural consequences of the Vote Leave victory may well inflict further damage on an already over-worked and under-paid teaching profession.

The aftermath of the referendum could well include a range of related education issues being left in the ‘non-urgent’ part of the in-tray: teacher pay, ITT reform, uncertainties around school budgets – including the employment of EU teachers and trainees. This state of limbo can only serve to exacerbate existing recruitment strains. Certainly, the Leave vote is deeply regrettable at a time when even some of the least ‘challenging’ schools report difficulties in attracting well-qualified English graduates to posts -
sometimes filling vacancies with teachers holding degrees only in cognate subjects. It is only in recent years that the EA’s Transition Special Interest Group has had reason to contemplate the possible impact of the teacher recruitment crisis on A-level teaching and learning and its subsequent impact on undergraduates. There has for a long time been the assumption that teacher shortages are confined to subjects such as maths and physics, yet as application statistics reveal, English seems increasingly in danger of joining them.

It goes without saying that A-level English students deserve knowledgeable and committed subject specialists to teach them and that universities expect to receive new undergraduates who are well prepared for degree-level modules. This task of preparing students for university study became more onerous with the reform of English Literature GCSE back in 2014. With its emphasis on the ‘English literary heritage’ and texts from the British Isles, the new qualification is much further adrift from the international outlook of university English than its predecessor. Indeed, at the risk of sounding cynical, the reformed KS4 curriculum could be seen as Michael Gove’s attempt at bringing English into line with the Brexit mind-set: inward looking, narrowly traditional and entirely out of step with the diverse make up of many of today’s classrooms.

And what type of university experience can future English undergraduates look forward to in the coming years? With the potential loss of EU research funding, universities are now having to brace themselves for some financial belt-tightening and the inevitable impact that this will have on the student experience. There are already warnings that some MA courses might be rendered unviable without the steady recruitment of international students guaranteed in pre-referendum times, leading to a narrowing of choice and diversity in postgraduate study. While the teaching of English at degree level will doubtless continue to be resolutely global in its approach and outlook, it is yet to be seen how far the rich international make-up of current student and staff communities will be affected by the leave outcome. And, of course, the prospects for those young people who aspire to study in an EU country – a modest but increasing number since the recent tuition fee rises – would seem to be very much less rosy than they were just a few weeks ago, with fees likely to rise to match international student rates.

Yet while prospects might appear quite bleak, we should take heart from the fact that around three-quarters of the under-25s voted to remain part of a connected Europe. I write as someone who has benefited from over forty years of EU citizenship and who has taught students in France, Italy and the USA; I have also taught in Hackney and Wolverhampton: two places that might be taken to represent opposing sides of the referendum debate. But for all the differences between these places, and the specific challenges and demands that each one brought with it, they all held in common a receptiveness to the pleasures of our subject. English classrooms have long been spaces dedicated to expanding horizons and inspiring a desire to engage with ways of being, thinking, feeling and living that might not be ‘ours’. In these disquieting times, it is vital that they remain so.
The June 23rd Referendum outcome has prompted considerable unease among members of the Association of Adaptation Studies (AAS). Our field of study is defined in a broader and more plural fashion than that suggested by the politics of Brexit. The texts with which we engage and the theories we use and create are both European and Global. Adaptation by definition crosses boundaries - of medium, of language, of nationality – and it is this diversity that enriches our subject. We are also notable for the international breadth of our membership, comprised of scholars from around the world and especially around Europe. AAS has held conferences in The Netherlands, Germany and Sweden and we look forward to future events across the continent with our friends and partners, and to welcoming them to the United Kingdom.

