Richard Evans, in his recent inaugural lecture as Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, claimed that British historians are more cosmopolitan than their continental European colleagues. They write more about other nations and they participate more in debates abroad. If true, this is a provocative assertion, raising the question as to why some cultures are curious about the world, while others rest self-contentedly in themselves. If restless curiosity about the world is laudable, then it is rare that a prominent historian trumpets the virtues of his country. Only in the nineteenth century did historians proclaim national pre-eminence, practically as part of their jobs. For Evans praises not just his colleagues. His tribute is to the cultural curiosity of the English-speaking world. ‘Anglophone societies’, he approvingly quotes a colleague, ‘seem to be fundamentally as interested in the pasts of other cultures as they are in their own’ (p. 8).

Much of the book into which Evans’s lecture was padded (Cosmopolitan Islanders: British Historians and the European Continent, Oxford, 2009) is given over to summaries of modern British historiography and excerpts from colleagues’ emails. The interesting parts are quantitative. He has classified historians in the UK and US, France, Germany and Italy – whether they work on their national histories, on foreign countries, or on both.

English-speaking historians, Evans shows, are much more active in writing the history of other countries than is true – mutatis mutandis – on the continent. Over half of Italian historians are working on their own nation. Substantially less than a
third of Americans are. Over 60 per cent of US historians, but only 15 per cent of their German colleagues, write only about other nations. Yet, more continental historians (ca. a third) than British (one-fifth) and American ones (one-tenth) work on both their own and other countries. Moreover, historians vary in how far afield they venture. Those few Germans and Italians who work outside their own country focus on other European nations (82 and 75 per cent, respectively). The French and British are equally Eurocentric (62 per cent). By contrast, well over half of American historians who write about foreign nations study the world beyond Europe.

I was intrigued by Evans’s numbers because I had, for a different project, done some similar rough calculations. Anyone who works at an Anglophone history department has a gut feeling that the continent is less interested in the rest of the world. I wanted to test whether this was true. To my surprise, no particularly sharp division between the English-speaking nations and the continentals emerged from my figures and so I let the matter drop. Statistics trump intuitions. After I read Evans, however, a second pass over the terrain seemed warranted. Some of Evans’s argument rests on his own statistical artifact. Historians do not always work hermetically on either their own nations or others. Sensibly, he created a third category of those who do both and found that the in-between category is larger on the continent. No wonder, perhaps. German historians are required to write a doctoral dissertation on one national topic, then a Habilitation, in essence a second book, on an entirely different field, topped off by an inaugural lecture in a third area of history. Nothing of the sort is required of their Anglophone colleagues. If we include the historians who work on both domestic and foreign topics together with those who focus only on the great abroad, Evans’s distinction is moderated. The US and UK still come out ahead, with about two-thirds of historians interested in foreign countries. France comes close (63 per cent abroad), while in Italy and Germany only about half of historians look beyond their borders.

Intrigued by the distinction that remained, I had a second look at my own calculations. Evans includes Italy and more universities (in some countries, but not all). My figures come from two universities each in four nations: France (Paris IV and Ecole Normale Supérieure), Germany (FU Berlin and Munich), the UK (Cambridge and University College London) and the US (Harvard and Yale). They suggest that, while the English-speaking nations may be a tad more cosmopolitan, the gulf is far from dramatic. But it is quite hard to compare. The websites of Anglophone universities list fulltime permanent faculty members. On the continent, while academic hierarchies remain, departmental staff lists encourage the pleasantly egalitarian fiction that all are equal. Postgraduate students, technicians and administrators, as well as non-ladder teachers, are all lumped with fulltime faculty members.

I found that American historians are the most cosmopolitan, with 66 per cent studying other nations, alongside the French (65 per cent), then the British (59 per cent) and, at a remove, the Germans (51 per cent). One can quibble with any choices made, but also with Evans’s. Evans’s sample sizes vary dramatically: 472 UK historians, 92 Italians. Evans claims to have surveyed 93 historians from France. Yet Paris IV alone
has 63 historians (18 working on France only; 31 primarily on the rest of the world, or both; while 14 were not faculty members in the UK or US sense). Since Evans looks at only two universities each in Italy and France, his results are robust really only for the UK, US and Germany.

Take the University of Vienna (not one surveyed by Evans). Its Faculty of Historical and Cultural Studies includes thirteen different institutes. Some include faculty members who would, in an Anglophone institution, be in history departments; others would not. One problem with Austria is whether German history counts as local or not. But, in any case, few historians work exclusively on Germany. Looking only at the Institute of History, counting only those with some sort of professorial title, and double-counting those who work in both Austrian and non-Austrian history in both categories, then the Austrians indeed seem provincial. Twice as many study their own country as the great abroad. But if we add the Institute for East European History, the Institute for Contemporary History and so on, we find that 61 per cent of Viennese historians work on the world outside of Austria – a figure in line with the British and American.

