The Global Future of English Studies

James F. English
The Global Future of English Studies
Blackwell Manifestos

In this new series major critics make timely interventions to address important concepts and subjects, including topics as diverse as, for example: Culture, Race, Religion, History, Society, Geography, Literature, Literary Theory, Shakespeare, Cinema, and Modernism. Written accessibly and with verve and spirit, these books follow no uniform prescription but set out to engage and challenge the broadest range of readers, from undergraduates to postgraduates, university teachers and general readers – all those, in short, interested in ongoing debates and controversies in the humanities and social sciences.

Already Published

The Idea of Culture
Terry Eagleton

The Future of Christianity
Alister E. McGrath

Reading After Theory
Valentine Cunningham

21st-Century Modernism
Marjorie Perloff

The Future of Theory
Jean-Michel Rabaté

True Religion
Graham Ward

Inventing Popular Culture
John Storey

Myths for the Masses
Hanno Hardt

The Future of War
Christopher Coker

The Rhetoric of RHETORIC
Wayne C. Booth

When Faiths Collide
Martin E. Marty

The Future of Environmental Criticism
Lawrence Buell

The Idea of Latin America
Walter D. Mignolo

The Future of Society
William Outhwaite

Provoking Democracy
Caroline Levine

Rescuing the Bible
Roland Boer

Our Victorian Education
Dinah Birch

The Idea of English Ethnicity
Robert Young

Living with Theory
Vincent B. Leitch

Uses of Literature
Rita Felski

Religion and the Human Future
David E. Klemm and
William Schweiker

The State of the Novel
Dominic Head

In Defense of Reading
Daniel R. Schwarz

Why Victorian Literature Still Matters
Philip Davis

The Savage Text
Adrian Thatcher

The Myth of Popular Culture
Perry Meisel

Phenomenal Shakespeare
Bruce R. Smith

Why Politics Can’t Be Freed From Religion
Ivan Strenski

What Cinema is!
Andrew Dudley

The Future of Theology
David F. Ford

A Future for Criticism
Catherine Belsey

After the Fall
Richard Gray

After Globalization
Eric Cazdyn and Imre Szeman

Art Is Not What You Think It Is
Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago

The Global Future of English Studies
James F. English
The Global Future of English Studies

James F. English
For Jimmy, John, and Eileen
Contents

List of Illustrations ix
Preface xi
Acknowledgments xiii

PART I
The Future of English Enrollments:
Massification and Global Demand 1
   I Beyond Crisis 3
   II Let’s Do the Numbers 9
   III Not a Bust but a Boom 27

PART II
The Future of English Professors:
Efficiency versus Prestige in
the Age of Global Rankings 51
   I The Economics of Massification 53
   II Doing More with Less 57
   III Demand for the Doctorate 65
   IV Credentials Fever 76

PART III
The Future of the English Curriculum:
Literary Studies in Its Global Aspect 105
   I The End of the Discipline as We Know It 107
   II Language versus Literature 115
Contents

III China: English Plus, Literature Minus? 126
IV English Studies and “Culture Studies”
   in Europe and Australia 141
V Creative Writing for a Creative Economy 157
VI The Global English Major 172

MANIFESTO 189

Index 193
## List of Illustrations

1.1 Bachelor’s degrees conferred, by discipline, United States, 1983–2008.  
1.3 Number of graduating majors and share of total degrees, selected disciplines, United States, 1983–2008.  
1.4 Percent change in share of undergraduate degrees granted, United States, 1983–2008.  
1.5 Percent change in number of undergraduate degrees granted, United States, 1998–2008.  
1.6 Percent change in number of undergraduate degrees granted, United States, 1983–2008.  
1.7 Percent increase in undergraduate enrollments by discipline, United Kingdom, 1999–2009 – unadjusted HESA statistics.  
1.8 Percent increase in undergraduate enrollments by discipline, United Kingdom, 1999–2009 – adjusted HESA statistics.  
1.9 Total tertiary enrollments, 1980–2007, worldwide and by region.  

ix
List of Illustrations

1.10 Number of graduating English majors
   in selected countries and regions, 1996 and 2008. 36
1.11 Number of graduating English majors,
   1996 and 2008, by broad groups of countries. 36

2.1 Number of teachers in tertiary education,
   1980–2007, selected regions. 58
2.2 Student–teacher ratio in tertiary education
   worldwide, 1980–2007. 59
2.3 Number of instructional faculty by employment
   status, United States, 1970–2007. 61

