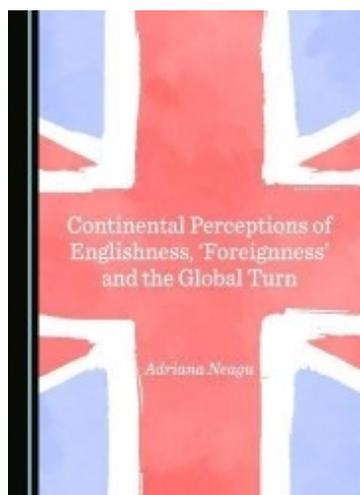


CONTINENTAL PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISHNESS, 'FOREIGNNESS' AND THE GLOBAL TURN — BOOK REVIEW

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Book Details:

Title:

Continental perceptions of Englishness, 'foreignness' and the global turn

Author:

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Publisher:

Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 120 pages

ISBN-13: 978-1-4438-9599-6

ISBN-10: 1-4438-9599-7

Published and distributed online <http://www.cambridgescholars.com/continental-perceptions-of-englishness-foreignness-and-the-global-turn>

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Citation: Boyadzhieva, E. (2017). Continental perceptions of Englishness, 'foreignness' and the global turn – Book review. *English Studies at NBU*, 3(2), 88-91. Retrieved from <http://esnbu.org/data/files/2017/2017-2-3-boyadzhieva-pp88-91.pdf>

Ellie Boyadzhieva, PhD, is Associate Professor of General Linguistics, Cultural studies and English morphology and syntax at SWU "Neofit Rilsky" in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria. Her main interests are in three basic areas: contrastive analysis, comparative analysis of cultures, and language planning and language policies with regard to the place of ELT in the Bulgarian cultural context. In the last 5 years she published two books: *The Science of Language* (2015) and *The Verb in Standard Modern English (in comparison with Bulgarian)* (2013) with SWU Publishing House. She is also an author of over 50 articles in these three fields. Presently, she is Head of the Department of Germanic and Romance Studies at the Philological Faculty of the South-West University of Blagoevgrad.

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Continental Perceptions of Englishness, 'Foreignness' and the Global Turn was published by Cambridge Scholars in 2017. The author Adriana Neagu is associate professor of Anglo-American Studies at the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca in Romania. She is an author of two earlier monographs devoted to Anglophone postmodernism and has also published a number of critical articles relating English culture as embedded in modern English literature. Since 1999 she has been Advisory Editor of the scientific journal *Academic Anglophone Society of Romania*.

The current book endeavours into various issues of the English identity presented in several major literary works of quite a few leading contemporary British authors.

The book consists of nine chapters each of which is a separate essay on a particular topic, while the last one addressing the topical theme of BREXIT and its aftermath for the English society, although not signified as a chapter, serves as a conclusion.

In the foreword Neagu points out that the book is a collection of critical essays, published in various journals before, each of which deals with a different facet of the multidimensional understanding of Englishness. As the author states the essays have been "written within the space of well over a decade" and this is why they engage with "different conceptual frameworks" and "do not form an organic whole" (Neagu, 2017, p. xi). However, as a whole they are united by constantly applying an integrative critical thinking framework in discussing the focal topic of each one.

The opening two chapters are devoted to the problems of translation in the global world. In both of them the author introduces the idea of Global English as a "third space" which allows erasing the opposition *we* versus *alien*. She claims that after 9/11 translation serves not only the exchange between the existing vernaculars but also between world Englishes and states that the translation process is doing "justice to both the Queen's idiom and Pidgin" (p. 5). An important point that Neagu makes in the second chapter is that the traditional domestication of foreign culture texts when translated into English blurring the difference between Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky brings to the problems of the "interdisciplinarity of translation studies in current Anglo-American contexts" that establishes a new era of language imperialism (p. 10).

Chapter three brings to the fore the problem of Anglo-centric attitudes in the time of devolution, when numerous of books on Englishness are published and where the authors are trying to overcome the traditional taboo on investigating the English difference nurtured by the post-imperial sense of guilt, which she calls a “willed-amnesia syndrome”. The author makes an interesting link with what type of literature is studied in East-European Universities, mentioning that the discipline *English literature* “has successfully itinerated from English literature to literatures in English” to match the new trends in literary criticisms dealing with multicultural, multiracial England and immigrant writings.

The fourth essay explores the reception of English authors in Romanian academic circles before and after 1989. Neagu’s observations are sharp and persuasive and give food for thought for further comparative analysis. She states that before the revolution England was imagined and mainly placed in the past since there was quite limited first-hand knowledge of the country on the part of the university academics. In this way the image of Englishness was imaginary and quite bookish. In the years after the fall of the Iron Curtain the tendency moved towards what she names “textualist-tourist constructions of Englishness” (p. 30). She notes that after the Bologna process English departments have adopted language policies which are pluralistic, although English as a native language has remained the mainstream.

Chapter five is in essence an interview with Peter Ackroyd, one of the most compelling voices writing in the UK today”, as Neagu depicts him (p. 33). The interview is very informative and reveals Acroyd’s views on Englishness, looking for it in the history and explaining his, for the majority of critics, eccentric thoughts and unexpected arguments to support them. The interview is a prelude to the next-coming three chapters, devoted to a critical reading of Ackroyd’s ideas of Englishness embedded in his works.

Chapter six endeavours on P. Ackroyd’s *London: The Biography*, chapter seven is devoted to his ideas of Englishness in several of his works that are discussed from a continental perspective, and finally, chapter eight explores his cultural visions he shares in his novel *Thames – Sacred River*. In a nutshell, he opposes Englishness to foreignness, English indigenusness to internationality and defends the English idiosyncratic

“cultural difference” by searching for its roots in the historical past and the literary tradition thus opposing to the mainstream cultural universals. In all his works, Neagu states, he follows “a distinct, holistic approach, what he defines as the *genius loci* of the English imagination” (p. xii). She also points out that he builds a utopian picture of a Catholic constitutive of Englishness bare of any ideological or political influence (p. xii).

The last chapter is also book-based. The author explores the notion of Englishness as opposed to foreignness in the book of a non-native English author, namely *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro, a seminal novel published in 1989. She notices that Ishiguro’s writing “is an experience of detachment, rather than that of identification” (p. 85), which, paradoxically, turns to be an “iconic ‘English’ piece”, “a quintessential expression of Englishness” for the non-native English readership (p. 85). However, in the author’s opinion a deeper reading would reveal that Ishiguro’s interpretation of Englishness as a cultural model is that of exclusion rather than inclusion, idiosyncrasy rather than collaboration.

The book ends up with a short essay wittily entitled *English Studies in the Chinese Century: An Afterthought*. Neagu opposes the newly developed Anglo centrism to Euro centrism in the light of the BREXIT process. She voices her opinion that Europe, and especially in European academy, the question of the British Euro scepticism should be rethought from the historical perspective of the British imperial past and cultural isolation (ibid: 94). The author proposes that a difference should be drawn between Englishness and Britishness. In the foreword, she determines that: “The crux of Britain leaving the EU lies in the difficult relationship between Britishness and internationalism and the new patterns of cultural identification ...” (p. xiii). This last essay gives a lot of food for thought and instigates advanced exploration in the matter. It seems that considering the Celtic inheritance on the British Isles and the attitude of Scotland, Northern Ireland and partly Wales to BREXIT and their Celtic identities as opposed to Englishness would be of immense interest for further comparative literary and cultural research.

With its remarkable informativity, eloquent language, sophisticated style and theoretical assumptions, the book is highly recommendable not only to all interested in English identities, but also to all who work in the area of comparative cultural studies.