

Thesis Synopsis, Postmodernism, Posthumanism and Their Objective Correlative in English, American, Translation and Interpretation Studies

The thesis offers an analytical, in-depth account of the main directions characterising my post-doctoral output, the key findings in the body of research that I have conducted, accompanied by a brief description of forthcoming objectives and targets. It is structured around the central areas of my expertise: American studies in critical and global culture theory, English studies, translatology, interpretation theory and the pedagogies of these disciplines. It opens with a *rationale* describing the principles informing my critical thinking and research ethics, insisting on the pursuit of continuity, discontinuity and paradigmatic change, as article of faith. As well as presenting the 'factual' achievements, in the thesis I sought to capture the smooth transitions to and fine articulations between the various stages of my post-doctoral work, highlighting the elements interrelating them. It is my firm belief that a self-respecting scholar should be able to identify the patterns of continuity and discontinuity propulsating his/her work. As a result, in drafting the thesis, defining methodology and concept design has constituted a priority and one of the organising principles. Valuing methodicity and graduality I made a point of introducing the key concepts that formed an integral part of my research and for which I believe I can take the credit: *globalism*, *dystopianism* and the *zombie apocalypticism*, at least in my acceptance, as ideological constructs underpinning globalisation, the posthumanist-postapocalyptic aesthetics and politics.

One of the first thesis statements that I formulate concerns postmodernist studies, the departures from the liquidated project of postmodernity, which the closing section of my doctoral dissertation announced, and the new beginnings and modes of writing ushered in by 9/11, which I describe as a period marker and cultural modifier that refashioned the ways of reading and representing culture in twenty first century humanities. These I associate with the phenomenon of the global turn in culture theory, one marking as I argue several dramatic changes of dominant, the shift from cultural studies to transnational studies of culture, from postcolonial to global theory among them. I go on to expound the conjunction of globalism, terrorism, dystopianism and posthumanism, which have formed a systematic pursuit of my critical-cultural studies interrogations, as illustrated in the series of articles and conference papers mentioned in the thesis. Central to my commentary on the status of theory in the *fin-de-millennium* climate of ideas was the demise of high theory as a coherent 'grand narrative', a thesis that, admittedly or not, informed the anti-hegemonic, anti-foundationalist and relativistic framework of postmodern debate as subject and object kept de-structuring, and one kept losing one's sense of objective reference.

'Globalism', a concept I marketed early on after my doctoral *viva*, and upon which I elaborated in a series of papers and articles (v. "After Identity: Globalism, Dystopianism and the 'Imagination of Disaster'," "Post-Apocalypse Now: Globalism, Posthumanism, and the 'Imagination of Disaster'", and in volume *Utopia, Dystopia and the Global Order of the Image*) is the underlying, root cause of the ideologies of posthumanism, which I identify as a logical culmination of the post-apocalyptic strands that marred the horizon of the human sciences at the turn of the millennium and of the global anxieties accelerated by 9/11. In my reading, posthumanism is an interrogation, a radical negative critique of 'traditional humanism' viewed in its articulations with the global Anthropocene and, at the same time, a condition of the subject. Posthumanism entails structural, paradigmatic challenges to disciplinary knowledge, calling for integrative theoretical frameworks and methodologies, being reflective of the new forms of materialism, of the formation, comprehension and processing of information. The central tenet of my enquiries into posthumanism is that only by addressing the above challenges is one capable of taking the leap into the post-humanities. The central themes that I have constantly observed within the broad ambit of postdisciplinary humanities, thus pertain to the dystopian structures of the global imagination. I construe these as themes and mythemes acting as fundamental generic units of narrative structures and have observed them in film and popular fiction. Applying core concepts of global theory and elements of imagology to dystopian representations, I have examined the modes of the global imagination, their configuration and the morphologies endemic to the posthuman self.

