Bridgeable Gaps: The Writer, the Critic, and the University, 1958-2000

Joseph Williams

Thesis submitted for the qualification of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)

University of East Anglia

School of Literature, Drama, and Creative Writing

9th September 2024

Word Count: 80,240

This copy of the thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with the author and that use of any information derived therefrom must be in accordance with current UK Copyright Law. In addition, any quotation or extract must include full attribution.

Abstract

This is a thesis about the postwar British university and its relation to contemporary literary culture. This relation is considered by examining the creative, critical, and educational work of four figures: the first three are Malcolm Bradbury, Lorna Sage and David Lodge, and the fourth 'figure' is the journal *Critical Quarterly*, founded by C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson in 1958. These five individuals began working as academics in English departments in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when F. R. Leavis's influence over the discipline was still widespread. They taught, researched, and wrote throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, that period in which the discipline of English was the dominant subject of the humanities in British universities. This was also a time of major social and intellectual changes in and around the institution of the British university, beginning first with the establishment of the seven 'new' universities between 1961 and 1965 and the further expansion of British universities after the 1963 Robbins Report, and then catalysed both by the May 1968 student protests in Paris and the later dissemination of continental literary theory, most notably poststructuralism, deconstruction, and feminism as practiced by the French critics Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous, among others. Throughout this period, Bradbury, Lodge, Sage, Cox and Dyson shaped university English in important ways, not least by establishing Creative Writing within the discipline. These five did not simply adopt or reject wholesale the developments of continental literary theory, but rather modified the Leavisism of their intellectual formation to be more open to both literary theory and contemporary creative practice, as well as other cultural developments such as television, American literature and, crucially, the comic novel. What emerges from the work of these five figures – who are, if not a loose group then certainly a network of acquaintances – is a theory of the novel which is dialogic, comic, creative, and critical.

Access Condition and Agreement

Each deposit in UEA Digital Repository is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, and duplication or sale of all or part of any of the Data Collections is not permitted, except that material may be duplicated by you for your research use or for educational purposes in electronic or print form. You must obtain permission from the copyright holder, usually the author, for any other use. Exceptions only apply where a deposit may be explicitly provided under a stated licence, such as a Creative Commons licence or Open Government licence.

Electronic or print copies may not be offered, whether for sale or otherwise to anyone, unless explicitly stated under a Creative Commons or Open Government license. Unauthorised reproduction, editing or reformatting for resale purposes is explicitly prohibited (except where approved by the copyright holder themselves) and UEA reserves the right to take immediate ‘take down’ action on behalf of the copyright and/or rights holder if this Access condition of the UEA Digital Repository is breached. Any material in this database has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the material may be published without proper acknowledgement.

To my parents
who have paid to teach me

Contents

List of Illustrations 5

Acknowledgements 6

Introduction: profitable intimacies 7

Part one: The creative and the critical

1 Malcolm Bradbury and the ‘serious’ writer 46

2 David Lodge’s dialogism 89

Part two: The university and the public

3 Lorna Sage: writing life 134

4 ‘Literature is for everyman’? *Critical Quarterly*’s democratic literary culture 181

Conclusion 223

Bibliography 228

List of Illustrations

Figure 1. British universities and the novels or writers associated with them. Malcolm Bradbury, *The Atlas of Literature* (De Agostini, 1996), p. 275.

Figure 2. The British 'provinces' and the writers associated with them. Bradbury, *The Atlas of Literature*, p. 241.

Figure 3. Introduction to Ian McEwan's MA thesis (1971). Box 114, Ian McEwan/Kazuo Ishiguro, Bradbury, M. mss. III., Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

Figure 4. Opening page to 'Intersection' from Ian McEwan's MA thesis (1971). Box 114, Ian McEwan/Kazuo Ishiguro, Bradbury, M. mss. III., Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

Figure 5. English Department Research Seminars, University of Birmingham (1978). Box 38, Folder 6, The David Lodge Papers, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

Figure 6. Derrida at the lectern (1987). *Big Words… Small Worlds*, Channel 4, 22nd November 1987.

Figure 7. Colin MacCabe interrupts David Lodge's monologue (1987). *Big Words… Small Worlds*, Channel 4, 22nd November 1987.

Figure 8. Handout for 'Fiction and the Reality Effect' (1984), LS/TC/3, Lorna Sage Archive, British Archive for Contemporary Writing, University of East Anglia.

Figure 9. Handout for 'Autobiography' (2000), recto, LS/TC/1, Lorna Sage Archive, British Archive for Contemporary Writing, University of East Anglia.

Figure 10. Handout for 'Autobiography' (2000), verso, LS/TC/1, Lorna Sage Archive, British Archive for Contemporary Writing, University of East Anglia.

Figure 11. Angela Carter and Lorna Sage delivering a lecture (undated, mid-1980s), LS/AC/16, Lorna Sage Archive, British Archive for Contemporary Writing, University of East Anglia.

Figure 12. 'Manchester Course on Literature' (1970), recto, Critical Quarterly Society, CQA2/2/4/156, Critical Quarterly Archive, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

Figure 13. 'Manchester Course on Literature' (1970), verso, Critical Quarterly Society, CQA2/2/4/156, Critical Quarterly Archive, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

Acknowledgments

This thesis is the result of just over three years of doctoral research at the University of East Anglia. My work has been supported by the CHASE doctoral training partnership as well as a one-off grant from The Book Trade Charity, for which I give thanks. I thank my supervisor, Matthew Taunton, for his patient help and steady guidance, for reading and commenting on numerous drafts, and for reading me the riot act when he needed to. I thank Thomas Karshan, who acted as secondary supervisor, for his enlivening discussion and encouragement. I thank Stephen Benson, who was internal examiner at my probationary review, for his ideas and direction, as well as Jeremy Noel-Tod, Andrew Kenrick and Andrew Cowan of UEA, Justine Mann, Bridget Gillies and Helen Busby of the British Archive for Contemporary Writing, Barry Shiels of Durham University, William Burns of UCL, and Leo Robson of *Critical Quarterly*. I thank the Malcolm Bradbury Trust for their enthusiasm and support. I thank the Raymond Williams Society, in particular Phil O'Brien, for their sound advice and good example. Much of the work of this thesis was presented at conferences and seminars throughout the global campus: Futures for Creative Writing at UEA in June 2021, Raymond Williams @ 100 in Manchester in April 2022, Modernism Remodelled in Cambridge in February 2023, Contemporary Modernisms in Frankfurt in May 2023, Uses of Modernism in Ghent and Lessons of Academic English in Melbourne in September 2023, the Modernist Studies Association in Brooklyn in October 2023, and New Work in Modernist Studies in Liverpool in December 2023. I thank the organisers for having me and the attendees for their comments and suggestions; in particular I thank Kristin Bluemel of Monmouth University for going out of her way to make arrangements for me to join the panel on rural modernism at the MSA. That panel is also where I first heard the phrase 'peri-academic reader', said to me by Luke Seaber of UCL. Sections of this thesis were published as articles: 'How critical is Creative Writing? Malcolm Bradbury and the "serious" writer' in *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* (2022) and '"Literature is for everyman"? *Critical Quarterly*'s democratic literary culture' in *Key Words: A Journal of Cultural Materialism* (2023) – I thank their editors, reviewers, and readers. I also thank the editors and reviewers of *Textual Practice*, whose comments on a section from my chapter on David Lodge were enormously useful as I came to revise the thesis. But most of all I thank my parents, Barbara and Richard, to whom this thesis is dedicated: for their generosity, for their love, for their money, for it all . . .

Introduction: profitable intimacies

This is a thesis about the postwar British university and its relation to contemporary literary culture. This relation is considered by examining the creative, critical, and educational work of four figures: the first three are Malcolm Bradbury (1932-2000), David Lodge (1935-2025), and Lorna Sage (1943-2001), and the fourth 'figure' is the journal *Critical Quarterly*, founded by C. B. 'Brian' Cox (1928-2008) and A. E. 'Tony' Dyson (1928-2002) in 1958. These five individuals began working as academics in English departments in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when, as Matthew Taunton puts it, 'the powerful influence of F. R. Leavis could be felt everywhere in the discipline of English Literature.'[1] They taught, researched, and wrote throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, that period in which the discipline of English was the dominant subject of the humanities in British universities. This was also a time of major social and intellectual changes in and around the institution of the British university, beginning first with the establishment of the seven 'new' universities between 1961 and 1965 and the further expansion of British universities after the 1963 Robbins Report, and then catalysed both by the May 1968 student protests in Paris and the later dissemination of continental literary theory, most notably poststructuralism, deconstruction, and feminism as practiced by the French critics Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous, among others. Throughout this period, Bradbury, Lodge, Sage, Cox and Dyson shaped university English in important ways, not least by establishing Creative Writing within the discipline. These five did not simply adopt or reject wholesale the developments of continental literary theory, but rather modified the Leavisism of their intellectual formation so as to be more open both to literary theory and to contemporary creative practice, as well as to other cultural developments such as television, American literature and, crucially, the comic novel. What emerges from the work of these five figures –

---

[1] Matthew Taunton, '*Critical Quarterly*, Leavisism, and UEA', *Critical Quarterly* 61.2 (2019), pp. 5-14 (p. 5).

who are, if not a loose group then certainly a network of acquaintances – is a theory of the novel which is dialogic, comic, creative, and critical.

The title of this thesis is taken from the title of a review-article that Bradbury had written for the *Times Literary Supplement*, published 17th January 1992. In it, Bradbury claims: 'a fissure has opened up between those who "create" and those who theorize in a post-humanist authorless world.'[2] More than three decades later, we might recognise something of this in the discipline of English after the developments of postcritique and the so-called 'method wars' of the last fifteen years, both of which suppose an opposition between those who write texts and their colleagues who read them; or, as John Guillory puts it in his recent monograph *Professing Criticism* (2022), a 'volatile relation between interpretation as *method* and literature as *object*.'[3] My purpose in this thesis is not to wade into any such discussion of method, but rather to question our continuing acceptance of that 'fissure' which Bradbury had described back in 1992. In doing so, I seek to bring creative writing and literary criticism into closer proximity by foregrounding a poetics of the novel as a mode of intellectual enquiry. What follows over the course of four chapters is not so much a history of the subject Creative Writing as it is an historical account of four intellectual projects which sought in different ways to bridge several gaps or perceived gaps in British literary culture after the Second World War: not just the creative and the critical, but also criticism and theory, the novel and the essay, the university and the public, grub street and the ivory tower, the avant-garde and the popular, the author and the reader. I do not mean to suggest that any such binary opposition is natural or indeed useful, but rather to say that a renewed attention towards the different ideas and projects of Bradbury, Lodge, Sage, and *CQ* can ameliorate the widening of these gaps at a time when the discipline of English seems to have halted its expansive phase and even begun to feel embattled. In the introduction which follows, I will situate the work of Bradbury, Lodge, Sage and *CQ* within a broader historical context that begins with the work of F. R. Leavis and ends with the current crisis of purpose affecting university English studies in both Britain and America. By considering the interventions of these five British critics, in particular their engagements with the peri-academic reading public, I hope to show how a renewed attention to the work of Bradbury, Lodge, Sage, Cox and Dyson might offer one way out of the current impasse.[4]

---

[2] Malcolm Bradbury, 'The Bridgeable Gap: Bringing Together the Creative Writer and the Critical Theorist in an Authorless World', *Times Literary Supplement*, 17th January 1992, pp. 7-9 (p. 9).
[3] John Guillory, *Professing Criticism* (University of Chicago Press, 2022), pp. 62-63.

I

Today it is generally accepted that English is at a point of crisis. As Joe Moran tells us, writing in 2022, the subject has recently seen 'a steep decline in undergraduate admissions – part of a broader decline in the proportion of students studying humanities subjects since 2012, as austerity and higher fees have driven more career-specific choices.'[5] This has been exacerbated by 'a mood of suspicion towards universities in political and public life', brought on by a caricature of the institution which sees it primarily as the site of 'hidebound practices, woke politics and deplatforming.'[6] The American college system, though very different to the British university, is experiencing a similar crisis: as Jonathan Kramnick describes in his monograph *Criticism and Truth* (2023), higher education in the United States of America has seen in recent years 'a many-pronged catastrophe' involving 'a drop off in enrollments; an over-emphasis on STEM; an instrumentalist view of learning; a steady and steep decline in funding; [and] the corporatization of higher education, including a widespread turn to casual labor.'[7] For

---

[4] I use 'peri-academic' rather than 'para-academic' to describe this reading public, for two reasons. The first is that the prefix 'para-' carries with it a sense of subsidiary or auxiliary work, as in the term 'paramedic'. This hierarchical sense, though apt to describe Leavis's second minority (as I discuss from p. 20-onwards), is less suitable for my purposes. The second reason is that the prefix 'peri-' better captures my intended sense of a readership who exist about and around the institution of the university from multiple sites, at various distances, and with differing angles of approach.

[5] Joe Moran, 'Delivering the Undeliverable: Teaching English in a University Today', *English* 77.273 (2022), pp. 140-160 (p. 141).

[6] Moran, 'Delivering the Undeliverable', p. 141.

[7] Jonathan Kramnick, *Criticism and Truth: On Method in Literary Studies* (University of Chicago Press, 2023), p. 108.

Kramnick, this is ‘a time when majors are dropping and humanistic writing is ignored or misunderstood.’[8] And we can recognise this misunderstanding in the British situation. In 2021, the then-Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson, spoke in the House of Commons of ‘slashing the taxpayer subsidy for such subjects as media studies’ and bemoaned universities for ‘pushing young people on to dead-end courses that give them nothing but a mountain of debt’.[9]

Moran writes in a subsequent essay, also published in 2022, that such attacks on the humanities ‘can seem scarily unprecedented’ and yet in fact ‘draw on resilient themes, rehearsed in various iterations for more than sixty years.’[10] This is no doubt the case, although English as a subject has long suffered a more specific, and much older, crisis of purpose. As the novelist Martin Amis (who was Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Manchester from 2007 to 2011), puts it in the introduction to *The War Against Cliché* (2001), the study of literature has long suffered ‘historic vulnerabilities’, foremost that ‘it has never seemed difficult enough. […] Interacting with literature is easy. Anyone can join in.’[11] From its very beginning, when the study of English literature was first institutionalised in English universities at the end of the nineteenth century and the start of the twentieth, literary critics had to justify its – and by extension their – place there. As Carol Atherton writes in her monograph, *Defining Literary Criticism* (2005): ‘Objections to English, then as now, focused on its perceived lack of academic weight and the belief that it was bound up with judgements rather than knowledge, making it difficult to assess for academic purposes.’[12] Defenders of the subject ‘therefore had to demonstrate that it was possible to formulate an appropriate academic methodology for English', including 'what the study of English literature was to involve, the kinds of knowledge it was to produce and why these were considered valuable, within a wider social context as well as in academic terms.'[13] These two contexts were and are by no means congruent: as Atherton writes, the institutionalisation and professionalisation of literary criticism has been 'marked by a continuing tension surrounding the relationship between amateur and professional, between academic practice and the needs and values of the wider public' and, ultimately, 'the question of whether academic literary criticism is actually needed – and, if not, whether it should continue to survive in its current institutional form.'[14]

---

[8] Kramnick, *Criticism and Truth*, p. 99.

[9] Gavin Williamson, quoted by Joe Moran in Moran, ‘Delivering the Undeliverable’, p. 141.

[10] Joe Moran, ‘The Humanities and the University: a Brief History of the Present Crisis’, *Critical Quarterly* 64.3 (2022), pp. 5-28 (p. 5).

[11] Martin Amis, *The War Against Cliché: Essays and Reviews 1971-2000* [2001] (Vintage, 2002), pp. xiii-xiv.

[12] Carol Atherton, *Defining Literary Criticism: Scholarship, Authority, and the Possession of Literary Knowledge, 1880-2002* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 3.

Arguably the most successful project to define and thereby justify the practice of academic literary criticism in the first half of the twentieth century was that of F. R. Leavis – who taught at Downing College, Cambridge from 1927 to 1964 – and the movement surrounding his journal *Scrutiny*, which was in print from 1932 to 1953. It would pay to consider briefly Leavis's project so as to better understand its influence upon Bradbury, Lodge, Sage and *CQ*. In his highly influential essay 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture', first published in 1930, Leavis argued that 'culture is at a crisis', under threat from mass-produced goods, the cinema, and the tabloid press. The future of culture – which, for Leavis, meant the literary tradition – depended on 'a very small minority' of expert critics with specialist knowledge about literature. Leavis argued: 'The minority capable not only of appreciating Dante, Shakespeare, Donne, Baudelaire, Conrad (to take major instances) but of recognizing their latest successors constitute the consciousness of the race'.[15] He continued:

> Upon this minority depends our power of profiting by the finest human experience of the past; they keep alive the subtlest and most perishable parts of tradition. Upon them depend the implicit standards that order the finer living of an age, the sense that this is worth more than that, this rather than that is the direction in which to go, that the centre is here rather than there.[16]

---

[13] Atherton, *Defining Literary Criticism*, p. 3.

[14] Atherton, *Defining Literary Criticism*, pp. 7-8.

[15] F. R. Leavis 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture' [1930] in F. R. Leavis, *Education and the University* [1943] (Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 141-171 (p. 143-5).

[16] Leavis, 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture', pp. 144-145.

In *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (1958), Raymond Williams reminds us that this conception of culture 'mainly derives from [Matthew] Arnold;'[17] in particular, it goes back to Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), in which culture is described as 'the best which has been thought and said in the world'.[18] Williams charts the development of this minority elite idea, beginning with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, to whom 'the minority was to be a class, an endowed order of clerisy whose business was general cultivation' in 'the whole body of sciences'; then, for Arnold, 'the minority was a remnant, composed of individuals to be found in all social classes, whose principal distinction was that they escaped the limitations of habitual class feeling.' But rather than the more general focus of Coleridge's 'National Church' comprised of 'the learned of all denominations' or of Arnold's vague conception of culture as 'the study of perfection,' Williams explains that Leavis developed these ideas into a conception of a minority elite as, 'essentially, a literary minority, which keeps alive the literary tradition and the finest capacities of the language.'[19] As Leavis himself writes, again in the 1930 essay: 'In their keeping, […] is the language, the changing idiom, upon which fine living depends, and without which distinction of spirit is thwarted and incoherent. By "culture" I mean the use of such a language.'[20] Crucially, Leavis's minority elite was, unlike Coleridge's clerisy or Arnold's remnant, to be based in the university, which he described elsewhere as 'a centre of human consciousness: perception, knowledge, judgment and responsibility'.[21] At the centre of Leavis's ideal university was the English school, which would provide 'a standard, a centre and a source of stimulus and suggestion'.[22]

---

[17] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* [1958] (Vintage, 2017), p. 333.
[18] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* [1869] (Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 5.
[19] Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 333.
[20] Leavis, 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture', pp. 144-145.
[21] F. R. Leavis, *Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow* (Chatto and Windus, 1962), p. 29.
[22] F. R. Leavis, 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture', p. 142.

Christopher Hilliard points out that while Leavis's minority elite idea 'was not straightforward snobbery', 'it did not allow much room for positive cultural contributions from those without the most rigorous training in criticism.'[23] We should add to this that Leavis's pessimism towards the present allowed no room for positive cultural contributions from creative writers in particular. For Leavis, the 'consciousness of the race' was to be constituted by a minority who are capable of 'appreciating' the major writers of the past – such as Dante, Shakespeare, Donne, Baudelaire, Conrad – and 'recognizing their latest successors', but there is no account of how a contemporary writer might *become* one of those successors. Indeed, those who had studied at Cambridge during Leavis's time at Downing remember the profoundly negative effect of such pessimism. The novelist A. S. Byatt, who won the 1990 Booker Prize for her best-selling novel *Possession: A Romance* (1990), wrote in 1993 that 'His [Leavis's] students lost the desire to write novels, or poems, for the most part.'[24] In the same way Cox, who would go on to write four collections of poetry between 1985 and 2007, recalls in his memoir, *The Great Betrayal* (1992), that 'Leavis's scorn was easy to imitate, and made my own personal writings seem feeble (as they were, but they were beginnings on which I might have built).'[25]

Cox and Dyson's project at *CQ*, as we shall see in chapter four, was to be more open and positive about contemporary work. As Taunton puts it, Cox and Dyson 'modified the Leavisism of *Scrutiny* and *Essays in Criticism*' by adding an 'emphasis on celebrating the best of contemporary culture'.[26] As Cox and Dyson themselves wrote in a 1972 essay: '*The Critical*

---

[23] Christopher Hilliard, 'Leavis, Richards, and the Duplicators' in *The Critic as Amateur* ed. Saikat Majumdar and Aarthi Vadde (Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2019), pp. 109-128 (p. 109).

[24] A. S. Byatt, 'Reading, writing, studying', *Critical Quarterly* 35.4 (1993), pp. 3-7 (p. 4).

[25] Brian Cox, *The Great Betrayal: Memoirs of a Life in Education* (Chapmans, 1992), p. 79. N. B., Cox explains in the introduction that he started publishing under 'Brian Cox' from 1985-onwards, when he began a monthly column for *The Times Education Supplement*. Amusingly, 'some readers failed to connect this person with the supposedly right-wing C. B. Cox who edited the Black Papers. […] The change from C. B. Cox to Brian Cox reflects this change in public perceptions, so for this autobiography I have retained my new image.' (p. 7). From 1992-onwards 'Brian Cox' is used exclusively. The bibliography and initial references to Cox's writing will use whichever name appears in that particular publication, and 'Cox' thereafter.

[26] Taunton, '*Critical Quarterly*, Leavisism, and UEA', p. 7.

Quarterly took over the *Scrutiny* emphasis on the value of past traditions, but refused to accept its entire cultural pessimism about the present. *The Critical Quarterly* rejected the "waste land" mentality, both in theory and in practice.'[27] As early as their inaugural editorial, published in March 1959, the pair opposed any such critical approach which claimed superiority for the critic at the expense of the contemporary writer:

> Too much can be written, too solemnly, about the critic's "responsibilities". […] His main function, in our view, is to assist rather than oppose the powerful and dangerous immaturities out of which truly creative writing, and reading, grow. Debunking soon becomes boring, and seldom does much to nourish a genuine taste for the good.[28]

As such *CQ* published poetry from the first issue, and fiction from 1968.[29] As editors, Cox and Dyson dedicated 'an appreciable amount of space to the publication of new poets such as Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes, Thom Gunn, R. S. Thomas and Sylvia Plath'.[30] They also looked beyond the British Isles, publishing new work by international writers such as the Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite. This close proximity between contemporary criticism and contemporary creative work within *CQ's* pages provided what Bradbury described in a 1993 festschrift for Cox as '[a] profitable intimacy between contemporary creation and contemporary criticism', which he saw as 'one of the reasons for its [*CQ*'s] influence and importance.'[31]

---

[27] C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson, 'Literary Criticism' in C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson (eds), *The Twentieth-Century Mind: History, Ideas, and Literature in Britain*, 3 vols. (Oxford University Press, 1972), vol. 3 (1972), pp. 440-63 (p. 441).

[28] C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson, 'Foreword', *Critical Quarterly* 1.1 (1959), pp. 3-4 (p. 4). N.B., The use of the definite article in the journal's title is common albeit inconsistent under Cox and Dyson: in issue 1.1 the masthead and foreword both feature '*The Critical Quarterly*'; in issue 1.2 Cox and Dyson use the definite article in the editorial notice but just '*Critical Quarterly*' on the previous page's masthead. This is likely due to a last-minute indecision about a change of name. In any case, as Matthew Taunton points out, the *The* 'seems to have fallen away by the time Colin MacCabe took over the editorship in the 1980s: now it is always just *Critical Quarterly*, or *CQ*.' (Matthew Taunton, '*Critical Quarterly*, Leavisism, and UEA', p. 13n2.). For interests of space, I use '*CQ*' in the text and '*Critical Quarterly*' in the notes.

[29] See C. P. Snow, 'Character Sketches from an Unpublished Novel', *Critical Quarterly* 10.1-2 (1968), pp. 176-183.

[30] Cox and Dyson, 'Literary Criticism', p. 441.

[31] Malcolm Bradbury, 'Critical years: some thoughts on Brian Cox and *CQ*', *Critical Quarterly* 35.4 (1993), pp. 31-35 (p. 33).

II

This idea of a 'profitable intimacy' between creative writing and literary criticism contradicts the argument of Lise Jaillant's recent monograph *Literary Rebels* (2022), that '[c]reative writers and scholars are not, and have never been, natural bedfellows.'[32] Jaillant claims that the history of Creative Writing is marked by 'opposition to the mainstream university', and that '[c]reative writing began on the margins of academia, and the discipline continues to be uncomfortable with the university system.'[33] This narrative of opposition – which situates an emerging methodology as a disruption to one which is established yet waning – will be familiar to readers of other histories of the discipline, such as Atherton's *Defining Literary Criticism*, Gerald Graff's *Professing Literature* (1987) or Joseph North's *Literary Criticism: A Concise Political History* (2017). Atherton, to take one example, refers to the work of Wallace Martin to consider 'the opposition between "scholarship", a concern with the accumulation and analysis of knowledge along scientific lines; and "criticism", a more evaluative approach that drew on an older, humanist conception of literature.'[34] Jaillant rehearses a similar narrative of antagonism despite referring, rather bafflingly, to all academic staff within university literature departments as 'scholars', regardless of their training or methodology. But another recent monograph, Rachel Sagner Buurma and Laura Heffernan's *The Teaching Archive* (2020) makes an important intervention by refuting the idea that English as a discipline 'has been formed by controversy over method', be it controversies between 'scholars vs. critics or historicist vs. formalists'.[35] Buurma and Heffernan instead refer to the archived teaching notes of poets and critics such as Cleanth Brooks, T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards, and Edmund Wilson to emphasise 'a world of practice in which those methods rarely oppose one another.'[36]

---

[32] Lise Jaillant, *Literary Rebels: A History of Creative Writers in Anglo-American Universities* (Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 1.

[33] Jaillant, *Literary Rebels*, pp. 1-2.

[34] Atherton, *Defining Literary Criticism*, p. 68. See also, for the American context, Joseph North, *Literary Criticism: A Concise Political History* (Harvard University Press, 2017) or Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (University of Chicago Press, 1987).

[35] Rachel Sagner Buurma and Laura Heffernan, *The Teaching Archive: A New History for Literary Study* (University of Chicago Press, 2020), pp. 8-9.

One of the interventions this thesis seeks to make is to refer to both archived teaching notes and published materials to show how such narratives of opposition fail to account for the development of the discipline at institutions that have been mostly overlooked by previous historical accounts, namely UEA, Birmingham and Manchester. While Jaillant does indeed refer to archival material, her conclusion that Bradbury, for example, was '[d]eeply ambivalent towards the university system' is simply wrong.[37] Bradbury was entirely invested in the institution of the university, and so too were Lodge, Sage, Cox and Dyson: they were lifelong academics who clearly saw the university as fertile ground for the development of literary culture. The MA in Creative Writing at UEA, for instance, was established by Bradbury and Angus Wilson in 1970 to bring creation and criticism into closer proximity and – to repeat that term which Bradbury used in 1993 to describe *CQ* – achieve a 'profitable intimacy' between the two. As Bradbury recounts in the 1992 piece 'The Bridgeable Gap', he devised the UEA MA course with Angus Wilson so as to bring about 'new relations between the "creative" and the "critical", both in individuals and in university culture too.'[38] In particular:

> a course of this kind, conducted from the distance of an academic environment, distinct from the commercial marketplace, could have some impact on the state of serious fiction in Britain at the time, by which both of us were dismayed. And […] the presence among our own literature students of serious, articulate writers might have some impact on the bee-swarms of new theory that regularly surge through literature departments, and by which we were also concerned.[39]

Although Bradbury articulates a concern here about 'bee-swarms' of literary theory 'surg[ing]' through university English departments, we should note that Creative Writing students at UEA were, during Bradbury's time, required to take modules in literary theory. Writing in 2011,

---

[36] Buurma and Heffernan, *The Teaching Archive*, p. 9.
[37] Jaillant, *Literary Rebels*, p. 231.
[38] Bradbury, 'The Bridgeable Gap', p. 7.
[39] Bradbury, 'The Bridgeable Gap', p. 7.

