
The Evaluation of Research

In October 2008 the Italian National University Council (CUN, Consiglio Universitario Nazionale) requested all scholarly societies in the humanities to express their views on the evaluation of research. The paper below, produced by the Board of ALA (Associazione Italiana di Anglistica) outlining ALA's position and circulated to all its members, was also signed by Compalit (Associazione per lo Studio della Teoria e Storia Comparata della Letteratura), by AIS (Associazione Italiana degli Slavisti) and by SUSLFF (Società Italiana per gli Studi di Lingua e di Letteratura Francese).

The Research Dimension in Evaluation

As we start it needs to be remembered that the evaluation of research products is just *one* dimension of evaluation. Other dimensions include teaching and the contribution made to the discipline in the form of participation in *colloquia* and conferences, preparation of academic events etc. It is to be hoped that, in deciding the criteria for the evaluation of products, those factors are not sidelined which can prove useful in tracing the continuous professional development of scholars in relation to the scientific community they belong to and thus *in relation to* the growth of their own students, considered as people and not, in the words of one university President, as “credit crunching machines”.¹

The Product Collocation Scenario

This is how we choose to call the listing of the journals and the sources of publication held to be qualifying in each disciplinary sector. There exist classifications of journals, such as ERIH (European Reference Index for the Humanities), which we do not consider, at least in their current form, to be particularly valid/useful. The members of the ERIH panels themselves point out that the classification is *not* aimed at providing instruments to evaluate research projects, or the research products by the individual researcher. Indeed it is important to emphasise that the ERIH criteria of distribution and circulation, which place any journal in a language other than English in category “B” or “C”, automatically create an imbalance (not to say a distortion) in favour of English which is not necessarily to be shared

by all.² Although its promoters tend to say that the classification does not have an evaluative function, it has inevitably led to category “C” taking on a negative valence as the “recipient” of everything which has not been placed in the “higher” categories.³ The *panels* responsible for the ERIH classification then argue that the merit of each contribution is totally unconnected to the categories where the journal is “placed”: every category can host contributions whose intrinsic value is highly diverse. This is one of the many reasons why the classification has given rise to considerable criticism from researchers working in the humanities,⁴ one cogent example being the finely documented and caustic article published in *Le Monde Diplomatique* (December 2008, p. 32).

There are a wide range of possible publishing venues for the products of disciplines included in English Studies in Italy:

- a) journals/series of Department volumes (or former Institutes, now Departments);
- b) journals/volume series published in Italy (in Italian, which are also published in English);
- c) journals/series of volumes published in Italy, only in English;
- d) journals/ volume series of Italian University (English) Departments published abroad;
- e) international journals/series published outside Italy in English;
- f) international journals/series published outside Italy in a foreign language other than English;
- g) journals/series published online.

Any exhaustive and detailed “picture” of all the available journals, series and publishers may in

a sense seem a paradox. The world of publishing is dynamic and constantly changing, making any attempt to “freeze” every source of publication in a set position or category not only difficult to achieve but above all pointless:

a) there are journals and/or series which appear locally and then grow rapidly in terms of quality, selectivity and prestige;

b) well-known international publishers are regularly involved in takeovers, mergers or the launching of new series – Pergamon is a case in point, rapidly entering and then leaving the market;

c) there is a network of large and small publishers in Italy which require protection (these days there are frequent press reports of their going out of business), so as to avoid the tradition of scientific publication in Italian being simply annihilated by the hegemony of English-language publishers;

d) finally (or rather above all) there is, and it is expressly emphasised here, the prestige and originality of the single product which for various reasons is published in Italian and at a local level, but this should detract *nothing* from its worth. Giving way weakly before criteria which at all costs reward international publication compromises or prejudices in every sense the value of the single research product. No evaluation board can, in the end, shirk the responsibility of evaluating the individual piece of work as a contribution to the construction of knowledge, independently of the language or of the kind of publication in which it appears. The history of science itself reveals how the strictest parameters can be spoiled or obscured by human actions in which straightforward common sense would have rendered judgment simpler and clearer. The history of the invention of the telephone is a good example, with its recent attribution to the Italian Meucci after decades of legal battles which had long favoured the American Graham Bell.

It seems quite dangerous for the future of publishing, as we have noted above, to squeeze out the so-called minor journals (minor in terms of circulation, subscriptions etc.) to prop up a market which broadly speaking favours English language journals. Further, the current debate,

even in its most heated moments, unanimously claims that the worth of the single contribution is *not* indissolubly linked to its venue, and rather has stressed that in the construction of knowledge it is not unusual for the more radically innovative work to appear in publications which are not mainstream (cf. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, cit.).

There are 2,200 sources of publication mentioned in the *Bibliographie Linguistique*⁵ – and linguistics is just one of the many research domains covered by English Studies in Italy. In the light of what has been stated so far, it would seem unwise to produce a selection or a classification of the publishing scenario for English Studies in Italy – or other non English-speaking countries. Researchers in the field of English Studies in these countries typically operate in a wide variety of academic contexts and scholars are often under pressure from the start of their university career not just to publish in English, but also to constantly try and improve the quality of the English language journals produced “at home”, to make them competitive internationally.

If, then, each evaluation board takes due account of the value of internationally recognised indicators such as the ISBN of a volume or series or the ISSN of a journal, of its refereeing policy and of its international editorial board etc., this does not release it from the obligation of *reading* – reading also work that is published in “local” journals which do not have an international refereeing apparatus – and of expressing an evaluation. In this regard we feel that the debate on *refereeing* needs to be mentioned, nor can we ignore the comments raised over the role of international journals as *gatekeepers*.⁶ The English language is undoubtedly an instrument which provides visibility, yet visibility, and the power connected with it, is no unquestioned guarantee of primacy in the construction of knowledge: judgment on the individual product cannot give such misleading weight to its place of publication. Brilliant Ph.D students and young researchers, in the haste imposed by job application deadlines and national selection procedures, have published with local publishers, “gifting” them

products which would have merited publication, but at the cost of a long waiting list, in international publications.

Within English Studies, for over a decade there has been a lively debate over the criteria which give centrality to knowledge, leading to marginalisation and nearly silencing great scientific traditions. Publication in English involves adopting English models and patterns of scientific writing - this interweaving or the Gordian knot of language, knowledge and power has been widely studied and debated.⁷

Italian writing on English Studies in Italy is well-placed internationally. Perhaps, as well as being the rigorous custodian of the standards of their own journals and series, we should also, together with other foreign language and literature scholars and with academics in Italian Studies, support Italian sources of publication and journals both in Italian and in other European languages. A ranking system mainly based on quantitative parameters will likely place them in the “waste paper basket” of category “C”, no matter their worth.

