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Address to members of the SAES (Société des Anglicistes de l'Enseignement Supérieur)

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Address to members of the SAES (Société des Anglicistes de l'Enseignement Supérieur) whose annual meeting was held at the Université Jean-Moulin 2-4 June 2016. The theme of the congress was "Confluence(s)".

In June 2016, as Director of the Institut d'études transtextuelles et transculturelles, I was asked by the organizers of the SAES at Lyon, Marie-Agnès Gay and Manuel Jobert, to address the participants at the congress dinner. Unfortunately, I was taken ill on the eve of the dinner and was unable to attend. What follows is the text of the short address I had prepared:

Within the IETT, we study texts, we study cultures, we study the connections between texts and contexts, texts and texts, and texts and cultures. These texts and cultures concern the written, the visual and the sung, the canonical, the middlebrow and the popular.

While thinking of what to say tonight, my daughter asked me to help her revise for her Baccalaureate English examination. It took me back more decades than I care to mention, when I was revising for my own English literature examination — no-one said literature in English then. As I studied, I listened to English pop lyrics, or rather songs and their lyrics in English. Dylan (Thomas that is) on the page, and Bob in my ears: Death not going gently into the good night of my notes, while a hard rain penetrated my ears. While yesterday my troubles were so far away, all our yesterdays lighted fools the way to dusty death. Needless to say, listening to music while reading is not a study method I recommend to my students today. And, of course, my daughter's popular cultural references are very different from those that the great poets triggered in me 40 years ago.

But we both agree on how "cool" Shakespeare is, and on the fact that Philip Larkin was a misanthropic, misogynistic "old git", who should have been sent to Coventry, or rather never should have left it in the first place. But while Larkin seems glued to the pages of examination syllabuses across the decades. However hard we try to marshall and contain them, literatures and cultures will always shift and change with time and space. They also have a tendency to refuse to stay in their national boxes—they travel, are translated. I still remember vividly when on my first student year abroad in China, seeing Macbeth incongruously performed in Chinese in a local Peking theatre: 明天，明天，在一個明天 *Mingtian, mingtian, zaiyige mingtian* which you may already have guessed was the translation of "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow".

Sitting here in Europe we sometimes have little idea of the impact of English literature further afield, on literary creativity, on social critique and even on political life. Byron was translated numerous times into Chinese at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Naturally, he was seen as a revolutionary who opposed his own class and backed anti-imperialist causes. But he was mainly lauded because of his criticism of Elgin who stole the now eponymous marbles from the Parthenon at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Fifty years later, Peking's Summer palace was sacked and purloined by his grandson. The praise for Byron's came at the very moment emerging Chinese nationalism was battling both the dynasty-long Manchu occupation and Britain's colonial encroachment on what would soon become China. It was in this light that China's literati read and translated lines these lines from *Child Harold's Pilgrimage*:

The ocean queen, the free Britannia, bears
The last poor plunder from a bleeding land:
Yes, she, whose generous aid her name endears,
Tore down those remnants with a harpy's hand.
Which envious eld forbore, and tyrants left to stand.

We cannot control or determine the Other's reception of literature. The endless possibilities of this magnificent linguistic assemblage we call English, from Coventry to Canberra, from Minnesota to Manchester, from Kuala Lumpur to Kampala, are boundless.

I left England many years ago, at a time when I refused to work on Maggie's farm no more. But, I didn't, could never, abandon the English language I grew up in.

I'll stop here, and by way of conclusion salute your dedication to the study and dissemination of the English language in all its varieties, and to the texts, cultures and practices expressed in them.

GBL

Lyon, 2 June 2016

Note: On 13 October 2016, Bob Dylan was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.