I am not claiming that Evans is wrong. Nor do I hold up my figures as exemplary. I do wish to suggest that counting is tricky and much hinges on the details. Results differ depending on who is counted and where one looks. Some nations may house more legal historians in law faculties, or historians of medicine in medical schools, or historians of antiquity in classics departments. Evans’s numbers do not prove his case.

Moreover, Evans assumes that the normal state of affairs would be for historical curiosity between the Anglosphere and the European continent to be about equal and that the greater historical traffic running eastwards therefore needs to be explained. But the idea that the flows of interest should not be asymmetrical may be logically mistaken. For the purposes of discussion, assign the Anglosphere (UK and US) one hundred historians. Assume that the continent has ten equally large nations each with ten historians, each group working and publishing in its own distinct language. Assume, furthermore, that half of all these two hundred historians study their own nation and the other half other countries. If so, the Anglosphere will have fifty historians to focus on ten nations abroad, or five historians for each foreign country if they distribute randomly. Each of the ten continental nations, in contrast, will have but five historians to study the other ten nations, or half a historian for each of the other countries. The basic asymmetry springs from relative size and the inability of the continental nations to devote the same attention to the great abroad as can the Anglosphere. Size matters.

But perhaps Evans has nonetheless put his finger on something interesting, even if for the wrong reasons: English-speaking historians do seem to have more ecumenical interests than their continental colleagues. Why?

Some nations, by their geo-temporal position, must be cosmopolitan. Others cannot be. If – like the US – you are a large new nation with a short history, then the
intellectual territories to conquer lie abroad. To judge from Evans’s figures, around a
quarter of Europe’s historians work on medieval topics. By definition, all American
medievalists are cosmopolites. (Conversely, all Italy’s ancient historians, and a goodly
fraction of its medievalists and early modernists will, almost by definition, be working
on domestic topics.) No wonder that 77 per cent of Australian historians work on
other countries, and 66 per cent of New Zealanders. This is no more surprising than
that 99 per cent of vacations taken by the Luxembourgeois occur outside their own
country. Barring a stultifying descent into obsessive navel observation, what could
the Australians possibly study if not something other than themselves?

Conversely, small old countries, saddled with languages no one speaks, must write
their own history since no one else will. At the University of Copenhagen, 62 per
cent of historians work on Danish history. At the University of Oslo, 73 per cent of
historians work on Norway. The Scandinavians are as provincial as the Italians.

You remember the classic elephant joke, where citizens of various countries write
books that reveal their national obsessions. The Frenchman writes *The Love Life of the
Elephant*, the Englishman *Elephants I Have Shot* and the American *How to Build a New
and Better Elephant*. The German is usually author of a ten-volume *Prolegomenon to the
Study of the Pachyderm*. But there is also a variant where he writes *The Elephant and
the German Question*. In much the same way, those few Norwegian historians who
are interested in an allegedly foreign topic almost invariably pursue some variant of
‘Norway and X’. (Jarle Simensen, *Norsk misjon i afrikansk historie*; Hilde Henriksen
Waage, *Peacemaking Is a Risky Business: Norway’s Role in the Peace Process in the Middle
East, 1993–96.*

Small new nations are cosmopolitans and small old nations are provincials, both by
necessity. But what about medium-sized nations with long histories? Why should the
British be more interested in the great abroad than the French, Germans or Italians?
Evans suggests various reasons. Colonial historians have followed the flag; immigrants
to the Anglophone world have inspired interest in the ‘old country’; British historians
write well, and are therefore often translated.

Yes, these are factors. But let us not lose sight of more fundamental issues. Every
nation writes about itself first. Only then does it pay attention to elsewhere. On
university funding, library books per capita, the percentage of university-trained
people, Nobel prizes per capita, or citation density of scientific publications, Italy
trails the UK, Germany and France, more or less in that order. Perhaps investment
in research/education and cosmopolitan historiography are functionally related. If so,
then what Evans uncovers is what we would expect.

Yet more is at work here. The Scandinavians are first-class scientists, with high
R&D spending, numerous patent filings, and the world’s highest scientific citation
intensities outside of Israel. Yet their historians are hopelessly provincial. Perhaps
Japan is similar. Provinciality or cosmopolitanism are not just functional responses to
academic resources. They are also cultural choices. The Italians may be geographically
blinkered historians because their universities are antiquated across the board. But the
Scandinavians, while world-class in biotech, write provincial histories. So is Evans
right? Are some nations more curious about the world than others?
That brings us to the role of English as the world’s lingua franca. This is no place to go on about the role of English. Suffice it to say that, however annoying for speakers of other great languages and however clear the socio-economic and geopolitical reasons for English’s triumph in the post-war world, it is surely the most democratically consensual decision of such a rank ever taken, emerging as it did out of the fortuitously intertwined effects of British colonialism, the Marshall Plan and some combination of Hollywood and rock and roll.