In my interrogations of 9/11, I looked at its driving force as a periodical and cultural marker, adopting a mix of global and co-cultural theories to elicit value judgements on what was increasingly profiling itself as a dying liberal world order, succumbing to the impact of globalization and digitization, in their double-barreled, at once enabling and disabling cognitive effect. Mindful of the framework of cultural-critical reference ensuing post 9/11, I observed and sought to factor in the effects of the global economic balance of power on the new cultural dynamics indeed the global world order, marking, among other, the end of the hegemony of the United States as the world's sole superpower. The interrelation among globalism, terrorism, dystopianism and posthumanism, has formed a systematic pursuit of my critical-cultural studies interventions, as illustrated in a series of conference papers, of which, *After Identity: Cultural Methodologies and Academic Practice post- 9/11* is perhaps the most contiguous in scope with my post-doctoral endeavors throughout.

As indicated in the thesis, in my postdoctoral pursuits I have aimed at an integrated research track abiding by the guiding principle of the pressing importance of a critical adherence to the present. Invariably, in all my conference presentations delivered from the 2000's onwards, I thus argue for the potentially disastrous, indeed the impossibility of not addressing the present, in whatever modes come

closest to the private and the public spaces one inhabits, in part as a result of the aggressive pace at which it imposes itself upon us, in part of its 'global incontinence'. In the sphere of the theoretical humanities, I regard this 'presentist fever' or ultimacy as of special beneficial urgency, as never before had the contemporary event-scene generated such a flurry of discursal activity.

In keeping with the aforementioned research ethic, following a paradigmatic, far-seeing investigation, I thus focused on the dramatically changing condition of critical and cultural studies after 9/11 which I set out to examine from the vantage point of the challenges the phenomenon posed to critical-cultural theory and practice in the academic humanities¹. With this end in view, my exploits were geared toward a tentative mapping of the field of cultural critical studies as it profiled itself at the entry into the third millennium, pointing to some of the limitations and failures of cultural thinking at that precise juncture in time, in the changing and challenging socio-political landscape brought about by the terrorist attacks. Consciousness-raising, in American Studies, 9/11 acted as a 'moment of truth', *the prise-de-conscience* displacing attention from an amnesic, celebrational 'melting pot', and other myths of the nation, to a long overdue realignment of multicultural thinking. Its lessons and legacy pointed to the 'integration fallacies' of Western liberal thinking, and the aberrant proliferation of stereotypicality generated by the inflationary politics of multiculturalism in the global age.

As well as an attempt at a series of distillations of the contemporary theoretical imaginary, the enquiries sought to factor in some of the categorial and categorical pronouncements and anxieties that set in in the aftermath of 9/11. Among these, the anti-war feeling, Christian fundamentalism, the economic and military imperialism of US, Eurocentrism and the neo-imperialism of western culture, anti-Americanism, Islamophobia, the emergent Europe versus America 'structure of feeling', and the new pattern of conflict in global society in the wake of 9/11, which, in my discussion of the reverberations of the event on culture theory and academic practice, I inevitably if tangentially addressed. Although bearing directly on the discussion, I deemed it outside my scope to provide case studies of the autocratic, the authoritarian, the neo-colonial and the doctrinaire in the rhetoric of former president George W. Bush. Rather, my interest lay in observing these as reflections of the systemic flaws in the contemporary socio-political cartography, in their articulations with the methodologies at work in culture analysis, with a mind to ponder their role in reshaping the conceptual grounds of cultural studies.

¹ For the purposes of this account, I am using the syntagm 'cultural practice', as indeed 'cultural methodology', to designate the operative assumptions underpinning cultural interrogations in the Academia and the protocols informing their transaction toward best practice. My treatment and application are premised on the existence of formal critical 'etiquettes', consciously or subliminally inscribed, manifest in the self-legitimizing effort of one academic institution or another. A self-evident assumption is that method, as a set of codes and procedures, is inseparable from theory hence my conflation of the terms method and methodology in discussing the state of cultural investigation post-9/11.

An ongoing concern of my critical observation, in post 9/11 context, was to delineate the causes responsible for the foundering of multiculturalism with the specification that it was multiculturalism as project and ‘discursive event’ that the propositions advanced applied to, and not multiculturalism as the historical reality of cultural multiplicity, for it was in my view the ‘ism’ wherein its logic lay. Multiculturalism, I argue, is an epistemologisation of the historical reality of multiculturalism. Of the central causes responsible for the collapse of multiculturalism, its politicisation and commodification deserved in my view the most negative credit.

