Introduction

There is a long tradition of British authors travelling or living abroad and basing their books on other countries. We can note this before looking at the main theme of the book, which is linked with being overseas, teaching English, and writing based on the experiences.

The earliest known example of a picaresque novel based on travel abroad is by Thomas Nashe (1567-1601). Between 1586 and 1588 he travelled in France and Italy, and then settled in London in 1588 and became a writer. His unusual novel *The Unfortunate Traveller: Or the Life of Jacke Wilton* was published in 1594. It is an account of the adventure of Jacke Wilton, an English page, and his frightening experiences in France and Italy; it has been described as a mock-historical fantasy.

The first proper guidebook to be published was probably James Howell’s *Instructions for Forreine Travell* in 1642, based on his twenty years abroad. The first surviving account is Sir Kenelm Digby’s *Journal of a Voyage into the Mediterranean* of 1628; it was first published from the manuscript in 1868.

A well-known source of the early writing was ‘The Grand Tour’, which began in the sixteenth century and became a custom in eighteenth-century England for aristocratic families. It involved leisurely travel through several countries in Europe, sometimes lasting for two or three years and usually finishing in Italy.

One of the earliest travellers to write about the Grand Tour was Joseph Addison (1672-1719), the distinguished classical scholar from Oxford University. He travelled on the continent from 1699 to 1703 and then wrote his travel book *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, 1701-1703*, 1705. His book became very popular and was referred to by many tourists.

A number of well-known people wrote of their experiences of travelling; these included Tobias Smollet, Laurence Sterne, James Boswell, George Gordon Lord Byron, and Benjamin Disraeli.
Some teachers in Britain, not abroad, were writers-lexicographers whose dictionaries became renowned: for example, Nathaniel Bailey who wrote one of the first major works – *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary*, 1721. This was a forerunner of Samuel Johnson’s world famous *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 1755. Bailey defined ‘TO TEACH’ as ‘to instruct in Literature, Trade, Mystery, etc.’. There was no mention of language or grammar, and the reference to ‘mystery’ adds an unusual dimension. Perhaps this influenced some of the EFL teachers in the writing of their novels!

In the early days of their writing, authors often took on other jobs in order to earn a living. Not many, however, could compare with P.C. Wren (1885-1941) – a descendant of the English architect Sir Christopher Wren – whose best-known book was *Beau Geste*, 1924. After studying at Oxford, Wren spent five years travelling in all the continents, and working his way as a sailor, journalist, farmer, hunter and schoolteacher, as well as several other jobs. He then lived in India for ten years as assistant director of education and physical culture to the Bombay government, and produced his first book of stories set in India – *Dew and Mildew*, 1912. More usual occupations for writers were journalism, publishing and teaching. For those who had been to university, subjects that were frequently studied were classics, history, modern languages and English.

**Theme of the Book**

The main theme of this book is twentieth-century British writers who taught English abroad in a variety of circumstances and situations, extending from tutoring a child in a family to teaching in a school, and to lecturing in a university, or training teachers of English. Both English language and literature were covered within this range. Teaching English overseas provided the writers with a livelihood, opportunities to get to know other cultures and languages, and a wealth of experience upon which to draw for their later writing. In a number of cases the teachers were employed by the British Council. As the writers published more and became better known to a wider readership, some of them found that they could earn their living from full-time writing; consequently, they stopped teaching. In other cases, however, some writers for many years combined their writing with another career, for example, sometimes lecturing in universities or working for the British Council.

In this survey it is not possible to cover all countries and all the writers as there would be far too many. Many of the writers taught or lectured in several countries, some with the British Council. The
teaching and the countries that inspired most of the writing are the ones focused on. An example of a writer with a range of overseas experience is Frank Tuohy (1925-1999) – his full name was John Francis Tuohy.

Frank Tuohy graduated from King’s College, Cambridge, in 1946. His first overseas experience of teaching was in Finland in 1947-1948; an account of this is given in the Europe section: Finland. He is also covered in the British Council section as he lectured for them in Poland, 1958-1960. In addition, he lectured in Brazil and Japan. To take Brazil as an example. . . .

From 1950 to 1956 Tuohy was Professor of English at the University of São Paulo. Brazil became the setting for his first two novels – *The Animal Game*, 1957, and *The Warm Nights of January*, 1960; in addition, there were some short stories. *The Animal Game* is a very entertaining book about some expatriates living in Brazil. The title of the novel came from the name given to an illegal form of lottery: it was a ‘numbers racket’ in which the numbers have the names of animals. Just by living in an erratic society, the characters seem to be taking part in a lottery.