Bibliometric Criteria

It is worth pointing out that the criteria used in bibliometric evaluation are currently being critically revised by their very proponents in the quantitative disciplines. The following are useful reading: the report by R. Adler, J. Ewing, P. Taylor of the Joint Committee on Quantitative Assessment of Research, entitled *Citation Statistics. A Report from the International Mathematical Union (IMU) in cooperation with the International Council of Industrial and Applied Mathematics (ICIAM) and the Institute of Mathematical Statistics (IMS)*, published on 6/11/2008, <<http://www.mathunion.org/fileadmin/IMU/Report/CitationStatistics.pdf>>; the motion unanimously approved by the Scientific Committee of UMI (*Unione Matematica Italiana*) on 22/11/ 2008; the “revisionist” contribution on the notion of IF in N. Adler and A.-Wil Harzing, “When knowledge wins: Transcending the sense and nonsense of academic rankings” (Academy of Management Learning & Education, 8/1, New York, 2008). From the works *supra* and the numerous documents

which have recently been circulating it is clear that bibliometric criteria are:

- a) difficult to use in an appropriate way;⁸
- b) far from being completely reliable.⁹

It is worth noting that the Humanities Committee of the European Science Foundation has stated unequivocally that these criteria are *not* suited to knowledge in the humanities.¹⁰

The limitations of the bibliometric approach to evaluation should be highlighted, above all in the humanities, to reduce the risk of hasty consensus, already lingering in the air: in several Faculties, humanities scholars have been put under pressure by statisticians and more generally quantitative disciplines to espouse bibliometric parameters and apply them to their own work.

It would therefore be useful for colleagues in these areas to read the argumentation of the major world exponents in their respective disciplines, before brandishing bibliometrics as a useful sword with which to adjudicate the sharing out of research funding.

Additional Observations

I

Objective criteria are already used by university evaluation bodies in order to share out the funds made available by the central government fairly and in a principled fashion. Whatever the future of that funding, it must be noted that the “weighting” of the very same typology of research product is still determined locally, making the overall picture appear somewhat fragmented. If the *contribution to the construction of knowledge* and its *critical sharing* in the scientific community counted more than the notion of product, it might appear somewhat incongruous, for example, that some institutions hardly consider the following:

- a) review essays, where authors deploy knowledge developed over years of research work in their critical reading;
- b) theoretical and methodological notes to translations, both literary and domain-specific;
- c) the editing of proceedings and anthologies, giving visibility to contributions which through painstaking editorial care are made to converge

on important and innovative themes, sometimes opening up new methodological and/or interdisciplinary horizons. In some Departments, editorial work is not even eligible for evaluation: contributions to an edited anthology are awarded points, while the labour of the editor is rewarded with zero points!

d) online materials, often just as valid and more up to date than printed material, especially when they have eISBN and eISSN codes.

II

In some universities there are byzantine bureaucratic procedures which need to be overhauled. It might not be untoward to suggest that the Ministry of Simplification (Ministero della Semplificazione, sic!) could well take an active role within our University or Department regulations. For example, in several universities entertaining invited speakers, even for a plain meal, can only be done at one's own expense. Such conviviality can prove highly productive in terms of research, where the interpersonal dimension has a positive valence and on many occasions has led to the opening up of valuable international projects – but no, you either tell your guest to go and eat alone, or you turn your home into a dinner club for the whole department (don't Italian women academics know, visiting lecturers mean cleaning up your kitchen at one in the morning...). Still on the subject of unnecessary complications, publishing abroad can often involve multiple gatekeeping processes. Thus internationalisation may not be so much an intercultural process, but rather the fruit of great patience and negotiation with resistant practices which smack of provincial narrow-mindedness.

Conclusions

Where evaluation means the overall estimation/assessment of the research trajectory, from **PROJECT** to **PROCESS** to **PRODUCT**, it is important to point out that quality is not the “automatic” consequence of setting up evaluation filters:

- researchers should be guaranteed greater freedom of movement and the possibility of more streamlined administrative management of research funds;

- the refereeing of single products should always respond to minimum standards of transparency as regards, for example, the publication *a posteriori* of the composition of the evaluation committees;

- refereeing procedures need to develop into a supportive practice beyond mere gatekeeping, aiming as far as possible to provide valuable suggestions / comments;

- the evaluation of products in the humanities, while keeping to objective criteria, cannot uncritically and naively espouse bibliometric parameters currently being debated in the areas of the so-called “hard” sciences, and in any case must only be handled by committees of experts in the field;

- any kind of *ranking* of publications, far from depending only on “diffusion”, must also safeguard linguistic and cultural identity, and the great traditions of knowledge. These traditions depend on publishing, both in print and online, which is either supported through local academic funding (departments) with or without subsidies from external bodies (local government, Foundations etc.), or through market activities, in the form of subscriptions and national / international distribution and sale. The provenance of the published material might be comparatively local, yet it might well make an important contribution to scientific debate in its widest sense.

- the culture of evaluation must gain consistency and credibility through collective monitoring and *peer-reviewing*, operated by academic societies/communities and starting from their respective bibliographies. Annual monitoring of journals and volume series divided into two main typologies, namely those supported through local academic funding and those “on the market”, and considering the two categories as rigorously parallel, will help construct an increasingly accurate perception of the quality of publications, including journals and series which appear to be local but which in actual fact occupy positions of prestige in their discipline. This procedure is detached from mechanistic parameters which distort the reality through pre-constituted judgments. In this way the critical issue is avoided of a *ranking* system which is excessively linked to quantitative criteria such as circulation and distribution. Evaluation will start promoting more varied criteria, identifying for example Department journals and series

through tools such as international boards, which are no less deserving of appreciation than “marketed” journals with a large circulation. Since we presume that the two typologies cannot be kept totally separate, this procedure will also usefully highlight the dependency of the humanities on funding from academic/cultural bodies which, unlike other research areas, cannot attract businesses or corporations interested in exploiting trademarks and patents. Finally, by developing finer evaluation parameters within each discipline, it is possible to assess the typology of publications specific to our discipline (including edited volumes, critical review essays etc.) far more accurately than is currently done in individual departments.