Concluding my perusal of 9/11 and 7/7 is a statement on how these are dates that act as paradigmatic dynamos, yielding to a welder of reassessments, triggering an epistemic drive similar to that of period terms in literary and culture history. In the humanities, they cut across conventional critical practice, providing the opportunity and space to revisit practices, test endurance, resilience, intellectual limits and explode disciplinary boundaries, precisely because they are ‘moments when everything changed’ (Calhoun et al 1). In whatever description and irrespective of the colour of the banner of the critical intervention, they are ‘shakers’ of conviction in that they alter indelibly received ideas and one’s hard-won certitudes if ever such certitudes did exist.

While in American studies, my research interests lie primarily in the condition of postmodernity and the developments from postmodernity viewed from the perspective of global theory, in English Studies I have pursued the following lines of enquiry: Anglophone sensibility as a cultural construct, Englishness as reflected in the poetics of Peter Ackroyd’s writing, and the comparative approach to Englishness as a ‘homegrown’ versus a continental concept, addressing the postcolonial issues implicated in the debate. Expanding on my extensive research into Peter Ackroyd’s formative and summative assessments of English identity, I have sought to become an exeget of Ackroyd’s work, which I envisage as a master-model informing my investigation of the ‘grammar of Englishness’. By the ‘grammar of Englishness’ I wish to designate the defining spirit and characteristics of English national and individual character, of English temperament, and, most importantly, the dominant aesthetic and cultural patterns distinguishing English identity from British and/or European continental identity. The master-scope of my English Studies pursuits has thus been that of identifying the commonalities of feeling, social mindsets, and the shared cultural ethos underpinning images and ideas of Englishness. To this end in view I looked for tentative cultural and aesthetical models able to single out the English national character and English poetic genius, revealing of the deeply ingrained elements of cultural difference. In the process, I have tried to address the underlying deepseated beliefs, received views and cultural stereotypes inherent in the models that have perforce been the subject of heated debate.

In its encyclopaedic breadth and singlemindedness, Peter Ackroyd's *oeuvre* has functioned as the catalyst to my study of English identity. In brief, four are the main traits central to Ackroyd's model that I analysed in depth: insularity, versatility, popular culture as rooted in the Catholic tradition before the Reformation, and the uniqueness of the English landscape. In looking at these, I placed particular emphasis on Ackroyd's notion of English genius and the 'Cockney native visionary' that encapsulate his vision of Englishness. Observing the limitations of the 'native' English approach, I formulated my critical interventions from the vantage point of the Continental European English studies scholar, adopting the perspective of insider and outsider of Englishness, somewhat reading my exploits of Peter Ackroyd against those of Kazuo Ishiguro.

An accomplished poet, novelist, and literary critic, and one of England's foremost biographers, Ackroyd is the author of an impressive body of work, ranking as one of the most prolific English writers of all times. Having established himself as a distinctive presence in literary history through radical biographical innovation, Ackroyd has in the latter years become indispensable for an informed discussion of English cultural identity. With over 40 books to his name, he is one of the most influential and enduring figures in contemporary literature and probably among the few contemporary English writers to be read in a hundred years' time. Ackroyd's dense and passionately articulate prose engages notions of national and international appreciation, the English and the continental imagination, acting as an *agent provocateur* and inviting value judgements along with a timely rethinking of the question of English identity. The main argument that the present article advances is that in the local-universal, personal-collective, inside-outside dynamics that it forges, Ackroyd's writing of Englishness can be viewed as a catalyst to an integrative examination of English identity in the trans-national context of the new Europe. I would also suggest that whereas in England Ackroyd's vision of national culture may appear utopian, in a European framework of interpretation it confers to his writing a compelling timelessness, that may, in the long run, prove more in tune with the values of the post-secular world as I argue in '*Peter Ackroyd's Englishness: A Continental View*' published in *Contemporary Review (London)* in 2006.

