

Graham-Yooll and the question of Anglo-Argentine identity

Andrew Graham-Yooll, the journalist and writer who is a central referent in any study on the Anglo-Argentine community, was born in Buenos Aires to a Scottish father and an English mother in 1944. He joined the *Buenos Aires Herald* in 1966. Following the 1976 coup, Graham-Yooll and his family were in exile in London, where he stayed for 18 years. He worked for *The Daily Telegraph* (1976 - 77) and *The Guardian* (1977 - 84) and directed two magazines in London.

Back in Argentina in 1994, he was director, President of the Board and Senior Editor of the *Buenos Aires Herald* in different periods. He left in 2007 and is now a contributor to several Argentine and British newspapers and magazines.

He has published about thirty books in English and Spanish. *A State of Fear*, on his experience as a journalist in Argentina in the terror years preceding the dictatorship and his exile, was first published in London in 1981 and has since then been reprinted and translated into several languages. *The Forgotten Colony*, quoted several times in these articles, was originally published in London in 1981 and again in Buenos Aires in 1999.

Graham-Yooll is an Anglo-Argentine by birth but also in terms of his bilingualism and his interest in the question of identity. He has become the chronicler not only of the community but of Argentine history in English and in Spanish. Although he has been back in Argentina since 1994, he still finds it more comfortable to write in English 'although it's self defeating, because it becomes rusty very quickly'. He keeps in regular contact with his family in the UK, reads avidly and publishes in both languages, so his bilingualism is anything but 'rusty'.

His book *Point of Arrival. Observations Made on an Extended Visit (to Britain)* (1992) reflects on Britain, on being very angry and wanting to leave, on being a visitor, on belonging, on travelling. *Goodbye Buenos Aires* (1999) (which sold out in England and was published in Spanish two years earlier) is ‘a son’s attempt to recreate his father’, who died when he was nineteen. Yooll also remembers his father in a poem written in Acassuso, Buenos Aires, on 13 July 1969, six years after his father’s death, which is part of the *Day by Day* collection (included in *Se Habla Spanglés*, new edition, p. 85).

I remember my father, try to forget him
By recalling better days.
I hate him for the humiliation,
When I besought him at the bar, to find other ways.
I shiver and feel it is part of that past right now:
Dragged him through unlit streets, heard him mutter,
Pleaded with people not to stare
But help me carry him, when he rolled in the gutter.
Trembling, saw him fall in to the empty bath,
Watched him come up with a bloody face.
People say, do not think of your dead father that way;
Just dream of him in another place.

(In memory of Douglas Noel Graham-Yooll, d. 13-3-63)

‘Everything I have ever written has to do with my immediate environment,’ he asserts, and then wonders whether ‘Anglo-Argie social group’ is the right label for that environment. It is in his poetry that his ‘double-barrel identity’ becomes playfully expressed through code-switching, in ‘Spanglés’. ‘Spanglés,’ he admits, may be ‘a lazy resource, but I think it is a way of being faithful to my two cultures’ (in Libedinsky 1998, my translation).

The collections *Se Habla Spanglés* and *Day to Day*, published in the early 1970s, were ‘exotic in the swinging London sort of way’. They were reprinted as one book in Buenos Aires in 1998, and this is the edition used in this article.

This is how you do ‘Las cosas en Spanglés’ (‘Things in Spanglish’) according to the poem that closes the first collection (p. 78).

Con un poco
of the castellano
y otro tanto del
speak in English,
se obtienen cosas en
spanglés.
Aunque la academia
no lo aprecie,
esto no es bastardo y se usa;
es puro por cruza:
la comunidad lo produjo
aunque el americano lo introdujo
mediante cursos
de empresarios
y becas para operarios.
El spanglés
has the great advantage
de ser una contribución
towards overcoming great barriers
y ayudar a los analistas
a establecer la incomunicación.

Yooll states that Spanglés is actually used and was produced by ‘the community’, though, not without cynicism he clarifies that ‘the American introduced it by means of corporate courses and scholarships for workers’ and concludes that ‘Spanglish has the great advantage of contributing towards overcoming great barriers and helping analysts establish incommunication’.

When asked whether he perceives a pattern in the way he code-switches, whether there is any criterion he follows, he says he just lets it flow naturally as he does in conversation (and this is confirmed by an interview in Spanglés that is not to be just transcribed but also partially translated to be ‘quotable’).