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NOTES

1. Report by G. Trombetti, CUN Conference “Università e sistema paese”, Rome, 18-19 June 2008.
2. Amazingly, a number of “foundation” journals for English studies are missing from the on-line list (available at <<http://www.esf.org/research-areas/humanities.html>>). Two conspicuous omissions are the *Review of English Studies* and *Notes and Queries*, both published by Oxford University Press and included in library catalogues worldwide. This obviously contradicts the “diffusion” principle inspiring the classification.
3. See the handout, paper on “The Classification of Publications” presented by H. van Riemsdijk (Member, linguistics panel, ESF/ERIH) at the International Conference “Evaluation in the Humanities: Towards a Common European Policy”, Univ. of Bologna, 12-13 December 2008: “It is desirable, but difficult, to establish the C-category as high-quality, as a positive qualification, and not as an ‘any other’ category with low prestige”.
4. See <<http://evaluation.hypotheses.org/102>>, notably methodological arguments raised by O. Boulnois (Director, Research Laboratory on Monotheism, EPHE/CNRS) in “Entre rire et larmes. L’évaluation automatisée en sciences humaines”, publ. on 22 October 2008. Also P. Riley (Crapel-Atilf-CNRS, Université de Nancy), “Bibliométrie, ethos et discours universitaires: répercussions sociales d’une pratique d’évaluation professionnelle”, paper presented at the Conference on “Les discours universitaires”, Brussels, 24-26 April 2008, now in *AIA Newsletter* 53, December 2008.
5. For this as well as other very useful data, and cogent arguments on the consequences of *ranking* of journals, see B.D. Joseph, “Evaluation of Journals: An Editor’s Perspective”, paper presented at the Bologna Conference, cit.
6. See A. Figa’-Talamanca, “L’Impact Factor nella valutazione della ricerca e nello sviluppo dell’editoria scientifica”, IV Seminario Sistema Informativo Nazionale per la Matematica, Lecce, 2 October 2000, namely the sections on “Gli effetti dell’IF sull’editoria scientifica”; “Gli effetti negativi dell’IF sulla comunicazione scientifica”.
7. The literature on the effects of English monolingualism is simply vast. See A. Duszak, *Culture and Styles of Academic Discourse*, Berlin, 1997; A.S. Canagarajah, *A Geopolitics of Academic Writing*, Pittsburgh, 2002; G. Cortese & P. Riley (eds.), *Domain-specific English*, Bern, 2002, and, *inter alia*, what Italian scientists had to say, in G. Cortese (ed.), *Tradurre i linguaggi settoriali*, Torino, 1996.
8. Difficulties in handling the IF adequately, in ranking journals and even more so individual contributions to journals, amply illustrated in Figa’-Talamanca, cit., are closely and critically scrutinized in D.A. Pendlebury, *White Paper. Using Bibliometrics in Evaluating Research* (Research department, Thomson-Reuters, 2008). These, and other expert opinions, highlight the inevitable subjectivity and the risk of data manipulation.
9. See note 5, note 8.
10. <www.esf.org/erih>, “ERIH Information Days”, 2-4 April 2007, p.9.

World War One Literature Oxford Launches Major New Digital Archive

Access to digital resources is now quickly becoming the norm for teaching and researching English literature, and the availability of primary source material for modern literary studies (as opposed to medieval studies which has always been well catered for) is opening up new approaches.

A recent major archive launched jointly by the Faculty of English and the Computing Services at Oxford University has taken this even further. The First World War Poetry Digital Archive has released over 12,000 digital objects for free world-wide educational use via the Web <www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit>. The project has a particular focus on the major British poets of the Western Front, but also includes a wealth of historical material to provide context to the poetry, much of which was contributed by the general public.

As with all such initiatives the story begins much earlier. In 1996-1998 Oxford led a pioneering digitization project that photographed the manuscripts, letters, and war records of the poet Wilfred Owen. These were then released freely onto the web with additional online tutorials and tools for researchers. This was a very influential project and was cited regularly in print and online publications, and even boasted the first web-based tutorial to teach English literature centred on the poet Isaac Rosenberg and his 'Break of Day in the Trenches' (launched as far back as January 1994).

In 2007 Oxford received further funding (£400,000) from the UK's Joint Information Systems Committee to expand this archive. In the intervening 10 years it had attracted a community of researchers and teachers who were regularly requesting more material on other poets. This new project ran from 2007 to 2009 (the site was launched on November 11th 2008 to mark the 90th anniversary of the Armistice) and set about digitising the poetical manuscripts, letters, diaries, photographs, and war records of the following poets to add the existing Owen collection:

- . Edward Thomas
- . Isaac Rosenberg
- . Robert Graves
- . Vera Brittain
- . Roland Leighton

Again these have all been made available for browsing and searching for free via the web. The project had the full support of the surviving family members of the poets and the literary estates, plus the holding institutions. It drew on major collections in Britain, the US, and Canada, and also material owned by individuals (e.g. Edward Thomas's war diary held by the family). Due to this support the project has also been able to add the manuscript variants of Part 7 of David Jones's *In Parenthesis*, and is currently digitizing the war poetry manuscripts of Edmund Blunden and Ivor Gurney. Thanks to some additional funding, by September 2009 we also hope to include the manuscript variants for Siegfried Sassoon's *The Old Huntsman and Other Poems*, *Counter-Attack and Other Poems*, and *Picture-Show*.

Supplementing these is the contextual material – photographs of the battlefields, audio interviews with veterans, film clips from newsreels and cinema releases during the war – mainly drawn from London's Imperial War Museum. Included also is material covering the role of women in the War effort, the Home Front, and the presence of Imperial forces. Finally, as part of the project, Oxford ran the Great War Archive initiative over four months in

2008. Here the general public (primarily in the UK) was asked to submit digital copies of material they personally held to do with the First World War. A collecting web site was set up, and a series of 'scanning roadshows' were initiated around the country, which resulted in over 6,500 objects being collected in the space of a few weeks. These were not necessarily connected to literature but they did provide a wealth of contextual material related to the experience of the War.

Combined with this large digital archive of material, were a set of online tutorials, podcasts of interviews with commentators and literary tours of museums, educational films, and a revised version of the earlier Path Creation Tool that allows users to create annotated trails through the collection. Most recently we have also run workshops for teachers who have created online resource packs for school teaching drawing from the collections.

All told this represents one of the largest online collections of material related to Britain and the War, and certainly the English poetry originating from the conflict. It is being used by teachers and researchers across the world, as well as members of the public.