Andrew Cowan, who took the MA in the year 1984-1985, remembers being 'obliged to enrol in one critical module each term' and choosing 'contemporary literary theory with Lorna Sage in term one'.[40]

Bradbury, Lodge, Sage, Cox and Dyson were working in universities at the point in time when continental literary theory, most notably structuralism and poststructuralism, entered British academic culture, and they engaged variously with this developing body of knowledge. Sage's MA class 'Fiction and the Reality Effect', the module which Cowan had taken in 1984, compared each week one eighteenth- or nineteenth-century novel with a particular combination of literary theorists. In the first week, for instance, they read Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1767) alongside the work of Viktor Shklovsky, Northrop Frye, Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva, and in week seven they read Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* (1864) alongside the work of Bakhtin, Hélène Cixous, and Gérard Genette.[41] Around the same time, Lodge ran a regular English department research seminar for faculty and postgraduate students to discuss key works of criticism and theory. The earliest programme held in Lodge's archive at the Cadbury Research Library is from Autumn 1978; it lists sessions on a range of theoretical texts, from W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley's 'The Intentional Fallacy' (1946) to Michel Foucault's 'What is an Author?' (1969) to Stanley Fish's 'How to do Things with Austin and Searle: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism' (1976).[42] Although all three of these texts consider the broad themes of interpretation and the author function, the seminar is arranged, like Sage's course on fiction, as a survey of possible approaches rather than a series of antagonistic oppositions. Lodge's interest in theoretical plurality is also evident in the two anthologies he edited: *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism: A Reader* (1972) and *Modern*

---

[40] Andrew Cowan, 'Blind Spots: What Creative Doesn't Know', *TEXT* 15 (2011) <http://www.textjournal.com.au/april11/cowan.htm> [accessed 30th June 2022].

[41] 'Fiction and the Reality Effect', LS/TC/3, Lorna Sage Archive, British Archive for Contemporary Writing, University of East Anglia.

[42] 'English Department Research Seminars – Autumn 1978', Box 38, Folder 6, The David Lodge Papers, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

Criticism and Theory: A Reader (1988). The former included essays of Anglo-American New Criticism and practical criticism by T. S. Eliot and I. A. Richards, short essays by practising writers such as Henry James, Virginia Woolf, and D. H. Lawrence, as well as articles of 'classical structuralism' by Northrop Frye, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Roland Barthes. Lodge writes in the foreword that 'no single method of approach can answer all the questions that may legitimately be asked about a work of literature, nor exhaust the sources of possible interest within it.'[43] Amusingly, Lodge wanted to include an article by Leavis, but he was refused permission. Lodge writes in the preface: 'I very much regret that Dr F. R. Leavis was unwilling to allow any of his criticism to be included [...] In no other case was the editor prevented from including an author of his choice.'[44]

III

While archived teaching notes show us that Bradbury, Lodge, and Sage did incorporate theory into their teaching, they typically travestied such work in their more public writing. As quoted above, Bradbury referred in the 'The Bridgeable Gap' to 'the bee-swarms of new theory that regularly surge through literature departments'. Two years later, the *Times Literary Supplement* would publish a short piece by Lorna Sage titled 'The Women's Camp' (15th July 1994), in which she argued, with a more heightened rhetoric than Bradbury, that 'theory is the region where common sense dies',[45] despite having taught her theory course for at least a decade when this piece was published. Both 'The Women's Camp' and 'The Bridgeable Gap' were published under Ferdinand Mount's tenure as editor, from 1991 to 2002. (Mount had previously been head of the Number 10 Policy Unit from 1982 to 1983, working closely with Margaret Thatcher.) More than a decade earlier, in 1981, Lodge invoked 'common sense' in the preface to *Working with Structuralism*, a short, cheap paperback of essays published for a non-academic audience. Lodge opens with the by now familiar point that '[l]iterary criticism is at present in a state of crisis' but quickly gives a curious modification, writing that this crisis 'is partly a consequence of its own success.'[46] He goes on to explain:

---

[43] David Lodge, *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism: A Reader* (Longman, 1972), p. xviii.
[44] Lodge, *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*, p. xviii.
[45] Lorna Sage, 'The Women's Camp' [*Times Literary Supplement*, 15th July 1994] in *Good as Her Word*, ed. Sharon Sage and Victor Sage [2003] (Harper Perennial, 2004), pp. 186-189 (p. 186).

> the discipline has made huge intellectual advances, but in the process has become incomprehensible to the layman – and indeed to many professionals educated in an older, more humane tradition. This incomprehensibility is not simply a matter of jargon – though that is a real stumbling block; more fundamentally, the new criticism, like the new physics, often runs counter to empirical observation and common sense. It therefore tends to alienate the common reader.[47]

The term 'common reader' had been used variously before the postwar period – by the likes of Samuel Johnson in the eighteenth century or Virginia Woolf in 1925 – and yet the audience Lodge refers to is a much newer formation: created, rather ironically, by the postwar university itself. As Hilliard notes, '[t]he professionalization of criticism meant more amateurs doing it. As literary criticism became institutionalized in universities and schools, critical procedures were taught to thousands of people for whom criticism would never become a profession.'[48] If the 'success' of criticism which Lodge identifies did indeed lead to a state of crisis, it was not simply because of the development of new methods of criticism. Rather, the emergence of this new audience, who were extramural and yet not entirely unfamiliar with the methods and procedures of academic criticism, created a demand for criticism which was informed by specialised academic work while being couched in the familiar language of non-specialists and written in the first person. Writing about her generation of writers in 1993, Byatt identifies this enormous – and to an extent largely unexamined – shift in public taste brought about by the formation of this new audience:

> Writers in my life-time are the first generation to have studied set texts and then to have become set texts themselves. They are the first generation to have written, knowing that they have a sizeable possible audience – or a series of sub-groups of possible audiences

---

[46] David Lodge, *Working with Structuralism* [1981] (ARK, 1986), p. vii. N.B., when Lodge refers to 'the new criticism' he means the new methods of criticism, rather than the work of the New Critics of the 1940s and 1950s.

[47] Lodge, *Working with Structuralism*, p. vii.

[48] Hilliard, 'Leavis, Richards, and the Duplicators', p. 109.

> – of *professional* readers, from A-level students looking for “relevance” to deconstructionists, feminists, Marxists and proponents of the Death of the Author.[49]

The existence of this audience complicates the historical account given by Guillory in *Professing Criticism*, which assumes a ‘line of demarcation between lay reading and professional reading’ and a concomitant difference in reading practice, namely ‘[t]he distinction between judgment and interpretation’.[50] This assumption leaves no room for the existence of the graduate or peri-academic reader, who despite being outside the ‘professional’ centre of learning is able to maintain and express an interest in specialist literary critical knowledge. This is not to say that subsequent developments in the academy have not alienated the peri-academic reader, but rather that the emergence of any lines of demarcation has been far more complex than Guillory’s account might allow for.

Leavis theorised his own version of this peri-academic audience in the 1930 essay ‘Mass Civilization and Minority Culture’. This is best summarised in Leavis’s own words:

> In any period it is upon a very small minority that the discerning appreciation of art and literature depends: it is (apart from cases of the simple and familiar) only a few who are capable of unprompted, first-hand judgment. They are still a small minority, though a larger one, who are capable of endorsing such first-hand judgment by genuine personal response. The accepted valuations are a kind of paper currency based upon a very small proportion of gold. To the state of such a currency the possibilities of fine living at any time bear a close relation.[51]

We can see here that there are actually two minority groups in Leavis’s model: the first ‘small minority’ make the initial critical judgements, then a second ‘small minority, though a larger one,’ endorse these judgements with their own ‘personal response’. In Leavis’s economic metaphor, the gold standard of critical judgement made by the first minority sets the value for the ‘paper currency’ responses of the second minority. This forms what is essentially a ‘trickle-down’ model of culture in which the understanding discerned by the first minority reverberates outwards through the second, larger minority to inform 'the consciousness of the race' more widely. Whilst this model is clearly hierarchical, with the implicit judgement that the knowledge of the 'minority culture' is more valuable than that of 'mass civilization', Leavis does not explicitly mention class at any point. Indeed, as I shall come to later, Leavis's cultural minority was characterised by deep training rather than socioeconomic background. Richard Hoggart, author of *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life* (1957) was profoundly influenced by Leavis, in particular his criticisms of mass forms such as 'the newspaper press' and the cinema, the latter of which 'involve[s] surrender, under conditions of hypnotic receptivity, to the cheapest emotional appeals, appeals the more insidious because they are associated with a compellingly vivid illusion of actual life.'[52] These popular forms contribute to what Leavis calls a 'psychological Gresham Law', a term first used by the Nobel Peace Prize-winning politician and pamphleteer Norman Angell in *The Press and the Organization of Society* (1922):

---

[49] Byatt, ‘Reading, writing, studying’, p. 4.
[50] Guillory, *Professing Criticism*, p. 329.
[51] Leavis, ‘Mass Civilization and Minority Culture’, pp. 143-144.

> just as in commerce debased coin, if there be enough of it, must drive out the sterling, so in the contest of motives, action which corresponds to the more primitive feelings and impulses, to first thoughts and established prejudices, can be stimulated by the modern newspaper far more easily than that prompted by rationalized second thought.[53]

For Leavis, the moral importance of these two minority groups is that they maintain this 'rationalized second thought' against the slings and arrows of a reductive popular media.

But Bradbury, Lodge, Sage, Cox and Dyson were less pessimistic than Leavis about the public and popular media, namely newspaper journalism and television. Bradbury, Lodge, and Sage in particular regularly wrote literary pieces and book reviews for daily and weekly newspapers. Sage, who was the most prolific and by far the most interesting journalist of the three, reviewed regularly for the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *Observer* and the *London Review of Books*, and in chapter three I close read a number of pieces so as to identify what I call her 'living style'. From 1991 to 1992, Lodge wrote a regular column for *The Independent* titled 'The Art of Fiction'. Each piece involved one or two short extracts from a novel followed by an essay on a particular technique or effect, for instance 'The Intrusive Author' with reference to George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859) and E. M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910), or 'Ideas' with reference to Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (1962). Bradbury wrote for a number of papers throughout his career, not least the tabloid newspapers the *Daily Mail* and *The Mail on Sunday*. These were less informed by his academic work: one piece published in 1997, two years after Bradbury's retirement from teaching, was titled 'Just Why Do We All Love David Jason?'[54] Bradbury wrote variously for television throughout the 1980s and 1990s – as did Lodge – from original television plays such as *The After Dinner Game*, which was broadcast in 1975 as a BBC Play for Today, to detective dramas like *Inspector Morse* or *Dalziel and Pascoe*. In 1981 Bradbury wrote that television was 'as important in my writing life as the novel form itself'.[55] He conceived of television as a 'writer's theatre' and 'a form for exploring not so much the naturalistic face of society but of the modes by which we fictionalize it and ourselves into existence'. Television, for Bradbury, could be used to 'haunt, disturb, estrange and parody the familiar and often facile images it so readily and frequently constructs.'[56]

---

[52] Leavis, 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture', p. 149.

[53] Norman Angell, quoted in Leavis, 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture', p. 148.

IV

The peri-academic reading public were mostly graduates – though of course there would have been collateral shifts in taste among those who had not attended university but came into contact with graduates through professional or social connections, both formal and informal – and its rapid growth was one result of the mid-century expansion of the universities. Between 1961 and 1965, seven new universities were established and began taking students: Sussex in

---

[54] Malcolm Bradbury, 'Just Why Do We All Love David Jason?', *Daily Mail*, 12th February 1997, p. 8.
[55] Malcolm Bradbury, *The After Dinner Game* [1982] (Arena, 1984), pp. 18-19.
[56] Bradbury *The After Dinner Game*, p. 10; p. 19.

1961, UEA and York in 1963, Essex and Lancaster in 1964, and Kent and Warwick in 1965. This expansion had in turn been the result of a rapid increase in student numbers in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, as the baby boomer generation reached university age. The student body at UEA, for instance, had grown from 113 in 1963 to 1724 in 1967, then rose again to 2603 by 1971.[57] As Moran points out, another factor in the increase of students was the abolition of National Service in 1960, and so too was the 1962 Education Act, 'which required local authorities to pay tuition fees and maintenance grants.'[58] This financial support had a particular effect on the numbers of students taking degrees in the humanities and social sciences, as it removed the material necessity for lower income students to take vocational degrees; as Moran notes: '[w]orking-class students no longer needed to train as teachers to study the humanities.'[59]

The rise in popularity of the campus novel during this period, particularly the works of Bradbury and Lodge, is another consequence of the formation of this new peri-academic audience. Aside from a few instances – C. P. Snow's *The Masters* (1951) is one example – the British or indeed English campus novel is typically set outside the 'elite centres' of learning: the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. The genre begins in earnest with Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954), set at the University of Leicester; Bradbury's first novel, *Eating People is Wrong* (1959), was also set there. Indeed, with the exception of Lodge's *The British Museum is Falling Down* (1965), each of Bradbury and Lodge's campus novels takes place in an academic setting away from Oxford, Cambridge, or London. Their most well-known and commercially successful contributions to the genre, Bradbury's *The History Man* (1975) and Lodge's Rummidge trilogy – *Changing Places* (1975), *Small World* (1984), and *Nice Work* (1988) – are mostly set in the fictional cities of Watermouth and Rummidge, analogues for

---

[57] Michael Sanderson, *The History of the University of East Anglia, Norwich* (Hambledon Continuum, 2002), p. 188; p. 218.
[58] Moran, 'The Humanities and the University', p. 8.
[59] Moran, 'The Humanities and the University', p. 8.

Bournemouth and Birmingham.[60] The provincial settings of the English campus novel follow the pattern of the American equivalents: Mary McCarthy's *The Groves of Academe* (1952), for instance, is set at the fictional Jocelyn College in rural Pennsylvania, and John Williams's *Stoner* (1965) is set at the University of Missouri.

In 1956, when Bradbury was working on the doctoral thesis 'American Literary Expatriates in Europe, 1810-1950' at Victoria University of Manchester alongside writing *Eating People is Wrong*, he published a short article in *The Antioch Review* titled 'The Rise of

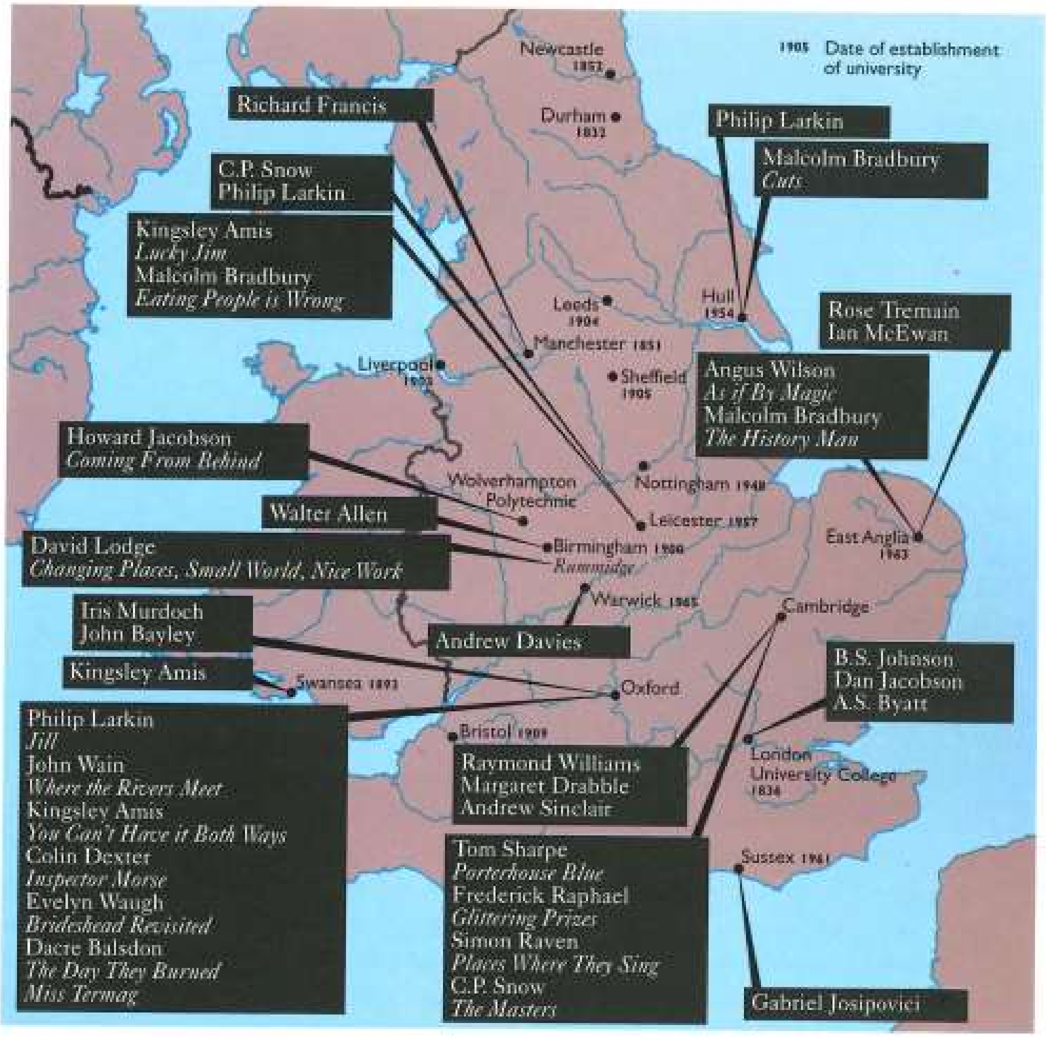

Newcastle 1852
1905 Date of establishment of university
Richard Francis
Durham 1832
Philip Larkin
Malcolm Bradbury
Cuts
C.P. Snow
Philip Larkin
Kingsley Amis
Lucky Jim
Malcolm Bradbury
Eating People is Wrong
Leeds 1904
Hull 1954
Rose Tremain
Ian McEwan
Manchester 1851
Liverpool 1903
Sheffield 1905
Angus Wilson
As if By Magic
Malcolm Bradbury
The History Man
Howard Jacobson
Coming From Behind
Wolverhampton Polytechnic
Nottingham 1948
Walter Allen
Leicester 1957
East Anglia 1963
David Lodge
Changing Places, Small World, Nice Work
Birmingham 1900
Rummidge
Warwick 1965
Cambridge
Iris Murdoch
John Bayley
Andrew Davies
Kingsley Amis
Swansea 1893
Oxford
B.S. Johnson
Dan Jacobson
A.S. Byatt
Philip Larkin
Jill
John Wain
Where the Rivers Meet
Kingsley Amis
You Can't Have it Both Ways
Colin Dexter
Inspector Morse
Evelyn Waugh
Brideshead Revisited
Dacre Balsdon
The Day They Burned Miss Termag
Bristol 1909
Raymond Williams
Margaret Drabble
Andrew Sinclair
London University College 1836
Tom Sharpe
Porterhouse Blue
Frederick Raphael
Glittering Prizes
Simon Raven
Places Where They Sing
C.P. Snow
The Masters
Sussex 1961
Gabriel Josipovici

Figure 1. British universities and the novels or writers associated with them.[61]

---

[60] Watermouth, where most of the action of *The History Man* takes place, is a coastal town in the south west of England which most resembles Bournemouth, however the University of Watermouth itself closely resembles UEA, not least for its interdisciplinary programme, brutalist campus, and origins in an Elizabethan hall (See Malcolm Bradbury, *The History Man* [1975] (Picador, 2017), p. 37.

[61] Malcolm Bradbury, *The Atlas of Literature* (De Agostini, 1996), p. 275.

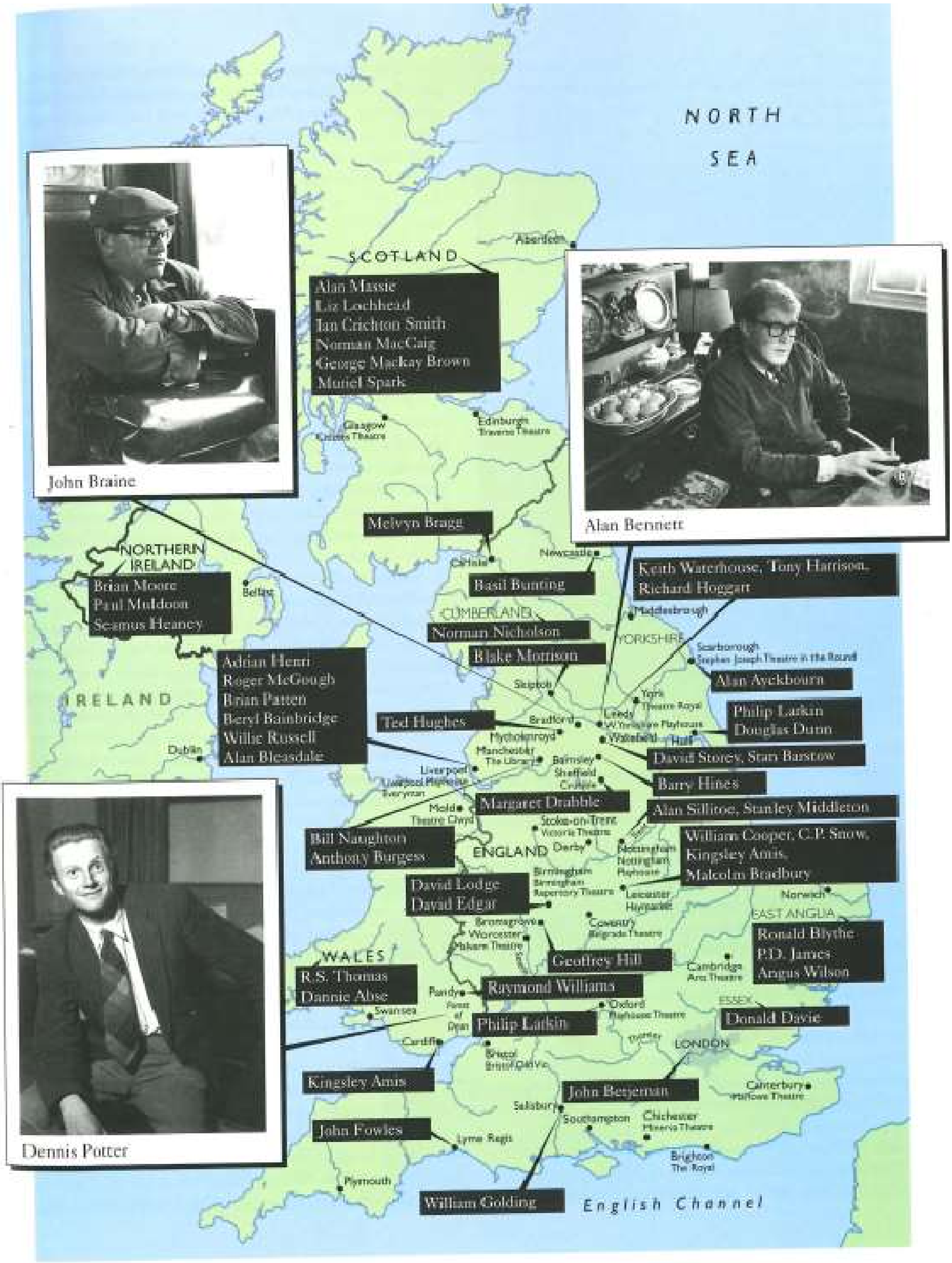

NORTH SEA
John Braine
SCOTLAND
Aberdeen
Alan Massie
Liz Lochhead
Ian Crichton Smith
Norman MacCaig
George Mackay Brown
Muriel Spark
Glasgow
Citizens Theatre
Edinburgh
Traverse Theatre
Alan Bennett
Melvyn Bragg
Carlisle
Newcastle
Basil Bunting
NORTHERN IRELAND
Brian Moore
Paul Muldoon
Seamus Heaney
Belfast
Keith Waterhouse, Tony Harrison,
Richard Hoggart
Middlesbrough
CUMBERLAND
Norman Nicholson
YORKSHIRE
Scarborough
Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round
Blake Morrison
Alan Ayckbourn
Adrian Henri
Roger McGough
Brian Patten
Beryl Bainbridge
Willie Russell
Alan Bleasdale
IRELAND
Skipton
York
Theatre Royal
Ted Hughes
Bradford
Leeds
W Yorkshire Playhouse
Philip Larkin
Douglas Dunn
Mytholmroyd
Wakefield
Hull
Dublin
Manchester
The Library
Barnsley
David Storey, Stan Barstow
Liverpool
Liverpool Playhouse
Everyman
Sheffield
Crucible
Barry Hines
Mold
Theatre Clwyd
Margaret Drabble
Alan Sillitoe, Stanley Middleton
Stoke-on-Trent
Victoria Theatre
Bill Naughton
Anthony Burgess
ENGLAND
Derby
Nottingham
Nottingham Playhouse
William Cooper, C.P. Snow,
Kingsley Amis,
Malcolm Bradbury
Birmingham
Birmingham Repertory Theatre
David Lodge
David Edgar
Leicester
Haymarket
Norwich
EAST ANGLIA
Bromsgrove
Worcester
Malvern Theatre
Coventry
Belgrade Theatre
Ronald Blythe
P.D. James
Angus Wilson
WALES
Geoffrey Hill
Cambridge
Arts Theatre
R.S. Thomas
Dannie Abse
Pandy
Raymond Williams
Forest of Dean
Oxford
Playhouse Theatre
ESSEX
Donald Davie
Swansea
Philip Larkin
Cardiff
Bristol
Bristol Old Vic
LONDON
Kingsley Amis
John Betjeman
Canterbury
Marlowe Theatre
Dennis Potter
Salisbury
Southampton
Chichester
Minerva Theatre
John Fowles
Lyme Regis
Brighton
The Royal
Plymouth
William Golding
English Channel

Figure 2. The British ‘provinces’ and the writers associated with them.[62]

---

[62] Bradbury, *The Atlas of Literature*, p. 241.

the Provincials'. In it, Bradbury recounts a visit Leavis made to Leicester in 1951, while Bradbury was an undergraduate there from 1950 to 1953. The piece begins with a caricatured portrait of Leavis 'wearing a shirt open at the neck and carrying over one shoulder a haversack which had been purchased at an army-surplus store'.[63] Like Carey Willoughby, the novelist and critic who serves as the antagonist of *Eating People is Wrong*, Leavis forgoes the 'elaborate dinner' that the college had laid on for him, instead 'consuming nothing save a series of small tablets.'[64] But overall the piece is broadly positive in its assessment of Leavis, in particular his moralism: Bradbury presents him as a hero-figure for the 'people who have been brought up in lower middle-class households where this kind of nonconformist strenuousness is to be found, where moral issues are pressing.'[65] Writing in 1956, Bradbury notes that '[i]t has only been in fairly recent years that the children of these homes have been able to obtain university education and even achieve eminence in the world of letters and in the groves of academe.'[66] Bradbury had, like Lodge, Cox and Dyson, benefitted from the increase in free grammar school places between the wars; Sage, who was born later, benefitted from the 1944 Education Act, which abolished fees for state secondary schools and in doing so widened grammar school provision. Colleagues and associates of these figures, including Hoggart, Williams, Frank Kermode, and Ted Hughes, had also been educated at grammar schools. Dyson, who had grown up in poverty in Paddington, was acutely aware of his own social mobility: as he would go on to put it in a letter to Cox, they were 'the generation that, as it seems, had the luck'.[67]

In 'The Rise of the Provincials', Bradbury also characterises Leavis as an emollient to the 'dilettantism and "the amused superiority" of the sophisticated'.[68] Despite the fact that in

---

[63] Malcolm Bradbury, 'The Rise of the Provincials', *The Antioch Review* 16.4 (1956), pp. 469-477 (p. 469).
[64] Bradbury, 'The Rise of the Provincials', p. 469.
[65] Bradbury, 'The Rise of the Provincials', p. 471.
[66] Bradbury, 'The Rise of the Provincials', p. 471.
[67] A. E. Dyson to C. B. Cox, 5th October 1987, COX1/2/7/33, Brian Cox Papers, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.
[68] Bradbury, 'The Rise of the Provincials', p. 471.