The first part of *Writers and their Other Work* (WOW) looks at writers who taught or lectured in different parts of the world, while the second part considers the role of the British Council in connection with English Language Teaching (ELT), literature and writers. It also notes the character of the British Council in fiction and then the literature work today in reality. Most of the writers referred to are British, and the teaching situations are in countries where English is a Foreign Language (EFL) or an official/Second Language (ESL). The USA and other countries in which English is the mother tongue have been excluded because there would be far too many. The third part deals with the current position of the British Council.

In addition to noting which countries the writers taught in and during which period, we shall also see the types of writing in which they were engaged and what use they made of their teaching experience and life abroad. Such writing encompasses fiction, poetry, travelogues, (auto)biography, and other kinds. Sometimes novels were written in a particular style, for example, in the form of letters or a diary. In fact, Alex Martin’s first novel, *The General Interruptor*, 1989, which is written in the form of a diary, based in Italy and involving his EFL experiences there, sparked off the idea for this book; his novel is featured in the Italy section. The title *Writers and their Other Work* was prompted by the series of booklets that were started by the British
Council in 1950 – *Writers and their Work*. These are referred to in Part 2; thus a link is established with the British Council.

A worldwide demand for English developed during the twentieth century for reasons that included countries adopting English as an official language, as well as English being needed for educational, scientific, business and social purposes. Consequently, there was an increasing need for teachers of English. Who better than a native speaker of the language to do the job? – thought many institutions, families and individuals.

A number of extracts from writers’ works have been included for several reasons. In particular, they reflect the writers’ attitudes towards teaching, the English language and literature, the students and their learning abilities, and the situations and countries and cultures in which the writers were working. Some of the extracts, especially those from novels, are also entertaining.

**Note on Abbreviations**
The three abbreviations given on the previous page, i.e. EFL (English as a Foreign Language), ELT (English Language Teaching), and ESL (English as a Second/official Language) are commonly used. If ‘T’ is added in front it is Teaching EFL or ESL. Other abbreviations are TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), ESP (English for Specific Purposes) and EAP (English for Academic Purposes). Other abbreviations that are sometimes used are PGCE – Postgraduate Certificate in Education, DipTEO – Diploma in Teaching English Overseas, VSO – Voluntary Service Overseas, BC – British Council, Rep. – Representative.

**Accuracy**
Any opinions expressed in the books, including this one, are those of the authors and not necessarily of the British Council where there are references to the Council. Any errors of fact are those of the authors.
Nineteenth-Century Background

William Cobbett

Before looking at twentieth-century writers we shall consider a few from the nineteenth century. An unusual and virtually unknown book was by William Cobbett (1763-1835) who became famous for his collection of essays which gave an account of his horse-riding in the south and east of England between 1822 and 1826 – *Rural Rides*, 1830. Cobbett was the son of a small farmer in Farnham, Surrey, who taught himself to read and write. He joined the army, then left it and went to France, where he learnt French. He soon emigrated to the USA and taught EFL to French refugees in Philadelphia in the 1790s. He returned to England and again went back to America in 1817. While on Long Island, and making use of his experience of teaching English to the French immigrants, Cobbett started to write letters to his fourteen-year-old son, James Paul. Like his father, James Paul had no formal school education. Consequently, Cobbett’s letters contained information about learning grammar. Cobbett made use of the letters and added more, planning to create a grammar book from them. This he did and it was published in London in December, 1818: *A Grammar of the English Language In a Series of Letters* (‘Intended for the Use of Schools and of Young Persons in general; but, more especially for the Use of Soldiers, Sailors, Apprentices, and Plough-boys’). The first letter to Mr James Paul Cobbett was dated 6 December, 1817, from North Hempstead, Long Island, and entitled ‘INTRODUCTION’, and addressed to

My Dear Little James

You have now arrived at the age of fourteen years, without ever having been bidden, or even advised, to look into a book; and all you know of reading or of writing you owe to your own unbiased taste and choice. . . .

Later in the Introductory Letter Cobbett explains: ‘I have put my work into the form of Letters, in order that I might be continually reminded,
that I was addressing myself to persons, who needed to be spoken to with great clearness. . . .’

A total of twenty-three letters covered the etymology and syntax of a range of grammar. They concluded in an extraordinary fashion in order to draw the reader’s attention to the need for accuracy in grammar. Letter XXI ‘Specimens of False Grammar, Taken from the Writings of Doctor Johnson and from Those of Doctor Watts’, was followed by Letter XXII ‘Errors and Nonsense in a King’s Speech’. The book ended with Letter XXIII ‘On Putting Sentences Together, and on Figurative Language’. The book did remarkably well, selling about 10,000 copies in the first four weeks. It reached the third issue in less than three months.