The effect of having access to such a wealth of primary source material cannot be underestimated. In Figure 1, an example often used from the original project, we can see a section of one of the manuscripts of Owen's 'Dulce et Decorum est'. Here we can see the poet struggling to find a particular word and the evident rewriting and care brings home to the student the true processes involved in writing a poem.

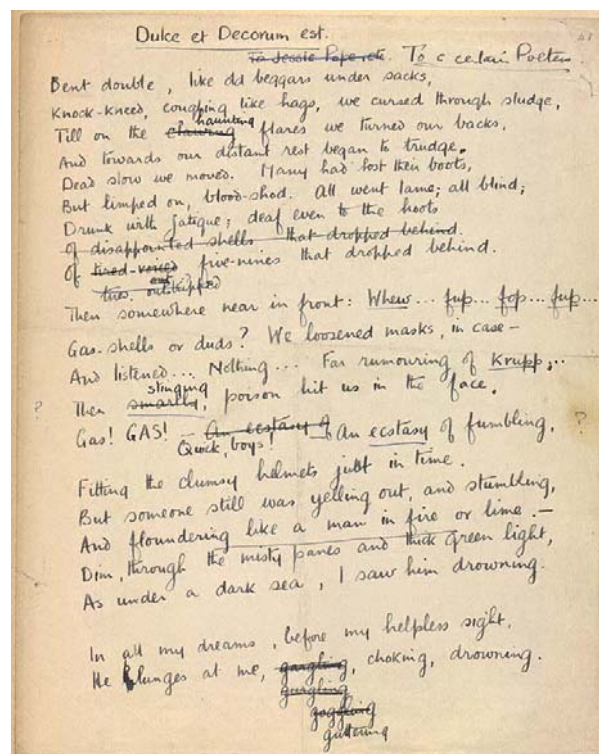


Figure 1: Extract from BL, MS Add 43721 f. 41, © The British Library/The Wilfred Owen Estate

In Figure 2 we can see Owen struggling with the rhyme scheme of a poem ('As bronze may be much beautified'), this time illustrating that the methods we often use to teach poetry are actually used by poets in the process of composition.

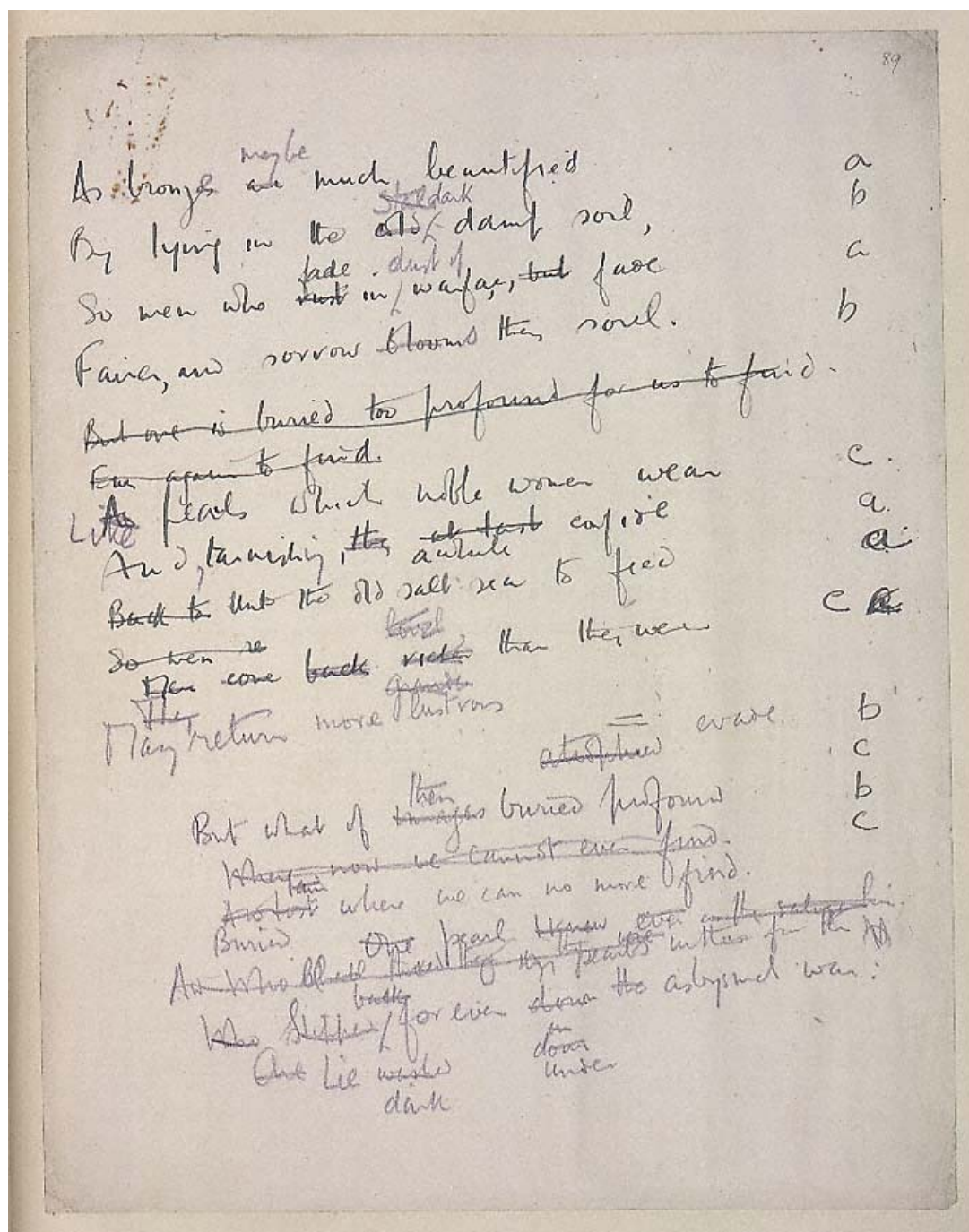


Figure 2: BL, MS Add 43721, f. 89, © The British Library/The Wilfred Owen Estate

The material also tells us about the context of composition. Figure 3 shows some lines from Rosenberg's 'Daughters of War'. These have been scribbled on a scrap of Salvation Army notepaper along with parts of a play. It is torn, muddled, and folded as Rosenberg (a private) moved from trench to trench. The sanitized page of an edition simply cannot convey such information.