1956 Leavis was still based at Downing College, Cambridge, Bradbury claims that he 'is a somewhat uncomfortable inhabitant' there, and he maintains that Leavis's work provides 'a rigorous training in discrimination' that opposes the 'Good Taste that one associates with the dons of Oxford colleges, with Virginia Woolf or E. M. Forster'.[69] (In his biography of Leavis, Ian MacKillop explains that whereas the figures of 'Bloomsbury' – most notably Woolf and her father, Leslie Stephen – equated literary creation with 'sensibility' and 'states of mind', '*Scrutiny* believed the literary world was constructed'.[70]) In contrast to Oxford, Cambridge, and London, this new generation of grammar school-educated academics had their 'training' in literature in 'the provincial universities [...] where the virtues emphasized are good hard work, keeping decent, and getting on.'[71] This idea of a 'training' in literature – as opposed to an innate, amorphous 'Good Taste' – was a key part of this new generation's admiration for Leavis, who was unusual among the Dons of the first half of the twentieth century in that he had obtained a PhD. His thesis, finished in 1924, was on the literary culture of the eighteenth century; the finished draft was titled 'The Relationship of Journalism to Literature: Studied in the Rise and Earlier Development of the Press in England'.[72] As MacKillop notes, obtaining a PhD was a requirement for scientists at Cambridge at the time, but 'it was not necessarily a promising route for higher studies in the humanities.'[73] In those early days of the Cambridge English School, when most of the faculty were, like Arthur Quiller Couch, gentlemen of, to use Bradbury's term, 'Good Taste', the PhD 'was not a prestigious course: to have a doctorate for which one had worked did not impress.'[74] A decade later, Leavis was the only person teaching Cambridge English with a PhD, 'though there were to be other doctors, like Richards and [E.

---

[69] Bradbury, 'The Rise of the Provincials', p. 471.

[70] Ian MacKillop, *F. R. Leavis: A Life in Criticism* (Allen Lane, 1995), p. 232.

[71] Bradbury, 'The Rise of the Provincials', p. 471.

[72] MacKillop, *F. R. Leavis*, p. 71.

[73] MacKillop, *F. R. Leavis*, p. 72.

[74] MacKillop, *F. R. Leavis*, p. 73.

M. W.] Tillyard, who owed their title to a set of publications.'[75] He even grew to be embarrassed by the qualification: 'He did not want "Ph.D." on the title-page of *New Bearings in English Poetry* [1923]: "It would raise the worst suspicions, and, anyway, looks comic."'[76] Later in Leavis's life, his PhD went on being a source of derision: the moniker 'Dr. Leavis' was, first and foremost, a dig, intended to portray him 'as a Crippen-like, "murdering-to-dissect" analyst.'[77]

'The Rise of the Provincials' is very much an essay of the Fifties, with its puritanical tone and endorsement of a Protestant work ethic. It captures something of the literary fashion of that decade, namely social realism and the popularity of the so-called 'Angry Young Men' in fiction and drama and 'the Movement' in poetry. The figures who comprised these two informal groupings were mainly based in provincial towns and cities, and a number of them – namely Kingsley Amis, Donald Davie, D. J. Enright, and Philip Larkin – were contributors to, and friends of, *CQ*. In Bradbury's fiction, Louis Bates in *Eating People is Wrong* is an Angry-Young-Man-in-waiting, and James Walker, the protagonist of Bradbury's second novel, *Stepping Westward* (1965), is a fair-to-middling Angry Young Man novelist who leaves dreary postwar Nottingham to take up a writer's residence at the fictional Benedict Arnold University in the small town of Party, 'where the middle west meets the far west and the south-west the north-west'.[78] Likewise Lodge's second novel, *Ginger, You're Barmy* (1962), a soberly realist account of national service, has much in common with the atmosphere and style of the Angry Young Men. In his 1976 inaugural lecture at the University of Birmingham, Lodge characterised the Angry Young Men as 'antimodernist' writers 'who aimed to communicate clearly and honestly their perceptions of the world as it was, in dry, disciplined, slightly depressive verse.'[79] Both Lodge and Bradbury would come to write more overtly comic novels as their careers progressed, acknowledging as they did so the longstanding satirical traditions of the novel. For Lodge the central figure was Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), who had given an important defence of comedy as a progressive force in his study *Rabelais and His World* (1965).[80] For Bradbury, the key figure was Laurence Sterne, whose work Leavis had dismissed in *The Great Tradition* (1948) as no more than 'irresponsible (and nasty) trifling'.[81]

---

[75] MacKillop, *F. R. Leavis*, p. 73.
[76] MacKillop, *F. R. Leavis*, p. 73.
[77] MacKillop, *F. R. Leavis*, p. 73.
[78] Malcolm Bradbury, *Stepping Westward* [1965] (Picador, 2012), p. 1.

Despite their provincial context, Bradbury, Lodge, Sage, Cox and Dyson looked beyond the provinces to acknowledge American influences. Early on in their careers, Bradbury, Lodge and Cox had all spent at least one year working at an American college: Bradbury in Indiana, Lodge and Cox both in California. Despite the relative brevity of the time spent there, the year in America had a profound effect on each of them: Bradbury and Lodge both produced campus satires set in America – *Stepping Westward* and *Changing Places*, respectively – and Cox published a number of American poets at *CQ*, most notably Robert Lowell, Theodore Roethke, and Sylvia Plath. In 1961, Plath would go on to edit the second of *CQ*'s poetry supplements, titled *American Poetry Now*. This openness stands in stark contrast to Leavis, who sought to resist American influences, namely the technological advancements which had led to the new mass media. In the 1930 essay 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture', Leavis opposed America as the land of the 'machine', which has 'brought about change in habit and the circumstances of life at a rate for which we have no parallel.'[82] The car, for instance, 'has, in a few years, radically affected religion, broken up the family, and revolutionized social custom.'[83] In a 1959 symposium on Leavis's work published in *CQ*, the American critic R. J. Kaufmann suggested that 'there is something fundamentally rural in his [Leavis's] imagination

---

[79] Lodge, *Working with Structuralism*, p. 9.

[80] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* [1965] (Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 92.

[81] F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, *George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (George W. Stewart, 1948), p. 2n2.

[82] Leavis, 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture', p. 146.

[83] Leavis, 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture', p. 146.

[…] Seen from one perspective, Leavis's whole work is a series of wide-ranging, superlatively intelligent, violently partisan responses to the repellent and central fact of modern *hugeness*.'[84]

The 'Angry Young Men' were, as both a social and an aesthetic formulation, associated most of all with realism, whereas Bradbury, Lodge, Sage and *CQ* actively worked to theorise and valorise the category of literary modernism. As Rachel Potter points out in 2019, '[t]he invention of something called modernism […] took place in and around the pages of *Critical Quarterly*.'[85] In 1975, *CQ* published Lodge's essay 'Metaphor and Metonymy in Modern Fiction', which begins from the basic premise that there are 'two kinds of fiction in the modern period', divided over how best to represent 'reality':

> The pursuit of 'reality' in fictional representation throughout the nineteenth century eventually led some writers to adopt techniques that were, when developed to their limits of expressive possibility, the reverse of 'realistic'; while other writers, equally convinced that they were rendering the real, were content to refine and modify the techniques of traditional realism. James Joyce and Arnold Bennett may stand as representative of the two directions between which the post-Flaubertian novelist had to choose; and at different points in our century – notably in the thirties and sixties – novelists have been collectively conscious of facing essentially the same choice.[86]

This kind of binary opposition is common in Lodge's critical work both locally and generally; indeed that final remark about the 'choice' of the novelist in the sixties served as the initial premise for his earlier collection, *The Novelist at the Crossroads* (1971). But as Marina MacKay and Lyndsey Stonebridge suggest in their 2007 collection *British Fiction after Modernism*, this 'formalist distinction between experimental and realist fiction' which has 'dominated accounts' of the mid-century novel 'has also, and not always merely incidentally, stamped many mid-century writers as irretrievably and disastrously minor.'[87] Lodge's essay was an earlier version of his chapter in the collection *Modernism: A Guide to European*

---

[84] R. J. Kaufmann, 'The Morality of Mind', *Critical Quarterly* 1.3 (1959), pp. 247-252 (p. 249).

[85] Rachel Potter, '*CQ* and the invention of modernism', *Critical Quarterly* 61.2 (2019), pp. 32-37 (p. 32).

[86] David Lodge, 'Metaphor and Metonymy in Modern Fiction', *Critical Quarterly* 17.1 (1975), pp. 75-93 (p. 75).

[87] Marina MacKay and Lyndsey Stonebridge, *British Fiction after Modernism: The Novel at Mid-Century* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 3.

Literature 1890-1930 (1976), which Bradbury had edited alongside his UEA colleague James McFarlane, a scholar of Henrik Ibsen. As Potter points out, Bradbury and McFarlane thought of modernism as 'a chronological, geographical and aesthetic field, and a field whose boundaries could therefore, and would be energetically debated.'[88] In the preface, Bradbury and McFarlane argue:

> because Modernism is still, in some fashion, a shaping art behind the art of our own times, […] for all our exhibitions and archives, the task must stay provisional. To suppose one can open up for inspection – trimmed, grassed, confidently labelled – the kind of constantly re-excavated site Modernism has become would be to mistake the nature of the phenomenon.[89]

Bradbury and McFarlane's acknowledgement that modernism is 'a shaping art behind the art of our own times' complicates the 'formalist distinction' between realism and experiment observed by McKay and Stonebridge. And one of the central ways in which modernism has acted as 'a shaping art' is, precisely, through the university: countless writers – and, indeed, readers – of the postwar period had studied modernist literature at university. The reading list for one of Bradbury's modules from the late-1980s, 'Fiction and the Creative Process', included Fyodor Dostoevsky, Henry James, Thomas Mann, Marcel Proust, Joyce, Woolf, William Faulkner, and so on.[90] More recently, critic Barry Shiels has coined the phrase 'ambient difficulty' to describe the infrastructural modernism of the online world, in particular its procedures of text publication, production and reproduction.[91] But we might repurpose 'ambient difficulty' to refer to literary culture in the postwar period, when the procedures and aesthetics of literary modernism – foremost among them being metaphor, fragmentation, intertextuality and difficulty – begin to emerge in novels and other cultural artefacts from outside the existing avant-gardes. The peri-academic reading public will have studied, among others, such writers as Joyce, Pound, and Woolf, and as such they will be familiar with and more responsive to ambient difficulty in contemporary literature.

---

[88] Potter, '*CQ* and the invention of modernism', p. 6.

[89] Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930* [1976] (Penguin, 1991), p. 12.

[90] 'Fiction and the Creative Process' [undated], UEA/BRAD/22, UEA Collection: Malcolm Bradbury, British Archive for Contemporary Writing, University of East Anglia.

[91] Barry Shiels uses this phrase in the forthcoming book *The Disciplines of Modern Style*.

V

In *Criticism and Truth* (2023), Kramnick writes that public criticism – including, but not limited to, newspaper journalism – is important because 'it convinces people to support work done in universities.'[92] This is no doubt true, but for Bradbury, Lodge, Sage, Cox and Dyson their engagement with the peri-academic reading public was an end in itself: in the inaugural editorial for *CQ*, published in March 1959, for example, Cox and Dyson concluded that literature 'is still one of the major pleasures of life', and as such should be made available to 'everyman – for everyman, that is, who will pay it the courtesy of a creative response'.[93] Kramnick goes on to note that '[o]ne challenge of public-facing writing' is that it lacks 'clear feedback into more traditional academic practice.'[94] In *Culture and Society*, Williams reminds us that 'much of what we call communication is, necessarily no more in itself than transmission: that is to say, a one-way sending'. To 'complete communication' there must also be 'active reception' and 'living response'.[95] In chapter four, I will use this theory of communication to consider the extent to which Cox and Dyson were able to democratise literary culture through the *CQ* project. But we should note here that while much of the public-facing work undertaken by Bradbury, Lodge, Sage, Cox and Dyson had no formal mechanisms of feedback, their writing was indeed influenced by the peri-academic public in that they altered their writing to suit the perceived tastes of this audience. They did so in two important ways, which will be made clear if we briefly return to that quotation from *Working with Structuralism* in which Lodge diagnoses the 'crisis' of literary criticism:

---

[92] Kramnick, *Criticism and Truth*, p. 100.
[93] Cox and Dyson, 1.1, p. 4.
[94] Kramnick, *Criticism and Truth*, pp. 99-100.
[95] Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 396, p. 415.

> the discipline has made huge intellectual advances, but in the process has become incomprehensible to the layman – and indeed to many professionals educated in an older, more humane tradition. This incomprehensibility is not simply a matter of jargon – though that is a real stumbling block; more fundamentally, the new criticism, like the new physics, often runs counter to empirical observation and common sense. It therefore tends to alienate the common reader.[96]

The first point is about style: as we might expect, these figures sought to avoid technical language so as to appeal to an audience beyond specialists. Lodge uses the word 'jargon' to refer to such specialist language, a term which Raymond Williams reminds us is typically 'dismissive' when it is used 'in relation to an opposing intellectual position such as Marxism.'[97] This political aspect is no doubt relevant here: indeed, as we shall see in chapter two, Lodge expresses in the same preface specific misgivings about the ideological focus of the work of Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida, which he describes as 'polemical and *engagé*.'[98] But more important than this overtly political sense is the fact that, as Williams points out, the term 'jargon' is typically used to describe specialist language within 'branches of knowledge which bear on matters which already have a common general vocabulary […] since the material reasons for specialized precision are less clear or are absent.'[99]

The question of specialist language in the discipline of literary criticism is particularly fraught – and particularly important to Bradbury, Lodge, Sage, Cox and Dyson – precisely because of the wider prevalence of amateur discussion about literature taking place outside of the universities during the twentieth century. To return to that line from Martin Amis, quoted above: 'Interacting with literature is easy. Anyone can join in.'[100] Later in the preface to *Working with Structuralism*, Lodge explains that he made an effort in the essays which comprise that book to 'assimilate' the influence of structuralism 'without paying the price of incomprehensibility to all but a small group of initiates.'[101] About a decade earlier, Cox and Dyson expressed a similar view on technical language in the essay 'Literary Criticism' (1972): 'The aim of our journal was to promote high standards in common educated discourse, to make literature accessible to any student with goodwill, and, in Northrop Frye's words, to prevent it from "stagnating among groups of mutually unintelligible élites".'[102] *CQ* was not to publish essays which communicated specialist knowledge between experts – that kind of writing which Bradbury would jokingly refer to in 1970 as 'minor articles in minor journals about minor symbols and their minor function in a minor work by a minor writer'[103] – but rather an organ for a 'common' and 'accessible' knowledge. The journal was to be 'lively and responsible, intelligent and readable'.[104]

---

[96] Lodge, *Working with Structuralism*, p. vii.
[97] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* [1976] (Fontana, 1988), p. 175.
[98] Lodge, *Working with Structuralism*, p. ix.
[99] Williams, *Keywords*, p. 175.
[100] Amis, *The War Against Cliché*, p. xiv.

In 1965, Cox went as far as to publish a hoax article by Robert Conquest, titled 'Christian Symbolism in *Lucky Jim*', in which Conquest argued in a highly-wrought style that his close friend Kingsley Amis's comic campus novel was in fact a work of Christian allegory, with Jim Dixon as the Christ figure whose surname contains 'the Cross at its centre for him to Di(e)on'.[105] Conquest continues:

> It is an old story that the deepest levels of effect in our literature are often traceable to the religious elements inculcated at an early and profound level into the unconscious as well as the conscious minds of the inhabitants of our culture. It is natural enough, therefore, that if we look upon *Lucky Jim* as a world fable ('Weltfabel', von Lippe-Detmold's expression) – as we must, of course, look upon any significant work of literature – we find a pervasive tone of religious symbolism both at the apparently superficial verbal level (and I say "apparently" because we must not denigrate any thread in this richly shuttled texture) and in the basic structure of the story.[106]

Here we can see Conquest taking aim not only at labyrinthine sentences, but also arcane technical language such as 'Weltfabel' – coined by the fictional 'von Lippe-Detmold' – and unusual constructions such as ‘richly shuttled texture’. More amusing than the essay itself is the fact that a number of readers actually fell for it; Cox wrote in a later editorial that the journal had received ‘several letters pointing out that the articles and books mentioned in the notes do not exist.’ Cox concluded: ‘This proves once again how easily we all accept academic jargon. So-called “professional” criticism is carefully written by its authors, carefully studied by its readers, without any true feeling for the works of literature involved.’[107]

---

[101] Lodge, *Working with Structuralism*, p. ix.

[102] Cox and Dyson, 'Literary Criticism', p. 441.

[103] Malcolm Bradbury, 'Introduction: The State of Criticism Today' in Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer (eds), *Contemporary Criticism* (Edward Arnold, 1970), pp. 11-38 (p. 24).

[104] Cox and Dyson, 1.1, p. 3.

[105] Robert Conquest, 'Christian Symbolism in *Lucky Jim*' in *Critical Quarterly* 7.1 (1965), pp. 87-92 (p. 88).

[106] Conquest, 'Christian Symbolism in *Lucky Jim*', p. 87.

Returning again to Lodge’s preface, we see the second, more fundamental alteration which these figures made to their work so as to appeal to the tastes of the peri-academic reading public. As Lodge writes, ‘the new criticism, like the new physics, often runs counter to empirical observation and common sense.’[108] By ‘empirical observation’ Lodge is referring to the idea of intentionality. As Lodge further explains in the preface to *After Bakhtin* (1990), a collection of essays on fiction based on the work of the Russian theorist:

> Perhaps in the end Bakhtin’s greatest contribution to contemporary criticism is, through the historical irony of his long obscurity and posthumous fame, to have made a timely reaffirmation of the writer’s creative and communicative power. This is an idea that structuralism (implicitly) and poststructuralism (explicitly) have sought to discredit and replace with theories about the autonomous productivity of texts and their readers. Readers outside the academy, however, continue to believe in the existence and importance of authors. This is one of several issues that have created a barrier of non-comprehension between academic and non-academic discussion of literature’[109]

Conspicuously absent from this passage is any mention of the French literary theorist Roland Barthes, though Lodge is undoubtedly referring to his essay ‘The Death of the Author’ (1967), in which Barthes argued that the interested student of literature should not seek to uncover the intended meaning of a text as inscribed by its author, because no such meaning exists. As Barthes puts it: ‘a text is not a line of words releasing a single “theological” meaning (the “message” of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.'[110] If there is no inherent meaning in the text, then we must therefore pay attention to the reader rather than the apparent author, because the reader is, as Barthes puts it, 'the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but its destination.'[111]

---

[107] C. B. Cox, ‘Editorial’, *Critical Quarterly* 7.3 (September 1965), p. 203.
[108] Lodge, *Working with Structuralism*, p. vii.
[109] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 7.

Bradbury, Lodge, Sage, Cox and Dyson were profoundly influenced by Barthes's idea: they found it to be incredibly generative, not least in the many ways that they could undermine, oppose, or disparage its argument. As such they were influenced by Barthes in the sense described by Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973): they made 'poetic misreading[s]' of Barthes's argument.[112] One example of this is when Bradbury jokes in the introduction to *Class Work* (1992), a collection of short stories by UEA graduates, that because he and Wilson 'were both novelists as well as teachers of literature, and took our profession seriously, it seemed somewhat strange for us to be announcing the Death of the Author in the classroom, then going straight back home to be one.'[113] Another is Bradbury's comic novella *Mensonge* (1987), which tells of a fictional French poststructuralist who is so committed to the absence of the author that he himself disappears. Conversely, in 'The Bridgeable Gap' Bradbury uses a more serious tone to express his reservations with poststructuralism and deconstruction, which he found to be 'decreative' in that, along with 'philosophical post-humanism and ideological critique', they encourage a style of reading which 'exteriorizes and de-existentializes actual creative activity' and seeks 'to take the intentionality out of writing.'[114] Sage expresses similar reservations in her piece, 'The Women's Camp' (1994), also published in the *Times Literary Supplement*, in which she argues that '[t]he language of theory gives its users the illusion that they are in charge, somehow, riding this authoritative discourse, when more of them are in truth closer to being its creatures.'[115] The different arguments which Lodge, Bradbury and Sage each express, both to and for their peri-academic audience, take issue with those theoretical approaches to literature which, to use Lodge's term, contradict 'empirical observation' by affording primacy to the reader over the writer.

---

[110] Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text* (Fontana, 1977), p. 146.
[111] Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, p. 148.
[112] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* [1973] (Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 14.
[113] Bradbury, *Class Work*, p. viii.
[114] Bradbury, 'The Bridgeable Gap', p. 8.

VI

In their different reservations about theory, Bradbury, Lodge, Sage, Cox and Dyson might be said to anticipate the ideas of postcritique. This term does not refer to a co-ordinated school or movement but rather, as Leo Robson writes, to 'a range of interventions which have been grouped under the umbrella of "post-critique".'[116] These include, but are not limited to, Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best's co-edited special issue of *Representations* titled *The Way We Read Now* (2009), which sought to theorise a practice of 'surface reading';[117] Timothy Bewes's essay 'Reading with the Grain: A New World in Literary Criticism' (2010), which argued for a practice of 'reading that suspends judgment, that commits itself, rather, to the most generous reading possible';[118] and most notably the work of Rita Felski, whose monograph *The Limits of Critique* (2015) considers suspicion to be a 'pervasive presence as mood and method'.[119] Felski centres her enquiry around the term 'hermeneutics of suspicion', first coined by the philosopher Paul Ricœur, to describe academic work which uses the ideas of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud to 'read against the grain and between the lines […] to draw out what a text fails – or wilfully refuses – to see.'[120] Bradbury famously satirised this mode of ideology critique in his novel *The History Man* (1975), in which the fictional sociology lecturer Howard Kirk could explain anything with 'a little Marx, a little Freud, and a little social history'.[121]

---

[115] Sage, 'The Women's Camp', p. 188.

[116] Leo Robson, 'Jameson after Post Critique', *New Left Review* 144 (2023), pp. 111-132 (pp. 115-116).

[117] Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, 'Surface Reading: An Introduction', *Representations*, 108.1 (2009), pp. 1-21 (p. 1).

[118] Timothy Bewes, 'Reading with the Grain: A New World in Literary Criticism', *differences* 21.3 (2010), pp. 1-33 (p. 1). This is 'the oddest contribution to post-critique' according to Robson ('Jameson after Post Critique', p. 127).

[119] Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 1

[120] Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, p. 1

Felski has coined the term 'method wars' to refer to the various debates over practices of reading, interpretation, and the hermeneutics of suspicion.[122] Kramnick suggests that these debates have been 'really quarrels about what critics believed was the appropriate stance to take toward literary texts and other objects of study,' in particular 'whether one ought to put in the foreground the pleasure to be found in artworks or the politics beneath their creation, meaning, and circulation.'[123] This distinction leaves no room for the kinds of intervention made by Bradbury, Lodge, Sage, Cox and Dyson which at once foregrounded 'pleasure' as well as an understanding of the political or other significances 'beneath their creation, meaning, and circulation'. Foremost among these is the idea that creative work, in particular the novel, can itself be a critical intervention. Bradbury articulated this idea in the speech he gave as Chair of Judges of the 1981 Booker Prize. Before announcing that Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* was the winner, Bradbury made some more general remarks about the prize and British literary culture more widely. He called the Booker 'a prize for serious fiction, a term difficult enough to cope with.'[124] He continued:

> The novel is a capacious yet often very conventional form, and it is all too easy to become an able contributor to an elegant convention, an artificer of repetitions. The serious novel is not always jagged and experimental, though often it is, but it is certainly the work of a writer who is pressing at the edge of the genre, taking it as a form of enquiry, into the grammars and orders, the means and structures, by which we build up sufficient fictions of the world. The novel is a major mode of enquiry, as serious as science, as thoughtful as philosophy, but always conscious of its own fictionality.[125]

Bradbury here theorises the novel as a form which is at once creative and critical. This is not entirely the same as the later category 'creative criticism', formulated by Stephen Benson and

---

[121] Bradbury, *The History Man*, p. 25.
[122] Rita Felski, 'Introduction', *New Literary History* 45.2 (2014), pp. v-xi (p. v).
[123] Kramnick, *Criticism and Truth*, p. 16.
[124] Malcolm Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury* (Arena, 1987), p. 372.
[125] Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury*, pp. 372-373.

Clare Connors in 2014 as critical writing which ‘exploits, distorts, works over, hyperbolises, erases or plays’ with the ‘stern injunctions’ and ‘leaden bureaucratese’ of academic criticism.[126] Rather, as I show in detail in chapter one, Bradbury offers a theory of how the novel as a creative form might function as a ‘mode of enquiry’ that can intervene into critical or theoretical debates.

It is now the case that literary criticism and creative writing are broadly presented as two entirely different disciplines. At UEA, for example, a student on the MA Creative Writing Prose Fiction in the year 2024–2025 could conceivably complete the degree and graduate without having written a single critical essay – or without having met a single literary critic. In February 2016, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education published their first ‘Subject Benchmark Statement’ for Creative Writing. In that document, the QAA argue that ‘the formal methods of teaching that first began to develop in relation to Creative Writing in the 1970s have now established it as an academic subject in its own right, methodologically independent of English or other “parent” subjects.’[127] An updated QAA benchmark statement, published in 2024, claimed that ‘Creative Writing is a highly interdisciplinary subject’,[128] without referring to its most crucial interdiscipline: literary criticism. The argument of this thesis is that we should once again pursue that ‘profitable intimacy between contemporary creation and contemporary criticism’ which Bradbury had identified in the pages of *CQ*. To bridge the apparent gap between literary criticism and creative writing is one route out of the method wars; it is also one route towards an intellectually rich and lively literary culture.

VII

---

[126] Stephen Benson and Clare Connors, *Creative Criticism: An Anthology and Guide* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 3.

[127] Quality Assurance Association for Higher Education, ‘Subject Benchmark Statement: Creative Writing’, February 2016, p. 6.

[128] Quality Assurance Association for Higher Education, ‘Subject Benchmark Statement: Creative Writing’, April 2024, p. 3.