In the small European nations, pupils used to emerge from secondary school after years studying languages to the detriment of almost all other subjects. They were equipped to do little other than be tour guides and airline stewards or work for UNESCO. Today, non-Anglophones need learn only one foreign language. Gone are the days when Icelandic children first learned Danish, and Finnish pupils Swedish, only to discover that this effort was just the beginning of whatever cultural pilgrimage they might still muster the energy for.

A linguistic windfall, in contrast, drops into the Anglophones’ laps. Only those who specifically want to study other cultures must learn foreign languages. Anything they write the rest of humanity can read. The dark side – insisted on by language teachers, aesthetes and professional polyglots à la George Steiner – is a certain flattening of the cultural and perhaps psychological worlds of the monoglots. But against that, the savage opportunity costs of Babel have been tamed. If we could use the trillions of man hours spent learning other languages instead to broaden our knowledge in other respects would not the world be better off?

English is the language of history too. True, historians do not need to publish in English. National historical discussions proceed happily in linguistic isolation in the scholarly journals and forums of each country. But increasingly even, say, Germans working on German history seek broader recognition in Anglophone periodicals. The Revue Historique has just decided to double its English summaries, hoping for better sales. Historians from small nations sometimes publish directly in English to immediately become part of international discussions. Take, for example, two small-country historians from different generations. Carl-Axel Gemzell, who died in 2006, was a Swedish historian with a chair in Copenhagen. He published in German on the military history of the Second World War, and was well received in that role, and then spent his later career writing about the welfare state. Unusually for a Scandinavian interested in social policy, he focused not on his home country, but on the UK. His major work on this subject was a book published in Swedish in Denmark (its title translates as: The Scientification of Politics and the Politicisation of Science: On the Rise of the Welfare State in England, 1993). As best I can tell, this work, of some 380 pages, has never been reviewed in English and only ever cited twice. According to Worldcat, in all the world (one hopes outside of Scandinavia, but you never know) it is owned only by the University of Limerick library. The thought of such waste is enough to make you weep.
In contrast, Gemzell’s Swiss colleague, Matthieu Leimgruber, published his work on the Swiss welfare state – a subject previously absent from the extensive literature on social policy – directly in English and innovatively compared Swiss developments to the US (Solidarity without the State: Business and the Shaping of the Swiss Welfare State, 2008). On the one hand, we have a book on an important subject, executed in a fashion guaranteed to ensure that it will never be read. On the other, we have one on an obscure topic, approached with an international methodology, made accessible, and ambitious to punch above its weight in geo-historical terms.

The linguistic asymmetry between the Anglosphere and the continent, and indeed the rest of the world, is jarring. To have a work translated into English may be the culmination of a continental historian’s career and his entry onto the world stage. The merest Anglophone PhD dissertation, squeezed into its ISBN by the tender mercies of the Edwin Mellen Press or Peter Lang, enters onto that same stage as though it were its birthright. This entitlement bestowed on English-language scholarship encourages Anglophone historians to imagine they are more important than is true. By publishing a work in his own language, the English-writing historian participates in international discussions from which his other-glottal colleagues are barred. In turn, this has led to an Anglophone corpus of historical literature that is a short cut to the state of the art.

This well-developed English-language historiography – on subjects of interest to Anglophone historians – consists of those few of the best continental works that British and American publishers are willing to translate, alongside the best works of Anglophone historians, as well as all the work – good, middling or poor – of the Anglosphere’s remaining historians. It is possible to study topics such as the Second World War or the French Revolution up to an advanced undergraduate level entirely in English.

But it is not just the Anglosphere that grazes on this historiographical commons. Many continental students too take a short cut to their histories across this Anglophone pasture. Gone are the days when, say, the Danish student of continental history would read German or French. Thanks to the single degree of separation that English offers us all, the efficient Danish professor assigns readings in English to his students for all courses other than those on the most narrowly Danish topics. Last year, for example, in Sniff Anderson Nexø’s course at Copenhagen University on the Body and Medicine, all the recommended reading was in English, unless his students drummed up a copy of the now out-of-print Danish translation of Foucault’s Birth of the Clinic. It is not just the English and the Americans who are monoglottal today. The dominance of English renders the continent functionally monolingual too. Students approach the history of other countries, even their neighbours, via English and thus via the intellectual and methodological choices that have crystallised, for whatever reasons, in this Anglophone buffer historiography.

When the average Swedish undergraduate studies the Weimar Republic, he reads Karl Dietrich Bracher – if at all – as filtered by the Anglophone publishers. He is much more likely to read Richard J. Evans than Heinrich A. Winkler – the reigning German historian of the inter-war period, only one of whose books is available in
The Dominance of (the) English in Current History Writing

translation. He is much more likely to read Gordon Craig than Hans Ulrich Wehler, the prolific dean of modern German historians, precisely one of whose books can be had in English. He will come away thinking that translated German historians are equalled in importance by the Anglophone historians he also reads – most necessarily of a lesser calibre. Thanks to the open invitation all Anglophones enjoy to the international intellectual smorgasbord, all who publish in English will share space on the syllabus – democratically but not meritocratically. The native-speaking neophytes rub shoulders with translated eminent foreigners, delighted to be considered their peers.