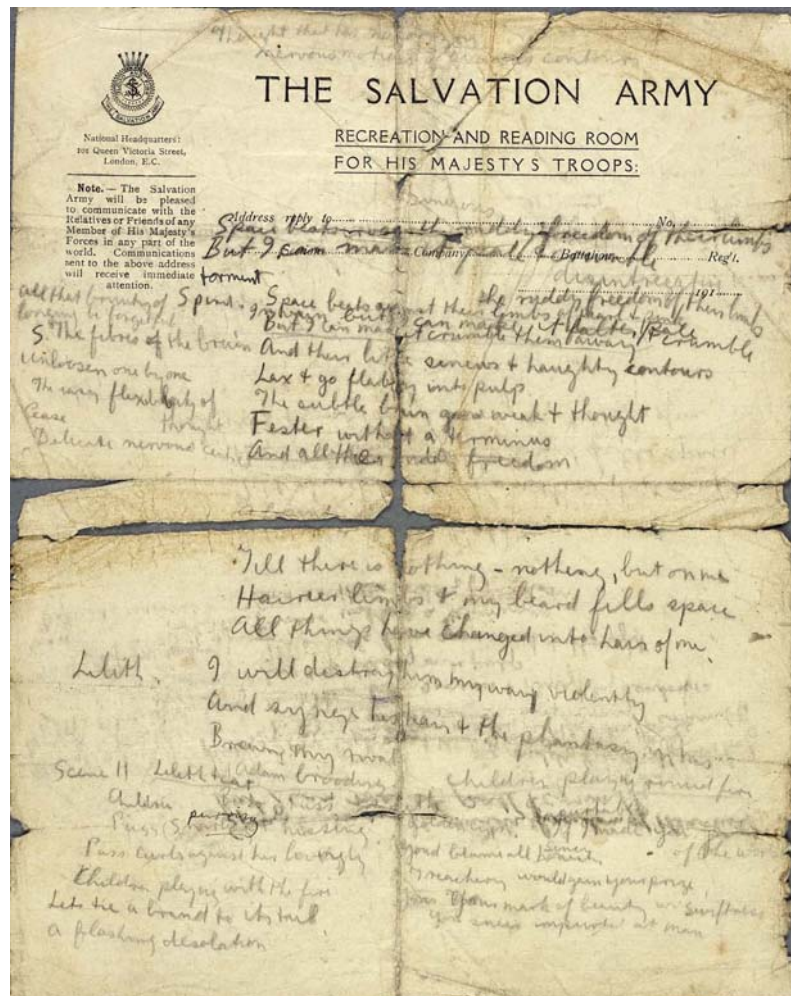


Figure 3: IWM, IR/I/265, © The Imperial War Museum/The Isaac Rosenberg Estate

As stated earlier, all the material is freely available world-wide for educational use. New funding has been received to consider how we can expose the data in other web-based services to make it more accessible and usable. We would welcome any suggestions or comments on the initiative.

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Of Openings and Closures: An Interview with Franco Marengo

Giuseppina Cortese (Torino, Italy)

Franco Marengo is Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Torino, Italy. A full member of the Accademia delle Scienze e Lettere of the same city, and corresponding member of the English Association, he was Chairman of AIA (Associazione Italiana di Anglistica) in 1979-81 and 1993-99, and visiting lecturer at various English and American Universities. He taught Italian Literature at the Universities of Birmingham (1960-61) and Reading (1961-68); and English, American and Comparative Literature at the Universities of Perugia (1968-72), Genova (1972-80) and Torino (1980-). He has published extensively on English Renaissance literature and drama, on the literature of travel and American discovery, on European literature and culture in the 20th century, and on literary theory. Among his recent publications are *La parola in scena. La comunicazione teatrale nell'età di Shakespeare* (2004); "La colonna e la rovina: Roma nell'immaginario britannico fra Sette e Ottocento", in Cesare de Seta ed., *Imago Urbis Romae. L'immagine di Roma nell'età moderna* (2005); *Arcadia puritana. l'uso della tradizione nella Prima Arcadia di Sir Philip Sidney* (new ed., 2006); "Adolescenti nel dopoguerra: il rinnovo della scrittura", in Carlo Alberto Augieri ed., *Le identità giovanili raccontate nelle letterature del Novecento* (2006); "Dallo spettro al meccano: la teoria letteraria in Inghilterra, oggi", in *Moderna*, VII, 1/2005 (2006); "Retorica e antiretorica dell'esotismo nella narrativa di Joseph Conrad", in P. Amalfitano and L. Innocenti eds., *L'Oriente. Storia di una figura nelle arti occidentali (1700-2000)*, (2007); "Il canone della poesia in lingua inglese: ovvero, il confronto fra Europa e America attraverso le antologie", in Gianfranca Balestra and Giovanna Mochi eds., *Ripensare il canone. La letteratura inglese e angloamericana* (2007); "Che ne ha fatto della storia il romanzo moderno?" in *La modernità letteraria*, I, 2008.



How would you evoke your own academic trajectory? When and how, in particular, did Professor Marengo come to tread a broader path and place his literary focus within a comparative perspective?

Allow me to answer focussing specifically on the Italian scene. In the course of my research and teaching experience I became more and more impatient with the boundaries and limitations imposed by a strictly enforced division of knowledge and culture, leading to jealously guarded, self-referential and self-complacent enclosures. The problem is not peculiar to our academic system, where the differentiation and splitting-up of disciplines and competences rests, at least initially, on necessary grounds – but it has been variously mismanaged to the single end of creating new positions, courses and jobs, often the mere replicas of existing ones. It relates, more conspicuously and dangerously, with the dramatic entrenchment of Italian culture into regional and provincial – not to say parochial – interests and loyalties, which could still be counted a mixed blessing in a past era of flourishing folklore, but is now, in an age of worldwide, interethnic dialogue, the true certificate for early decay and evaporation. Dissatisfaction with this state of affairs led me to the study of literature on a comparative basis, which, mind you, has nothing innovative in it: it is in fact the natural development of what I have been doing since the start of my academic career. When I was teaching Italian in England (Birmingham and Reading in the 'Sixties), I produced a study on the interconnection between literary and religious discourses in the XVI century, and in order to contextualize Sidney's *Arcadia* – “silly pastime” as it did sound to most modern professional readers at the time – I had to delve into English, French, Italian and Latin texts, and draw the resulting complex lines of similarity and derivation. Since then, I have maintained this comparative approach whenever possible: literature viewed not as an exercise in stylistic accomplishment, nor as an exclusively philological treasure-hunt, but as a critical problem across national boundaries, characterized by evolving critical discourses, relevant to the present more than to the past, and as free as

possible from any conformity and routine-thinking; indeed as a continuous rejection of all prejudice and received opinion, relying on maximum latitude of investigation. I do not think that, in the last century, literary criticism would have achieved much had it been unaware of post-Nietzschean philosophy, or post-Saussurian linguistics, or post-Freudian psychology, or post-Lévi-Straussian anthropology: it is only by cultivating cross-fertilization that our criticism remains close to, and often at the centre, of the cultural debate.