In the introduction to their 2020 monograph, *The Teaching Archive*, Buurma and Heffernan claim that their work simultaneously 'overturns nearly every major account of what the history of literary studies has been', 'demolishes the received idea that literature professors once taught a narrow canon that "opened" in the late 1960s and early 1970s', and 'scrambles existing genealogies for twentieth-century methodological change'.[129] Although I forgo such heavy-handed rhetoric, this thesis makes similar claims: by considering the creative, critical, and educational work of Bradbury, Lodge, Sage, Cox and Dyson, we see how the institutionalisation of literary criticism in the university was far more complex than the rather simplistic division of 'lay' and 'professional reading' put forward by Guillory in *Professing Criticism* (2022). With that said, my approach is different to Buurma and Heffernan's in a crucial way. Buurma and Heffernan claim at the outset of their account – with, again, a certain rhetorical flourish – that '[t]he true history of English literary study resides in classrooms', where 'teachers and students have invented and perfected the core methods of literary study'.[130] Though it could not feasibly exist, Buurma and Heffernan suggest that a 'true, impossible teaching archive' involving 'all the syllabuses, handouts, reading lists, lecture notes, student papers, and exams ever made' would form 'a much larger and more interesting record than the famous monographs and seminal articles that usually represent the history of literary study.'[131] My work begins from the assumption that what takes place in the classroom is indeed important and worthy of treatment in an account of literary history, and yet I do not argue that the classroom should take precedence over the monograph, or indeed the creative work. This is for two reasons. The first I take from Kramnick, who points out that '[o]ne writes and publishes about material one doesn't teach, and one teaches material one doesn't write about, all the time.'[132] The second, and more important, reason is that my interest is in the relation between the different – and indeed seemingly contradictory – aspects of these figures' intellectual projects, for instance the relation between the creative and the critical, between teaching and research, or between the novel and the seminar. In chapter three, for example, my account of Lorna Sage's intellectual career hinges on the contradiction between her public hostility to literary theory and her otherwise evident interest in teaching theory in the classroom. I therefore treat the monograph, the creative work, and the archived teaching note with a certain parity of esteem.

---

[129] Buurma and Heffernan, *The Teaching Archive*, p. 6. It would pay to mention here one specific difficulty of archival work which Buurma and Sagner fail to acknowledge. With seminar notes in particular, it is often difficult to discern which notes in the same handwriting have been made before the class (and are therefore the articulation of the thoughts of their author, say Bradbury or Sage), and which have been written during the class (and could therefore be a transcription of a student's response). Typically, the three-hour seminars which have been commonplace on literature MA courses since the early 1960s begin with between one and three student presentations, so as to begin discussion. The notes may all be in the same hand and yet the verbal author of the note could be a completely different person. The only way to discern as much is with attentive reading and careful inference.

[130] Buurma and Heffernan, *The Teaching Archive*, pp. 2-3.

[131] Buurma and Heffernan, *The Teaching Archive*, p. 2.

Across the two parts of this thesis, 'The creative and the critical' and 'The university and the public', I ask two central questions: first, how did Bradbury, Lodge, Sage and *CQ* shape English studies in the postwar British university? And secondly, how did their work democratise the otherwise specialist knowledge of academic literary criticism? There are other local questions, which I articulate at the outset of each of the four chapters. In the first, 'Malcolm Bradbury and the "serious" writer', I look closely at Bradbury's theory of the 'serious' novel as a mode of intellectual enquiry and consider the influence of this idea on both the shape of the UEA MA as well as three of Bradbury's novels: his most well-known, *The History Man* (1975), one of his least known, *Mensonge* (1987), and his most complex and interesting, *To the Hermitage* (2000). Published shortly before his death, *To the Hermitage* has, like *Mensonge*, received scant critical attention to date; this is despite it being, as Auberon Waugh put it in a rather Oedipal quote for the paperback edition, '[t]he funniest novel ever written'.[133]

---

[132] Kramnick, *Criticism and Truth*, 21.

[133] Malcolm Bradbury, *To the Hermitage* [2000] (Picador, 2012), front cover.

The second chapter, 'David Lodge's dialogism', builds on this idea of the novel as a form for intellectual enquiry by reading four of Lodge's mid-career novels – *Changing Places*, *How Far Can You Go?* (1980), *Small World*, and *Nice Work* – as dialogic novels of ideas. By reading these novels alongside Lodge's contemporaneous critical writing on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, I show how Lodge makes use of the dialogism of the novel form so as to explore ideas in dynamic tension, without resolving to a monologic synthesis. As such, Lodge's novels function like university seminars, where ideas are presented but the participant – the reader – is left to make their own conclusion.

The third chapter, 'Lorna Sage: writing life', moves away from the novel to consider Sage's journalism, teaching, and her memoir *Bad Blood* (2000), with a particular focus on the seeming contradictions between these three modes. I argue that Sage's regular reviews and articles for newspapers and magazines share a continuity with the public criticism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By looking closely at the 'living style' of Sage's journalism, as well as her courses on literary theory and autobiography, I consider how *Bad Blood* functions as a reflexive work of life writing.

In the final chapter, '"Literature is for everyman"? *Critical Quarterly*'s democratic literary culture' I look closely at the ways in which Cox and Dyson sought to modify Leavis's minority culture so as to create what they called an 'expanding élite'. This was, by far, the most programmatic project to democratise literary-critical knowledge and to an extent it was a great success. In Boris Ford's *New Pelican Guide to English Literature* (1995), John Holloway described *CQ* as 'probably the most influential English literary-critical journal in the academic field over the post war decades'.[134] Aside from the occasional journal article, not enough work has been done to consider the scale of this influence or the forms that it took. This chapter therefore marks the longest single account of Cox and Dyson's broader intellectual project both within and outside the journal. By referring to Williams's theory of complete communication, which involves not just the 'transmission' of ideas, but also the incorporation of 'active reception' and 'living response', I move to propose how we might build on the *CQ* example and in doing so create a more plural and democratic literary culture.

---

[134] John Holloway, 'The Literary Scene' in Boris Ford (ed.), *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature: From Orwell to Naipaul* (Penguin, 1995), pp. 61-118 (p. 68).

Finally, in the conclusion, I bring the arguments of each of the four chapters together so as to articulate how a reappraisal of the work of Bradbury, Lodge, Sage and *CQ* can provide us with new ways of thinking about the current 'crisis' of the humanities, in particular by questioning those apparent oppositions which have shaped previous accounts: the creative and the critical, criticism and theory, the novel and the essay, the university and the public, grub street and the ivory tower, the avant-garde and the popular, the author and the reader. Bradbury, Lodge, Sage, Cox and Dyson maintained faith in the university and their individual intellectual projects constitute a valuable set of examples for how the university as an institution might once again work to enrich and democratise literary culture.

Bradbury, Lodge, Sage, Cox and Dyson were major figures in postwar British literary culture who shaped both the university and literature more widely in important ways, and yet now in 2024 they are at best faintly remembered by contemporaneous readers and at worst ignored by scholars and critics of postwar literature. My close reading of *To the Hermitage* is the first extended critical treatment of that novel, and the same is true of my close reading of Cox's poetry in chapter four. This thesis could well have been about Kingsley Amis, Angela Carter, W. G. Sebald, and Raymond Williams, but those figures are at this time well-accounted for in previous histories of the discipline. The news of Malcolm Bradbury's death, for instance, was covered by all the major British newspapers, and even made the front pages of *The*

Scotsman and *The Independent*.[135] Just over two decades later, there is no literary biography and his substantial legacy within the discipline and for our wider literary culture is little understood. This gap in the intellectual history of postwar British literary culture is vast, but by looking closely at the ways in which these figures shaped the university and literary culture I hope to begin the important work of bridging it.

---

[135] Chis Gray, 'Sir Malcolm Bradbury, Novelist, Critic and Teacher, Dies at 68', *The Independent*, 28th November 2000, p. 1; Tracey Lawson, 'Malcolm Bradbury Dies', *The Scotsman*, 28th November 2000, p. 1.

Part One

The Creative and the Critical

Chapter One

Malcolm Bradbury and the 'serious' writer

During his lifetime Malcolm Bradbury was both a commercially successful comic novelist and a leading literary critic, and yet the contribution to postwar literary culture for which he is best remembered is his establishing in 1970 the University of East Anglia's MA in Creative Writing, with fellow novelist Angus Wilson. The Iowa Writers' Workshop had been running since 1936, but the UEA MA was the first attempt to formalise the study and practice of fiction writing in a British university. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Bradbury recounted in a 1992 review-essay published in the *Times Literary Supplement* that he and Wilson 'saw a fundamental aim of our programme as being one of new relations between the "creative" and the "critical", both in individuals and in university culture too.'[1] In particular:

> a course of this kind, conducted from the distance of an academic environment, distinct from the commercial marketplace, could have some impact on the state of serious fiction in Britain at the time, by which both of us were dismayed.[2]

In one sense the term 'serious fiction' refers to the publishing category 'literary fiction', but looking at another speech from a decade earlier, we see that Bradbury had something more specific in mind. In a speech he gave as Chair of Judges for the 1981 Booker Prize, Bradbury defined 'serious fiction' as 'a discovering form':

> the work of a writer who is pressing at the edge of the genre, taking it as a form of enquiry, into the grammars and orders, the means and structures, by which we build up sufficient fictions of the world. The novel is a major mode of enquiry, as serious as science, as thoughtful as philosophy, but always conscious of its fictionality.[3]

The parallel between Bradbury's 'pressing at the edge of the genre' and Ezra Pound's infamous slogan, 'make it new', is obvious enough. The spatial metaphor of 'the edge' – which points to the metaphor implicit in the term 'avant-garde' – tells us that the serious novel, for Bradbury at least, is a work which takes things further than previous writing. To do so would require an awareness of literary form: a writer would have to know the novel and its boundaries before ‘pressing at the edge of the genre’. But Bradbury also refers here to an awareness of structuralist and poststructuralist theory: the ‘serious’ writer is conscious of the ways in which meaning is constructed, or, as Bradbury puts it, ‘the grammars and orders, the means and structures’ of ‘the world’ outside the novel. Bradbury therefore conceived of the serious writer as one who makes use of critical and theoretical knowledge, and he saw this knowledge, which has for the past century been institutionalised within the university, as central to the ‘serious novel’.

---

[1] Malcolm Bradbury, 'The Bridgeable Gap: Bringing Together the Creative Writer and the Critical Theorist in an Authorless World', *Times Literary Supplement*, 17th January 1992, pp. 7-9 (p. 7).

[2] Bradbury, 'The Bridgeable Gap', p. 7.

[3] Malcolm Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury* (Arena, 1987), pp. 372-373.

The idea of the serious writer raises the question of the relationship between academic literary criticism and contemporary creative practice. More specifically: what is the relationship between the university as an institution and contemporary literary culture? In what ways can the university act as a literary tastemaker, ‘distinct from the commercial marketplace’? This chapter thinks through these questions by looking at Bradbury’s own creative, critical, and educational work. The first section considers Bradbury’s idea of ‘serious’ fiction, in particular how the ‘serious’ novel – which is both creative and critical, both literary art and a ‘mode of enquiry’ – might act as an intervention into social and intellectual discourses. The second section moves to consider the MA in Creative Writing as a cultural intervention, in which Bradbury and Wilson sought to provide institutional support for serious fiction in the second half of the twentieth century. To do so, it considers the priorities of Bradbury’s creative writing tuition – in particular his emphasis on criticism and theory and his supervision of Ian McEwan in that initial year, 1970-1971 – in light of the poetics of fiction explored in the previous section. The third section then performs a close reading of *The History Man* (1975), *Mensonge* (1987) and *To the Hermitage* (2000) to consider how Bradbury used the novel as a form to question and theorise the creative process itself.

I. A discovering form: the poetics of serious fiction

Bradbury was foremost a comic writer, so it is curious that he used the word 'serious' to describe fiction which is 'pressing at the edge of the genre, taking it as a form of enquiry'. It would therefore pay to consider at the outset of this chapter how other critics and writers have used the term so as to better understand Bradbury's theorisation. In the essay 'Serious Century' (2006), Franco Moretti identifies 'bourgeois seriousness' as the characteristic style of nineteenth-century literary culture. As Moretti points out, Denis Diderot – who is, as we shall see later in this section, the protagonist of Bradbury's *To the Hermitage* – 'introduces the *genre sérieux*, in 1757, in the *Entretiens sur le fils naturel*' and 'places it more or less halfway between comedy and tragedy.'[4] Moretti identifies the serious as being, therefore, a bourgeois style, existing somewhere between 'the aristocratic heights of tragic passion, and the plebeian depths of comedy', but always tending toward 'the "high" style of the old ruling class'.[5] Indeed, 'although serious may not mean tragic, it certainly means dark, cold, impassible, silent, heavy, solemn.'[6] The serious may, therefore, mean something like severe, and Bradbury does draw on this sense of the word when he writes, as he does in the 1987 essay 'Writer and Critic', of 'the Serious Fifties', a time of 'moral seriousness'. Bradbury was, as a young man at the beginning of his academic career in the 1950s, 'deeply into F. R. Leavis and Lionel Trilling, the great tradition and the liberal imagination, a devotee of moral scruple and critical responsibility and the best that was known and thought in the world', an attitude he summarises as a 'common puritan seriousness'.[7]

Leavis uses the term 'serious' throughout his 1948 monograph *The Great Tradition*. In that book, Leavis argues that '[t]he great English novelists are Jane Austen, George Eliot,

---

[4] Franco Moretti, 'Serious Century' in Franco Moretti (ed.) *The Novel*, 2 vols. (Princeton University Press, 2006), vol. 1 (2006), pp. 364-400 (p. 368).

[5] Moretti, 'Serious Century', p. 369.

[6] Moretti, 'Serious Century' p. 368-9.

[7] Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury*, p. 15.

Henry James and Joseph Conrad.'[8] One of the principal qualities which Leavis identifies in these four novelists is their 'common seriousness of concern';[9] indeed the word 'serious' or its cognates occurs some forty-six times across the volume's two hundred and sixty-six pages. In Austen's work, for example, 'the irony has a serious background'; in George Eliot's there is a 'moral seriousness'; in James's fiction, 'the qualities of his art derive from the profound seriousness of his interest in life'; and Conrad's *Nostromo* (1904) displays 'so serious and severe a conception of the art of fiction.'[10] Laurence Sterne, who was a major influence for Bradbury – he is mentioned, as we shall see, throughout *To the Hermitage* – is relegated to a mere footnote, in which Leavis describes him as a writer 'in whose irresponsible (and nasty) trifling, regarded as in some way extraordinarily significant and mature, was found a sanction for attributing value to other trifling'.[11] But the most glaring omission from Leavis's 'line of great novelists' is Charles Dickens, despite his enduring status as one of the most broadly popular novelists throughout British literary history.[12] Leavis writes: '[t]hat Dickens was a great genius and is permanently among the classics is certain. But the genius was that of a great entertainer'.[13] Dickens, for Leavis, 'had for the most part no profounder responsibility as a creative artist than this description suggests'.[14] Leavis does acknowledge *Hard Times* (1854) as a significant novel, but only on account of its differences from the rest of Dickens's work, not least the fact that its relative brevity 'leaves no room for the usual repetitive overdoing and loose inclusiveness'.[15]

The severity of seriousness is, however, at odds with Bradbury's six novels, which are all broadly comic. In the foreword to his fourth novel, *Out of the Shelter* (1970), David Lodge describes that book as ‘a “serious” realistic novel in which comedy is an incidental rather than structural element, and metafictional games and stylistic experiment are not allowed to disturb the illusion of life.’[16] Although Lodge uses scare quotes, this definition, which corresponds with the ‘bourgeois seriousness’ of nineteenth-century literary realism as described by Moretti, could be applied to Bradbury’s first two books, *Eating People is Wrong* (1959) and *Stepping Westward* (1965), as the comedy in those novels is indeed incidental, the comedy of awkward or embarrassing situations rather than the comedy of a larger structure which governs the book’s plot. But Bradbury’s definition of the serious novel as ‘the work of a writer who is pressing at the edge of the genre’ contradicts this equation of the serious novel with realism and subverts the usual Leavisite view of seriousness as oppositional to ‘metafictional games and stylistic experiment’. Innovation is, for Bradbury at least, serious business.

---

[8] F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, *George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (George W. Stewart, 1948), p. 1.
[9] Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, p. 10.
[10] Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, pp. 10, 30, 129, 190.
[11] Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, p. 2n2.
[12] Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, p. 19.
[13] Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, p. 19.
[14] Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, p. 19.
[15] Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, p. 20.

Leavis had been a professional literary critic working at Downing College, Cambridge, and the high water mark of Leavisism – the *Scrutiny* years of 1932 to 1953 – coincided with the professionalisation of literary criticism in British and American universities more broadly. This trend of professionalisation was in many ways the major shift in the function and style of literary criticism over the past two hundred years. Before this shift, as Bradbury writes in ‘Writer and Critic’, ‘those who speculated on art and guided taste and judgement were the creators of the art in the first place’.[17] Bradbury gives as examples the poets and playwrights Philip Sidney, Ben Jonson, John Dryden, Samuel Johnson, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose critical writing ‘not only assessed the past, judged the present and pointed to the future but also, as Wordsworth said, established the taste by which they might be understood.’[18] This continued into the twentieth century, in the criticism of modern writers such as Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, and Henry James. After the expansion of the universities in Britain and America at the beginning of the twentieth century – and the creation of English departments in those universities – criticism 'left the *ateliers* and the bohemian cafés or the pages of the avant garde reviews, and moved into the groves of academe.'[19] In the university, 'with its own institutional momentum and its institutional funding' criticism became, and largely remains, 'independent, professionalised, an educational function, an academic subject, a tenured enterprise.' This shift, which saw the emergence of what Bradbury calls a 'critical salariat,'[20] was part of a conscious project to codify and formalise the practice of literary criticism. As the academic John Crowe Ransom writes in the influential 'Criticism, Inc.' (1937):

---

[16] David Lodge, *Out of the Shelter* [1970] (Vintage, 2011), p. 278

[17] Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury*, p. 4.

[18] Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury*, p. 4.

> Rather than occasional criticism by amateurs, I should think the whole enterprise might be seriously taken in hand by professionals. Perhaps I use a distasteful figure, but I have the idea that what we need is Criticism, Inc., or Criticism, Ltd.[21]

Because of the syntax here, the adverb 'seriously' could at first glance be taken to be a synonym for 'really', but later in the essay Ransom refers to the 'serious study' of contemporary literature within the academy, arguing that literary criticism 'must become more scientific, or precise and systematic, and this means that it must be developed by the collective and sustained effort of learned persons – which means that its proper seat is in the universities.'[22] Literary criticism is, in many ways, nothing like a twentieth- or twenty-first-century science – the natural sciences being, as they are, dependent on advanced technologies and the measurement of experimental data rather than the practice of reading books and writing about them – but Ransom's use of the word 'scientific' to describe the 'precise and systematic' work of trained professionals working collectively does help us make sense of Bradbury's definition of serious fiction as writing which is 'as serious as a science, as thoughtful as philosophy'.

---

[19] Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury*, p. 7.
[20] Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury*, p. 9.
[21] John Crowe Ransom, 'Criticism, Inc.', *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 13.4 (1937), pp. 586-602 (p. 588).
[22] Ransom, 'Criticism, Inc.', p. 587.

Writing about the rhetoric of collective apologies, such as those made on behalf of a nation state, government, or corporation, Steven Connor draws our attention to the etymology of *serious*: 'To be serious in fact means to form a series, a row, line, or continuous sequence, from Latin *serere*, to join together […] Collective apologies are nonserious because they pretend to a continuity that they cannot have.'[23] In this sense, the serious novel, or the novel taken *seriously*, can be thought of as imaginative writing which enters into a continuity of discussion on a particular subject. Thinking of the serious as part of a series, we arrive at a definition of the serious novel as fiction which is written as a conscious and deliberate response to past works. Again, a novel can only begin 'pressing at the edge of the genre' if its author is aware of the current boundaries of that genre. This definition of the serious novel bears resemblance to the now-famous model of tradition in T. S. Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919):

> what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. And the poet who is aware of this will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities.[24]

Eliot's 'ideal order' of 'existing monuments' is a series of works, and Bradbury's 'serious' novelist must, like Eliot's 'poet who is aware', be familiar with these past works as they make their entrance into that series. As Bradbury writes in the 1992 essay 'The Bridgeable Gap':

> most of the serious exploration – the reinterpretation of the literature and canon of the past, the construction of the significant literary aesthetics of the present, the concept of

---

[23] Steven Connor, *Giving Way: Thoughts on Unappreciated Dispositions* (Stanford University Press, 2019), pp. 138-139.

[24] T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' [1919] in Frank Kermode (ed.), *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* (Faber, 1975), pp. 37-44 (pp. 38-39).

> the authority of writing and the exploration of the task of ‘poetry’ in culture – has historically occurred in the work of the major literary practitioners.[25]

Here we see ‘serious’ refer to a continuity of discussion which, like Eliot’s tradition, both alters the past through ‘reinterpretation’ and directs the present through ‘the construction’ of a literary aesthetic. This ‘serious exploration’ is, for Bradbury, not solely the work of professional literary critics: rather, it has historically been the work of creative writers. Such exploration occurs not only in critical essays or lectures, but in the writing itself; as Bradbury puts it in the essay ‘Writer and Critic’ (1987): ‘every writer *is* a critic, and amends, qualifies and rewrites the work of others.’[26]

To view the novel as somehow *not* critical would be to dismiss the complexities of the creative process. Novels, Bradbury writes in ‘The Bridgeable Gap’:

> involve complex matters of craft, of choice, of existential decision-making, which have to do with how we shape, develop, discover, contradict, divert and subvert the flow of those imaginary and those rhetorical materials out of which we make fictive things from the elements of life and consciousness that challenge our own individual imaginations[.][27]

The writer ‘amends, qualifies and rewrites’ not only ‘the work of others’, but also their own thoughts, words, and ideas in the act of composition. This work, with its ‘complex matters of craft, of choice, of existential decision-making’ is an act of criticism, involving as it does the use of critical judgement upon differing literary effects. As T. S. Eliot writes in ‘The Function of Criticism’ (1923): ‘the larger part of the labour of the author in composing his work is critical labour; the labour of sifting, combining, constructing, expunging, correcting, testing: this frightful toil is as much critical as creative.’[28]

---

[25] Bradbury, ‘The Bridgeable Gap’, p. 7.

[26] Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury*, p. 12.

[27] Bradbury, ‘The Bridgeable Gap’, p. 8.

[28] T. S. Eliot, ‘The Function of Criticism’ [1923] in Frank Kermode (ed.), *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* (Faber, 1975), pp. 68-76 (p. 73).

For Bradbury, writing was active intellectual work, akin to criticism; he therefore advocated turning scholarly attention towards 'those aesthetic introspections and insights that come from the writers themselves'.[29] But Bradbury did also mock the more anti-intellectual discussion had by contemporary writers outside of the academy, which he portrayed in 'Writer and Critic' as being limited to such inane questions as 'is it best to write lying down, or standing up, like Hemingway, or naked, like Victor Hugo, or late at night, or in a swimming pool'.[30] Such discussion, which romanticises and even mystifies the writer and their daily habits, is both naïve to the developments of literary theory and incapable of offering any alternative ideas about the complex intellectual and imaginative work that creative writing involves. 'The absence', Bradbury writes in 'The Bridgeable Gap', 'lies in works of serious, and contemporary, reflection by high practitioners, exploring the nature of writing's art, and craft, and historicity.'[31] Bradbury attempted this kind of reflection in his 'Fiction and the Creative Process' module, which he taught at UEA in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and which I discuss at length in the next section.

Defining the term 'Novel' in *Keywords* (1976), Raymond Williams makes the following distinction: 'we can now sometimes say that novelettes, or bad novels, are pure fiction, while novels (serious fiction) tell us about real life.'[32] Thinking of the serious novel in this way, as writing which 'tells us about real life', we begin to see that serious fiction provides not only a critical reappraisal of past literature, but also a critique of our empirical experience, or 'real life'. The approach taken by Philip O'Brien in his monograph *The Working Class and Twenty-First-Century British Fiction* (2020) begins from the idea that fiction operates as a form of critique. Setting the terms for his close readings of the work of six contemporary novelists, O'Brien writes:

---

[29] Bradbury, 'The Bridgeable Gap', p. 8.
[30] Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury*, p. 10.
[31] Bradbury, 'The Bridgeable Gap', p. 8.
[32] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* [1976] (Fontana, 1988), p. 135.

> These texts are located not as a source for 'representations' of class but rather as a way of analysing and configuring it. They map out an understanding of how class is formed and how it works; they are not simple 'reflections' but powerful interventions into both class discourse and the drastic changes to class formation in Britain brought about by the ideologies of neoliberalism. […] Cultural representations are sites in which both ideology and the struggle against hegemony are powerfully worked through and communicated.[33]

Without referring to Bradbury or his work, O'Brien here articulates in the language of cultural materialism how serious fiction functions as 'a major mode of enquiry'. The serious novel tells us something about the meanings by which we construct the social world, or as Bradbury puts it in the 1981 Booker Prize speech, 'the grammars and orders, the means and structures, by which we build up sufficient fictions of the world.' The novel is, in this way, 'as serious as science, as thoughtful as philosophy'. As Bradbury writes in the introduction to *No, Not Bloomsbury* (1987), the collection of essays in which his Booker Prize speech was published: 'an awareness of our most powerful fictions is as profound an insight into our lives and condition as there is.'[34]

Recent theoretical work on the novel has sought to theorise its intellectual significances. Timothy Bewes, for instance, in his book *Free Indirect* (2022) identifies in twenty-first-century fiction 'an enigmatic, little-studied, in fact barely noticed, technically untheorizable, yet insistent quality', which he describes as both 'a quality of not only refusing to connect the work and the world but of thinking, inhabiting, even forging the space of their disconnection.'[35] The principal example of this for Bewes is J. M. Coetzee's novel *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), which contains within it 'a noninstrumental, nonsubjectively inhabitable, nontransferable and therefore nonideological thought specific to the novel'.[36] As Leo Robson has put it, the thought which Bewes seeks to describe and theorise ‘eludes approaches that strongly resemble both post-critique and the postcritical travesty of traditional critique’:

---

[33] Philip O'Brien, *The Working Class and Twenty-First-Century British Fiction: Deindustrialisation, Demonisation, Resistance* (Routledge, 2020), p. 1.
[34] Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury*, p. x.
[35] Timothy Bewes, *Free Indirect: The Novel in a Postfictional Age* (Columbia University Press, 2022), p. 6.
[36] Bewes, *Free Indirect*, p. 6.

> The kind of “thought” he [Bewes] wants to talk about is neither “direct” in the sense of a “grammatically self-evident mode of representation” – he never mentions [Rita] Felski or [Eve Kosofsky] Sedgwick or [Bruno] Latour – nor “indirect”, the kind of “veiled, or otherwise coded thinking” which emerges “alongside a discourse of literary ‘interpretation’”.[37]

Bewes therefore uses the term ‘free indirect’ to describe this ‘noninstrumental, nonsubjectively inhabitable, nontransferable and therefore nonideological thought’. But while Bewes’s theory may be attractive at first – it functions really as a kind of hermeneutic trump card – his idea of the novel’s ‘free indirect’ thought is simply too vague and amorphous for it to provide either an ongoing theory with which we might read subsequent novels, or an ongoing poetics with which we might write them.