Anglophone historians are not only given a leg up by virtue of nothing more impressive than speaking their mother tongue. They have also become gatekeepers to the history of the world, for the world. That is a big responsibility, and one that ought to be discussed rather than, as now, ignored. Historians from the Anglosphere have the home-team advantage. The size of their home market gives them both the chance to write bestsellers and to publish commercially books so obscure that, in smaller markets, they would need subsidies. And it allows the Anglophone universities to siphon off foreign specialists to teach their own fields. The Matthew Effect – to them that have shall be given – has blessed the Angloverse.

Sometimes this works harmoniously. Cross-border historiographical discussion can function despite the asymmetrical access. Anyone writing in English about any aspect of Nazism can expect German historians to read his work in the original. The Germans recognise that such topics are internationally significant and they participate in this wider discussion. But imagine the Axis powers had won the war. American and British historians would today be honing their German and Japanese to keep abreast of the German and Japanese historiography of the Anglosphere’s disarmingly peculiar Sonderweg into democracy, decline and defeat.

Elsewhere, the marriage is less harmonious. France is the most popular European topic among American historians and ranks second in Britain, after Germany. But, as Evans details, French historians have not been nearly as receptive to the Anglosphere as the Germans. The result has been a parallel universe of English-language French historiography to which French scholars contribute (if translated), but from which they take little. This historiographical no-man’s-land between nations is compounded where methodologies that excite the historians of one nation leave those of another cold. The ‘linguistic turn’ in history, for example, wheeled French historians around a lot less abruptly than it did their Anglophone colleagues. This may strike English-speaking scholars as odd, since the ‘theory’ on which the linguistic turn turned was French. But what the French exported as philosophy in the form of Foucault and Derrida did not return to bite them as history. Much of the fashionable cultural history of France written by English-speaking scholars might as well – from the vantage of Francophone historians – be about Patagonia.

Evans’s binary view of cosmopolitanism and provinciality is too simple. The English-language buffer historiography is the funnel through which the world’s historiographical pedagogy passes. In the international Anglophone discussion, the
laurels of cosmopolitanism surely go to the continentals. It is they who engage with their colleagues abroad by writing in the lingua franca. Yes, in one sense the Anglophone historiographical buffer testifies to the cosmopolitan interests of English-speaking historians. But it equally suggests cultural insulation. We are interested in foreign histories at arm’s length, as we mediate and digest them, and insofar as the foreigners come to us. Why, after all, does it make us cosmopolitan to have brought forth Evans, rather than reading Wehler and Winkler?

As Evans notes, Anglophone books about other nations are more often translated than foreigners’ books about the Angloverse. Evans points out that British historians write well, tell vivid anecdotes and amuse continental audiences. Christopher Clark’s book on Prussia, *Iron Kingdom*, was a bestseller in German translation with its ‘tremendous verve, flair and panache’, and ‘deft character sketches’. A German newspaper (perlentaucher.de) similarly lauds Evans’s Nazism book for its ‘matter-of-fact, yet gripping and popular’ style, its ‘sparkling miniature biographies’, and ‘deft descriptions’. It would be damning with faint praise if this were the only or even main reason Anglophone historians attract continental readers. The big Anglophone market incentivises historians to write popular histories in the style of Evans or Simon Schama. By calibrating their topics, spicing up their prose and broadening their appeal, they add significant royalty income to their professorial salaries. This is good for them. Whether it is beneficial for the discipline is another question. If universities treated copyrights like patents and owned shares of the intellectual property produced on their time and dime, popular historians might turn back in a more scholarly direction.

Why a nation reads works by others about itself ultimately says something not only about the books, but about itself. Nations too can be narcissists, and some may positively bask in attention. The old joke has the bore droning on about himself until finally – nagged by a vague unease – he turns to his date and says, ‘But enough about me, let’s talk about you. What do you think about me?’ Foreigners’ histories of yourself is like reading travel guides to your home city: the pleasure of recognition mixes with the kick of feeling at the centre of attention. Germany, its nationalism trod underfoot, keen to be accepted into the post-war Western community, may well have had a receptive national psychology of translation.

Nations may also welcome, or at least tolerate, outside attention because they are unable to deal with their own history. Anglophone historians have engaged – Evans argues – in messy local issues as objective outsiders, trusted as impartial observers in nations where historical disputes are inseparable from political infighting. Thus, Clark’s *Iron Kingdom*, a runaway bestseller in Germany, succeeded not only because it appeared on the sixtieth anniversary of Prussia’s formal disappearance or thanks to its sparkling prose. Clark was also balanced in his treatment of a contentious topic, much polemiced in Germany. The book helped normalise German history
for a reading public longing for normality. But this captures only part of the issue. Evans correctly focuses on the politics behind the occasional open invitation extended to Anglophone historians. But he is naive to assume that, like the cavalry to the rescue, their services have always been benign. Anglophone historians have not always stood loftily above local disputes. Sometimes they have been tools and dupes.