Your research projects in comparative literature range from text-analysis to thematic criticism to theoretical problems such as the relationship between history and narrative. How did your own “thread of discourse” as a scholar lead you from empirical-descriptive to theoretical issues?

An important distinction must be made here: I always rejected descriptive, mimetic commentary, which is nothing but an emphatic would-be “embellishment” of what is already there, a multi-faceted unit, open as such to the reader's interpretation. The commentator's subjective “help”, if not limited to recalling a historical background, ends up being a poor substitute, basically unfaithful to its object and useful to no one, least of all to the students, soon bored by the exercise. For the same reason I reject rigid thematic criticism, insofar as it fixes a definite and single meaning on to a simple formula and tends to stick to it, mindless of the mobility of the language that substantiates a text – in other words, obscuring its instability, i.e. its capacity to speak to different audiences in different ages according to the value words and structures of words have acquired or lost over time. True, thematic props have to be kept in mind, but this approach must never gain the upper hand over another process, that of the full and free appreciation of the linguistic potentialities inherent in the text as a whole – its polyphony if you want.

As for literary theory, I do believe, as shown – very superficially indeed – by what I have just said, that an acquaintance with theoretical problems is never wasted. One theoretical crux

that has belatedly come to my notice (sorry, my fault!) is the changing relationship of history and narrative: a central problem for present-day culture, especially in countries like Italy, where history – the search for “the factual truth” – and its narrative “emplotment” by the media are at dire loggerheads. The issue has been discussed at length by many eminent historians and philosophers on both sides of the Atlantic, from Hayden White to Carlo Ginzburg, and yet a large number of literary critics, after a stint of important work done in the ‘Eighties, seem to have remained indifferent to it. In a recent essay I tried to tackle the question from the point of view of the literary historian, asking *What has the modern novel done with history?* In brief, I suggested that major contemporary novelists tend to cast aside either the old faith in the transparency of words, or in the diachronic order, or in the finality and predictability of civilized endeavour, or in all three categories together, thus dismantling the old alliance between historical writing and narrative writing. Hundreds of examples could be made, but in my own work I focussed my analysis on Günter Grass, J. M. Coetzee and Claudio Magris, for their different attitude to form.

How far did the practice and theory of literary translation contribute to your scholarly profile?

As a reader in more than one language, I was obviously engaged in the daily effort to grasp the full meaning of a small, home-made canon, mainly imparted at school – by no means a secondary factor in the intellectual growth of my generation (now nearing retirement). I learned French at secondary school, English and German at University. The professional side of translation came my way at a very early stage, as I was still a student, thanks to the great interest that Italian publishers then had in disseminating all that was new and controversial in European and American culture (one reminder out of many: it was an Italian publisher who introduced Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago* to the West in 1958). Things are different now, with other media – advertising, film, theatre and music in particular – attracting the country’s economic potentialities, together with

an increasing number of expert translators, often leaving the complexities of literary translation to ill-paid, improvised practitioners. In the middle part of my career I abandoned the practice of translating, having fallen prey to an academic prejudice: translation was not considered “original” enough to achieve scholarly status. More generally, translation theory may have taken root as a corrective to this condition. I for one was a latecomer to this concern, which counts a number of excellent pioneers in the field of English studies, offering a good foothold to a recruit like me (now in charge of a new translation of Shakespeare’s works).

Literary translation is a formidable testing ground for a scholar’s depth of approach to literature, culture, language. Or, rather, languages. As the founder of a European PhD programme, in which languages do you expect your doctoral students to be proficient?

This is an exceedingly sore point, linked to the shortcomings of the education system I was discussing earlier – or should I say systems in the plural, as all Western Europe seems to me beset by the same problem (as far as I know, only a few Eastern European countries can boast a good record in foreign language training). Except for the Faculties of Foreign Languages – which have their disadvantages anyway, especially in the compression of the syllabuses in other subjects – the academic set-up in Italy does not allow sufficient room for learning these essential tools for intellectual exchange and mutual understanding. The effects are readily discernible in the performance of some prospective PhD students, who are perhaps very good at handling concepts, but seem to be limping along language-wise. Each individual research project currently discussed in our courses in Comparative Literature and Culture must include, and refer to, texts in at least two of the main European languages apart from Italian – i.e. English, French, German, Spanish – with the possible addition, in special cases, of Russian, or Arabic, etc.; and with the comparative effort frequently extended to non-literary media, including music, theatre and cinema. Seminars are conducted in turn by staff and postgraduates, and are based on texts in all the above languages, but discus-

sion has to be in Italian: we simply cannot ask so diversified an audience to read and discuss texts in several languages other than in translation.

Is a solid background in the classical languages relevant? How can we, the heirs to a great classical tradition, meaningfully contribute to the study of English literature today? I remember the time when a typical dissertation title was “The fortune of X in Italy”, or, conversely, “The fortune of the translation of Y in English literature”...

Titles as obsolete as “The fortune of X” or “The sources of Y” have happily disappeared from our horizon, superseded by such new tools of analysis as “the textuality of historical processes”, “intertextuality” etc. Obviously this has only highlighted the need for a thorough training in languages, both classical and modern, for only the perception of what goes on in the model-text can ensure a full appreciation of its re-embodiment or reflection. Shakespeare’s and Marlowe’s imagery and rhythms, for instance, cannot be fully appreciated if one is unacquainted with Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, which was compulsory reading in Elizabethan schools. But let me stress one point: however important, linguistic practice should be envisaged as a preliminary, rather than a central concern for graduate education – except when part of specialization itself. Primary and secondary school are the proper foundation for all subsequent learning, and learners should be empowered accordingly: languages are to be learnt there, together with maths, history, geography etc., in order to be used as a key to all subsequent knowledge (here I am in fact thinking of the intolerably repetitious approach in Italian education, with practically the same syllabus repeating itself in each school cycle and some units being repeated even year after year, which means: productivity amounting to zero). With one notable proviso, called for by the great momentum linguistic theory has acquired throughout the Twentieth Century: specialized knowledge of the structures and workings of language – the national one for a start – ought to be encouraged as part of both undergraduate and postgraduate education, connected or

unconnected with the study of literature as such.