One specific aspect of the novel for which Bewes’s theory cannot account – but which Bradbury’s theorisation of the novel as a critical intervention can – is the explicit presentation of, and engagement with, ideas. The novel of ideas, as we shall see in the next chapter, has been variously disparaged over the course of the past century: Northrop Frye, for instance, wrote in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) that an ‘interest in ideas and theoretical statements is alien to the genius of the novel proper’.[38] More recently, Sianne Ngai claims in *Theory of the Gimmick* (2020) that the novel of ideas is ‘a self-interpreting artwork’ and that ‘the mission of presenting “ideas” seems to have pushed a genre famous for its versatility toward a surprisingly limited repertoire of techniques.’[39] But as Mary McCarthy – author of one of the earliest recognisable campus novels, 1952’s *The Groves of Academe* – notes in her 1980 monograph *Ideas and the Novel*, ‘it would have been impossible in former days to speak of the “novel of ideas.” It would have seemed to be a tautology.'[40] The shift from the 'former days' which McCarthy refers to is broadly the shift from the Victorian novel to the modernist novel, a shift marked, principally, by the career of Henry James. We see this in T. S. Eliot's praise of James's work, published in a 1918 special issue of *Little Review*:

---

[37] Leo Robson, ‘Jameson after Post Critique’, *New Left Review* 144 (2023), pp. 111-132 (p. 128).

[38] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* [1957] (Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 308.

[39] Sianne Ngai, *Theory of the Gimmick: Aesthetic Judgment and Capitalist Form* (Harvard University Press, 2020), p. 126; p. 109.

> James's critical genius comes out most tellingly in his mastery over, his baffling escape from, Ideas; a mastery and an escape which are perhaps the last test of a superior intelligence. He had a mind so fine that no idea could violate it.[41]

In the introduction to *The British Novel of Ideas: George Eliot to Zadie Smith* (2025), Rachel Potter and Matthew Taunton point out that 'in the sphere of the novel, "modernism" was articulated in opposition not to realism but to the novel of ideas.'[42] And yet Bradbury in his definition of serious fiction seeks to reconcile the formal experiment of a modernist literary aesthetic with a capacity for intellectual and critical intervention. As he argues in his 1973 monograph, *Possibilities*: 'certain types and forms of art, not only now but in the past as well, have served as speculative instruments, creative centres of verbal innovation.'[43] The serious novel, then, is a centre of innovation, both aesthetically and intellectually.

II. Creative Writing at UEA

The MA in Creative Writing course at UEA was distinct from other programmes in Europe and America in that its founding aim was not in fact to teach students how to write, but rather to bring about 'new relations between the "creative" and the "critical", both in individuals and in university culture too.'[44] As referred to previously, Bradbury articulated the mission of the UEA MA in the 1992 piece 'The Bridgeable Gap', writing:

---

[40] Mary McCarthy, *Ideas and the Novel* (Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich, 1980), pp. 18-19.

[41] T. S. Eliot, 'Henry James' (1918) in Frank Kermode (ed.), *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* (Faber, 1975), pp. 151-152 (p. 151).

[42] Rachel Potter and Matthew Taunton, 'Introduction: The British Novel of Ideas' in *The British Novel of Ideas: George Eliot to Zadie Smith* (Cambridge University Press, 2025), p. 7.

[43] Malcolm Bradbury, *Possibilities: Essays on the State of the Novel* (Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 4.

[44] Bradbury, 'The Bridgeable Gap', p. 7.

> a course of this kind, conducted from the distance of an academic environment, distinct from the commercial marketplace, could have some impact on the state of serious fiction in Britain at the time, by which both of us were dismayed. And […] the presence among our own literature students of serious, articulate writers might have some impact on the bee-swarms of new theory that regularly surge through literature departments, and by which we were also concerned.[45]

Whereas the canonical figures of early-twentieth-century literary modernism – writers like Pound, Eliot, Woolf, Gertrude Stein, and James Joyce – avoided the university in favour of the café, the salon, or the little magazine, Bradbury embraced the university as an institution which could provide a kind of patronage to contemporary writers working beyond what Herbert Marcuse has called the 'repressive tolerance' of the market.[46] But the UEA programme was also conceived as an intervention into the academic culture of the university: as Bradbury puts it, he and Wilson were equally concerned by 'the bee-swarms' of literary theory. This section will look closely at the ideas behind the UEA MA and how Bradbury put these ideas to use, both in his supervision of McEwan in 1970-1971 as well as in his teaching of the creative writing workshop and 'Fiction and the Creative Process' in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In doing so, this section asks: how far is the university the place for 'serious' fiction?

The story that the UEA MA in Creative Writing began in 1970 with McEwan as its only student is a familiar one, but recent scholarship has somewhat complicated this version of events. Kathryn Holeywell has shown that the origin of Bradbury and Wilson's formal MA programme began with 'certain decisions made during the initial organisation and development of UEA in the early 1960s', ranging from a more general 'ethos of nonconformity and broadmindedness at the institutional level' to specific actions taken by Ian Watt, the Dean of English Studies for 1963-1964, the University's inaugural year.[47] It was Watt, author of the influential monograph *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), who emphasised the importance of seminar group teaching and made the ‘landmark proposal’ to hire Angus Wilson, which Holeywell suggests was ‘the first time in the history of UK higher education that a creative writer was offered a university post.’[48] A 1964 letter sent to Wilson by the second Dean of English Studies, Nicholas Brooke, refers to Wilson ‘advising students on their own writing’, but Holeywell rightly points out that this remark does not refer to creative writing specifically, and may refer instead to students’ academic writing.[49] There exist no archival records of Wilson’s formal or informal creative writing tuition, although Holeywell does interview Peter Humm, a student at UEA from 1963 to 1966, who ‘recalls “story writing as one form of assessment in the (Wilson’s) courses on Dickens and the novel”.’[50]

---

[45] Bradbury, 'The Bridgeable Gap', p. 7.

[46] Herbert Marcuse, 'Repressive Tolerance', in Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore and Herbert Marcuse (eds), *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Beacon Press, 1965), p. 88.

[47] Kathryn Holeywell, 'The Origins of a Creative Writing Programme at the University of East Anglia, 1963-1966', *New Writing* 6.1 (2009), pp. 15-24 (pp. 16-17).

Lise Jaillant has then questioned the significance of Bradbury’s contribution altogether, concluding that the more concise origin story – that creative writing at UEA began with Bradbury and Wilson’s MA in 1970 rather than Wilson’s informal undergraduate teaching as early as 1963 – is a ‘myth’ which had been actively ‘chosen’ by Bradbury for his own self-interest, because ‘the aging Bradbury increasingly saw the MA programme as one of his most important achievements’.[51] Jaillant writes that McEwan ‘had no more than a few informal meetings with Bradbury – nothing that resembled a structured writing programme’, and refers to interviews and magazine articles where Bradbury gave the concise version of events: ‘“McEwan was in my creative writing class”, he declared in a *typical* 1992 interview’.[52] This gives the impression that Bradbury consistently denied or downplayed the more complex series of events identified by Holeywell, but Jaillant does not refer to those many instances when Bradbury did indeed acknowledge both the programme’s longer history and the lack of a formality in his supervisions with McEwan. In an introduction to the collection *Class Work* (1995), an anthology of short fiction by UEA graduates, Bradbury recounts that he and Wilson had been 'working informally' with 'a new generation of vigorous and creative undergraduates' including 'Rose Tremain, Clive Sinclair, the playwright Snoo Wilson, and Jonathan Powell,' and that the two began proposing a formal MA course in 1967. 'By the end of the Sixties', Bradbury writes, 'the course had struggled its way onto our postgraduate programme – as a possible small supplement to an academic MA degree.'[53] That 'academic' course was the MA in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Novel. It was a critical MA – today's equivalent is the MA in Modern and Contemporary Writing – with two modules in the Autumn and two in the Spring, followed by an MA thesis to be written in the summer term.

---

[48] Holeywell, p. 17.

[49] Holeywell, p. 21. I quote from the same page Holeywell’s transcription of Nicholas Brooke to Angus Wilson (1964), University of Iowa Special Collections, MsC 199: Papers of Angus Wilson.

[50] Holeywell, p. 21.

[51] Lise Jaillant, *Literary Rebels: A History of Creative Writers in Anglo-American Universities* (Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 149.

[52] Jaillant, *Literary Rebels*, p. 130 (my emphasis).

The origin of the MA in Creative Writing at UEA as 'a possible small supplement' to the critical MA can be attributed, to an extent, to institutional necessity and academic *realpolitik*. It also resembles the beginnings of the first creative writing programme, the Iowa Writers Workshop, which, according to D. G. Myers, began in 1936 as 'merely one track of a more extensive graduate program in English organized around the study and practice of criticism'.[54] But the critical orientation of the UEA MA remained as it expanded and became more formalised over subsequent years. This was deliberate, being as it was part of Bradbury and Wilson's attempt to establish 'new relations' between the creative and the critical. Because of this aim, the content of the MA in Creative Writing under Bradbury's direction was closely aligned to that of the MA in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Novel, to the point that the creative writers took the same critical modules. The novelist Andrew Cowan, for instance, recounts taking Bradbury's course on the postmodern novel in the Spring 1985 semester.[55]

---

[53] Malcolm Bradbury, *Class Work: The Best of Contemporary Short Fiction* (Sceptre, 1995), pp. viii-ix.

[54] D. G. Myers, *The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880* [1996] (University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 124.

[55] Andrew Cowan, 'Blind Spots: What Creative Doesn't Know', *TEXT* 15 (2011) <http://www.textjournal.com.au/april11/cowan.htm> [accessed 30th June 2022].

It was this 'possible small supplement' which interested McEwan. In the inaugural year there was no workshop, so McEwan took four critical modules: 'The Theory of Fiction', 'Symbolism and American Literature', 'The English and American Novel 1945-present', and 'A Comparative Study of Some English & European Novelists'; but he was the first student to submit a collection of three short stories in lieu of a conventional MA thesis.[56] In his own introduction to *Class Work*, printed alongside Bradbury's, McEwan writes:

> I was struck by the offer of a full immersion, in Norwich, in postwar American and British fiction, with a little literary theory on the side, a dose of comparative European nineteenth-century literature, and the option of handing in at the end of the year twenty-five thousand words of fiction in place of an academic mini-thesis.[57]

Both introductions published in *Class Work* acknowledge the lack of formal supervision or creative writing workshop that year: Bradbury writes candidly that 'Angus and I met him [McEwan] in pubs and teashops' and McEwan mentions the Maids Head Hotel in Tombland as the location of his first supervision with Bradbury.[58] In the essay '1970', first published in the year 2000, McEwan recounts in more detail Bradbury's laissez-faire teaching style:

> I met Malcolm occasionally in his office, or in the corridor and once or twice in the Maid's Head [*sic.*]. Our meetings never lasted more than fifteen minutes. He was much in demand, and sometimes elusive. Informality, muted judgement and a complete lack of interference were the principal elements of his pedagogic style. Behind it all was an unspoken but intensely radiated assumption that there was nothing quite so exciting or essential as the writing of fiction. To be the "product" of his writing "course" was to be the beneficiary of an absolute artistic licence and minimal guidance.[59]

Despite the informal – and indeed rather twee – appearance of these supervisions, the work McEwan began producing that year constituted a concerted effort to experiment with voice and narration – and, in doing so, press at the edge of the genre. McEwan submitted three stories for his MA thesis, with a short introduction: 'I Invented Coitus for My Sister',

---

[56] 'MA Courses' [handwritten sheet]; 'M.A. Courses in Literature 1970-1' [typescript], UEA/BRAD/11, UEA Collection: Malcolm Bradbury, British Archive for Contemporary Writing, University of East Anglia.

[57] Ian McEwan, 'Class Work' in Malcolm Bradbury (ed.), *Class Work: The Best of Contemporary Short Fiction* (Sceptre, 1995), pp. xv-xix (p. xvi).

[58] Bradbury, *Class Work*, p. ix; McEwan, p. xvii.

[59] Ian McEwan, '1970' (2000) in Malcolm Bradbury, *Doctor Criminale* [1992] Picador, 2011), pp. v-xiv (p. ix).

‘Intersection’ and ‘Disguises’. The first and third stories appear in McEwan’s first collection, *First Love, Last Rites* (1975), with the former renamed ‘Homemade’. But McEwan also produced the five other stories included in *First Love, Last Rites*, as well as the seven stories published in the second collection, *In Between the Sheets* (1978), during his one year at UEA. In the same essay, ‘1970’, McEwan repeats a well-known anecdote. He has just delivered his first story, ‘Conversation with a Cupboard Man’, which would go on to be published in *First Love, Last Rites*, and meets Bradbury at the Maids Head hotel. McEwan remembers the conversation as follows:

> ‘I like it,’ he [Bradbury] said at last, unemphatically. ‘It might be publishable. But let’s not think about that now. What are you going to write next?’
>
> ‘I want to spend the year writing short stories.’
>
> ‘Fine.’
>
> ‘I thought I might try out a number of deranged first-person narrators.’
>
> ‘Why not?’
>
> ‘One’s about a vile boy so anxious to lose his virginity he makes love to his younger sister.’
>
> ‘Let me have it by the end of the month.’[60]

McEwan did write that story, ‘I Invented Coitus for my Sister’, and its disturbing plot is exactly as McEwan describes in the quotation above. Written in the retrospective first-person narration of the unnamed older brother, the story is made yet more troubling by the included dialogue of the younger sister, Connie and, in particular, the accuracy of McEwan’s acutely-observed imitation of a ten-year-old child’s speech: ‘I am sure *our* mummy and daddy don’t do this.’[61] The italicised ‘*our*’ portrays, with just one word, the innocent intonation of a child. In his 2009 monograph *The Program Era*, Mark McGurl argues that ‘the key components of the autopoetic process’ taught by Creative Writing programmes in America can be summarised with three core mottos: ‘write what you know’, ‘find your voice’, and ‘show don’t tell’.[62] But here McEwan is purposefully writing what he *doesn’t* know, finding a voice which *isn’t* his, and showing *and* telling. Indeed, McEwan alternates between mimesis and diegesis so as to heighten the story's unsettling nature: the telling by the deranged incestuous rapist is shocking and upsetting, but it is the 'showing' of the child's reaction to this act as it happens which most affects the reader.

---

[60] Ian McEwan, ‘1970’, p. viii.

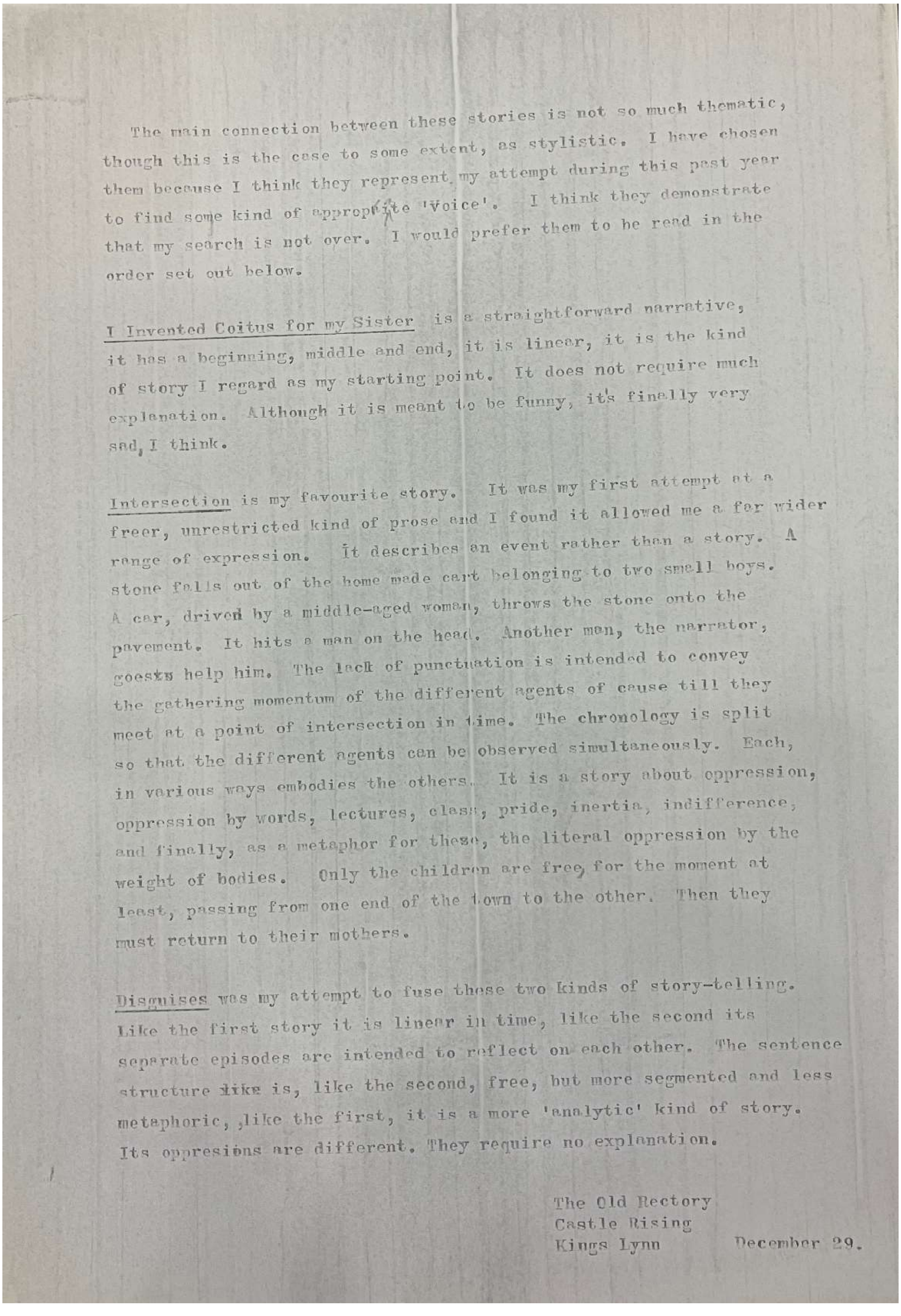
[61] Ian McEwan, *First Love, Last Rites* [1975] (Picador, 1976), p. 22.

[62] Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 23.

In the short introductory preface to his thesis, McEwan explains that he had chosen 'I Invented Coitus for My Sister', 'Intersection' and 'Disguises' for submission 'because I think they represent my attempt during this past year to find some kind of appropriate "voice". I think they demonstrate that my search is not over.'[63] The word 'attempt' is central here, as it emphasises the extent to which McEwan's short stories are essays in the original sense of the word: 'to attempt' or 'to test'. The stories McEwan submitted for his MA thesis are, to use Bradbury's phrase from *Possibilities* (1973), 'speculative instruments': fiction as a mode of enquiry. Perhaps the most visibly experimental of the three stories is 'Intersection', which McEwan explains in the introduction is his 'favourite'.[64] It involves a freak accident, witnessed by the narrator: a stone falls from a small cart belonging to two young boys; a woman drives her car over the stone; the stone is thrown out by the weight of the car; the stone hits a man on the head; a crowd forms around the man, killing him. McEwan explains in the introductory preface that '[i]t is a story about oppression, oppression by words, lectures, class, pride, inertia, indifference, and finally, as a metaphor for these, the literal oppression by the weight of bodies.'[65] This oppression is heightened by long sentences with very little punctuation, which McEwan explains is 'intended

---

[63] Ian McEwan's MA thesis (1971), Box 114, Ian McEwan/Kazuo Ishiguro, Bradbury, M. mss. III., Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington. N.B. the thesis is unpaginated.
[64] Ian McEwan's MA thesis, np.
[65] Ian McEwan's MA thesis, np.



The main connection between these stories is not so much thematic, though this is the case to some extent, as stylistic. I have chosen them because I think they represent my attempt during this past year to find some kind of appropriate 'Voice'. I think they demonstrate that my search is not over. I would prefer them to be read in the order set out below.

I Invented Coitus for my Sister is a straightforward narrative, it has a beginning, middle and end, it is linear, it is the kind of story I regard as my starting point. It does not require much explanation. Although it is meant to be funny, it's finally very sad, I think.

Intersection is my favourite story. It was my first attempt at a freer, unrestricted kind of prose and I found it allowed me a far wider range of expression. It describes an event rather than a story. A stone falls out of the home made cart belonging to two small boys. A car, drived by a middle-aged woman, throws the stone onto the pavement. It hits a man on the head. Another man, the narrator, goes~~to~~ help him. The lack of punctuation is intended to convey the gathering momentum of the different agents of cause till they meet at a point of intersection in time. The chronology is split so that the different agents can be observed simultaneously. Each, in various ways embodies the others. It is a story about oppression, oppression by words, lectures, class, pride, inertia, indifference, and finally, as a metaphor for these, the literal oppression by the weight of bodies. Only the children are free, for the moment at least, passing from one end of the town to the other. Then they must return to their mothers.

Disguises was my attempt to fuse these two kinds of story-telling. Like the first story it is linear in time, like the second its separate episodes are intended to reflect on each other. The sentence structure ~~like~~ is, like the second, free, but more segmented and less metaphoric, ,like the first, it is a more 'analytic' kind of story. Its oppresions are different. They require no explanation.

The Old Rectory
Castle Rising
Kings Lynn December 29.

Figure 3. Introduction to Ian McEwan's MA thesis (1971).[66]

---

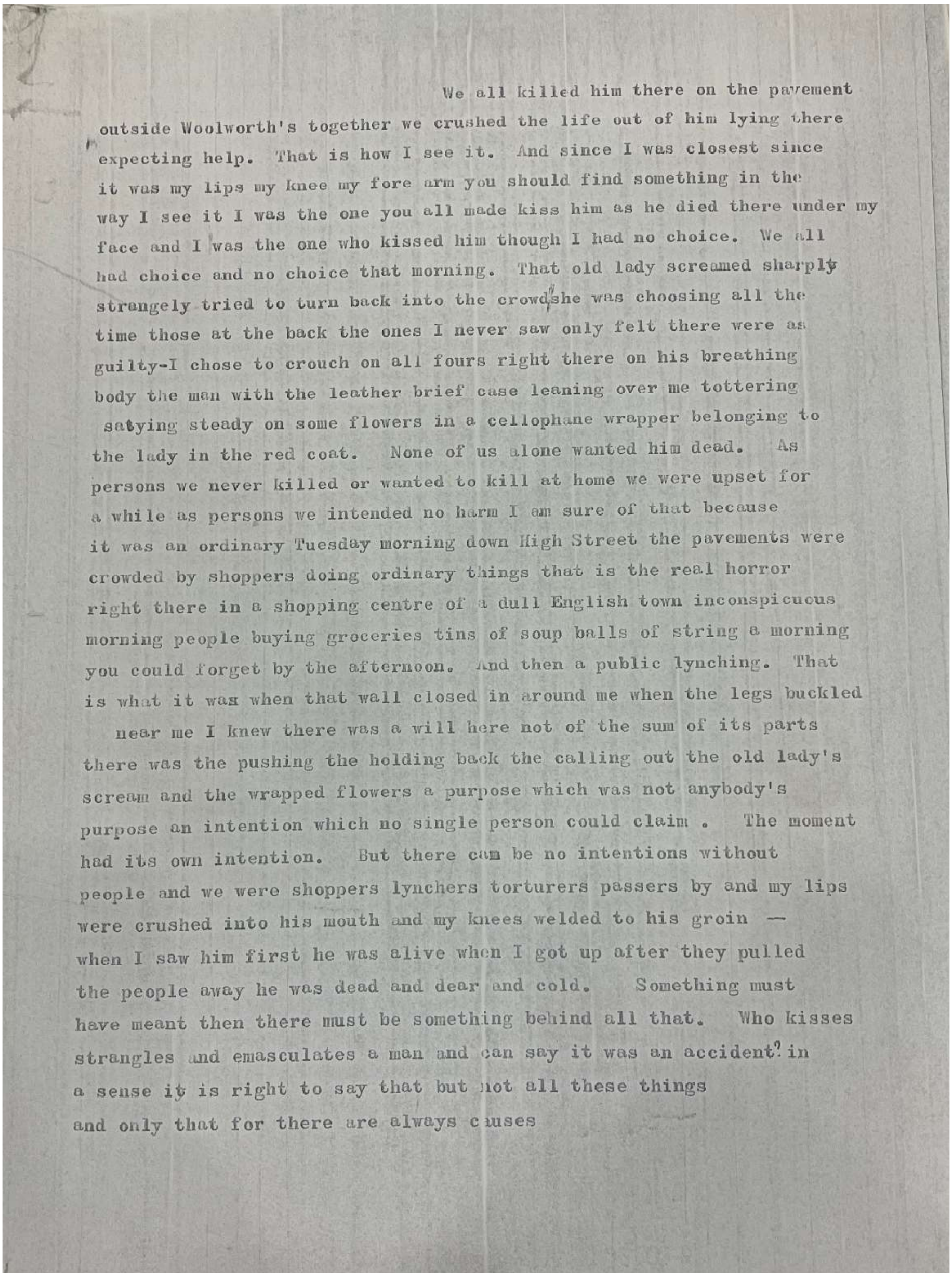
[66] Ian McEwan's MA thesis (1971), Box 114, Ian McEwan/Kazuo Ishiguro, Bradbury, M. mss. III., Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

to convey a gathering momentum of the different agents of cause till they meet at a point of intersection in time.' The opening reads:

> We all killed him there on the pavement outside Woolworth's together we all crushed the life out of him lying there expecting help. That is how I see it. And since I was the closest since it was my lips my knee my fore arm you should find something in the way I see it I was the one you all made kiss him as he died there under my face and I was the one who kissed him though I had no choice. We all had choice and no choice that morning. That old lady screamed sharply strangely tried to turn back into the crowd she was choosing all the time those at the back the ones I never saw only felt there were as guilty – I chose to crouch on all fours right there on his breathing body the man with the leather brief case leaning over me tottering saying steady on some flowers in a cellophane wrapper belonging to the lady in the red coat. None of us alone wanted him dead. As persons we never killed or wanted to kill at home we were upset for a while as persons we intended no harm I am sure of that because it was an ordinary Tuesday morning down High Street [and so on.]

With its relative lack of punctuation – there are full stops and em-dashes, but the sentences are overlong – the experiment of 'Intersection' resembles certain experiments of European literary modernism, most obviously Molly Bloom's 'soliloquy' in the final episode of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) or Samuel Beckett's novel *How It Is* (1961). McEwan's intended effect, 'to convey a gathering momentum', is certainly evident; but so too are more subtle ambiguities. When the man with the briefcase speaks, for instance, the lack of quotation marks makes it unclear whether he has said 'steady on' or 'steady on some flowers in a cellophane wrapper'; even though the reader can discern the man's utterance from the narrator's description of the physical world, the lack of punctuation causes these phenomena to mix and fuse together. Another ambiguity occurs when the narrator says '[a]s persons we never killed or wanted to kill at home we were upset for a while', which could be read at first to say '[a]s persons we never killed or wanted to kill *at home*'; the second variation has an obviously different, though admittedly humorous, meaning.