My views on English identity coalesce in *Continental Perceptions of Englishness, Foreignness and the Global Turn* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), an attempt at an integrative approach to the subject. Broadly analytical in substance and purport, this is a collection that comprises essays written within the space of well over a decade or so, engaging different perceptual and conceptual frameworks and contexts of critical enquiry. Viewed as an ensemble, the essays describe the pursuit of cultural narratives and interpretations of Englishness by a continental European scholar more concerned with the continuities, rather than the discontinuities, of the subject. To a great extent, my approach to the theme of Englishness is filtered through and informed by translation and comparatism, exploring the culture-

translation nexus positioned in the horizon of expectation of the continental European scholar, speculating on the subject of English as a ‘third space’ in the cultural studies acceptance of the syntagm as marketed by the postcolonial thinker Homi K. Bhabha. In the attempt to factor in contemporary, post-Brexit developments, the closing piece contains reflections on new departures, particularly on the failures of the multiculturalist project and the future of English studies in a multi-polar world. It is there that I seek to address the articulations between Englishness and Britishness, as well as the cultural disjunctures intervening in this equation in a global context.

It is the nature of long-term research commitments to be single-minded, heterogeneous and many-sided, in this case to seek to grasp the ‘essence’ of Englishness --the clichés, the belief systems, the stereotypes, indeed the myths lying at the heart of English identity-- and to do so by drawing on mixed and variegated sources. The essays here point to a concerted effort and give forth a set of reiterative themes regarding the ideals and ideas of Englishness. One of the leitmotifs running through these pieces therefore is that of Englishness as a ‘structure of feeling’ accommodating, on the one hand, home-grown and vernacular, and on the other, continental, ‘bookish’ visions of the English character. In order to explore the imbricated elements constitutive of this dialectic, I set out to observe constructions of Englishness in the writing of Peter Ackroyd and Kazuo Ishiguro; the authors that illustrate, as I indicated, the mutually informing polarities underlying the aforementioned cultural paradigms. Foregrounded in their narratives of Englishness is a revealing, albeit unlikely, interchange between self-image and external projection, biography and historiography, insularity and cosmopolitanism.

To valorise my continuing work on Peter Ackroyd, I designed an ample editorial project currently in progress, a monograph envisioned as a corollary to my exegetic, expository and interpretive scope, tentatively entitled ‘*Anglophilia*’: *The Politics of Peter Ackroyd’s Englishness*. The work embarks upon an extensive consideration of the aesthetics and politics of the Ackroydian model of Englishness, engaging a full panoply of themes, recurring motifs, principles and patterns. Taking Ackroyd to be an exemplar of a ‘grand English narrative’, I examine his quest for re-writing English cultural identity, which I situate between mythography and what I define as a drive towards ‘hagiography’.

To a certain extent, in my investigation of ideas and images of Englishness, I tried to pit Ackroyd’s construct of a national English literature against Ishiguro’s poetics of introversion, which I explored in “International Writing: Kazuo Ishiguro and the Introvert Identities of the Novel” (2010). Published in *English*, the Journal of the English Association, the article is an enquiry into Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day* (1989), the seminal piece of his ‘English fictions’, and gravitates around two centres of attention: Ishiguro’s writing of Englishness and the generic status of his prose. Premised on the mutually informing dialogue between cultural identity and the generic identity of writing, the paper examines the bearing of the constitutive form of the novel on Ishiguro’s representations of cultural identity. The reading of

Ishiguro's text is informed by a consideration of three pivotal attributes of the novelistic discourse as laid out by rhetorical theorist and poetician Mikhail Bakhtin: dialogism, polyphony and heteroglossia. As well as the established categories above, the interpretation hopes to valorise the early Bakhtinian exploits of the philosophy of the subject, particularly Bakhtin's enquiries into the interconnectedness between form and alterity. The principal claim the examination makes is that while the novel is a political form (albeit not necessarily in the overt, programmatic sense promulgated by the literatures of identity), Ishiguro's writing, in general, and his 'English' fictions *par excellence*, are apolitical, blank, monophonic narratives foregrounding identity as a private space of interiority rather than a site of culture politics. Following from the above is that Ishiguro's writing of Englishness articulates itself as a *lieu de mémoire*, his international quality - if indeed the notion holds - being more accountable in terms of aesthetic and genre than in those of ideology.