With regard to language and its role in higher education today: what do you envisage/recommend as the best approach to national languages and cultures in Europe? Of course I have Italian and its current “minority language” status in mind – our tradition from Dante to our great writers of science. (There are of course many outstanding European traditions, and here the milestone, from a discourse perspective, is Duszak’s *Culture and Styles of Academic Discourse*, published in 1997). Will journals cultivating this tradition all earn a “C” for publishing work in Italian, following some of the current criteria for evaluating research products? Is this the only possible direction in the new “culture of evaluation”: supporting the ascendancy of English and its implicit hegemony in writing styles, often firmly established by the top journals in the field?

I may be thought of as a relic of past ages, but I continue to cherish my mother tongue, for day-to-day conversation as much as for my own academic writing. You mention style, and it is a concern for style – and its pleasure, its power to overcome internal confusion in the writer – that prompts my answer. Of course, I am prepared to recognize everyone’s right to take great pleasure in the use of the language she or he feels more comfortable or less inhibited in, and to give her or him all the prizes in the world for being proficient in it, but I want to be equally recognized for operating in a tradition which has little to envy any other in Europe. And let me say I join in the current protest by speakers of the so-called minority languages, when in international encounters they have to bow to English as the sole medium of dialogue. Given these premises, you may understand how unsympathetic I feel to the so-called present-day culture of evaluation. General means of evaluation may be necessary amidst the contemporary inflation of specialized books, periodicals and journals, but at heart its exercise remains a matter of individual judgement and authority, nothing more. That any academic journal should earn a “C” for being published in Italian, only because the evaluating panel does not know what to make of it – well, this seems to me a

far cry from anything reasonable. Quantity – the number of publications you produce – prevails over quality – the consensus they may elicit among experts. Imagine what would have happened at Cambridge in the ‘Thirties, had these requirements been applied to Wittgenstein. The

problem lies in the fact that the culture of evaluation is a by-product of a market-oriented cultural trend where, as predicted by Lyotard’s *La condition postmoderne* as early as 1973, everything comes to be measured not on the basis of truth or justice, but of “how well it sells”.

CONFERENCE REPORT
**Fourth International Aldous Huxley Symposium:
“Aldous Huxley in America”**

Los Angeles, 31 July–3 August 2008

Gerd Rohmann and Eva Oppermann (Kassel, Germany)

The first Aldous Huxley Symposium (Münster, 1994) commemorated the centenary of Huxley's birth and resulted in the foundation and rise of the International Aldous Huxley Society (since 1998). In due course, this process led to the subsequent symposia in Singapore (2000/2001) and Riga (2004), which were highly successful in bringing together scholars from around the globe to discuss and promote the study of Aldous Huxley's thought and writings.

“Aldous Huxley in America,” the topical frame chosen for the fourth international meeting, gave rise to the idea of making Los Angeles and California the setting of the 2008 symposium. After the death of Huxley's wife Laura († 13 December 2007), the *Los Angeles Times* had turned Hollywood's disregard of Huxley's work into the announcement that “a major revival of interest in his ideas [was] coming, at a moment in history when it is critical for the world to hear his warning voice, his insights into and remedies for the human situation.”

As American advisor, Prof Peter Firchow (University of Minnesota), who sadly died only two months after the conference and who will always be remembered as an outstanding Huxley scholar of international renown, had paved our way into the United States, and the planning by Prof Bernfried Nugel (University of Münster), Chairman of the International Aldous Huxley Society, was magnanimously supported by regional organizer Prof Joan Wines from California Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks, acting as co-convenor. The Conference Warming on 30 July was crowned by “A Woman's Vengeance,” the film version of Huxley's crime story “The Gioconda Smile,” which was competently presented by Prof David Dunaway (University of New Mexico).

The Huntington Library, San Marino, proved to be the perfect location for the conference, inasmuch as it combined a beautiful ambiente of botanical gardens with excellent facilities for a scholarly congress. Each of the three conference days was devoted to a particular theme, viz “Huxley in California” (31 July), “Huxley's American and Global Travels” (1 August), “Huxley's American Legacy” (2 August), and the symposium was appropriately opened with addresses by David Zeidberg, Director of the Huntington Library, Dr Chris Kimball, President of California Lutheran University, and Prof Bernfried Nugel as Chairman of the Aldous Huxley Society.

The first day began with a keynote lecture by David King Dunaway (University of New Mexico) on “Huxley in Hollywood,” dealing with Huxley's frustrated hopes of film sales of his books as well as with his pacifist and mysticist activities. James Sexton (Camosun College, University of Victoria, B.C.) followed with “Fictional and Historical Sources for *After Many a Summer*,” Huxley's critique of the American dream of rejuvenation. Sanford E. Marovitz (Kent State University) gave new insight into the Bates method of eye training, as discussed by Huxley in *The Art of Seeing* (1942). Joan Wines (California Lutheran University) presented “*This Timeless Moment: Memories of Laura Huxley*” together with other personal friends of Huxley's wife. The afternoon keynote lecture by Peter Firchow (University of Minnesota), “Huxley and Isherwood: The California Years,” focussed on the two authors' literary collaboration, culminating in their film treatment entitled *Jacob's Hands*, and on their relationship with Gerald Heard and the Vedanta Society. In his paper on “Gerald Heard and Aldous Huxley – Mystical Voyagers,” John R. Barrie (Nevada City, CA) enlarged upon the

Californian culture of mysticism and Huxley's and Heard's meditation on ultimate reality. Michael Horowitz & Cynthia Palmer's (Vancouver, B.C.) audiovisual contribution on "Aldous Huxley and the Psychedelic Movement," concentrating on little-known aspects of Huxley's drug experiences, was kindly presented by Dana Sawyer (Maine College of Art). Closing the day with "Aldous Huxley and the Desert," Gerhard Wagner (University of Münster) examined Huxley's experience of silence, space, light, solitude and death in the Mojave Desert.

On the second day, "Huxley's American and Global Travels" were evaluated by Kirpal Singh (Singapore Management University) in his keynote lecture on "East – West in the Balance," which centred on conflict resolution between Eastern religious radicalism and Western capitalism, and in his talk on "Aldous Huxley's Moral and Political Consciousness: The First Stirrings on His World Tour 1925–1926," A. A. Mutalik-Desai (Dharwad, India) commented on the beginning change of Huxley's moral and political views about India. As for Huxley's American travels, David Leon Higdon (Albuquerque, NM) presented his new biographical and anthropological findings concerning "Huxley's 1926 Discovery of the Zuñi and Hopi," with particular regard to the Snake Dance in the Indian reservation described in *Brave New World*.

