English Studies in Switzerland

Balz Engler

The ties between what was to become Switzerland and England were first forged during and after the reformation, because of the role of Calvin's Geneva, and especially because Switzerland served English refugees from the Marian restoration as a haven. At the end of the eighteenth century the country became popular with tourists, among them writers like the Wordsworths, Byron, the Shelleys, and later Ruskin, for the sublimity of its Alpine scenery and what seemed to be left of an authentically pastoral society (Wraight 1987); it was in this context, serving visitors, that the Swiss, no matter whether their mother tongue was German, French, Italian or Rumansh, acquired their first smatterings of English. Conversely, anglophile *hommes de lettres* played an important role in familiarizing Continental audiences with English culture: Beat de Muralt's *Lettres sur les Anglais et les Français* (1725), published in Geneva, began the Anglophile trend on the continent; Johann Jakob Bodmer und Johann Jakob Breitinger in early eighteenth-century Zurich promoted English literature in the German-speaking world; in Geneva Marc-Auguste und Charles Pictet edited the journal *Bibliothèque britannique* (1796-1815).

Because of the small size of the country and its multilingual character, the attitude of its inhabitants has been marked both by a stubborn insistence on its distinctiveness, and a strong awareness of how important it is to adapt to others. This has certainly helped the study of foreign languages.

Writing the history of English studies in Switzerland presents problems for several reasons. Education, also higher education with the exception of the technical sciences, has always been considered to be a matter of the cantons making up the federation—among them nine with their own universities and their respective academic traditions.[1] In what is, after all, a small country, there is, to this day, no national Ministry of Education that can lay down generally binding guidelines, even though the federation wields increasing influence coordinating and subsidizing cantonal academic institutions. Moreover, the academic cultures of neighbouring countries play a considerable role in the various language areas, especially in German-speaking Switzerland, which has always

formed a single market with Germany and Austria where the appointment of teaching staff is concerned. To give just one example: In the German-speaking part of the country *Habilitation* is required for a professorship; in the French-speaking part it does not exist.

A brief overview must then remain problematic.[2] Histories of a discipline, under these circumstances, may easily be reduced to syntactically linked lists of persons and places and their merits. Instead I shall try to sketch a history of trends, being fully aware that it must remain incomplete, and that its basis is somewhat shaky; a great deal of work remains to be done in the archives of individual universities. Under the circumstances the following account can pay less attention to institutions, junior positions, curricula, research, individual achievement, and student bodies than they would deserve.

The academic study of English in Switzerland started early, in the mid-nineteenth century. In the heady days after 1848, when the Swiss federal state was founded, there were also attempts to reform higher education, among them the establishment of a national university. Due to the resistance of the cantons, who feared competition for their own universities, this attempt was only partly successful. In 1855 the federal polytechnic opened in Zurich (later to be renamed Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule, ETH), defined by its founders as a "federal polytechnical school in association with a school for the advanced study of the exact, political and humanistic sciences". (ETHistory 1855-2005) Not surprisingly, it was here, in the fervour of educational reform, that the first continuous professorship in English was created, not only in Switzerland, but in the German-speaking world (Haenicke 1981: 5). It was held by the German refugee Hermann Behn-Eschenburg from 1855 to 1873. He mainly lectured on classical authors like Shakespeare, Milton, and Byron, and on English history; his publications, on the other hand, predominantly served English instruction in high schools. He also taught at Zurich University; in the progressive spirit that characterized Switzerland in the second half of the nineteenth century, it was there that the first doctorate on an English topic was granted to a woman in the German-speaking world.[3]

Two factors in particular shaped the early history of the discipline: the need for language competence and the *bourgeois* interest in *belles lettres*. From the beginning the practical aspects of teaching the language played a role in most universities—as international trade with English-speaking countries was increasing, the economy needed people who could do business in English, and therefore also teachers who could

instruct them. When in 1885 a 'Germanisch-Romanisches Seminar' was founded at Basel University, for example, it was with the express purpose of promoting both research and the training of language teachers. The role of language competence is also documented by the early employment of native speakers as *Lektoren,* i.e. essentially language teachers (Fribourg 1903, Neuchâtel 1907, Basel 1912, Berne 1917), and by the fact that much (today all) teaching in all the English departments has always been done in English.[4]

On the other hand, the literary interests of the *bourgeoisie* in the cities supporting the cantonal universities were quite influential. Often it was not scholarly achievement that seemed to be in demand in the first place, but elegance of expression and projection in public speaking.

The process of how the subject developed may best be viewed as one of steady, if often precarious growth and branching out, tree-like, into various specialties, much depending on where the development had begun. In the early days, English was just one, and usually a minor part, of the teaching brief of a professor in what tended to be called philology. In 1880 Alexandre Maurer started to teach German, Russian and English at Lausanne; in 1888 Eduard Müller-Hess was given an *Extraordinariat* at Berne in oriental languages and English philology. In 1894 the professor of palaeography in Fribourg also taught a course on English literature (Mortimer 1991). And still in the second half of the century, it was possible in Lausanne, for a professor, Ernest Giddey, to start off as the head of the Ecole de français moderne, from 1956 to 1969, before being appointed Professor of English literature.

But conditions were different in different parts of the country (the Italian-speaking part of the country has only had its own university since 1997). In the German-speaking part, at the universities of Basel, Berne, and Zurich, which followed the German model, English established itself in the protective shade of Germanic philology with its emphasis on the historical study of language. In the *Suisse romande,* on the other hand, the universities had developed from *académies,* institutions that had mainly served the training of protestant clergy.[5] In Neuchâtel 'it seems that the academy was taking advantage of the presence of chaplains sent to the local English church by the "Colonial and Continental Society"' (Zimmermann 1983: 192).