Clark’s book is doubtless a triumph of Anglophone cosmopolitanism. But if English-speaking historians are praised for doing the ideological heavy lifting Germans prefer to outsource, then what about less savoury examples of a similar historiographical displacement? David Irving, the stridently revisionist, Holocaust-denying historian who is banned from visiting Germany, has over twenty books currently available in German translation through Amazon Germany. That is more than either Ian Kershaw and Evans, who must otherwise be the most translated British historians of the moment.

Foreign historians sometimes say what their domestic subjects want to hear and sometimes not. Is it always a badge of honour to be well received by your host nation? That Norman Davies downplayed Polish pre-war antisemitism, emphasising Polish suffering, has probably not delayed or diminished the translations and official honours Poland bestowed on him. Anglophone historians who question whether the massacres of the Armenians (from 1915 on) were genocide find themselves installed in professorial chairs at Turkish universities: Stanford Shaw, Heath Lowry, Norman Stone.

In contrast, Robert Paxton’s *Vichy France* appeared in 1972. It was the first scholarly book to clarify the extent of the collaboration of the French regime with the Germans, hollowing out the claims of its post-war defenders that it had shielded a nation of resisters from the occupiers. Not pretty stuff, to be sure, and it took the French almost three decades to translate its hard truths. Similarly, Raul Hilberg’s *Destruction of the European Jews*, whose slow and circuitous route to publication in English in 1961 is already a shameful story, took a further three decades to appear in German. In these cases, cosmopolitan Anglophone history proved its mettle precisely by being too painfully truthful to be translated in a timely fashion.

Translations are coloured by politics. Outsiders can say the unsayable. Certainly that explains David Irving’s popularity in Germany. How gratifying and convenient to have an English revisionist! The more taboos a society has, the more truths outsiders can tell it. When, in the early 1940s, the Carnegie Foundation commissioned a major study of race relations in the US, it hired the Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal, whom it considered more objective than an American. Brilliant choice! Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, though 1500 pages long, went through 25 printings in its first edition and sold 100,000 copies. It had a measurable impact on American racial attitudes, told whites that they were responsible for blacks’ immiseration, and was cited in *Brown v. Board of Education*. In the event, *American Dilemma* appeared in English. But in effect it was a translation. Carnegie commissioned its own cosmopolitan outsider to speak truth to power.
On the continent, as taboos have mushroomed in the post-war period, foreign historians have been welcomed partly because they have expressed painful opinions. The more taboos, the greater the market for translations. Myrdal was invited by the Americans, and Paxton was eventually asked to testify in France at the trial of the Vichy collaborator Maurice Papon. That is the demand side explanation of why Anglophone historians have played a larger role on the continent than holds in reverse. But there is a supply side too. Why have historians from the Anglosphere rushed in where others feared to tread? Evans touches on part of the reason. The interesting events in modern history, he cites his British colleagues as saying, were largely continental. British history, in contrast, has been a story of continuity and stability, not the thing to grab an impressionable postgraduate student seeking a fascinating subject and the chance to do research in exotic locales.

Important Events in History are not, it is true, distributed equally over all nations, like a coat of paint. If the rise of liberalism or the industrial revolution interests you, look at England. For political revolutions, the French and the Russians’ ambition, savagery and effect trump the genteel tax revolt of the American colonists. As Charles Maier has argued, historians, like journalists, are congenitally tempted by ruptures and upheavals, revolutions and bloodshed. Yet, continuity – the reasons why something does not change, even as the world dissolves around it – is just as important a historical topic. Chasing world-historical ambulances, historians have been drawn to continental mayhem rather than the placid Angloverse.

Almost every aspect of continental history interests some Anglophone historian, but mostly they cluster like sheep. To this day, British interest in the continent means above all the French Revolution and the two world wars. Inspired by the disasters of the twentieth century, Anglophones tackle that enormous swath of European history that somehow lead up to this. Almost any topic, after all, sheds light on the Second World War. Evans himself disarmingly admits to this mercenary teleology, writing about German feminism not because the subject itself interested him, but as a ‘guide to the strength or otherwise of liberal values in the decades before the triumph of Nazism’ (p. 28). English-speaking historians of Europe thus write about the dark side of the modernity their own nations sunnily succeeded at. ‘There but for the grace of God go I’, is the leitmotiv of Anglophone historiography of modern continental Europe.