In the latter part of the thesis I describe my research trajectory in TS and IS, translation and interpretation studies, pointing out the relationship between theory and *praxis*. As I explain at the outset, whereas I have experimented with translation practice myself, ("The Speed of Light") as well as psycholinguistics and phenomenology (*The Idea of the Past*), my work has touched upon translatology and interpretation as academic subjects. Consistent with my methodology throughout, I seek to trace the progress of my work and articulate the interrelations among the various areas of investigation. I indicate that, although my original interest was in literary translation, the poetics and hermeneutics of translated discourse, my exploits in cultural studies, coupled with the interdisciplinarity called for by applied linguistics, directed me towards translation as interlingual and intercultural communication, which offer a profuse field of enquiry, that enabled me to observe key cultural studies concepts at work. In the following, I identify the research topics that I have approached within the broad area of translation as cultural mediation, cultural references, stereotypes and clichés, cultural perspectives on translation have been prominent themes. A *liaison* area, bringing together my *literateur* and applied linguist profile is poetic license, as the freedom of the translator to depart from the original source text and its reverberations on the in/visibility of the translator.

In IS, particularly in answer to my pedagogical practice, I have taken an interest in orality, rhetoric and public speaking skills and their bearing on the interpreter's expert performance. As well as this, of late I have started conducted research in interpretation and bilingualism and retour interpreting, or interpreting into a B language. A niche area that I have tried to acquire expertise in is that of ICS, interpreting for community services, my focus being on medical interpretation or interpretation for healthcare services. Currently, digital literacies, the new technologies and the way they shape today's

landscape of interpretation practice constitute one of my main preoccupations, with a focus on tablet interpreting and remote interpreting (v. “Riding the Wind of Change”).

The ensuing section of the thesis defines my pedagogical practice, which has developed in a synergic manner, in keeping with my research interests. I have thus started out teaching Twentieth Century English and American literature at BA and MA level, and progressively moved into British and American Cultural Studies at MA level. Having specialized in the poetics of Modernism and Postmodernism, my areas of predilection in the teaching of Anglo-American literature were literary theory, critical theory and historiographical metafiction. In cultural studies, I originally focused on postcolonial theory and fiction, only to refine, update and expand my didactic exploits to global theory, posthumanism and dystopian fiction in the 2000s. A subject I have taught constantly, throughout my career and that linked up my literary and linguistic areas of expertise is EAP, English for Academic Purposes, with emphasis on argumentation, textual analysis and contrastive rhetoric. As part of EAP, I developed an expertise in writing for degree purposes, which forms the object of a planned coursebook.

In over 30 years of teaching at HE level, in Romania, Norway and the UK, I have become well versed in a diversity of interdisciplinary genres, fulfilled an ample set of academic roles in national and overseas education settings, designed numerous ancillary and core modules for students, and contributed to the setting up of various course degrees, some of them, in pioneering fields. My international background and experience as Cambridge Speaking Examiner have enabled me to build interactive, engaging, student-centered techniques that ensure a vivid and mutually profitable exchange.

The centerpiece, indeed the very pedagogical ‘logic’ of applied modern languages, the department that I joined in 2007, is multidisciplinary, which has characterized my didactic trajectory ever since. The expertise in conference interpreting acquired as part of my second Master’s degree, has proven invaluable, completing my profile as educator. Conference interpreting training has informed my teaching methodologies and principles in incalculable ways, acting as a defining moment in my career. By virtue of inhabiting both roles, that of ‘seasoned’ practitioner and ‘coach’, academic scholar and trainer, I have become more keenly aware of essentials of the profession, such as information processing analysis, feedback and assessment, guidance and remedial action, and acquired a heightened perception of cognition, performance, language enhancement, and multi-tasking. As well as that, I have elevated my public speaking skills and acquired a sharper knowledge of professional communication. Furthermore, the vast number of European Parliament and European Commission training sessions that I attended annually, in the context of conference interpreting, combined with the EMCI, the European Master’s in Conference Interpreting quality assurance projects in which I have been involved have offered me additional insight into teaching standards at postgraduate studies level. Aptly, at the pinnacle of my

career, I define myself as an adept lecturer, a professional trainer of trainers, an expert assessor, and ultimately, an accomplished educator applying myself to both philological scholarship and multilingual communication, a happy marriage that I find ideal for a would-be doctoral adviser.