English was, until after the First World War, the second foreign language after German or French in the respective parts of the country; then, however, as elsewhere in Europe, English established itself as a core subject. The first university professorships in English were created

in 1890 in Berne, 1891 in Zurich (chair 1901), 1900 in Basel, 1903 at the bilingual French-German Catholic university of Fribourg.[6] In the *Suisse romande* the first chairs were created in 1907 in Neuchâtel; and in 1920 in both Geneva and Lausanne English and German were finally assigned to separate chairs.

In the early days, most of the professors of English were either local or German in the German-speaking universities; the first native speakers to be appointed were Henry Cullimore in Fribourg (1903) and John Albert Swallow in Neuchâtel (1907). In the fifty years leading up to 1980 their majority was actually Swiss, and they would move between universities: from St. Gallen to Geneva (Hans Häusermann, 1939), from Geneva to St. Gallen (Raymond Tschumi, 1957), or from St. Gallen via Berne to Basel (Rudolf Stamm, 1956; 1959), from Geneva to Neuchâtel (Georges-Denis Zimmermann, 1972). Increasingly, however, native speakers were in demand, and by the end of the century, they were represented in all Swiss universities; in Geneva all professors were either British or American.[7]

But to return to the image of the tree. Once chairs of English had been created, branching out could begin, first by separating modern literature from linguistics (which was largely historical linguistics) and medieval literature. Due to the different circumstances in different places this took place at different times and with different focuses (the dates are those of new full professorships in historical linguistics and/or medieval literature): in Basel 1925, in Berne 1926, in Zürich 1927, in Lausanne 1971, in Geneva 1965, in Neuchâtel 1991 (Fischer 1993). Further divisions and specialisations became possible with the creation of new professorships, due to developments in the field and the rising number of students: between English, American, and what was variously called Commonwealth, emerging, or post-colonial literature, on the one hand; on the other, between medieval literature, diachronic and synchronic linguistics.[8] The great tradition of philology, the historical study of language, has gradually made room for a stronger emphasis on medieval literary studies, in Geneva (1965), Lausanne (1971), Berne (1985), but it is still pursued in Zurich; in Basel, under the pressure of cuts, historical linguistics even had to be abandoned. These specialisations, especially where they went beyond the rough distinctions suggested here, were sometimes due not to any grand strategies, but to the interests of individual professors, who continued to play an important role in defining university policies well into the 1990s: Thus Berne had

a focus on Black American and Australian literature, Basel on the South Pacific and Native America.

In the absence of explicit national policies in higher education informal collaboration among English departments was all the more important. In 1936 the series *Schweizer anglistische Arbeiten,* publishing doctoral dissertations, was founded by representatives of the universities of Basel, Berne and Zurich; by 2005 volume 129 had been published. In 1956, however, Basel opted out, and started to publish its own series, the *Cooper Monographs,* now the *International Cooper Series in English Language and Literature.*

In 1947 SAUTE, the Swiss Association of University Teachers of English, was founded.[9] It was among the founding members of the Swiss Academy of the Humanities and Social Sciences, and joined ESSE in 1991. SAUTE has consistently promoted closer collaboration between Swiss departments of English. In the 1980s it decided that the introductory courses at the various universities, which pursued the same aims but were often different in structure, should be recognised at all Swiss institutions, a decision that made student mobility considerably easier. However, the introduction of the Bologna system, with its formal assignment of credit points, has now made things more difficult again.

Since 1981 SAUTE has organised biennial conferences, which take place, according to a strictly kept order, at the various universities. Their topics try to accommodate the interests of scholars in literature, linguistics, and, more recently, in cultural studies, which has proved to be an increasingly difficult task. Selected papers from these international conferences become part of the association's annual publication *SPELL (Swiss Publications in English Language and Literature).*[10] Es website is the one most frequently consulted among those of scholarly Swiss associations in the humanities (<http://www.saute.ch/>), for reasons which probably have more to do with cuisine than with scholarly interest.

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Notes

1 In alphabetical order of their location: Basel, Berne, Fribourg, Geneva, Lausanne, Neuchâtel, St. Gallen, Lugano, Zurich.

2 When I wrote, in the introduction to the first volume of *European English Studies,* that 'there is no national history of the discipline' (Engler 2000: ii) in Switzerland, there were good reasons for such a statement.

3 Helene von Druskowitz on Byron's *Don Juan* (1878).

4 It also led to a particular interest in phonetics and intonation, and contributed to the achievement of Maria Schubiger (1902-1986), who taught in several universities.

5 Interestingly, one of the early commentaries an Pope was published by a theologian from Lausanne, Jean-Pierre Crousaz, in 1737, 'Examen de l'essai de M. Pope sur l'homme' (and translated by Dr. Johnson in 1742), Zimmermann 1983: 194.

6 The first woman to be appointed to a full professorship was Margaret Bridges (Berne, 1985). Before her Claire-Eliane Engel acted as a professor in Neuchâtel (1943-45); Britta Charleston had been an *Extraordinaria* in Berne (1964-78).

7 There has been a shift in policy again, with the appointment of Lukas Erne in Geneva and Jürg Schwyter in Lausanne.

8 This sometimes led to adventurous combinations. In 1981 a chair in American and Commonwealth literature was created at Basel University.

9 Among its founders was Heinrich Straumann (1902-1991), professor of English at Zurich University, who insisted that its statutes should not cover more than one typed page—in a pragmatic spirit that is still alive in the association.

10 In 1978 the Swiss Association for North-American Studies was founded, which brought together students of literature and history in the name of area studies.

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