As a particular highlight of the conference, a tradition begun at the Singapore Symposium in 2000/2001 was continued with the "Panel for Young Huxley Scholars," chaired by Claudia Olk (Humboldt University, Berlin). In a span of almost two hours, intriguing research projects were presented by Eva Oppermann (University of Kassel) on "The Role of the Snakes in Aldous Huxley's *Island* and *The Crows of Pear-blossom*," Jake Poller (University of London) on Huxley and Krishnamurti in his talk "Dangerously Far Advanced Into the Darkness": Aldous Huxley's Californian Quest for Enlightenment," and three young scholars from the University of Münster, Uwe Rasch on "Satire and *satori*: Parallels Between Aldous Huxley and William Blake", Anja Wiesner on

"Aldous Huxley's Concept of Travelling in *Along the Road* and *Beyond the Mexique Bay*" and Kathrin Wöstemeyer on "Utopia Revisited: Robert Graves's *Seven Days in New Crete* as a Counterpoint to 'Brave New Worlds.'"

In the afternoon Grzegorz Moroz (University of Białystok) lectured on "Jesting Huxley: The U.S.A., India, Materialism and Spirituality in *Jesting Pilate*," whereas Sanjukta Dasgupta (Calcutta University), in her paper on "Geographies and Gender: Ideological Shifts in *Brave New World* and *Island*," spoke about the influence of landscape on soul space and Huxley's rejection and eventual re-construction of his American experience. A. K. Tripathy (Varanasi, India) then described "Aldous Huxley's Literary and Spiritual Odyssey: From Euro-English to Indo-Eastern Shores via America" and illustrated the influence of Hollywood and the Vedanta Society as a turning point in Huxley's spiritual and salvationist concerns. In the day's last lecture on "Huxley on Life and Death," Gerd Rohmann (University of Kassel) analysed the development from Montaigne's stoicism to Tantric Buddhism in Huxley's literary works as well as in his personal life, particularly at the moments when he had to face the deaths of his dearest relations and his own end.

The third day, devoted to "Huxley's American Legacy," was opened by Jerome Meckier's keynote lecture "On D. H. Lawrence and Death, Especially Matricide: *Sons and Lovers*, *Brave New World*, and Aldous Huxley's Later Novels," showing that Huxley's literary treatment of death was also inspired by psychoanalysis and the taboo of dying ingrained in the 'American Way of Life.' Janko Andrijašević (University of Montenegro) encouraged interactive presentations of endings and beginnings in "Good Night, Mr Huxley." Valery Rabinovitch (Urals State University) in his talk on "Aldous Huxley's Reworking of Anti-Utopian Elements from *Brave New World* in His Positive Utopia *Island*" set out to prove that reason plus meditation led Huxley to a new concept of predestination. Focussing on the reality of American education, Ron Zigler (Penn

State Abington) in “Democratic Values and the Social Visions of Aldous Huxley: The SAT as Our Brave New Test” questioned quasi-*Brave-New-World* methods in the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) as it establishes an educational U.S. class system. With “Aldous Huxley’s Revision of the Old Raja’s *Notes on What’s What* in His Final Typescript of *Island*” Bernfried Nügel (University of Münster) laid the basis for a critical edition of *Island*, enlarging on Huxley’s idea of making the best of Western and Eastern human potentialities, as enunciated in essays and lectures written in his last creative years from 1956–1963. Kulwant S. Gill (Ludhiana, India), in “Attention to Here and Now: Aldous Huxley’s Calculus of Compassion,” emphasised the correct use of the body and mind to reach salvation here and now. In his talk on “Aldous Huxley’s *Time Must Have a Stop* – A Mastery of Mysticism,” David Garrett Izzo (American Public University) argued that the central representation of mysticism in *TMHS* marks the final change from satire to hope in Huxley’s work. Discussing “Biblical Interpolations in Aldous Huxley’s *The Perennial Philosophy*,” Guin Nance (Auburn University at Montgomery) demonstrated that the concept of selflessness, Christ and the Holy Ghost allows Huxley to adopt a syncretism between Christian and Buddhist concepts of peace and understanding.

The last section, under the heading “Huxley’s Key Values,” was opened by Henning Nügel’s reading of “Crossroads of Science and Religion: Aldous Huxley and Erwin Schrödinger” by Lothar Fietz (University of Tübingen). The paper explored the idea of oneness underlying the diversity and heterogeneity of appearances that made the Nobel-Prize-winning German physicist and Huxley adopt a philosophy of mysticism independently of each other. In his talk on “What Aldous Huxley Teaches Us About Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century,” a scientist from another field, viz chemical engineering, Bernhardt Trout (Massachusetts

Institute of Technology), contrasted the tremendous success of modern science with its utter inability to say anything of significance about what are the most important things to human beings, such as love, justice, happiness; Huxley understood this problem and proposed a number of remedies. Concluding the whole symposium programme, Dana Sawyer (Maine College of Art) dealt with “Aldous Huxley, Environmental Prophet,” pointing out Huxley’s early awareness of our present environmental key problems: the ignoring of the dangers of overpopulation, environmental degradation, resource depletion, and global warming have led to the dysfunctional value paradigm that urges our materialist society on towards an unsustainable future; Huxley articulated his poignant recommendations for upgrading our culture’s value paradigm in order to promote all kinds of desirable human potentialities.

Between the conference sections, Robin Hull (Zürich) offered three workshops on “A Practical Approach to *The Perennial Philosophy*,” helping participants to relax and meditate by practising ‘The Way of Tranquillity’ and ‘The Way of Wisdom.’ The vast academic programme was enriched by a guided tour through the Huntington Library, the possibility to visit the Library’s gardens at any time during the conference, a reception by the Huntington Library, an excursion to Trabuco and the Vedanta Centre in Hollywood, and an invitation to attend an open-air performance of *Henry IV* at the Kingsmen Shakespeare Festival of California Lutheran University. Here the participants were treated, among other things, to the enactment of Huxley’s two favourite quotations from the play: “I can call spirits from the vasty deep” and “time must have a stop.”

More information about the speakers and topics is available at <<http://www.anglistik.uni-muenster.de/huxley/news.html>>. A selection of papers from the symposium proceedings will be published in the next issues of *Aldous Huxley Annual*.