The earliest known book for foreign learners of English had been published in London in 1580 – *The Englishe Scholemaister* by the Huguenot, Jacques Bellot, ‘Gentleman of Caen’ as he was known, as he came from Normandy. His book was for use by Huguenot refugees who came to England from France in the 1570s. The book gave an account of the English alphabet and pronunciation, with a discussion of ‘difficult words’, e.g. homophones – horse and hoarse.

**Charlotte Brontë**

Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855) is one of the earliest examples of a writer utilizing her experience of teaching English abroad in a novel. In February, 1842, Charlotte went with her sister Emily to study French at Pensionnat Heger in Brussels for nine months. In January, 1843 Charlotte returned there alone for twelve months as a pupil-teacher to teach English. She fell in love with Constantin Heger, the teacher of French and husband of the school’s proprietor. Her love was not reciprocated and her subsequent unhappy time in Brussels provided the basis for her first-written novel, *The Professor*, completed in 1846 but not published until 1857, after her death. In *The Professor*, William Crimsworth, an orphan in his early twenties, is the central character who goes to seek his fortune in Brussels. He is Charlotte Brontë in disguise, mirroring her life. He takes with him a letter of introduction to a Mr Brown whom he soon meets and expresses interest in a teaching post that is suggested. Mr Brown responds:

‘I think I can promise you the place, for Monsieur Pelet will not refuse a professor recommended by me; but come here again at five o’clock this afternoon, and I will introduce you to him.’

The word ‘professor’ struck me. ‘I am not a professor,’ said I. ‘Oh,’ returned Mr Brown, ‘professor, here in Belgium, means a teacher, that is all.’
The title ‘professor’ still causes confusion to this day for some people, especially, for example, university posts in Britain compared with Canada and the USA. Another of Charlotte Brontë’s novels, Villette, published in 1853, was based on her memories of Brussels. In the novel, Brussels is renamed Villette and has as its centre a pupil-teacher relationship, as in The Professor.

Anna Leonowens
Anna (Harriette) Leonowens (1834-1914) wrote her memoirs of living and working in Thailand. She was born in Wales, married an army major and they were posted to Singapore in 1856; he died there from sunstroke in 1859. Anna established a school for officers’ children in Singapore. Shortly afterwards, in 1862, she accepted an invitation from King Mongbut of Siam ‘to undertake the education of our beloved royal children’. She became governess to the king’s sixty-four children from his harem of about twenty wives, teaching English to the wives as well as the children. She left Siam in 1867 because of ill health; she soon started to write her memoirs which were published in 1870 – The English Governess at the Siamese Court. Another book was published in 1872, The Romance of the Harem.

In the first book, Anna Leonowens concentrated on a number of cultural aspects, e.g. harem and slaves, deaths of children, the white elephant, traditions and ceremonies. She strongly supported the ill-treated women and their children and often saw the king on their behalf.

In 1864 I found that my labours had greatly increased; I had often to work till ten o’clock at night to accomplish the endless translations required of me . . . my duties, which grew daily in variety and responsibility. What with translating, correcting, copying, dictating, reading, I had hardly a moment I could call my own . . .

Anna had a lot of influence on one of her pupils, Prince Chulalongkorn; about thirty years later, when he was king, he abolished slavery.

Eventually, a biography of Anna Leonowens by Margaret Landon was published in 1944. This led to the making in 1946 of a film, Anna and the King of Siam, and a musical in 1951, The King and I, which was filmed in 1956. Thus ‘mighty things from small beginnings grow’.

Dorothy Richardson
Dorothy M. Richardson (1873-1957) went to Hanover in 1891 at the age of 17½ to become a pupil-teacher, studying German and teaching English to the ‘daughters of gentlemen’. She stayed for only six months
Writers and their Other Work

but on her return to London it was clear that she had matured andecome more independent. Eventually she started to write and became
best known for the sequence of twelve highly autobiographical novels
entitled *Pilgrimage*, published between 1915 and 1938. The first,
*Pointed Roofs*, 1915, was based on her time in Hanover at Fräulein
Lily Pabst’s ‘institute’ at No.13 Meterstrasse. The narrow, high-
windowed house with its unusual gabled roof became the setting for
the novel. The central character is Miriam Henderson, who is at Fräulein
Pfaff’s school for girls in Hanover.

It was a fool’s errand . . . to undertake to go to the German
school and teach . . . to be going there . . . with nothing to
give. The moment would come when there would be a class
sitting round a table waiting for her to speak. . . . How was
English taught? How did you begin? English grammar . . . in
German? Her heart beat in her throat. She had never thought
of that . . . the rules of English grammar?. . . .