As holder of an EMCI conference interpreter certificate and interpreter trainer, I sought to keep up the standards of professionalism the EMCI Consortium, the Directorate General of Interpretation at SCIC, the European Commission, and the European Parliament set for accredited EU schools, consolidate and propel my own school, BBU, as MA Course Leader, since September 2021. Three research and didactic aspects are of immediate concern to me: retour interpreting, audiovisual aids and modelling, and their enhancement role in the pedagogical act.

Closing the *précis* of my body of work is a *Prolegomenon* on the main objectives I would like to pursue in the capacity of doctoral adviser, general as well as specific, objectives aimed at benefitting the wider community of young scholars conducting research at Babeș-Bolyai University. Rounding off my *exposé*, I indirectly reflect here on the importance of thinking widely, beyond the confinements of specialism and conversance, with a view to inculcating in the young scholar the savvy needed to produce enduring work, or else valorise knowledge gained by multidisciplinary and dialogic practice.

Beyond a genuine desire to share my own research experience and contribute to the formation of a new generation of highly capable, opinionated, independent, indeed groundbreaking young scholars able to increase Babeș-Bolyai University's international profile in advanced research in the humanities, here are some of the pointed goals that I envisage as deriving from being granted the position of doctoral supervisor. An objective that would tap into my idea of global, holistic mentorship regards the founding of a Centre for Academic Writing to cater for the BBU needs of writing across the curriculum, one that would ensure doctoral candidates at BBU acquire the degree of academic versatility and specialism in composition required in their various fields and that would actively involve doctoral candidates already enrolled in various PhD programmes. Here I see a generous opportunity for securing a EU fund for the creation of a Centre for Literary Translation based at the Faculty of Letters, with writers-in-residence involved in the teaching and assessing of Creative Writing, an academic subject taught in all self-respecting departments abroad.

Building on the expertise acquired in the training process at the European Masters in Translatology-Terminology, an EMT MA degree course offered by my Department, that I have been an active staff member of since 2010, I also seek to take on a more pro-active role in the training of highly-skilled, competent literary translators, providing networking opportunities with their peers via team projects, thus laying the foundations for further scholarship in the field. Translation industry being the dynamic and fast growing market of literary translation that it is today, it is my firm belief that it is the

responsability of our faculty to cater for this need and train well-qualified practitioners, by which I mean professional translators well-versed in both the poetics and the politics of translation, i.e. in cross-cultural exchanges and transfer. The initiative could take the shape of a taught programme providing instruction in core areas in translation studies, cultural translation and transculturalism.

Beyond the scholastic dimension of doctoral supervision, I am genuinely interested in my mentorship generating an active scholarly community, the result of a happy marriage between the pursuit of the academic route and the experience of partaking of a congenial, like-minded pastoral community. A lot of the work undertaken in research degree courses can prove a solitary experience in absence of vivid, peer-to-peer networking, being not necessarily conducive to emulation. In my view, the 'space' where excellence and performance manifest themselves lies in conferring and debating, a principle which should be embedded within and across the whole postgraduate studies process. To this end in view, I propose the founding of a BBU Honour Society, also based at the Faculty of Letters, a learned, scholarly society destined for the promotion of academic excellence and the provision of a framework for high-achieving PhD graduates in the human sciences. Not only would this particular affiliation enrich their professional experience, but it would also ensure they draw more satisfaction from it. Dialogic and pan-European in scope, the Society would organise an annual convention, a large event that would bring together representatives of a diversity of universities, to increase competitiveness and ensure that postgraduates stay in touch with the latest research in the field.

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