3.1 Transcript for 2004 English BA recipient in China. 130
3.2 Reading list in the British novel, from
   the Chinese national curriculum. 135
3.3 Table of contents from a Chinese anthology
   of British literature. 137
3.4 Curriculum for the BA in English,
   University of Basel, Switzerland. 144
3.5 Curriculum for the BA in English literature
   and culture (2011 matriculants), University
   of Amsterdam, Netherlands. 146
3.6 Number of programs awarding BAs and master’s
   degrees in creative writing, 1984, 1996, and 2008. 159
3.7 Approximate average distribution of classroom
   hours for an English BA in selected systems. 173
This is not a prescriptive manifesto on method, calling for a new approach to research, a new theorization of the literary object, or a new form of pedagogical practice. There are always plenty of books in circulation announcing new programs of research and teaching; such books are indeed one of the great constants of our discipline, one of the products it most reliably produces – one of the signs, indeed, of its stability and vigor. Yet when we step back to take a long view of literary studies, even the most contentious debates over specific disciplinary assumptions and practices tend to appear as minor eruptions on a placid surface, affecting a relatively small number of faculty and graduate students who are housed in a few exceptional institutions. As Barbara Herrnstein Smith observed in the midst of the fierce conflicts of the early 1990s, when English faculty were accused of pursuing a wholesale assault on the discipline’s traditional texts and values, “nothing in higher education has been more stable over the past 40 years than the curriculum of departments of English.”

This is not to deny that important changes have taken place. Recent decades have witnessed seismic shifts on the global terrain of higher education and English has not escaped the disruption and turmoil. But the changes it has been undergoing are not of
the sort that can be addressed in a standard-issue manifesto on critical method. The overabundance of English PhDs in Western Europe and North America and the acute shortage in many countries of South and East Asia; the explosion of creative writing programs throughout the Anglophone world; the widening effort, now evident in China, to reform the “English Plus” model and decouple English literary studies from the teaching of business writing and English for engineers: these kinds of changes are large scale – often too large scale for us even to register them in any coherent way, let alone to incorporate them into our disputes over theory and method. My aim here is to draw these kinds of tectonic shifts, and the tensions underlying them, into the compass of our more immediate matters of concern. To be sure, this widening of attention leads to certain implications for critical and pedagogical practice: that we should veer off from the orthodoxies of the (now almost elderly) “new” historicism; that we should adjust departmental formations, degree requirements, and standard coursework to emphasize the critical learning inherent in creative writing and the creative element in critical writing; that we should extend beyond the comfort zone of our habitual interdisciplinarities to form alliances with the quantitative social and informational sciences; and so on. But the purpose of this book is not so much to lay out my own agenda for English studies as to offer, however sketchily and imperfectly, the groundwork for clearer collective thinking about what the agenda should be. While I will maintain that our discipline’s future is not nearly so bleak as most commentators imagine, it does face major challenges. And our success in meeting those challenges will depend, to begin with, on our ability to map the new global landscape on which we are operating.
Acknowledgments

I could not have written this book without assistance from faculty and students in various English departments around the world. My colleagues at Penn, especially Peter Conn and Max Cavitch, have been among my most thoughtful and well-informed interlocutors. During my time teaching at Kings College, London, I learned much about the specificities of the British system from conversations with Mark Turner, Jo McDonagh, and Gordon McMullan. When he was at the University of Edinburgh, John Frow engaged me in a project of administrative data exchange between the English departments there, at Penn, and at the University of Melbourne. Elizabeth Anderson performed heroic labor in assembling the Penn data for that study, the results of which proved helpful to this book in a number of ways. David Carter arranged for me to make an extended visit to the University of Queensland, where my sense of the situation of English departments in Australia was sharpened by conversations with Nathan Garvey, Roger Osborne, Ian Hunter, and David himself. I also learned much from the Australian and New Zealand scholars at the 2011 SHARP Conference in Brisbane, and especially from Simone Murray of Monash University, who, among other things, explained to me the “Melbourne model.” Henrik Enbohm of the Swedish Writers’
Acknowledgments

Union invited me to a large gathering of writers, scholars, and translators in Stockholm, where I was able to speak with faculty and graduate students from literature departments in Sweden and elsewhere in Scandinavia. Andrew Shields at the University of Basel provided me with helpful information about English studies in Switzerland and Germany, as did Philipp Schweighauser and Ina Habermann. In Vienna, my Austrian guide was Hanno Biber, and I am grateful to Lianna Giorgi of the ICCR and the Euro-Festival Project for arranging my visit to that city, as well as to Bologna. Most recently, Rudolph Glitz arranged for me to visit the University of Amsterdam and provided clear and detailed answers to my queries regarding English studies in the Netherlands.