It is clear that McEwan's 'Intersection' constitutes a similarly ambitious 'attempt' to 'I Invented Coitus for my Sister', and we should note that both experiments, alongside 'Disguises', were deemed successful enough by Bradbury, Wilson, and David Lodge – who



We all killed him there on the pavement outside Woolworth's together we crushed the life out of him lying there expecting help. That is how I see it. And since I was closest since it was my lips my knee my fore arm you should find something in the way I see it I was the one you all made kiss him as he died there under my face and I was the one who kissed him though I had no choice. We all had choice and no choice that morning. That old lady screamed sharply strangely tried to turn back into the crowd/she was choosing all the time those at the back the ones I never saw only felt there were as guilty-I chose to crouch on all fours right there on his breathing body the man with the leather brief case leaning over me tottering satying steady on some flowers in a cellophane wrapper belonging to the lady in the red coat. None of us alone wanted him dead. As persons we never killed or wanted to kill at home we were upset for a while as persons we intended no harm I am sure of that because it was an ordinary Tuesday morning down High Street the pavements were crowded by shoppers doing ordinary things that is the real horror right there in a shopping centre of a dull English town inconspicuous morning people buying groceries tins of soup balls of string a morning you could forget by the afternoon. And then a public lynching. That is what it was when that wall closed in around me when the legs buckled near me I knew there was a will here not of the sum of its parts there was the pushing the holding back the calling out the old lady's scream and the wrapped flowers a purpose which was not anybody's purpose an intention which no single person could claim . The moment had its own intention. But there cam be no intentions without people and we were shoppers lynchers torturers passers by and my lips were crushed into his mouth and my knees welded to his groin — when I saw him first he was alive when I got up after they pulled the people away he was dead and dear and cold. Something must have meant then there must be something behind all that. Who kisses strangles and emasculates a man and can say it was an accident? in a sense it is right to say that but not all these things and only that for there are always causes

Figure 4. Opening page to 'Intersection' from Ian McEwan's MA thesis (1971).[67]

---

[67] Ian McEwan's MA thesis (1971), Box 114, Ian McEwan/Kazuo Ishiguro, Bradbury, M. mss. III., Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

served as external examiner – to be submitted for partial fulfilment of McEwan's MA.[68] It is therefore the case that McEwan was not only given the opportunity to experiment, but was rewarded for it, too. Curiously, however, when 'Intersection' was published in the little magazine *TriQuarterly* in 1975, it appeared with full punctuation. The opening section to the published version, equivalent to the quotation above, reads:

> We all killed him there on the pavement outside the shops, together we all crushed the life out of him, lying there expecting help. That is how I see it, and since I was the closest, since it was my lips, my knee, my forearm, you should see something in the way I see it. … I was the one you all made kiss him as he died there under my face, and I was the one who kissed him, though I had no choice. We all had choice and no choice that morning. That old lady who screamed sharply tried to turn back into the crowds, she was choosing all the time. … Those at the back, the ones I never saw, only felt – they were as guilty. My choice was to crouch on all fours right there on his breathing body, the man with the leather briefcase leaning over me, tottering, saying "Steady on"… some flowers in a cellophane wrapper belonging to the lady in the red coat. None of us alone wanted him dead, as persons we never killed or wanted to kill, at home we were upset for a while, as citizens we intended no harm. … I am sure of that because it was an ordinary Tuesday morning down High Street.[69]

Though an element of momentum remains, the addition of ellipses slows the passage down considerably, and the added quotation marks and commas entirely remove the subtler ambiguities drawn out above. Bradbury recounted in 'The Bridgeable Gap' (1992) that he and Wilson had wanted to conduct the MA 'from the distance of an academic environment, distinct from the commercial marketplace'.[70] The fact that a small literary magazine would make such changes, and in doing so modify the story so drastically, demonstrates the full extent of the pressures of 'the commercial marketplace' upon experimental fiction, as well as the increased 'distance' that the university can provide.

It was only after McEwan had completed the course and graduated that Bradbury began to teach a more formal workshop at UEA. But how critical was Bradbury's creative writing workshop? Bradbury's course handouts are worth quoting at length here. The 1992 handout, given to students in the first week, reads:

---

[68] Margaret Drabble, *Angus Wilson: A Biography* (Secker & Warburg, 1995), p. 419.
[69] Ian McEwan, 'Intersection', *TriQuarterly* 34 (1975), pp. 63-86 (p. 63).
[70] Bradbury, 'The Bridgeable Gap', p. 7.

> The term "workshop" is graceless and unsatisfactory but we have not yet found a better one. Essentially it is a meeting place for the informal but very detailed discussion of the work you are developing. It depends on a good deal of openness and frankness, but also a careful and sympathetic understanding of the aims of other writers whose themes, direction and motivation may in fact be very different from your own. There are no common styles, and the course (unlike some elsewhere) is not taught according to systematized notions (plot in week 1, character in week 2, and so on). The assumption is that each piece of work must grow individually, but everything about it can be usefully examined and very often improved and refined.
>
> This means that all members will need to read the work submitted closely and carefully, making their own analysis of the various elements: its conception, structure, development, pace, voice, style, tone, and degree of realization, etc.. Please do come along with some points for discussion, but please also remember that the aim is not a formal piece of literary criticism. This is work in progress, and not completed, publishable text. The aim is thoughtful editorial understanding of and respose [*sic.*] to the possibilities and the problems, the strengths and the weak spots, the structure and development, the elements that are there but perhaps not sufficiently brought out, of each piece of writing. Please also remember that it is sometimes easier to be critical than helpful, and the aim is to encourage everyone to bring out the very best in their writing potential. The workshop always works best when every member of it takes a real interest in the progress and development of the work of the others, providing both support and considered and thoughtful criticism.[71]

The advice of this handout is as much emotional as it is intellectual: the workshop is a 'careful' and 'sympathetic' space for the development and growth not just of the writers' works-in-progress, but of the writing individuals themselves. The emphasis of Bradbury's workshop handout is plural and heterogenous: the writers are expected to have 'very different' projects and the group is expected to have 'no common styles'. This stylistic plurality provides an opportunity for experiment, as it makes space for new directions – and 'pressing at the edge of the genre' – rather than inculcating a familiar or established form or style. The origin of this plurality can be identified in Bradbury's *laissez-faire* supervision of McEwan in that initial year, and it sets Bradbury's workshop at UEA apart from the programmes of Iowa and Stanford which, as McGurl writes in *The Program Era* ‘emerged from the richly descriptive regionalist literary movements of the thirties, and have generally remained committed to some version of literary realism ever since.’[72] Indeed, each of the three mantras of creative writing identified by McGurl – ‘write what you know’, ‘find your voice’, and ‘show don’t tell’ – inculcates a certain literary aesthetic, which David Lodge has called, elsewhere, ‘expressive realism’. This aesthetic assumes, as Lodge puts it, ‘that novels arise out of their authors’ experience and observation of life, [and] that they are works of verbal mimesis’.[73] Bradbury’s idea of the serious novel, on the other hand – the work which is ‘a form of enquiry, into the grammars and orders, the means and structures, by which we build up sufficient fictions of the world’ – is less a work of verbal mimesis than a self-reflexive work of intellectual enquiry: the novel not as an expression of experience, but as a ‘discovering form’ which seeks out, by creative and critical means, a new understanding of that experience.

---

[71] Malcolm Bradbury, 'Fiction Workshop' (handout), undated [1992], LIT/CW/10, British Archive for Contemporary Writing: MA Creative Writing Course, University of East Anglia. N.B. The handout itself is undated, but it mentions that anthologies of student work have appeared over 'the previous three years'; the first of these was *Unthank*, published in 1989.

It is worth noting that Bradbury’s workshop was a site for the discussion of writing, rather than the act of writing itself. This is a point of contrast between Bradbury’s teaching and more established workshops in the American colleges, for instance Kenneth Koch’s teaching at the New School in New York City. Koch taught poetry writing in the early 1960s and to do so he would set imitation exercises, as he recounts in 1996:

> When I was teaching at the New School, the things I wanted to bring into the classroom were: reading other poets and being influenced; trying new forms, like sestinas, say, or poems with only one word in each line […] All these things I turned into assignments, so that every week we weren’t talking about how good or bad the students were, but about good ways to write about dreams or good ways to get meaning into one word in a one-word line. It worked very well and I’ve been doing it ever since at Columbia.[74]

Koch was, of course, teaching poetry, whereas Bradbury taught fiction only. It would not be until 1996, when Andrew Motion took over from Bradbury as Professor of Creative Writing, that UEA would begin to teach poetry. Poems are, in general, briefer than novels, and as such it is materially possible within the confines of a university seminar room to ask a group of students to write a sestina, whereas they might only manage a paragraph or two of fiction. Overall the fiction workshop was, for Bradbury, a space for students to submit their own work for group discussion, which we might think of as a setting which is secondary to the act of writing, as opposed to the workshop being a space for the assignment of tasks, which we might think of as a primary setting.

---

[72] McGurl, *The Program Era*, p. 33.
[73] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 17.
[74] Kenneth Koch, *The Art of Poetry* (University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 155.

There is an interesting tension in Bradbury's workshop handout between the instruction that students provide 'both support and considered and thoughtful criticism' and the explicit assertion that 'the aim is not a formal piece of literary criticism.' As Raymond Williams writes in *Keywords*, 'criticism' and 'critical' are both associated with a 'pre-dominant general sense of fault-finding'; this has been the case since the early seventeenth century. But Williams also points out that the word originates from the Greek '*kritės*', meaning 'a judge'.[75] Literary criticism is therefore – in this sense – a case of judgement, rather than fault-finding. This sense continues in the everyday usage of critic to describe an employee of a newspaper or magazine who writes reviews of restaurants or plays at the theatre. Part of the job is, naturally, fault-finding, but a larger part depends upon recognition, weighing-up, and recommendation. Bradbury's assertion that 'the aim is not a formal piece of literary criticism' was likely an attempt to discourage fault-finding: the workshop is, after all, a place for not just 'openness and frankness' but also 'a careful and sympathetic understanding'.

What, then, is the difference between 'considered and thoughtful criticism' and 'a formal piece of literary criticism'? The operative word here is 'formal'. Bradbury does not mean to say that the aim of the workshop is not to judge a text, its technique or its effects, as students are expected to provide 'their own analysis' of the workshop piece. Equally, as the students are expected to comment on 'the degree of realization' as well as 'the possibilities and the problems', he does not mean to say that the aim is *not* interpretation. The 'formal literary criticism' Bradbury refers to is the kind of academic criticism which affords hermeneutic primacy to the reader over the writer, referred to variously as 'critique' or 'the hermeneutics of suspicion'. In 'The Bridgeable Gap', which was published in 1992, the same year as the workshop handout quoted above, Bradbury calls this kind of suspicious reading 'decreative', writing:

---

[75] Williams, *Keywords*, pp. 84-85.

> The Reader – which here means the trained theoretical reader, a professional – is elevated into the position of the Hyper-Interpreter, freely misprising the text, and interrogating it, in the interests of an externally derived agenda, often deeply political or ideological in character.[76]

This kind of reading 'exteriorizes and de-existentializes actual creative activity, and – pedagogically, philosophically, politically – academic literary theory, interlinked with philosophical post-humanism and ideological critique, has persistently striven to take the intentionality out of writing.'[77] A recognition of 'creative activity' and 'intentionality' are crucial to judging a workshop piece, which is still, as Bradbury points out, a 'work in progress, and not completed, publishable text.' The alternative – a workshop which encourages participants to deploy the hermeneutics of suspicion in search of unintended meanings – would, for Bradbury at least, stifle the creative act.

This nuanced difference between the critical and critique raises an important question about the nature of the engagement with literary theory which Bradbury expected the MA Creative Writers to make. Although the students were encouraged not to subject each other to Howard Kirk-style ideology critique in the workshop, and although the MA itself was established, as Bradbury puts it in 'The Bridgeable Gap', to counter 'the bee-swarms of new theory that regularly surge through literature departments', the MA was also, fundamentally, as much a critical project as it was a creative one. Under Bradbury's direction, the MA Creative

---

[76] Bradbury, 'The Bridgeable Gap', p. 8.

[77] Bradbury, 'The Bridgeable Gap', p. 8.

Writers were offered the same modules in literary theory as the students of the critical MA, not so that they would go on to dissect the unconscious motivations of each other's writing in a suspicious workshop, but rather to enable them to read and write self-consciously, knowingly, and in a manner that was not naïve to the difficulties, problems, and challenges of linguistic representation.

One of the critical modules Bradbury taught throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s was 'Fiction and the Creative Process', in which he attempted to provide an intellectual and aesthetic account of the elusive creative process. The earliest dated record held in the UEA archive is a reading list from the 1989 Autumn term, in which Bradbury's description of the course reads:

> Concentrating on some major works of fiction where there are useful records, in the form of notebooks, diaries, and memoirs, where writers have self-consciously analysed their own creative process, this course will move between a "creative" and a "critical" perspective on these works.[78]

The 'major works of fiction' discussed that semester were Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (1866); Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain* (1924); James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922); Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925); William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929); Italo Calvino, *If On A Winter's Night A Traveller* (1979); Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* (1962); Franz Kafka, *The Trial* (1925); and, in the final week, selected short stories by Eudora Welty, Donald Barthelme, and Raymond Carver. Other potential texts on offer to the cohort were Henry James, *The Ambassadors* (1903); the first three volumes of Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913-1921); John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969); and selected short stories by Samuel Beckett. Apart from Welty and Carver in the final week, each of the writers discussed is a recognised figure in the canon of Western modernism and postmodernism, and each of the listed novels is quite clearly 'serious' in the sense of

---

[78] 'Fiction and the Creative Process' [annotated reading list], UEA/BRAD/22, UEA Collection: Malcolm Bradbury, British Archive for Contemporary Writing, University of East Anglia.

‘pressing at the edge of the genre’. The avant-garde emphasis inherent in Bradbury’s poetics of the novel provides an interesting counterpoint to the tradition of ‘show don’t tell’ expressive realism exemplified by Carver in particular, and which is still emphasised by creative writing tutors today, particularly in America.

Bradbury’s teaching notes, held at UEA’s British Archive for Contemporary Writing, show us how exactly the module ‘move[d] between a “creative” and a “critical” perspective’. The notes, written in Bradbury’s hand, are of two kinds: those written in preparation for the seminar, and those written during the class discussion. Meetings began with three short papers, each prepared by a student: one on ‘background’, one on ‘text’, and one on ‘interpretation’. Bradbury’s prepared notes for the *Crime and Punishment* seminar in the first week one year provide an example of the kind of detail each of the papers was expected to include. The first sheet reads:

> MA / The Creative Process
> Dostoevsky, Crime & Punishment
> 1) 3 papers: Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics
> a) polyphony, polyglotism, travesty + parody, the dialogic and the carnivalesque. Also see Lodge anthology.
> b) relation of B’s interpretations to theories of modern fiction.
>
> 2) The notebooks for Crime and Punishment: see Norton edition.
> a) emphasis on the philosophical and social concept of the book; the type of character, the crisis;
> b) the writing process.
>
> 3) The text of C&P as a ‘modernist’ novel
> a) its methodology and design;
> b) its conceptions of form and construction;
> c) its moral conflicts.

And the second sheet reads:

> Dost., Crime and Punishment.
> Some key themes in relation to the Modern movement:
> a) The superfluous man, underground man; the modern anti-hero. The notion & evolution of this character in, e.g., Musil, Svevo, Kafka, etc. The characterless character of modern fiction; incl. immediacy of presentation.
> b) the philosophical implication of the character and theme: the figure seeking to transcend history. Note Nietzsche, Beyond Good & Evil.

> c) reputation of the novel as a trigger for modern recognitions: Nietzsche, Freud, Woolf, etc. The 'Russian' novel in modernism, which so often meant Dostoevsky.[79]

We can see here that even as he sought to theorise the elusive creative process, Bradbury both acknowledged and made use of Nietzsche and Freud in his seminar teaching. Another handwritten sheet from the seminar on *Crime and Punishment* reads:

> C&P. Began in 1864 – married in Siberia; magazine collapsed. Bankrupt; brother died; threatened with jail. He [fails?] on relation with publisher which threatened his independence. Problem of fulfilling contract. Writes two novels: The Gamblers and Crime & Punishment. Hired a stenographer – the pressure. Heavy drinker and gambler. Drunkards [?] became a sub-plot to C&P. Sonja loses her role (social protests aspect.?) The Marmeladov plot.: the drunkards.
>
> C&P. beginning of new narrative cycle. Prepared in Notes from Underground. The Russian Messenger letter. This letter goes with 1st person version : a criminal's confession. He replaced [?]; burned all previous versions. First person not suited to the book – why?
> Final version a) The Drunkards into C&P.
> b) 1st person into 3rd person…[80]

Adherents of the New Criticism and poststructuralism alike would have deemed this kind of biographical material to be entirely irrelevant to an interpretation of the novel or an appraisal of its techniques and effects. To Bradbury, however, this was all relevant information: these are the 'elements of life and consciousness' out of which 'fictive things' are made. The discussion of Dostoevsky's initial use of first-person narration – which Bradbury describes as 'a criminal's confession' – is also significant. At once this is a scholarly analysis of textual variants, but it also involves a critical judgement: Bradbury asks, 'First person not suited to the book – why?' This is precisely the kind of critical and creative work described by Eliot in 'The Function of Criticism', the work of 'sifting, combining, constructing, expunging, correcting, testing'.[81] A further handwritten note reads:

---

[79] 'MA / The Creative Process' [notes on *Crime and Punishment*], UEA/BRAD/22, UEA Collection: Malcolm Bradbury, British Archive for Contemporary Writing, University of East Anglia, pp. 1-2.

[80] Untitled [handwritten sheet on *Crime and Punishment*], UEA/BRAD/22, UEA Collection: Malcolm Bradbury, British Archive for Contemporary Writing, University of East Anglia.

[81] Eliot, 'The Function of Criticism', p. 73.

> In preface to Penguin edition, D's letter, which elaborates the plot. References to variant versions and possibilities: what was his first sense of the plot, and what gives him grounds for changing it? How does the changed version become better, more necessary? And what do we learn of the relation between intentions and produced text?[82]

Again, Bradbury encourages the class to make critical judgements – 'How does the changed version become better, more necessary?' – and we also see here how Bradbury takes into account the apparent intention of the author alongside the 'produced text' that the reader actually experiences. In doing so, the novel is experienced in the class as something authored, the final version of many 'variant versions and possibilities', with an emphasis on the changing decisions of the author and the changing effect upon the reader created by those decisions. In this way, a canonical text of Western modernism published more than a century earlier becomes, in the classroom, the subject of a creative writing workshop.

But where Bradbury diverged from the modernists was in his situating this discussion of the 'creative' and the 'critical' within both the seminar room and the institution of the university more widely. It is curious to note that the question of whether or not creative writing can be 'taught' – or, indeed, 'learned' – is, in effect, a repetition of a similar debate which took place almost a century earlier. Carol Atherton notes that Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater 'shared with each other – and with the Modernists – […] a belief that the critical process was essentially unteachable'.[83] This belief 'stood at odds with the need to define a paradigm for the study of English as a systematic and clearly defined academic discipline.'[84] In other words, there was a tension between an amateurist view of criticism – which saw this activity as a leisure pursuit for those who are innately capable – and the new professionalisation of an academic discipline based within the institution of the university. As Atherton explains, Arnold and Pater

---

[82] 'Dost., *Crime and Punishment*' [handwritten sheet], UEA/BRAD/22, UEA Collection: Malcolm Bradbury, British Archive for Contemporary Writing, University of East Anglia.
[83] Carol Atherton, *Defining Literary Criticism: Scholarship, Authority, and the Possession of Literary Knowledge, 1880-2002* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 61.
[84] Atherton, *Defining Literary Criticism*, p. 61.

> helped to shape an important philosophy of resistance that was embraced by many critics and academics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Put simply, this philosophy rested on the paradoxical belief that while criticism was important enough to warrant a place within the universities, it also rested on special qualities that set it apart from other academic disciplines. As a result, it did not need to fulfil the same criteria as other subjects: if it were to be restricted to these criteria alone, a large part of its "specialness" would be lost.[85]

We might compare this earlier concern about the 'specialness' of literary criticism with the mystifications of the creative process which Bradbury parodied as the discussion of whether it is 'best to write lying down, or standing up, like Hemingway, or naked, like Victor Hugo, or late at night, or in a swimming pool'.[86]

Can writing be taught? Angela Carter, who began teaching at UEA in the late 1970s and supervised Nobel prize winner Kazuo Ishiguro, described her work in the one-to-one supervisions as doing 'exactly as a copy editor in a publishing company does: to go through a piece of fiction and say, "look he's wearing odd socks here, what do you precisely mean, here, would so-and-so say such a thing?"'[87] Carter here offers us a parallel between the operations of the writing programme and those of the commercial marketplace, rather than the oppositional relationship suggested by Bradbury in 'The Bridgeable Gap'. But the process of copyediting Carter describes is also one part of Eliot's 'labour of the author': 'sifting, combining, constructing, expunging, correcting, testing.'[88] The creative writing student is, therefore, subject to the processes of 'correcting' and 'testing' by an established author so that they may themselves learn this skill. We might compare this to a much broader definition of university teaching formulated by Stefan Collini:

> One neat, but therefore only partly adequate, formulation says that while schoolchildren are taught, university students study. Undergraduates are being introduced to the modes of enquiry appropriate to various disciplines; what they develop, ideally, is not simply mastery of a body of information, but the capacity to challenge or extend the received understanding of a particular topic. […] Learning what is involved in conducting enquiry in a certain discipline partly grows out of being exposed to examples of such

---

[85] Carol Atherton, *Defining Literary Criticism*, p. 62.

[86] Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury*, p. 10.

[87] Edmund Gordon, *The Invention of Angela Carter* [2016] (Vintage, 2017), p. 288.

[88] Eliot, 'The Function of Criticism', p. 73.

> work and then being incited, not to reproduce them, but to produce a piece of work of one's own that is informed by having come to understand what the examples are examples *of*. This can only be done by becoming acquainted with work in a particular discipline: simply being exhorted in general to pursue truth, cultivate accuracy, express oneself clearly, and so on, will not achieve the desired goal.[89]

What Collini describes here is surely what it is creative writing students are being 'taught' when they attend their supervisions: they are 'exposed to examples' of the creative process and then expected – or, perhaps, hoped – to produce a work of fiction which is informed by the example of the creative process demonstrated by their supervisor. This is not to mystify writing as a process which cannot be taught, but rather to say that the practice of writing can be demonstrated and, as Collini puts it, studied.

III. Bradbury's serious novels

In his own fiction, Bradbury sought to create novels which were intellectual and aesthetic interventions and innovations. Bradbury wrote six full-length novels over six decades: *Eating People is Wrong* (1959), *Stepping Westward* (1965), *The History Man* (1975), *Rates of Exchange* (1983), *Doctor Criminale* (1992), and *To the Hermitage* (2000). Alongside these Bradbury wrote a novella, *Cuts* (1986), and a number of works of 'humour'. These were mainly collections of shorter pieces or parodies, like *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1976). One text which has previously been classified as a work of humour is *Mensonge* (1987), and part of my aim in the discussion which follows is to make the case for *Mensonge*'s significance as a shorter novel. This section will look closely at *The History Man*, *Mensonge*, and *To the Hermitage* in order to put together an account of how Bradbury used the novel form itself to theorise the elusive creative process.

1975's *The History Man* has been characterised primarily as an attack on the discipline of sociology, not least because Howard Kirk, the Machiavellian protagonist, is a scheming and conniving lecturer of that subject. But Bradbury's concern is less to do with sociology more broadly – indeed, Bradbury had himself published a work of sociology, *The Social Context of Modern English Literature* in 1971, while he was still working on *The History Man* – than it is to do with the methods of critique which came to be associated with that subject throughout the 1960s and 1970s, as well as their concomitant influence on literary studies. Kirk is a sociologist who can 'explain anything' with 'a little Marx, a little Freud, and a little social history'.[90] In Kirk's seminars, 'an apparently casual remark about one's schoolboy stamp collection, or a literary reference to the metaphoric significance of colour' leads to 'a sudden psychic foray from a teacher who will dive down into your unconscious with three shrewd enquiries and come up clutching something in you called "bourgeois materialism" or "racism".'[91] There is an obvious comparison to be made between Kirk's 'div[ing] down' and the hermeneutics of suspicion, which Rita Felski has described as 'a mode of interpretation that adopts a distrustful attitude toward texts in order to draw out meanings or implications that are not intended and that remain inaccessible to their authors as well as to ordinary readers.'[92]

---

[89] Stefan Collini, *What are Universities For?* (Penguin, 2012), p. 9.

Bradbury's concern with Kirk's style of critique is evident throughout his career. As referred to in the previous section, Bradbury argues in the 1992 piece 'The Bridgeable Gap' that such procedures of 'ideology critique' are fundamentally 'decreative'.[93] In the same piece, Bradbury discusses the work of Umberto Eco, specifically his three Tanner Lectures, given at Cambridge University in 1990, in which Eco theorised a kind of intention, the *intentio*, which cannot be divorced from the text. The lectures were published, alongside three papers given at a symposium the next day by Richard Rorty, Jonathan Culler, and Christine Brooke-Rose, as *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (1992). In his introduction to the collection, Stefan Collini summarises Eco's theory of the *intentio* as follows:

---

[90] Malcolm Bradbury, *The History Man* [1975] (Picador, 2017), p. 25.
[91] Bradbury, *The History Man*, p. 137.
[92] Rita Felski, 'Suspicious Minds', *Poetics Today* 32.2 (June 2011), pp. 215-234 (p. 216).
[93] Bradbury, 'The Bridgeable Gap', p. 8.

> the provocative notion of *intentio operis*, the intention of the work, plays an important role, as a source of meaning which, while not being reducible to the pre-textual *intentio auctoris* [the intention of the author], none the less operates as a constraint upon the free play of the *intentio lectoris* [the intention of the reader].[94]

The idea of an *intentio operis* corresponds with Bradbury's theory of the serious novel: if a novel is capable of acting directly on reality through the critical intervention it makes into committed discussion, then the intellectual content of that intervention is an *intentio operis* which cannot be divorced from the text. Bradbury, who had himself attended the 1990 lectures and symposium, writes in 'The Bridgeable Gap' that this *intentio* is 'not necessarily predetermined, stable, or conscious,' but, like the central argument of an essay, is 'consonant with the structured and shaping parameters of the work itself.'[95]

Bradbury understood the 'decreative' forms of interpretation to originate, ultimately, in the work of Roland Barthes, who had argued in his 1967 essay 'The Death of the Author' that 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.'[96] As Colin MacCabe points out, Barthes's death of the Author is different from the argument of W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley's 1946 essay 'The Intentional Fallacy':

> The project may seem to have something in common with the New Critical attack upon the author but its aims are very different. New Criticism sought to liberate the text's meaning from the unfortunate contingencies of an author's time and place. Barthes's attempt is to liberate the text from meaning altogether.[97]

If the novel is liberated from 'meaning altogether' then it cannot provide a critical intervention on life or literature. While Bradbury took issue with this idea in intellectual terms, he also saw the death of the Author as a subject ripe for comic treatment. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Bradbury quipped in the introduction to the UEA anthology *Class Work* (1995) that because he and Wilson 'were both novelists as well as teachers of literature, and took our profession seriously, it seemed somewhat strange for us to be announcing the Death of the Author in the classroom, then going straight back home to be one.'[98] But Bradbury also parodies and plays with the idea in *The History Man*. Late on in the novel, Kirk is stalking the corridors of the English department looking for Annie Callendar, a young female lecturer, when Bradbury himself appears:

---

[94] Stefan Collini, 'Interpretation terminable and interminable' in Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 9.
[95] Bradbury, 'The Bridgeable Gap', p. 8.
[96] Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, p. 148.
[97] Colin MacCabe, 'The revenge of the author', *CQ* 31.2 (1989), 3-13 (p. 3).