British historians have long believed that the continent is fundamentally different, and largely a disaster. Evans cites his predecessor as Regius Professor, William Smyth, who wrote on the French Revolution. Other historians, he adds, ‘were similarly convinced that it demonstrated the superiority of British institutions’ (p. 67). If so, then the cosmopolitanism Evans salutes is not an unmediated curiosity about the rest of the world, but provinciality and smugness. The Anglophone history of the continent is an inverted story of our own triumphs and successes. When we slow down to gawk at a traffic accident, we are motivated less by pity than that tingle of dread and relief that we ourselves were spared.
Implicitly patting ourselves on the back, we write the history of what they did not manage to avoid while they allow us to tell—or gloss over—some difficult truths. It is not—as Evans argues—that we are cosmopolitan and they provincial. That politics, and not cosmopolitanism, create the asymmetry of historical curiosity is also shown by this: other than history, the humanities and social sciences mostly do not depend on or even permit a choice between provinciality or cosmopolitanism. Either there is a largely transnational canon (philosophy). Or the aim is generalisation: a common methodology may use particular (national) examples, but only to arrive at universalisable insights (political science, sociology, anthropology). The main exception is literature. Here, the scholar, like his historical colleague, can specialise in his own culture or that of others. But the study of Rilke, Austen, Balzac or Whitman is not as treacherous a political minefield as history. If we look at scholars of literature in the eight universities I used earlier, we find that more than three-quarters of German scholars, and only slightly fewer French, study a literature other than their own, while the English and Americans clock in at two-thirds.

In other words, Evans’s purported cosmopolitan bias in history is not replicated in the study of literature. Are Anglophone professors of literature unexpectedly more provincial than their historical colleagues? Or are historians driven less by their cosmopolitanism or cultural curiosity and more by the temptation of studying the horrors of the twentieth century? That may be understandable or even laudable. But it is not cosmopolitanism. Continental historians are also drawn to these horrors, but since they happened in their homelands, they are prevented from displaying that cosmopolitanism that, to judge from their colleagues in literature, would naturally be their bent.

We also need to explain why continental historians do not write our history. As Evans rightly emphasises, more books by Anglophone historians are translated into continental languages than the other way. One reason is that foreign historians increasingly write their books directly in English. For example, in 2008, Pekka Hämäläinen, a historian trained at the University of Helsinki, swept all major awards in his field with *The Comanche Empire* (Yale University Press). When was the last time an American or British historian published a seminal, prize-winning book about Finnish history in Finnish? (Just in case anyone is tempted to invoke geopolitical importance, the Comanche were never more than 45,000 and were devastated by illnesses and wars as Europeans began farming their plains. Finland has one hundred times as many people and held at bay the Soviet Empire.) Gerald Stourzh’s books on Alexander Hamilton and Benjamin Franklin were published directly in America. Olivier Zunz’s *Why the American Century?*, having appeared in English, has been translated into his native French, as well as Chinese, Japanese and Italian. Few scholars anywhere publish in the language of their researches, of course, but other than possibly
Richard Cobb and Tim Mason, it is hard to think of any Anglophones who have bothered.

Continental historians are not nearly as provincial as Evans – fascinated by bestsellers – makes out, and increasingly they interest themselves in the English-speaking world, and especially the US. Many who work on the Anglosphere publish in their native tongues: Elise Marienstras, Naomi Wulf, Nathalie Caron, Frank Kelleter (though his book on Louis Farrakhan appeared in English), Reinhold Wagnleitner, Hans Ulrich Wehler, Maurizio Vaudagna, Detlef Junker, Ekkehart Krippendorf and Arnaldo Testi. In Turin, the Otto publishing house’s series, Nova Americana, on all parts of the continent, stands at twenty-two volumes. The Free University of Berlin’s Kennedy Institute for North American Studies publishes monographs in German and English, mainly written by Germans, on US history (twenty-three volumes), on North American Studies (twenty-four) and on American language and culture (thirteen). It publishes conference proceedings on similar subjects (thirty-five volumes), working papers (one hundred and thirty-five), and a yearbook in English and American literature (twenty-two). The German Association for American Studies has a monograph series with ninety-four volumes so far. I count seventy chairs and/or institutes at German universities concerned with some aspect of American studies. The Journal of American History sports a lengthy list of foreign contributing editors – many from strikingly exotic places. All work on US history and participate as equals in the field’s debates.

Some continental scholars’ work on the Anglosphere has been translated: Jürgen Kocka’s book on white-collar workers, Manfred Berg’s book on the NAACP and the one on JFK, Paolo Rossi’s book on Francis Bacon. Andrea Carosso has two books coming out on the 1950s and on US urban culture. Admittedly, this list is much shorter than that going in the other direction. Evans is right that the continentals’ books are not as topical or as punchily-written. And part of the Anglosphere’s problem with translations is, of course, that would-be continental historians of Britain or the US compete on the world’s largest market, well-supplied on its own.