For helping me to learn something about English departments in China, I owe a particular debt to Danling Li, my tireless guide and native informant in Beijing, who has continued to assist me back in Philadelphia. Wang Ning arranged my visit to Tsinghua University and set up a series of meetings and meals there; Shen Anfeng gave me a most informative tour of the campus. Mao Liang arranged my visit to Peking University, where he, Ding Hongwei, Thomas Rendall, and Shen Dan all patiently answered my many questions about their students, curriculums, teaching methods, and funding arrangements. Zhang Hongxia was a charming and informative guide in Shanghai. Junsong Chen of Shanghai International Studies University led me on a most enlightening tour of the English literature section of the SISU bookstore. He Weiwen, vice dean of the School of Foreign Languages at Shanghai Jiaotong University, hosted me on his campus, where I enjoyed helpful discussions with him and Wang Zhenhua. Sun Jian, the chair of English at Fudan University, generously made time for me in the middle of a busy week. My visit to Nanjing University was especially productive, and Liu Haiping did me great service in arranging for meetings with groups of administrators, faculty, and graduate students. Especially helpful was the participation of Yang Jincal, the dean of the School of Foreign Studies, and Gao Wei, Zhu Gang, Zhao Wenshu, Zhu Xuefeng, Hu Jing, and Fan Hao. Finally, Phoebe Liu, my student
Acknowledgments

at Penn, translated Chinese documents and websites for me, and canvassed her friends at universities in China for information that we could not find online.

No one has assisted me more with this book than David Dunning, who prepared all the charts and contributed much clarity of thought to the task of gathering and analyzing the statistical data. David also read the book in manuscript, steering me around numerous mistakes, as did the copyeditor Cheryl Adam at a later stage in the process. Fraser Sutherland worked rapidly to prepare an index. Aileen Castell was a superbly efficient project manager. Emma Bennett is the editor who originally encouraged me to write the book for her Manifesto series, and Ben Thatcher kept the project moving forward despite my habitual dodges, detours, and delays.

None of these people will fully agree with the analysis and arguments in the book. Nor do they share responsibility for whatever errors of fact and flaws of reasoning it contains. But the opportunity to discuss with them the present circumstances and possible futures of a discipline in which we are all invested has greatly enriched my understanding and enlivened my professional life these past few years.
Part I
The Future of English Enrollments
Massification and Global Demand
Beyond Crisis

For many readers of this book, particularly those who teach in US universities, it will come as strange news when I say that the academic discipline of English is not in a state of crisis, that its future actually looks pretty bright. Where have I been? Didn’t I get the memo? A 2008 *Nation* magazine piece by Yale University’s William Deresiewicz is more in sync with the professional pulse. “The number of students studying English literature,” writes Deresiewicz, “appears to be in a steep, prolonged and apparently irreversible decline. In the past ten years, my department has gone from about 120 majors a year to about ninety a year. Fewer students mean fewer professors; during the same time, we’ve gone from about fifty-five full-time faculty positions to about forty-five. Student priorities are shifting to more ‘practical’ majors like economics.” It really doesn’t matter anymore where we may stand on questions of critical method, canon, or ideology, concludes Deresiewicz. The “real story of academic literary criticism today is that the profession is, however slowly, dying.”1
What makes Deresiewicz’s diagnosis especially alarming is that he is writing from some of the highest and safest ground our field has to offer. This putative erosion of the undergraduate English major has after all been occurring in the context of a massive and malign rearrangement of the entire higher educational sector, from which heavily endowed private institutions like Yale are among the very few to enjoy any significant degree of insulation. In accordance with the global shift to a late-capitalist social and economic paradigm, academic labor (and particularly instructional labor) has been cheapened and casualized on a vast and international scale, while the fortunate few, atop the most elite enclaves, are enjoying unprecedented rates of compensation: a million dollars a year for university presidents, $3 million for superstar professors, and the sky’s the limit for football coaches. Students are lured to the most competitive private institutions with spacious campus apartments, organic cafeteria food, and state-of-the-art fitness centers, while their peers at under-resourced public institutions cannot even find seating space in the dilapidated lecture halls. For teachers and students alike, there has never been a wider gap between the haves and have-nots of the university system, nor so many who have next to nothing. If things look bad for English studies at Yale, what must they be like at Southern Connecticut State – or the University of Madras? And even these recent painful decades of productivity maximization and the market-driven, “customer service-oriented” retooling of academic programs have been in a sense a period of false hopes, transpiring within a millennial bubble of economic growth which has now been exposed as little more than a global Ponzi scheme. The bursting of this bubble in 2008, which exposed massive burdens of veiled debt, has brought new hardships to the educational sector and will likely lead to the closing of less advantaged departments and programs in the coming years, and even to the collapse of entire colleges and universities.

English literary study has certainly not been unscathed by this upheaval and transformation, and in some respects English clearly ranks among the system’s zones of dispossession. Yet we should recognize that, in comparison with many disciplines, not just in