Greg Walker
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In the omnishambles following the referendum result, it is unlikely that the impact of Brexit on the study of English Literature will be generating too many column inches in the daily press. But that impact is likely to be substantial none the less, and deeply troubling for those of us it affects directly. The long-term loss of EU research funding is, of course, likely to have significant consequences for university finances, and hence for the terms and conditions under which all academics, support staff, and students in English departments work, whether or not they are the direct recipients of EU grants. That the links with European funding will be severed at precisely the point when the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the principal funder of research in English in the UK, seemed to be gaining traction with the European funding bodies in building Arts and Humanities research into their various calls and schemes, is doubly frustrating. But just as important, at least in the short term, will be the less tangible impacts of Brexit for scholars and scholarship in English. English as a discipline plays a substantial and enthusiastic role in the European community of Letters, both collectively through its formal involvement in Europe-wide bodies such as ESSE and IAUPE,* and less formally through the many collaborations, networks, and regular conferences that form such a valuable, enriching part of most of our working lives. These collaborations, and the projects, friendships, and conversations that they generate are too valuable to be allowed to lapse. We would all be the poorer if the Brexit vote were allowed to place even minor barriers in their way. Other means have to be found to facilitate these events and contacts, and the national funding bodies will need to explore them as a matter of urgency.

In the days following the referendum result, many Vice-Chancellors have made reassuring statements about its likely consequences, and, so far as they are able, about the status of EU nationals among the staff and students in their universities. Such statements have been very welcome, as have the accompanying re-assertions of the internationalist outlook that is fundamental to the very idea of a university. But it is
still a cause for acute concern when colleagues who have worked in English Departments - and across our universities - for decades in many cases, are suddenly anxious for their futures, and made to feel strangers in their own academic homes. If the referendum was indeed, as the shrill voices urging an 'out' vote repeatedly asserted, an opportunity for us all to take back control of our destinies, it is just as surely a moment for those of us working in English Studies to seize the initiative and speak up for our core principles, to stress the value that our international colleagues bring to research and teaching in English, and to make clear how much we value them, both collectively and as individuals. These are troubled and troubling times, and the capacity to analyse texts, language, and culture critically and with sensitivity has never been more necessary.


Jeff Wallace

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“…I am English, and my Englishness is my very vision.” Little might D.H. Lawrence have guessed that this passing statement in a letter of 1915 should be elevated, for example by F.R. Leavis, to the status of a definition of his aesthetic. Yet it is some time now since Tony Pinkney (1990) showed how far this selective quotation actually falsified the letter and its context. Lawrence had continued: “But now I must go blind rather than commit the vast wickedness of acquiescence.” Lawrence married a German woman, and spent a lifetime of restless repudiation of that Englishness, including extended travel in Europe (mainly Italy and Germany) and “far-flung intercontinental pilgrimages” (Pinkney).

Since the EU referendum of 23rd June 2016, the meaning of the various UK national identities has been thrown into sharp focus. Let us acknowledge that the vote was to leave the entity known as the European Union rather than to relinquish Britain’s European identity and connections. Yet let us also acknowledge that the Leave campaign actively misled and lied to the very people it claimed to speak for, and that much of the campaign was conducted in a way that fostered a small-minded, closed and intolerant conception of national identity.

Learned societies such as the English Association or the British Association for Modernist Studies (BAMS) are now obliged to reassess and reinvigorate what “English” and “British” mean for them. Many colleagues within the English Association will surely wish to insist upon the richly impure and polyglot nature, both of the language that came to be known as “English”, and of the directions it is taking in a diverse multi-cultural society (the United Kingdom) and in a globalised world. Perhaps we would also want to say that the true focus of the Association’s concerns, across the educational spectrum, is excellence in language, and that “English” just happens to be the language in question.
I want to suggest that this is a moment, not only to defend such positions, but also actively to contest the merest hints of insularity, and to pursue new commitments to European communal identity. The English Association itself might work to affirm and to develop its affiliations with partner organisations in all European countries. As purveyors of the discipline of English, we might all as individuals similarly work to cultivate all possible connections with our European counterparts. At the levels of syllabus and curriculum, we might be less afraid of literature in translation, in order to establish as “natural” a place for the study of European literatures in English as, for example, post-colonial literatures in English, or English literature itself. Has, in fact, the great combined cultural and political failure since 1975 been the failure to make Europe visible within the UK, and English as a constituent part of it? (Imagine a long established, primetime, mainstream TV programme giving daily news from the European Union and Britain’s part within it: might a referendum rooted in misinformation ever have seen the light of day?). This is surely a moment for those of us in the discipline of English to be able to propose: “I am European, and my Europeanness is my very vision.”