But look at things the other way around. One of the invidious implications of Evans’s argument – and this really deserves a stake through its heart – is the idea that cosmopolitanism adheres to those who are translated more than those who translate. If Anglophone historians are more cosmopolitan than their continental colleagues, does that mean that their cultures are? Evans answers yes. He argues that Anglophone societies interest themselves in all pasts, their own and others, and that the continentals do not share this broad view. But translations demonstrate receptivity; they are a cosmopolitan counterweight.

Anglophone societies may be cosmopolitan in their historical interests. They are also insulated against outside influence, except insofar as foreigners join the Anglophone conversation. As translators, as hunters and gatherers of information about the world, Britain and America do not impress. Stieg Larsson’s The Girl Who Played with Fire became the first work in translation to rise to the first place on the New York Times hardcover fiction list since Umberto Eco’s Name of the Rose, over
a quarter of a century ago. Carlos Ruiz Zafon’s *Angel’s Game* was the only other translated book to make the fiction list at all in 2009 (NYT book review, 10 January 2010). The New York and London (Sunday) *Times*’ bestseller lists in 2010 have been dominated by English-language works: entirely for non-fiction, 96 and 94 per cent for fiction. The French lists (*Livres Hebdo*) are equivalently provincial for non-fiction (92 per cent). But only 62 per cent of the fiction is home-grown. On the German list (*Der Spiegel*), 82 per cent of non-fiction books are domestic, but only 41 per cent of fiction.

UNESCO’s Index Translationum reveals that the number of books translated into German (1979–2005) is almost four and a half times as great as into English. Given that there are at least four times as many native English speakers as German, the disproportion becomes even more humiliating. Thirteen countries have translated more books than the US. The UK ranks twenty-ninth, flanked by those publishing powerhouses, Portugal and Estonia. If translated works are our window to the outside, then the UK knows less about the world than does Croatia. Of course, much of this imbalance reflects the dominance of English, and one would want to know what (substantial) percentage of books translated into other languages are just Dan Brown and his ilk. But it would be an act of astonishing cultural hubris to assume that the world crawls so disproportionately to the Anglophone altar and that these figures reflect merely a neutral sampling.

The brutal fact remains that the continental nations are more interested – and more willing to do what it takes to satiate that interest – in the rest of the world than is the Angloverse. Perry Anderson has shown in the *London Review of Books* that while the French (among the most insular continental nations) have cut themselves off from foreign social science, they have been unusually receptive to outside currents in the arts and letters. To some degree, Anglophobia is uninterested in the rest of the world because of its size: it is already a larger fraction of the universe. But that is monopolism, not cosmopolitanism.

The size of the Anglosphere also means that it is more self-sufficient. Its sheer bulk, combined with its diversity, freedom and openness, means that somewhere, someone, at some time expresses more or less every conceivable opinion. By dint of size and vibrancy of civil society, outsiders can impart few opinions and views, and even few hard truths, that the Anglosphere has not already heard from within. Take US history as an example. Do we need an outsider to tell us that what was done to the natives was genocide, that US imperialism is singly the cause of the Third World’s sufferings, that America is largely responsible for the outbreak of World War II, that Roosevelt lured the Japanese into attacking Pearl Harbour, that Truman was a mass murderer, or that racism is indelibly part of American society, along with inequality and anomie? No, for we have Gabriel Kolko and William Appleman Williams, Richard Hofstadter and Walter LaFeber, David Stannard and Dee Brown, Howard Zinn and Gar Alperovitz, with Gore Vidal leading the parade. (Though Bernd Greiner’s recent book on atrocities in Vietnam, *War Without Fronts*, comes close to the Paxton model.)
At the end of the day, why do we want to be historically cosmopolitan, to write the histories of other nations, much less want other nations’ historians to write ours? Reading other countries’ histories doubtless expands the mind and leavens the soul. No argument there. But that requires only a public willing to read translations of foreign historians. The enormous exertion of training scholars to do what they can achieve only with greater efforts, or lesser effect, than their foreign colleagues: why? On their own turf, foreign scholars have the home-team advantage. They know the language effortlessly and in all its nuances, they have the archives closer by, they enjoy a guaranteed audience. Why compete with them?

Is cosmopolitanism more than a secondary virtue? Ask any scholar for what methodology of recent decades has most inspired the profession and most stimulated emulation. His examples will invariably be of histories that are, in themselves, provincial. The most influential school of history in the post-war period has been the *Annales* historians: resolutely focused on French social history, their radar extended at most to the Mediterranean or northwards into the Alsatian borderlands. The first influential quantitative history, seriously applying the statistician’s tools, was done largely on American topics. (The only historian rewarded with the economics Nobel Prize, Robert Fogel, helped found this school.) Michel Foucault, whatever you may think of his legacy, has probably been the single most influential – certainly the most cited – figure in recent historiography. He was, of course, myopically Franco-centric. Standing in the profession, influence and historiographical impact do not correlate with cosmopolitanism. Tocqueville’s history of the French Revolution is still read today, Carlyle’s is not.