> The door of a room adjoining opens a little; a dark, tousled-haired head, with a sad visage, peers through, looks at Howard for a little, and then retreats. The fact has a vague familiarity; Howard recalls that this depressed-looking figure is a lecturer in the English department, a man who, ten years earlier, had produced two tolerably well-known and acceptably reviewed novels, filled, as novels then were, with moral scruple and concern. Since then there has been silence, as if, under the pressure of contemporary change, there was no more moral scruple and concern, no new substance to be spun. The man alone persists; he passes nervously through the campus, he teaches, sadly, he avoids strangers. Howard knocks on this man's door; hearing no reply, he opens it. The novelist is not immediately visible; he sits out of the light, in the furthest corner, hunched over a typewriter, looking doubtfully up at his visitor. 'I'm sorry to disturb you,' says Howard, 'but I'm looking for Miss Callendar. Do you know where she is?' 'I don't think I do,' says the man. 'You've no idea?' asks Howard. 'Well, I thought she'd better go home,' says the man, 'she's in a very upset state.' 'Well, this is a very urgent matter,' says Howard, 'I wonder whether you'd give me her address.' 'I'm afraid I can't,' says the man. 'It's very important,' says Howard, 'Miss Callendar's not easy to find out about,' says the novelist, 'she's a very private person.' 'Do you know her address?' asks Howard. 'No,' says the man, 'no I don't.' 'Ah, well,' says Howard, 'if you want to find things out about people, you always can, with a little research. A little curiosity.' 'It's sometimes better not to,' says the man. 'Never mind,' says Howard, 'I'll find it.' 'I wish you wouldn't,' says the novelist. 'I will,' says Howard, going out of the room, and shutting the door.[99]

The fictional Bradbury has not disappeared, but he is entirely ineffectual. In trying and failing to control Kirk's scheme or 'plot', the fictional Bradbury functions as a parodic actualisation of the death of the Author: the novelist cannot control his own fictional character, the product of *his* imagination, and his fiction quite literally runs away from him. The irony here, however, is that despite making the fictional Bradbury so comically pathetic, the scene only serves to emphasise the 'plotting' done by the empirical or actual Bradbury. It is not Kirk's plot that the fictional Bradbury fails to prevent, but the actual Bradbury's. By putting himself into the novel, the actual Bradbury emphasises the novel's fictionality, and in doing so he emphasises his own actuality. Like the 'frightful toil' of Eliot's creative process, this metafictional play is 'as much critical as creative'.

---

[98] Bradbury, *Class Work*, p. viii.
[99] Bradbury, *The History Man*, pp. 220-221.

Bradbury continued his explicit comic treatment of the death of the Author in 1987's *Mensonge*, a comic novella presented as a work of scholarship in the manner of Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962), with a mock bibliography listing articles such as 'Frank Kermode, "The Room That Disappeared: An Unfortunate Incident at MLA",' and a mock index with entries like 'McCabe [*sic.*], Colin, not mentioned'.[100] The book also has an afterword written by David Lodge but attributed to Professor Michel Tardieu, a character from Lodge's *Small World* (1984). Writing in an ironic academic style, Bradbury claims to be searching for Henri Mensonge, a French deconstructive theorist and author of *La Fornication comme acte culturel* – or 'Fornication as a cultural act' – who is so committed to the death of the Author that he has himself disappeared. At first Mensonge – whose surname in French means 'lie' or 'falsehood' – 'insisted that his name should not appear anywhere in print, on the spines or title pages of books, whether they are by him or not, which we shall never know anyway.'[101] Eventually, however, he became aware of a profound 'illogicality': 'if the author was dead, it was still necessary to have a Deconstructionist author who could explain this to us.'[102] Mensonge therefore made himself totally absent, leaving only 'a lost credit-card here, an unanswered letter asking for the return of a favourite sweater there'.[103]

Mensonge is a comic novella which has until now been overlooked and described instead as a light work of humour or parody. One reason for this is because the mock-academic style is so well-sustained throughout its hundred and four pages; unlike *Pale Fire*, there are no moments of unreliability from which the reader can perceive a gap between the events of the novel and the presentation of those events. But a more significant reason is that *Mensonge* is, like an academic essay, narrated primarily through telling rather than showing. Indeed the entire mock-academic style of the novella is incredibly close to the humorous style of Bradbury's 'voice' in his more personal essays like 'Writer and Critic' (1987), which opens the collection *No, Not Bloomsbury*. In that essay, Bradbury describes himself as a 'writer and critic' and uses the conceit that these two parts of his intellectual career are in fact two different people who grow increasingly apart as literary theory develops:

---

[100] Malcolm Bradbury, *Mensonge* [1987] (Penguin, 1993), pp. 94-104.
[101] Bradbury, *Mensonge*, p. 26.
[102] Bradbury, *Mensonge*, p. 24.
[103] Bradbury, *Mensonge*, pp. 30-31.

> His [the critic's] habits grew secretive, he'd read all day, then go out at night; when I [the writer] had him followed I discovered he was attending meetings of Absurdists Anonymous. When he came back he'd pour himself a drink and say I didn't realise the world was constructed to an inhuman code; and writers who thought reality was just friendly old nice reality now bored him, he'd cry, looking hard at me. I reminded him of the old days, when he too believed in moral realism and deep seriousness. Leavis is dis-Kermoded, he'd say, if not entirely dis-Lodged; now we're working with structuralism. I recalled our earlier moment of liberation, when we put on our jeans and went to America; you're stuck he told me, with the wrong Levi-Strauss. And when I mentioned Marcuse to him, he just said Foucault.[104]

The comic treatment of literary theory in this essay functions primarily as the source of a mildly funny entertainment for knowing readers who are familiar with the likes of Frank Kermode, David Lodge, or Claude Lévi-Strauss. In *Mensonge*, Bradbury uses the same style, as he writes:

> What Barthes in that fine brief piece was able to prove, conclusively and to most of our satisfactions, was that the literary Author – the kind of author who goes around signing copies, claiming authority and wisdom for the books he likes to think he wrote, and suggesting indeed that he has accurately presented "reality" (never a good word to use these days) – is really an invention of bourgeois mercantile capitalism, probably only devised to let us find and buy the volumes in the bookstores without actually having to open every one up to try to discover who they were not by. For what Barthes asserted was indeed that they were not by anyone at all, or certainly not by their authors; for writers do not write but get written, and by *something outside themselves*. Of course we know this from experience; often it is a wife, an old aunt, the bank-manager, one's literary agent, or some new girl at the publishers who, unable to make head or tale of the stuff, sits down and rewrites it completely for clarity. Barthes however, argues more daringly that the responsible party is not another person at all, not being in favour of the concept. What writes books is in fact nothing other than history, culture, or to be more precise *language itself*. Indeed so effective is language that it has frequently arrived early in the morning, sat down at the typewriter, and as good as completed half

---

[104] Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury*, p. 17.

> a day's work before the average so-called author has even showered, dressed and got through his breakfast *croissant*.[105]

Both passages make use of the same exaggeration of theoretical ideas so as to produce comedy. Barthes did not argue that an autonomous '*language itself*' produces novels, but rather that the text's meaning is beyond the control of the person who writes it. But the latter is less ripe for comic treatment than the former. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, we might think of Bradbury's fictional treatment of Barthes as an example of the kind of 'poetic misreading' which Harold Bloom describes in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973). Bradbury creatively misread Barthes's ideas so as to make his comic treatment of them funnier to a knowing, peri-academic reader.

What links the style of *Mensonge* with 'Writer and Critic' and Bradbury's other personal essays is that both are narrated in a manner which tends more towards telling rather than showing. This is true of essays more generally, and it contradicts the perceived wisdom of fiction writing workshops that McGurl summarises as 'show don't tell'.[106] Bradbury uses the same style throughout his 2000 novel *To the Hermitage*, which plays with fact, fiction, and ideas about creativity and the creative process. The novel is told in chapters which alternate between NOW, when a fictional cipher for Bradbury narrates in the first-person a trip to Russia as part of an academic seminar called the Diderot Project, and THEN, when Denis Diderot himself makes his own trip to Russia to visit Catherine the Great's palatial 'Hermitage'. The THEN chapters are told in the third-person, narrated by the NOW's fictional Bradbury. Throughout the novel, long sequences of narration and digression begin with sets of questions, as we might expect in the introduction to an academic or personal essay, when the author sets the terms of their enquiry. The opening to the first NOW chapter, for instance, reads:

> So: where's the place? Stockholm, Sweden's fine watery capital, laid out on a web of islands at the core of the great archipelago. Time of day? Middle to late morning.

---

[105] Bradbury, *Mensonge*, pp. 21-22.
[106] McGurl, *The Program Era*, p. 23.

> Month? Let's see, the start of October, 1993. How's the weather? Cool, overcast, with bright sunny periods and occasional heavy showers. Who's coming on the journey? I think it's best to wait a bit and see.[107]

Bradbury takes this interrogative form of narration from Diderot himself. One of the epigraphs of *To the Hermitage* is the opening paragraph of Diderot's *Jacques the Fatalist* (1796), which reads: 'How did they meet? By chance, like everyone else. What were their names? What's that got to do with you? Where had they come from? The last place back down the road', and so on.[108] Diderot was a novelist as well as a critic, a philosopher, and a more general polymath. *Jacques the Fatalist* was written between 1765 and 1780 and published in 1796, more than a century before creative writing and literary criticism had been sufficiently defined and theorised; indeed *Jacques the Fatalist* was written before the novel had come to be defined and theorised as a distinct mode of writing separate from criticism or philosophy.

Both in 1796 and in 2000 the novel as a form has a singular quality, which Potter and Taunton describe as its 'constitutionally porous' nature: 'its ability to incorporate essays, philosophical tracts, political manifestos, and other extraliterary materials.'[109] As Mikhail Bakhtin theorises in the 1941 essay 'Epic and Novel':

> the novel often crosses the boundary of what we strictly call fictional literature – making use first of a moral confession, then of a philosophical tract, then of manifestos that are openly political, then degenerating into the raw spirituality of a confession, a "cry of the soul" that has not yet found its formal contours.[110]

Bradbury draws attention to this porous boundary in *To the Hermitage* by including within the text a conference paper given by the unnamed narrating protagonist. The paper, which has been written at the last minute and is titled 'A Paper That is Not a Paper' is written in the same style as the rest of the protagonist's narration, including interruptions from his audience. In 'A Paper That is Not a Paper', Bradbury presents *To the Hermitage*'s major critical intervention, the concept of ‘postmortemism’. This is a model of intertextuality and literary allusion in which contemporary writers consciously re-write the famous works of the past. As the protagonist explains: ‘the end of the story isn’t the end of the story at all. It’s simply the opening shot of the next story: the necrological sequel, the story of the writer’s after-life, the tale of the graveyard things that follow.’[111] Diderot’s *Jacques the Fatalist* began as a re-writing of Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1767), but as the fictional Bradbury explains, with interruptions from his audience:

---

[107] Bradbury, *To the Hermitage*, p. 9.

[108] Bradbury, *To the Hermitage*, p. xviii

[109] Potter and Taunton, 'Introduction: The British Novel of Ideas', p. 10.

[110] M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (ed.), (University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 33.

> Denis being Denis, the book that started out this way turned into something quite different. The wounded Uncle Toby turns into a fatalistic servant, bold enough to tell his master the one reason he’ll be remembered is because he had such a famous valet. (*BIRGITTA: Ah, my darling, I know what it is. Jacques the Fatalist And His Master …*) The servant became a significant figure of the day, in fact finally became – (*BIRGITTA: Figaro, of course, I told you that*). So we can say Sterne turns into Diderot; who turns into Beaumarchais; who turns into Mozart; who turns into Rossini. He also turns into Proust and Joyce, Beckett and Nabokov, and thus an essential part of our own literature. Instead of writing a book nobody would remember, because as Dr Johnson said nothing so odd can live long, he became the source of a whole tradition of stories, plays, operas – a classic case of Postmortemism.[112]

This model of literary allusion sees major ‘serious’ novelists – writers who were themselves ‘pressing at the edge of the genre’ before or after the wellspring of early twentieth-century literary modernism – as a tradition of intertextual responses, a tradition which *To the Hermitage* itself enters into. This idea of writing is not ‘creative’ in the sense that we usually understand the word – the sense of bringing something nonexistent into existence – but it is, crucially, not plagiarism. As the fictional Bradbury puts it: ‘I never steal. I simply inter-textualize.’[113] In his theorisation of the creative process as a process of rewriting, Bradbury acknowledges influence in a way which he had not – or indeed could not – in his earlier comic treatments of Barthes’s death of the Author. The serious novelist, like the literary critic, writes about other people’s words, but they do so creatively.

---

[111] Malcolm Bradbury, *To the Hermitage* [2000] (Picador, 2001), p. 153.
[112] Bradbury, *To the Hermitage*, p. 161.
[113] Bradbury, *To the Hermitage*, p. 162.

Conclusion

Bradbury's career as a critic, educator and novelist is marked by his theorisation of the serious novel as a form of enquiry and his repeated comic treatment of Barthes's death of the Author. But whereas *The History Man* and *Mensonge* exaggerate Barthes's argument for comic effect, the more generous and engaging use of Barthes's ideas in *To the Hermitage* results in a more intellectually and aesthetically stimulating novel. Archival records show that Bradbury's classroom engagements with the work of theorists and philosophers such as Barthes, Nietzsche and Freud were also more thoughtful and generous than his fiction, journalism or other public quips would have us think, such as his remark in the introduction to *Class Work* that 'it seemed somewhat strange for us [Bradbury and Wilson] to be announcing the Death of the Author in the classroom, then going straight back home to be one.'[114] The question, then, is why would Bradbury joke about theory in his fiction and journalism, then go straight to work to teach it?

For all the exaggerations and mocking comic treatments, Bradbury ultimately appreciated the questions that literary theory raised about language, representation, and fiction. To return to his 1981 Booker Prize speech, Bradbury says the serious novel is 'a form of enquiry,' not just into human behaviour and morality, but 'into the grammars and orders, the means and structures, by which we build up sufficient fictions of the world.'[115] And if the MA in Creative Writing was to be an MA in serious fiction, then the students would have to engage with these ideas about 'the grammars and orders, the means and structures'. Whether or not Bradbury found the death of the Author to be a truly risible idea is beside the point: the fact is that he understood the benefit of an MA in Creative Writing to be, as he puts it in 'The

---

[114] Bradbury, *Class Work*, p. viii.

[115] Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury*, pp. 372-373.

Bridgeable Gap', 'new relations between the "creative" and the "critical", both in individuals and in university culture too.'[116]

In 1998, three years after his retirement from teaching, Bradbury was invited to give the Andrew Wilkinson Memorial Lecture at UEA. The title was 'Creative Writing and the University', and the conclusion cast a despondent tone. Bradbury said:

> if you were to ask me now how I feel when – after twenty-five years – I have watched this subject move from fringe to centre, doubt to confidence, I can only say: yes, I do feel cheered, cheered above all by those truly good writers and truly good books that I have seen come out from some of it. But I also have to add that, when I see it surrounded by so many pretensions, so many claims, so many false hopes and, sooner or later, so many disappointed careers, well, I do sometimes wonder just what we in creative writing have all been creating...[117]

Bradbury articulates here, in his fear of 'pretensions', the beginning of a trend of specialisation which would see the UEA MA in Creative Writing move further and further away from the work of literary critics. Creative Writing is now seen to be a subject in its own right, and the UEA Creative Writers are now no longer obliged to take a critical module each semester. Indeed, as I mentioned in the introduction, a student on the MA Creative Writing Prose Fiction in the year 2024–2025 could complete the degree and graduate without writing a single critical essay or meeting a single literary critic. The UEA MA is, in 2024, understood to be not so much a site for 'new relations between the "creative" and the "critical"' than an opportunity for writers to discuss their work together, away from critics and theorists. The result of this gap between creative writing and literary criticism is, if not an increase in 'pretensions' among writing students, then certainly a lack of appreciation for 'the grammars and orders, the means and structures, by which we build up sufficient fictions of the world.'

A renewed attention to Bradbury's idea of the serious novel should therefore be encouraged, not least because it provides a useful counterpoint to one of the more enduring ideas of contemporary fiction which, following the example of Henry James, sees the novel primarily as a form for exploring character and psychology. If we wish to move past an idea of the novel as a Jamesian portrait of the mind and towards a mode of fiction which is as rich intellectually as it is aesthetically, then Bradbury's serious novel would make for a good place to start.

---

[116] Bradbury, 'The Bridgeable Gap', p. 7.

[117] 'Creative Writing and the University' [unpaginated print-out], UEA/BRAD/22, UEA Collection: Malcolm Bradbury, British Archive for Contemporary Writing, University of East Anglia.

Chapter Two

David Lodge's dialogism

Why write a novel rather than a critical work? What is available to the novelist which is unavailable to the critic or theorist? And what intellectual moves are available to the comic novelist, in particular? The work of a prolific novelist-academic like David Lodge presents the opportunity to explore such questions. As Lodge writes in the introduction to his 1990 collection *After Bakhtin*:

> I have always regarded myself as having a foot in both camps – the world of academic scholarship and higher education, and the world of literary culture at large, in which books are written, published, discussed and consumed for profit and pleasure in all senses of those words. Over many years I have published a book of criticism and a work of fiction in alternation. I took a keen interest in the developments of literary theory that arose out of European structuralism – learned from them, applied them, domesticated and cannibalized them in criticism and literary journalism, and satirized and carnivalized them in my novels, all in an effort (not always conscious) to encourage the circulation of ideas between two worlds of discourse. But undoubtedly this bridging posture has become increasingly difficult to maintain as the professionalization of academic criticism has opened up a widening gap between it and "lay" discussion of literature.[1]

This 'bridging posture' between 'academic criticism […] and "lay" discussion of literature' is evident in Lodge's collections of critical and theoretical essays, such as *Working with Structuralism* (1981) or *The Art of Fiction* (1992), which were published in affordable paperback editions and written, as Lodge writes in the preface to each, to communicate ideas from the academic sphere to an extramural audience, which he refers to both as the 'common reader' as well as 'a more general reading public'.[2] But alongside this democratising intellectual project, Lodge also wrote comic novels of ideas in which he 'satirized and carnivalized' the ideas of literary theory. This chapter reads four of these novels written between 1975, the year before Lodge was made Professor of Modern English Literature at the

---

[1] David Lodge, *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (Routledge, 1990), pp. 7-8.

[2] David Lodge, *Working with Structuralism* [1981] (ARK, 1986), p. vii; David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction* [1992] (Vintage, 2011), p. ix.

University of Birmingham, and 1988, the year after his retirement from academia, to consider what might be possible in a comic novel of ideas which is not possible in a work of popular criticism. Those novels are *Changing Places* (1975), *How Far Can You Go?* (1980), *Small World* (1984), and *Nice Work* (1988). The first, third, and fourth of these are often grouped together as the 'campus' or 'Rummidge' trilogy: they share minor characters – mostly academics in English departments – and the setting of Rummidge, a fictional city in the Midlands equivalent to Birmingham. I include *How Far Can You Go?* alongside my reading of the Rummidge trilogy because it is also a metafictional novel of ideas: in it, Lodge satirizes and carnivalizes both the doctrines of the Catholic Church as well as the arguments of liberal Catholics in the aftermath of the so-called sexual revolution.

My reading of Lodge's novels will refer to the work of the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), in particular his concept of 'dialogism'. As Peter Womack explains, the term 'dialogism' refers to '[t]he principle […] that speech is formed not by a single speaker but by the interaction of multiple speakers with differing intentions and meanings.'[3] Bakhtin posited that language itself is essentially dialogic, in that it contains an inherent doubleness and an orientation towards a plurality of voices. He writes in *The Dialogic Imagination*, first published posthumously in 1981, that '[t]he word in living conversation is directly, blatantly oriented towards a future answer word. It provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction.'[4] Although Bakhtin refers here to 'living conversation', he theorised that the novel was unique among other forms of writing – literary or otherwise – in that it was most capable of realising the dialogism inherent in spoken language. Perhaps his most famous passage, taken from *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, published again posthumously in 1984, reads:

---

[3] Peter Womack, *Dialogue* (Routledge, 2010), p. 152.

[4] M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (ed.), (University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 280

> The possibility of employing on the plane of a single work discourses of various types, with all their expressive capacities intact, without reducing them to a single common denominator – this is one of the most fundamental characteristics of prose. Herein lies the profound distinction between prose style and poetic style […] For the prose artist the world is full of other people's words, among which he must orient himself and whose speech characteristics he must be able to perceive with a very keen ear. He must introduce them into the plane of his own discourse, but in such a way that this plane is not destroyed. He works with a very rich verbal palette.[5]

Lodge, who was greatly influenced by his reading of Bakhtin's posthumously published work in the early 1980s, explains:

> The dialogic includes, but is not restricted to, the quoted verbal speech of characters. It also includes the relationship between the characters' discourses and the author's discourse (if represented in the text) and between all these discourses and other discourses outside the text, which are imitated or evoked or alluded to by means of doubly-oriented speech. It is of course true that everything in a novel is put there by the novelist – in this sense the literary text is not, like a real conversation, a totally open system. But it is Bakhtin's point that the variety of discourses in the novel prevents the novelist from imposing a single world-view upon his readers even if he wanted to. […] There is an indissoluble link in Bakhtin's theory between the linguistic variety of prose fiction, which he called heteroglossia, and its cultural function as the continuous critique of all repressive, authoritarian, one-eyed ideologies.[6]

It is this resistance to 'imposing a single world-view' which distinguishes fiction from other forms; as Lodge writes, 'the canonic genres – tragedy, epic, lyric – suppressed this inherently dialogic quality of language' in an attempt 'to establish a single style, a single voice, with which to express a single world-view.' They are therefore referred to as 'monologic'.[7]

Though academic scholarship is written in prose, Lodge argues that it tends toward monologism rather than dialogism. This is because, for Lodge at least, scholarly writing suppresses the 'heteroglossia' of prose in favour of a single style, that of the argumentative essay. As Lodge writes in 'After Bakhtin', the title essay of the 1990 collection:

> The professional scholar typically states his opinions as if they were facts, and avoids the pronouns "I" and "you", preferring the consensual terms "we" and "the reader", which bind together both addresser and addressee in a fiction of solidarity and agreement.[8]

---

[5] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 7, quoting from Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. Caryl Emerson (University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 200-201.

[6] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 22.

[7] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 21, p. 58.

[8] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 93.

Though this idea is convincing to a point, it is clearly an oversimplification: scholarly writing, in particular academic literary criticism, is largely dependent upon direct quotation, which is necessarily the language of another person; in the same way, a scholarly article or chapter typically begins with a literature review, which stages different arguments in colloquy. To Lodge, however, neither direct quotation nor the literature review constitute dialogue; rather: 'scholarly discourse aspires to the condition of monologue inasmuch as it tries to say the last word on a given subject, to affirm its mastery over all previous words on that subject.'[9] Lodge therefore sees the modern academic essay as inherently monologic, even when it is written for an extramural audience, because it suppresses the possibility of Bakhtin's 'future answer word'. And yet this argument, which is an extension of Bakhtin's work rather than an example taken from it, is less convincing when we think of the fact that most academics see their work as a contribution to the ongoing work of their field rather than a 'last word'. Indeed, it remains the case that one of the most common measures of the relative success of a work of scholarship is the number of times it is cited in future books and articles.

Yet despite the limitations of Lodge's rather crude verdict that scholarly writing 'aspires to the condition of monologue', this idea was enormously generative for his practice as a novelist in that it led him to explore how the comic novel of ideas might allow for a more enlivened, more dialogic discussion of intellectual arguments and concepts. Lodge's comic novels of ideas expose the reader to various ideas or academic theories – such as different schools of literary theory in *Small World*, or different arguments about the function of the university in *Nice Work* – without privileging a single world-view or ideology. Rather than attempting to give a last word on the ideas they satirize and carnivalize, the novels leave the discussions, tensions and contradictions unresolved, in an effort to encourage the reader to realise their own 'future answer word'. Although much of the dialogism is heightened or created by the comic effects of these novels, I will use the term 'dialogic novel of ideas' rather than comic novel of ideas in the disciussion that follows, so as to include that writing which is not overtly funny. This term also emphasises the argument that it is the novel's dialogism which enables and enriches the intellectual discussion contained within the novels.

---

[9] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 94.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first considers Lodge's own critical and theoretical writing on Bakhtin and the dialogic novel, and how this work fits into Lodge's broader intellectual project, that 'bridging posture' between the academy and the general reader. The discussion considers Lodge's interest in Bakhtin within the context of his academic interest in contemporary literary theory as well as his other extramural projects, namely the collection *Working with Structuralism* and the TV documentary *Big Words… Small Worlds*, which aired on Channel 4 in 1987. What links these various projects is not just the attempt at a 'bridging posture', but also a set of assumptions about the function of criticism, namely, as Chris Baldick puts it, the expectation of 'theories of literature to be not just interesting in themselves but beneficial in "practical" elucidation of texts.'[10] The second section then turns to a reading of the four novels – *Changing Places*, *How Far Can You Go?*, *Small World*, and *Nice Work* – as dialogic novels of ideas. In doing so I refute a reading of Lodge's campus satires which has misrepresented him as both a reactionary and an inherently conservative novelist. It is the contention of this chapter that, by nature of his dialogic treatment of intellectual concepts, where no single character or narrator is given a monologising 'final' word, Lodge brings the reader into an active intellectual participation with these concepts by encouraging them to draw their own conclusions. This is not a reactionary or conservative move per se, although it is a liberal one. As Womack points out, the very concept of dialogue has long been associated with 'the values of liberal politics', in the sense that 'everyone's point of view is valid in its own way, and the truest and wisest conclusions are reached through a discussion in which everyone gets a fair crack of the whip.'[11] There are obvious limitations to this idea, not least the fact that 'everyone's point of view' includes the prejudices of, for instance, fascist thugs. But Womack continues by arguing that '[d]ialogue is the discursive form of democracy', in that 'it means talking to someone in the expectation that they will talk back on the same basis, thus positing a formal equality between speaker and addressee.'[12] Despite the limitations of Lodge's liberal posture, this chapter seeks to explore how such a move can be used to enliven, challenge, and ultimately democratise academic literary criticism.

---

[10] Chris Baldick, *Criticism and Literary Theory 1890 to the Present* (Longman, 1996), p. 168.

I. The Novelist-Academic

The two central priorities of Lodge's critical project are aptly summarised by the following remark from I. A. Richards, which Lodge himself quotes in the introduction to *After Bakhtin*: 'The two pillars upon which a theory of criticism must rest […] are an account of value and an account of communication.'[13] In his critical writing and teaching, Lodge sought to provide a critical and theoretical account of the value of realist fiction, which had been, in the first decades of the twentieth century, either neglected in favour of the linguistic experiments of modernist writing, or subjected to a superficial moral reading. As Lodge points out, 'the Russian formalists provided a theoretical justification for avant-garde writing by their emphasis on the "defamiliarizing" function of all art.'[14] But what theory could provide a justification for realist fiction? Rather than turning to the sophisticated theoretical defences of realism made by an earlier generation of twentieth-century critics – notably Erich Auerbach in *Mimesis* (1953) and György Lukács in *Studies in European Realism* (1950) – Lodge began his theorisation of the novel by adapting the procedures of the Anglo-American New Critics, specifically their practices of close reading. As Lodge puts it in his first monograph, *Language of Fiction* (1966):

---

[11] Womack, *Dialogue*, p. 6.
[12] Womack, *Dialogue*, p. 6.
[13] I. A. Richards, quoted in Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 4.
[14] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 1.