In ‘Made In...’, Yooll uses ‘Spanglés’ to express a highly critical view of the average Argentinian’s admiration for whatever comes from abroad. If no translation of either

language is provided, the point the poem makes is still clear and emphatic: 'Foreign is best'. The representations constructed from the early days of travel writing are now inscribed in (Anglo-)Argentine culture: Europeans work harder, in Argentina everyone is indolent ('unos vagos'), foreign products are made to last, Argentinians would work harder if they were a European colony.

Es mejor,
naturalmente:
lo importado
they can make it better;
We have never bothered,
Of course;
Foreign is best.
Es otra mentalidad,
aquí sólo importa
el vino;
unos vagos.
They think more,
Those Europeans.
Much better,
of course.
Trabajan más;
nosotros
lo podríamos hacer
pero aquí
Nobody wants
To work.
Qué fabricación
la extranjera,
dura toda
la vida;
My father used it
My granddad too.

Tanto mejor
lo importado,
que ya no se consigue.
Si fuésemos
colonia europea
viera usted
cómo trabajaríamos.
No,
thank you very much.

In another poem, this time completely in English except for the title (perhaps because it was originally published in the *Daily Telegraph* magazine) he lists the stereotypical representations in the collective imaginary of tourists, and in a cynical counterpoint (thus ‘Contratango’) blends his views with a parodic version of the Lord’s Prayer in which the USA is ‘God’:

Do you remember, Micaela, when the tourists flew in
and called us underdeveloped;
with knitted brows told of their concern,
said our wine was like heaven
but our politics were hell
and the natives weren't friendly or grateful.

Our Father which art in Washington, Hallowed be thy aid;
It was then that we read about their new campaign
to stop children taking drugs,
black air and students acting like thugs;
we were guests of a full-page advert in May
that laid claim to our miserable earnings:
"This year, visit the U.S.A."

Thy Marines come;

Thy will be done; in earth as it is in business.

[...]

They said our public toilets stink,
our trains are unclean and the fashions uncertain;
their women wore big slacks in all shades of pink
that wobbled indecently
in our small catholic towns;
they said underdevelopment kept us down.

The power and the story, Forever and never. Amen.

(*Day to Day*, in *Se Habla Spanglés*: 88 – 89)

Another writer who code-switches in a similar way, alternating phrases in Spanish and in English, is Johane Flint Taylor, based in New Jersey, USA. We find a similar counterpoint in ‘Argentine Memory’, this time between the evocation in English and the flashes of memories in Spanish:

... the way the sweet smell of

orange trees in the rain
still mingles with the fumes of
desinfectante and wafts
over the iron brige
built by the British (*en la estación Borges*)
spur my soul (*mi alma*)
to soar
like the hawk above the distant wood –
alta en el cielo un águila guerrera.

The phrases in Spanish are italicised and so clearly separated from the rest. They sometimes clarify or specify, but sometimes they are voices from the past, as is the case of the last line, which is be a line from a patriotic song children sing at school in honour of the Argentine flag, especially when the flag is being hoisted. The very British hawk in the last line but one is contrasted with the eagle which is a symbol of the Argentine flag.

We may wonder at this point who is the target public of texts in Spanglés. They presuppose a bilingual audience, but also one acquainted with the cultural referents that the text does not transpose from one culture to another, a readership capable of that ‘translation’ which the text does not put into practice, a translation from one country to another, from one culture to another. Kramsch would call it a language and literature of ‘third places’, but the location seems too rigid. It is, rather, a ‘locus of hybridity in Bhabha’s terms, revealing

the ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority and enables a form of subversion, founded on that uncertainty, that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention.

(Bhabha 1985 in Ashcroft et al. 2006 : 42 / 43)

If Spanish is the official language of Argentina, Spanglés subverts its authority. If English is the language of globalisation, Spanglés localises its use. It reveals ‘the dynamics of creole self-fashioning’ Pratt (1993: 4) identifies as instances of *transculturation*.

We may also wonder whether Spanglés is a borderland identity strategy as Chicano English is in the Mexican-American border, one which belongs exclusively to the Anglo-Argentine

community. These reflections take us back to the Anglo-Argentine corpus as a whole and to examine the appropriacy of the term 'Anglo-Argentine' and the definition in the home page.

For references, see the bibliography file.

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