The only advantage that an outside historian brings is a fresh perspective. He may see something that eludes the blinkered vision of the local. Paxton could write his book precisely because he was not French, and so not suckered by the national *Lebenslägen*. More generally, the outside historian may apply a comparative perspective, implicit or spelled out, that sets a national development in a conceptual framework that would not have occurred to his domestic colleague. Thus, R. R. Palmer saw the French Revolution not as something singular and unprecedented, but as one of several similar attempts at democratic upheaval during the late eighteenth century. Thus, C. B. A. Behrens, comparing France to the other bank of the Rhine in the same era, concluded that the Prussians managed successfully to reform their administration and government and so avoided revolution while the French failed. Thus, Godfrey Hodgson admonishes American historians for their provincial belief that democracy and liberalism somehow exceptionally blessed their nation either first or most, by comparing the US with Europe in ways they themselves resist.

Locals do not always welcome outside historians posing comparative questions. The French largely ignored Palmer and Behrens. Mona Ozouf took non-French historians to task for the impertinence of comparing the supposedly singular French women’s movement to its equivalents elsewhere. Yet, occasionally, everyone profits from transnational comparisons. The *Sonderweg* debate (over whether Germany
deviated from a common Western path to liberal bourgeois democracy) has enlivened several national historiographies. Anglophone historians first encountered the *Sonderweg* as their German colleagues, seeking to explain the Nazi debacle, claimed that Britain and America were the standard against which to measure German developments. English-writing historians counter-argued that the Anglo-American trajectory was but one possible route to modernity, which in turn stimulated debate on the nature of modern political development generally. Today, social scientists ask whether there is an Asian route to modernity (modern economy with a non or semi-democratic political superstructure). Are China and Singapore similar to Germany and Prussia of yore?

The Germans are rare in being open to putting their own national trajectory into comparative perspective. Put differently, there is a cosmopolitanism of broadcast, but also one of reception. The cosmopolitanism of broadcast is the virtue that Evans claims for the Angloverse. But equally interesting is which nations allow themselves to be cosmopolitan in reception, becoming – like the patient in a teaching hospital – the object of others’ curiosity and inspection. The Germans both looked abroad and allowed the abroad a look in because they had been comprehensively defeated. The French, prickly about wartime collaboration, resisted both. The Americans may be broadcast cosmopolitans, but they resist being compared to others. Still *sui generis* in geopolitical terms, they consider that exalted status as bleeding over into history. Perhaps nations become receptively cosmopolitan, allowing others to paw through family secrets, only if they have had the nationalist stuffing kicked out of them and have lost the will to be egotists, much less cultural solipsists. America’s relative geopolitical decline is likely to be accompanied by a fading of its belief in exceptionalism.

In the nineteenth century, recognizably modern history matured into the nation state’s autobiography. We may pride ourselves today on being post-national in our historical studies. But are we really? When the Scandinavians, or the Swiss, decide to become world-class players in, say, genetics, they quickly enter the field as equal participants. As small nations, they may not be able to contribute to all fields of science. But where they focus their minds, they are contenders. In history, however, a nation cannot specialise as it sees fit. It has to write its own history before it can even consider going abroad. Some countries may allow outsiders to help write their history. But none have outsourced the task – and certainly not in order instead to write the history of other nations.

Where is the Ian Kershaw of the Germans? (He authored the definitive biography of Hitler.) Why has no German historian written a prize-winning two-volume biography of Churchill, translated into English and perched atop the bestseller lists? Is it their weak prose style, their fatal penchant for detail and lengthy footnotes? Or is it the robust national self-consciousness of the British, untainted by much post-nationalism? Would the British reading public tolerate, much less reward, a German Churchill biography? Both supply and demand conspire against it.

What will be worse for our grandchildren? That future Chinese historians ignore the West – or that they do not? Unlike the Americans, the Chinese are not a new
nation or a nation of immigrants, with surplus energy to lavish on the histories of the ‘old country’. The Chinese history departments of the future may look like those of the Italians or the Scandinavians today, introspective and unconcerned with the world. Or, Chinese historians may one day turn their attention to the West. But if they do, will we like the outcome? What if they place us in comparative perspectives that make sense to them, but not us? We may turn out to exemplify, say, the perils of ‘neo-hierarchism’, whereby a nation, as its civil society and its informal consensual bonds dissolve, turns to the state to impose order through external policing, enforcing ever more precise rules and regulations. Or, future Chinese historians may argue that one of the fundamental characteristics of twenty-first century Europe was ‘the revenge of the colonies’, when largely ethnically pristine nations saw their lax immigration policies turned back upon themselves. Or, the West may appear as a minor sideshow in the long-awaited rise of the Confucian millennium. Today, we contemplate the ambiguous attractions and motivations of cosmopolitanism. Future Western historians may someday brace themselves for the steam roller of the all-embracing, all-explaining, teleologically-supercharged Whig Interpretation of Chinese history.