

## Should English literature be replaced by Global literature?

Many people claim that English literature should be replaced by global literature, however I believe that English literature is a part of Global literature, and it would be wrong to separate the two.

The definition of English literature and global literature suggests that they are two distinct categories of work. English literature is defined as “written works produced in the English language by inhabitants of the British Isles (including Ireland) from the 7th century to the present day”<sup>1</sup> and global literature is that which is written in a different language and translated for English speakers to read. In the past it may have been important to maintain a specific national identity, and claim works of literature by labelling them as ‘English literature’. However today, in the diverse, global community that we live in (even within the British Isles) there are many benefits to learning about great works of literature from different countries and cultures. Making ourselves aware of the Global literature that already exists in Britain can be a chance to improve understanding in a multicultural society and represent minority groups in the UK through a vastly popular subject.

English Literature A-level is a widely acknowledged subject, prided for its “engaging and up to date”<sup>2</sup> specification, but how engaging can it be for our growing and evolving population if we fail to recognise the valuable people in society that make English literature global? Not only are there examples of contemporary literature with a global influence but also classic literature includes key ideas derived from different worldly cultures.

Any benefits to come from replacing English literature with Global literature would surely be limited to a more modern and inclusive name.

Due to England's lengthy colonial history spanning close to four centuries and high rate of development (with a Human Development Index of 0.929.)<sup>3</sup> its culture and literature has had generations of world influence. The choice to change the name of English literature then, would solely be for aesthetics because, as I will discuss, the literature that everyday people engage with and

study in England already has a multitude of cultures and traditions intertwined and woven tightly into it.

Emily Tucker

English literature has been shaped for hundreds of years by many styles of global literature.

Aristotelian concepts, such as the Three Unities (Unity of Time, Place and Action) derived from Greek tragedy, form the basis of tragic drama that playwrights can adhere to or subvert for dramatic effect.

In Shakespeare's "Othello" he breaks the unity of place (all actions must take place in one location) to catalyse Othello's tragic fall. He allows the setting to move from Venice to Cyprus; providing a wild and unpredictable atmosphere for Iago's evil to flourish unhindered. Furthermore, Shakespeare's works have had Senecan influences; one trope of Roman tragedy is that the catastrophe often ends in ghoulish bloodshed. Many of the English Playwright's works call upon this trope: Macbeth dies a gory death "[Re-enter MACDUFF, with MACBETH's head]" with his head being placed on a spike as a warning to others. Similarly, in Hamlet, the catastrophe ends in a gruesome manner, with death by poison to four of the characters "venom, to thy work." Most Shakespearian tragedies end in ghoulish bloodshed and rely upon the conventions suggested by Greek and Roman writers: demonstrating the influence upon English literature that Global literature has historically had. It begs the question; is there any need to separate the two? Or is the need to unite them even further?

The term "world literature," which one would argue is the same as Global literature, was introduced by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in the early 1800's<sup>4</sup>. He claimed that literature should not be restrained by national boundaries. Expanding upon this, one must consider the boundaries placed upon English literature and the breaking of them through globalisation. It is evident that since the time of Shakespeare, England's literature has become more widely examined and more culturally influenced. The Windrush generation immigrating from the Caribbean (1948-1973) "expanded the definition of what Britain was,"<sup>5</sup> as Anthony Joseph commented. The Caribbean influence upon oral literature has been carried through to present day as lyricists such as Stormzy and Dizzee Rascal exemplify styles of traditional Trinidadian songs in their music. It seems farcical to suggest separating

English and Global literature as it is clear they are, even as recently as the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, actively intertwined.

Emily Tucker

The Angles and Saxons who invaded Brittan in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century brought with them early oral poetry. Britannica writes “For nearly a century after the conversion of King Aethelberht I of Kent to Christianity about 600, there is no evidence that the English wrote poetry in their own language.”<sup>1</sup> Some of the first translations of St John’s gospel into English language were done by St Bede, a monk from the North-east of England. One would argue therefore that even the Bible, infamously renowned and hailed as one of the most important written works in history, is in fact a global work of literature. Proving again how English literature has different cultural influences, not just in contemporary literature. Without knowing it, all historical events (involving England) have influenced the way English literature has been written and passed on.

One might argue that works classified as English literature fail to represent all people, from different cultures and ethnic communities, who live in England. Though English literature has been shaped by global literature, one must acknowledge the lack of representation BAME groups receive. 9.6 million people in the UK are of non-UK birth (gov.uk) and without an inclusive range of literature we are left to consider, are we abandoning close to 15% of our society? Johann Wolfgang von Goethe argued “world literature emerged because of the development of global economic and cultural relations.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, for English literature to become global, more representation is needed.

Representation through literature, one would argue, is the most important form of inclusivity. The poem ‘Checking Out Me History’ is an overt example of this. John Agard uses the refrain “dem never tell me ‘bout that.” to emphasise how his culture has been excluded from his education. He goes on to personify the Government “blind me with me own identity.” and uses connotations of violence and mistreatment to allude how underrepresented people are hurt the most through, an absence of representation for their “identity” and backgrounds in education. He feels that, in a struggle, he must ‘carve out his own identity’ because of the lack of it he received. Multiple mentions of famous black

role models such as “Mary Seacole,” a British-Jamaican nurse, and themselves to criticise the English literature subject. The poem emphasises how harmful it can be to BAME children and students to “blind them” to their own culture and exclude multicultural literature from the education system.

Emily Tucker

The study of English literature is one of the fundamentals of education in England. Children are required to study it from primary school to the age of 16. Focusing upon the GCSE AQA specification for English literature the books include a Shakespearian play, a 19<sup>th</sup> century novel and modern drama or prose from a set list and poetry.

AQA have established a new set of poetry and three new texts to be released as part of their specification for 2023. The new additions will be included “to ensure they (the GCSE specifications) better reflect the diverse range of communities, teachers and students they serve.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it should be noted that AQA are making an active effort to change the amount of recognition the “diverse” society we live in receives.

Something else to consider would be the geographical definition of global. Writing and accessing literature in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is much easier than in previous decades. The vast quantity and accessibility of novels and poetry across the globe, in both printed copies and now more recently online or audible copies, provides the means for English literature to become globally available. Which supports the view that the subject should be ‘literature’ not labelled English or global.

In conclusion, English literature does not need to be replaced by Global literature. We must recognise the diverse nature of contemporary literature written in the English language. Therefore, I propose English literature should become known as literature and should include as many examples as possible of work written about and by people of different global origins and cultures.

Emily Tucker

References:

(1) <https://www.britannica.com/art/English-literature/The-Renaissance-period-1550-1660>

(2)

<https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/english/as-and-a-level/english-literature-a-7711-7712/introduction>

(3) <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/GBR>

(4) <https://ozzz.org/world-literature/>

(5) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/z6grnr#:~:text=On%2022%20June%20the%20UK,which%20would%20transform%20British%20culture>

(6)

<https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/english/gcse/english-literature-8702/subject-content/modern-texts-and-poetry>