In some respects, Miriam Henderson’s difficulties are similar to those
experienced by several twentieth-century writers who had no training
in teaching EFL. In the novel, Dorothy Richardson was a pioneer of
the ‘stream-of-consciousness’ technique, narrating the plot through
the thoughts of Miriam, thus enabling the feelings of characters to be
described without using conventional dialogue.

**Lafcadio Hearn**

Richard Aldington (1892-1962), the novelist, poet and biographer,
described Lawrence Durrell’s books about the Greek islands as not so
much ‘travel books’ as ‘foreign-residence’ books. An alternative label
might be ‘one-country’ books. Certainly these descriptions would be
appropriate for the remarkable writings about Japan by Lafcadio Hearn
(1850-1904).

Hearn was born on one of the Ionian Islands, of Irish-Greek
parentage, and was educated mostly in England, emigrated to America
and after many ups and downs as a journalist went to Japan in 1890
on a commission for *Harper’s Magazine*. He stayed there for the rest
of his life, marrying a Japanese woman, adopting the name of Yakumo
Koizumi and taking out Japanese citizenship.

Lafcadio Hearn started teaching English language and literature soon
after he arrived in Japan to boys aged twelve to sixteen years at a
Middle and Normal School in Matsue, a remote provincial town on
the main island of Honshu, facing the Sea of Japan. At the same time
he continued to write articles about Japanese life for American magazines. In fact, his first book on Japan was a collection of essays or sketches initiated by some of his magazine assignments – *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*, 1894.

A biographer of Hearn – Elizabeth Stevenson (in *Lafcadio Hearn*, 1961) – has commented on Hearn’s early days in teaching that he was kind and exciting and enjoyed the teacher-student relationship. He had never taught before and was not trained for it but found it immensely satisfying, as did his students. He realized that he could learn more about Japan from his students than from anyone else and this would benefit his writing.

After staying in Matsue for about a year, Hearn moved with his wife to Kumamoto on the southern island of Kyushu to teach in a Higher Middle School. His final move was to Tokyo in 1896 where he had been invited to become Professor of English Literature at the Imperial University, a post he held until 1903, the year before he died from a heart attack.

All the time he was teaching, Hearn continued his writing about Japan, regularly publishing one book a year: he described with warmth and affection the people, countryside, customs and folk tales of Japan. To the Japanese he was the best-known and best-loved chronicler of their country and way of life.

In Hearn’s first book on Japan, *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*, published in two volumes in 1894, the first sketch in Volume I was ‘My First Day in the Orient’. It contained very useful advice for the would-be writer.

‘Do not fail to write down your first impressions as soon as possible,’ said a kind English professor whom I had the pleasure of meeting soon after my arrival in Japan: ‘they are evanescent, you know; they will never come to you again, once they have faded out; and yet of all the strange sensations you may receive in this country you will feel none so charming as these.’ I am trying now to reproduce them from the hasty notes of the time, and find that they were even more fugitive than charming; something has evaporated from all my recollections of them – something impossible to recall. I neglected the friendly advice, in spite of all resolves to obey it: I could not, in those first weeks, resign myself to remain indoors and write, while there was yet so much to see and hear and feel in the sun-steeped ways of the wonderful Japanese city. Still, even could I revive
all the lost sensations of those first experiences, I doubt if I could express and fix them in words. The first charm of Japan is intangible and volatile as a perfume.

Volume II of the book contained sketch XIX ‘From the Diary of an English Teacher’, in which Hearn described his pupils in Matsue, observing the school customs and discipline, the social and religious customs, sports competitions, and a comparison of the Japanese and Western boys’ physique and physiognomy.

II. Matsue, September 2, 1890

. . . teaching Japanese boys turns out to be a much more agreeable task than I had imagined . . . although the lads cannot understand my words always when I speak, they can understand whatever I write upon the blackboard with chalk. Most of them have already been studying English from childhood, with Japanese teachers. All are wonderfully docile and patient. . . .

VIII. October 15, 1890

All teaching in the modern Japanese system of education is conducted with the utmost kindness and gentleness. The teacher is a teacher only: he is not, in the English sense of mastery, a master. He stands to his pupils in the relation of an elder brother. He never tries to impose his will upon them: he never scolds, he seldom criticises. . . .

Lafcadio Hearn’s works describing Japan and its people and customs include Out of the East, 1895, Gleanings in Buddha-Fields, 1897, In Ghostly Japan, 1899, and A Japanese Miscellany, 1901, plus several others. The admiration that the Japanese had for Hearn resulted in a Chair being named after him at Tokyo University. His lack of arrogance, his ability to adapt to a totally new situation and desire to be accepted by local people, provided an outstanding role model for foreign teachers. Japan continued to attract teachers and lecturers of English, especially British poets between the First and Second World Wars, as we shall see.