> if we are right to regard the art of poetry as an art of language, then so is the art of the novel; […] the critic of the novel has no special dispensation from that close and sensitive engagement with language we naturally expect from the critic of poetry.[15]

In his later monograph *After Bakhtin*, which appeared in 1990, Lodge writes that the above quotation from *Language of Fiction* 'derives' from Mark Shorer's essay 'Technique as Discovery' (1948), in which Shorer argued that 'technique [in fiction] is thought of in blunter terms than those which one associates with poetry'.[16] Lodge argues that Shorer's argument is emblematic of the 'dismissive attitude' that the New Critics had towards the novel; as Lodge puts it, the New Critics 'downgraded' the 'specifically narrative elements of a literary text.'[17] Lodge would, as he explains in *After Bakhtin*, go on to find this close attention to the functions of narrative in the work of narratologists such as Tzvetan Todorov, Gérard Genette, Roman Jakobson, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Seymour Chatman, which provided him with 'a poetics of fiction' that considered both 'the "deep structure" of a text, where the raw story-stuff is organized in terms of sequence, point of view, etc.,' as well as 'its surface realization in a specific verbal form.'[18]

Lodge's critical writing throughout the 1970s and early 1980s is marked by his engagement with the work of structuralists, albeit the work of 'classic structuralism', as opposed to poststructuralism; Lodge made the distinction between these 'two main branches' in the preface to his 1981 collection *Working with Structuralism*, first published by ARK paperbacks, an imprint of the academic publisher Routledge.[19] Lodge describes the work of 'classic' structuralism, including the work of those narratologists listed above, as an attempt

---

[15] David Lodge, *Language of Fiction* [1966] (Routledge, 2001), p. 47.

[16] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 5; Mark Shorer, 'Technique as Discovery', *The Hudson Review* 1.1 (1948), pp. 67-87 (p. 68).

[17] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 5.

[18] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 5.

[19] Lodge, *Working with Structuralism*, p. ix.

> to do for literature – or myth, or food or fashion – what grammar does for language: to understand and explain how these systems work, what are the rules and constraints within which, and by virtue of which, meaning is generated and communicated.[20]

The second branch, poststructuralism, includes the work of Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, and Jacques Derrida, and 'is ideological in orientation'.[21] Lodge describes it as a combination of 'the anti-empirical methodology of classical structuralism with ideas derived from Marxism, psychoanalysis and philosophy, to analyse cultural institutions, such as literature, as mediations of ideologies. This structuralism is polemical and *engagé*.'[22] Lodge's reservations about poststructuralism, deconstruction, and the hermeneutics of suspicion correspond with Bradbury's – as discussed in the previous chapter – and likewise originate from Lodge's practice as a writer. Lodge refers in *After Bakhtin* to the 'the writer's creative and communicative power', which 'structuralism (implicitly) and post-structuralism (explicitly) have sought to discredit and replace with theories of the autonomous productivity of texts and their readers.'[23] Lodge justifies his rejection of these developments by invoking the general reader: 'Readers outside the academy […] continue to believe in the existence and importance of authors. This is one of several issues that have created a barrier of non-comprehension between academic and non-academic discussion of literature'.[24]

Lodge's *Working with Structuralism* applies the ideas and methods of 'classical' structuralism, albeit in only the first five of the fifteen essays. Baldick writes that 'Lodge's adaptation of structuralism is much more recognizably in the English tradition of "close reading",' in that the theory itself is secondary to the 'elucidation' of the text.[25] While the book is plainly open to the developments of structuralism, the perspective Baldick describes is evident in the tone of the preface, in which Lodge describes the 'massive swing of attention towards Continental structuralism' as 'the most striking development of the last twenty years', continuing:

---

[20] Lodge, *Working with Structuralism*, p. ix.
[21] Lodge, *Working with Structuralism*, p. ix.
[22] Lodge, *Working with Structuralism*, p. ix.
[23] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 7.
[24] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 7.
[25] Baldick, *Criticism and Literary Theory 1890 to the Present*, p. 168.

> if the allegiances of the brightest young university teachers and graduate students are any guide, that battle has already been lost (or won, according to your point of view), and the question is what to do in the aftermath: how to work with structuralism, not only in the sense of applying it when it seems useful to do so, but also in the sense of working *alongside* it, recognising its existence as a fact of intellectual life without being totally dominated by it. I have called this book *Working with Structuralism*, but it might as well have been called *Living with Structuralism*.[26]

As Bernard Bergonzi points out, this language of 'allegiances' and 'battle' is 'reminiscent of those collaborationists in the Second World War who were convinced of the victory of the Third Reich and resigned themselves to "working with the Germans".'[27] Nevertheless, Lodge does make clear the importance of these new developments: 'For the professionals who know how to operate structuralist methodology […] there is no question of going back to something less precise, less powerful and less productive.'[28] The book is therefore an attempt to bring these developments to 'the layman' and 'the common reader', to whom 'the huge intellectual advances' made in literary criticism – including classical structuralism – are 'incomprehensible'. As referred to in the introduction to this thesis, Lodge writes that this 'is not simply a matter of jargon – though that is a real stumbling block', but rather the fact that such developments run 'counter to empirical observation and common sense.'[29] The invocation of 'common sense' is worth noting, if only because it complicates the idea of the common reader: is the common reader a 'common sense' reader? In what ways might the appeal to a 'common sense' be naïve, and how might it undermine the democratic impulse of Lodge's project? Peter Widdowson, for example, emphasises in a 1984 essay Lodge's 'liberal fear of politics and the political', arguing:

> Lodge's critical work represents an attempt to clear a space in which his own kind of fiction can operate; to neutralise and incorporate other more challenging forms of

---

[26] Lodge, *Working with Structuralism*, p. viii.
[27] Bernard Bergonzi, *David Lodge* (Northcote House, 1995), p. 54.
[28] Lodge, *Working with Structuralism*, p. viii.
[29] Lodge, *Working with Structuralism*, p. vii.

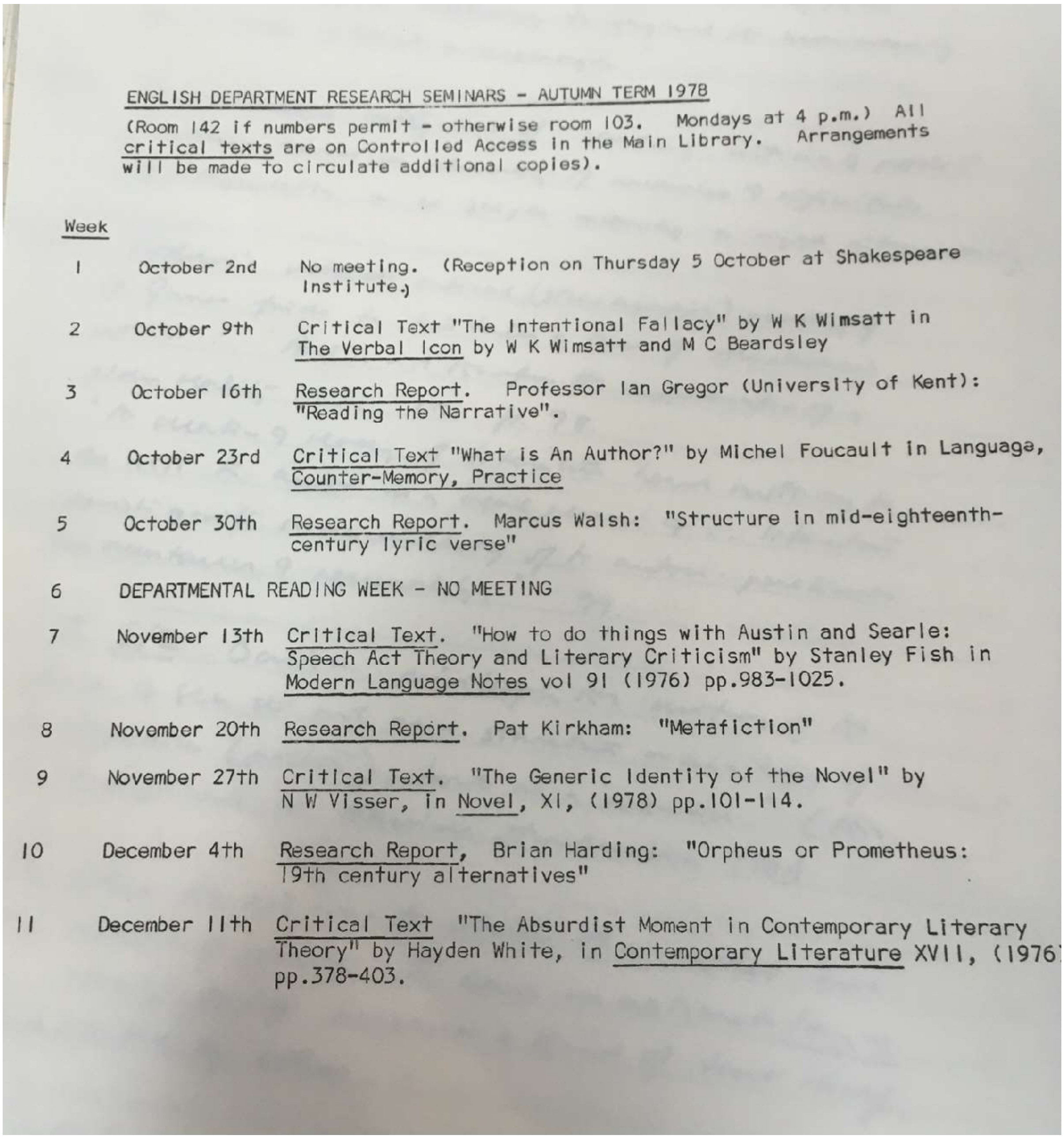
> criticism (especially post-structuralist and Marxist modes); and to offer, as a practising critic, discrete formalist analyses of particular writers and texts which interest him.[30]

While Widdowson is right to point out that Lodge's application of structuralist ideas in his criticism began from an attempt to develop a poetics of the novel, this judgement of Lodge's work understates the democratic motivations behind *Working with Structuralism*, as well as the obvious social value of bringing the ideas of structuralism to a readership beyond the academy.

In his own teaching career, Lodge was never simply 'against' the ideas of poststructuralism and deconstruction. In fact, as Professor of Modern English Literature at the University of Birmingham, Lodge was instrumental in the dissemination of these ideas both within and outside the institution. Archival records held at the University of Birmingham's Cadbury Research Library show that Lodge organised a regular English department research seminar in which faculty and postgraduate students met to discuss either a research report by one of the participants or a published 'critical text'. Seminars were held in Lodge's office on Monday evenings. The earliest programme, from Autumn 1978 – reproduced on the next page – demonstrates the seminar's scope. Beginning with a canonical essay from the New Criticism, the Autumn 1978 programme goes on to discuss a key text of poststructuralist theory, Foucault's 'What is an Author?' (1969), as well as an essay by the reader-response critic Stanley Fish. In subsequent semesters the seminar would continue to discuss the developments of poststructuralist literary theory, and by Autumn 1982 the seminar was named 'Research Seminar: Post-Renaissance Literature and Critical Theory' to reflect this focus. Other 'critical texts' discussed over the years were Fish, *Is There A Text In This Class?* (1980) and Hélène Cixous, 'Introduction to Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*' (1982) in Spring 1983, and Derrida, 'The Law of Genre' (1980) and Paul Ricœur, 'Narrative Time' (1980) in Autumn 1985.

---

[30] Peter Widdowson, 'The anti-history men: Malcolm Bradbury and David Lodge', *Critical Quarterly* 26.4 (1984), pp. 5-32 (p. 16).



ENGLISH DEPARTMENT RESEARCH SEMINARS - AUTUMN TERM 1978

(Room 142 if numbers permit - otherwise room 103. Mondays at 4 p.m.) All critical texts are on Controlled Access in the Main Library. Arrangements will be made to circulate additional copies).

Week		
1	October 2nd	No meeting. (Reception on Thursday 5 October at Shakespeare Institute.)
2	October 9th	Critical Text "The Intentional Fallacy" by W K Wimsatt in The Verbal Icon by W K Wimsatt and M C Beardsley
3	October 16th	Research Report. Professor Ian Gregor (University of Kent): "Reading the Narrative".
4	October 23rd	Critical Text "What is An Author?" by Michel Foucault in Language, Counter-Memory, Practice
5	October 30th	Research Report. Marcus Walsh: "Structure in mid-eighteenth-century lyric verse"
6	DEPARTMENTAL READING WEEK - NO MEETING	
7	November 13th	Critical Text. "How to do things with Austin and Searle: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism" by Stanley Fish in Modern Language Notes vol 91 (1976) pp.983-1025.
8	November 20th	Research Report. Pat Kirkham: "Metafiction"
9	November 27th	Critical Text. "The Generic Identity of the Novel" by N W Visser, in Novel, XI, (1978) pp.101-114.
10	December 4th	Research Report, Brian Harding: "Orpheus or Prometheus: 19th century alternatives"
11	December 11th	Critical Text "The Absurdist Moment in Contemporary Literary Theory" by Hayden White, in Contemporary Literature XVII, (1976 pp.378-403.

Figure 5. English Department Research Seminars, University of Birmingham (1978).[31]

In 1987, Lodge began preparing his *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* (1988), the third edition of which was published in 2008 and is still included on reading lists for university courses in literary theory to this day. The book is a counterpart to Lodge's earlier *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism: A Reader* (1972), which mainly comprised essays of

---

[31] 'English Department Research Seminars – Autumn 1978', Box 38, Folder 6, The David Lodge Papers, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

Anglo-American New Criticism and practical criticism such as T. S. Eliot, 'The Function of Criticism' (1923) and I. A. Richards, 'Communication and the Artist' (1924), as well as short essays by practising writers, including Henry James, 'Preface to *The Ambassadors*' (1909), Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction' (1919), and D. H. Lawrence, 'Why the Novel Matters' (1936), although a select few articles of 'classical structuralism' were also included, namely Northrop Frye, 'The Archetypes of Literature' (1951), Lévi-Strauss, 'Incest and Myth' (1960), and Roland Barthes, 'Criticism and Language' (1964). Intended for university students, the principle behind the first *Reader* was critical plurality, as Lodge writes in the foreword:

> Works of literature have their meaning, and their very existence, in a continual stream of human conversation *about* them, which at its most formalized and articulate we call literary criticism. [….] no single method of approach can answer all the questions that may legitimately be asked about a work of literature, nor exhaust the sources of possible interest within it.[32]

The second anthology, *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, was organised by the same principle of critical plurality. As Lodge explains in the foreword, the collection 'stretched the sense of "Modern" criticism or theory' to include writing from the beginning of the twentieth century and earlier, 'to allow more of an unmediated exposure to earlier influences.'[33] The collection therefore began with two extracts from *The German Ideology* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, written between 1845 and 1846. Other extracts included Lacan, 'The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious' (1957), Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' (1978), Foucault, 'What is an Author?', Wolfgang Iser, 'The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach' (1972), Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' (1967), Cixous, 'Sorties' (1975), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'The Beast in the Closet' (1986), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Questions of Multi-Culturalism' (1986), and Judith Butler, 'Critically Queer' (1996). But as well as these critical examples of poststructuralism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, feminism, and postcolonialism, the collection also included E. D. Hirsch Jr.'s re-affirmation of traditional literary scholarship, 'In Defense of the Author' (1967) as well as examples of 'classical' structuralism, such as an extract from Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1915), Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics' (1958) and Todorov, 'The Typology of Detective Fiction' (1966).

---

[32] David Lodge, *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism: A Reader* (Longman, 1972), p. xvii.

[33] David Lodge, *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* [1988] (Routledge, 2008), p. xvii.

Despite his engagement with various modes of literary theory, including poststructuralism and deconstruction, Lodge's growing interest in Bakhtin throughout the 1980s was motivated by certain anxieties about the function of criticism, in particular 'the opposition of humanist and post-structuralist viewpoints'.[34] Lodge equates the humanist viewpoint with what Catherine Belsey terms 'expressive realism', that is, 'that novels arise out of their authors' experience and observation of life, [and] that they are works of verbal mimesis'.[35] As he did in *Working with Structuralism*, Lodge writes in *After Bakhtin* that these 'theses […] are based on common sense, the grounds for believing them are self-evident.'[36] Correspondingly, Lodge writes that 'The grounds for believing the antithetical propositions [of contemporary literary theory] are not self-evident'; but, in an interesting move, he then suggests that this is the very reason for their 'value': by articulating these 'antithetical propositions', literary theory 'prevents – or would prevent if it were more accessible – the total dominance of our literary culture by expressive realism.'[37] These remarks go some way to explaining the apparent contradiction between Lodge's appeals to 'common sense' and his evident interest in the developments of literary theory. Rather than, as Widdowson sees it, an attempt to 'neutralise' the 'more challenging forms of criticism' in favour of humanism or 'expressive realism', Lodge's own exposition and dissemination of these forms challenges the otherwise 'total dominance' of humanist criticism. As Lodge writes elsewhere in *After Bakhtin*, Bakhtin's formulation of language as social and dialogic 'gets us off the hook of deconstructionist scepticism about the possibility of meaning' without 'having desperately to defend the possibility of a fixed or stable meaning in isolated utterances'. Rather, 'meaning exists in the process of intersubjective communication, since no utterance ever is truly isolated.'[38]

---

[34] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 21.
[35] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 17.
[36] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 17.
[37] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 17.

This idea of meaning as a 'process of intersubjective communication' is central to Lodge's application of Bakhtin to the novel, and it provides the poetics of fiction Lodge had been seeking from the beginning of his academic career. As he puts it in *After Bakhtin*: 'the total meaning of a given novel is mediated through a plurality of voices, some, on occasion all, of which cannot be treated as the author's.'[39] The realisation of this idea allows for a reading of a novel which takes into account both the intended effects of certain aesthetic decisions made by the author as well as the possibility of unintended meanings within the text. Lodge writes that most novel criticism, including his own *Language of Fiction*, 'invariably choose[s] a passage of narrative description that is either authorial, or focused through a character with whom the implied author is in sympathy', and in doing so 'look[s] for something like the equivalent of the lyric voice in poetry – some unified and homogenous verbal expression of the author's personal vision of the world.' But prose fiction is rarely so homogenous, and 'the unique quality of an individual writer's vision of the world and experience may be conveyed just as effectively through the reproduction and manipulation of voices other than his own.'[40]

This 'reproduction and manipulation of voices' can be in the form of dialogue between characters but also quotation, intertextual references, or irony. It is worth quoting at length from Lodge's summary of Bakhtin's 'typology of fictional discourse', which will be central to the close readings in the following section. Lodge writes:

There are three principal categories:

---

[38] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, pp. 57-58.
[39] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 76.
[40] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 76.

> 1. *The direct speech of the author.* This means the author as encoded in the text, in an "objective", reliable, narrative voice.
>
> 2. *The represented speech of the characters*. This may be represented by direct speech ("dialogue" in the non-Bakhtinian sense): or by the convention of soliloquy or interior monologue: or in those elements of reported speech which belong to the language of the character rather than the narrator in free indirect style.
>
> 3. *Doubly-oriented or doubly-voiced speech*. This category was Bakhtin's most original and valuable contribution to stylistic analysis. It includes all speech which not only refers to something in the world but also refers to another speech act by another addresser. It is divided into several subcategories, of which the most important are stylization, *skaz*, parody and hidden polemic. *Stylization* occurs when the writer borrows another's discourse and uses it for his own purposes – with the same general intention as the original, but in the process casting "a slight shadow of objectification over it". This objectification may be used to establish a distance between the narrator and the implied author, especially when the narrator is an individualized character, perhaps narrating his own story. When such narration has the characteristics of oral discourse it is designated *skaz* in the Russian critical tradition, though Bakhtin argues that the "oral" quality is less important than the adoption of another's discourse for one's own aesthetic and expressive purposes. Stylization is to be distinguished from *parody*, when another's discourse is borrowed but turned to a purpose opposite or incongruous with the intention of the original. In both stylization and parody, the original discourse is lexically or grammatically evoked in the text. But there is another kind of doubly-oriented discourse which refers to, answers, or otherwise takes into account another speech act never articulated in the text: *hidden polemic* is Bakhtin's suggestive name for one of the most common forms of doubly-oriented discourse.[41]

The interplay of these discourses – direct speech, represented speech, and doubly-oriented speech – is central to prose fiction, both at the level of the paragraph and even at the level of the sentence. As Bakhtin asserts, the 'possibility of employing on the plane of a single work discourses of various types, with all their expressive capacities intact, without reducing them to a single common denominator [...] is one of the most fundamental characteristics of prose.'[42]

Lodge found Bakhtin's 'typology of fictional discourse' to be enormously generative, and he applies the typology to a range of novels in a number of the essays which comprise *After Bakhtin*, from George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872) to James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). Lodge writes that '[e]ven in the so-called classic realist text, and still more obviously in modern fiction in the realist tradition', there is 'an amazing variety of discursive texture, and a surprising degree of interpretative freedom for the reader.'[43] In the essay '*Middlemarch* and the idea of the classic realist text', which had originally been presented as a paper at the George Eliot Centenary Conference held at the University of Leicester in July 1980, Lodge complicates the argument made by Colin MacCabe in *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word* (1979), that Eliot's novel is representative of 'the classic realist text' in which – as Lodge summarises it – 'the narrative discourse acts as a "metalanguage", controlling, interpreting and judging the other discourses, and thus putting the reader in a position of dominance over the characters and their stories.'[44] This is contrasted with the work of Joyce, who 'refuses to privilege one discourse over another in his writing, or to privilege the reader's position *vis-à-vis* the text'.[45] Lodge points out that the term 'metalanguage' really refers to 'the convention of the omniscient and intrusive narrator, which has a venerable history as a subject of contention in criticism of [Eliot's] work.'[46] Through a series of skilful, 'slow motion' close readings, Lodge demonstrates that the author-narrator of *Middlemarch* in fact combines direct speech – which I will refer to in this chapter as 'direct report' – and represented speech in such a way that 'the authorial commentary, so far from telling the reader what to think, or putting him in a position of dominance in relation to the discourse of the characters, constantly forces him to think for himself, and constantly implicates him in the moral judgements being formulated.'[47] Eliot therefore engages the imaginative faculties of the reader, and in doing so emphasises 'the indeterminacy that lurks in all efforts at human communication […] in the very act of apparently denying it through the use of an intrusive "omniscient" authorial voice.'[48] Lodge's essay demonstrates not only a deft example of a Bakhtinian reading of a realist novel, but also the existence of subtle ironies within the ‘classic realist text’ which are left unaccounted for in MacCabe’s well-known critique.

---

[41] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, pp. 59-60.
[42] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 7.

---

[43] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 86.
[44] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, pp. 46-47.
[45] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, pp. 46-47.
[46] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 47.
[47] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 53.
[48] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 56.

The title essay of the collection, ‘After Bakhtin’, was originally given as a paper at the Linguistics of Writing conference, held at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow in the summer of 1986. *Big Words… Small Worlds*, Lodge’s seventy-five-minute documentary about the conference, was produced by MacCabe and broadcast on Channel 4 at 8.45pm on Monday 22nd November 1987. The documentary included footage of lectures and discussion by the likes of Belsey, Derrida, Fish, Jane Tompkins, and Raymond Williams, as well as interviews filmed after the conference with Edward Said, Fredric Jameson, Terry Eagleton, Rosalind Coward, and Stuart Hall, among others. As a cultural artefact, the programme is remarkable for presenting these figures and their ideas to the British television-watching public on a Monday evening. The documentary is presented by Lodge in a television studio made out to look like a

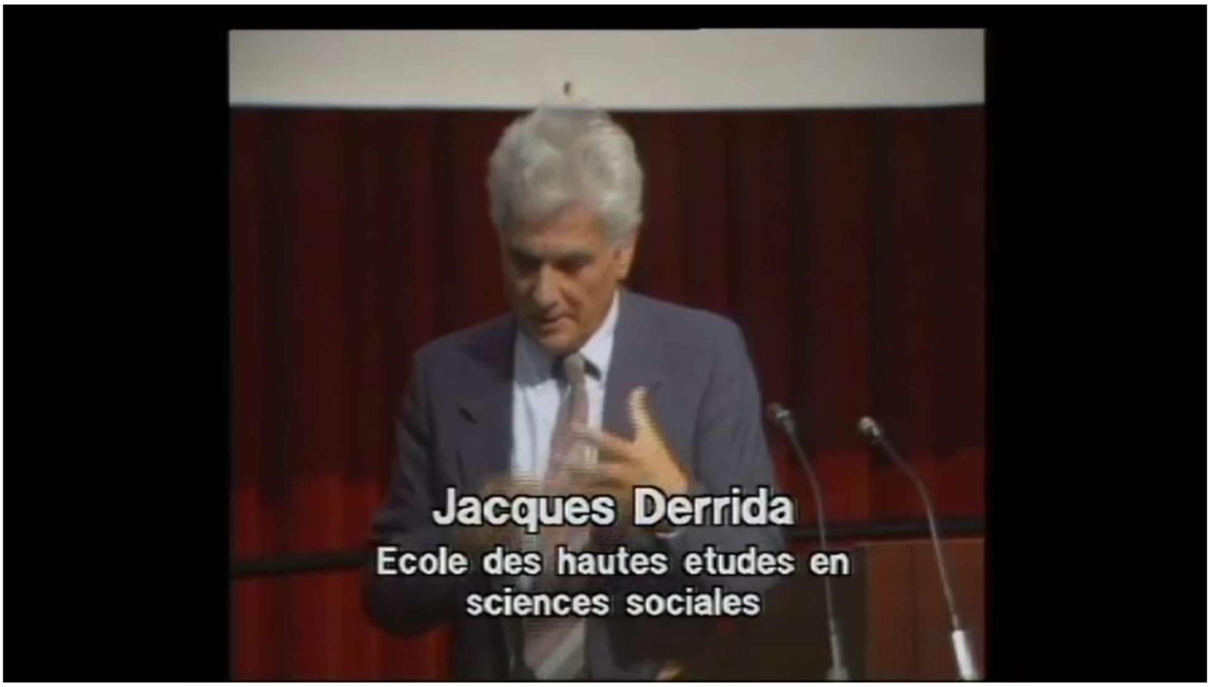


Figure 6. Derrida at the lectern (1987).[49]

---

[49] *Big Words… Small Worlds*, Channel 4, 22nd November 1987.

modern academic's office, complete with book-lined shelves and filing cabinets, with occasional voice over laid on top of footage from the conference. Lodge is presented in the programme as a knowing guide, at once part of the 'small world' of academia but also outside it, teasing those who are fully immersed. His speech to the viewer begins:

> On what turned out to be one of the hottest weekends in the summer of 1986, some three hundred people from every corner of the globe converged on the city of Glasgow to sit from morning till night in a crowded and stuffy room, listening to lectures with titles like "Functionalism and Stylistics", "Directions from Structuralism" and "On Syllable Counting Verse and Pattern Poetry in the Old Testament". […] This behaviour, which might seem mystifying or perverse to an outsider, is in fact a very common feature of modern academic life.[50]

From the beginning, Lodge establishes an opposition between academics on the one hand and the television-watching public on the other. The tensions inherent in Lodge's position as both conference participant and knowing, shaping documentary maker are directly addressed in the programme, in an entertaining scene where Lodge and MacCabe break the fourth wall. Presenting to the camera, Lodge explains the ideas of the monologic and the dialogic to the viewer. I transcribe the scene as follows:

> Lodge (*voice over*): The more dialogic a discourse is, the more open it is not only to a multiplicity of viewpoints, but also to confusion, imprecision, mistakes and cross-purposes. (*Cut to close-up of audience member who is asleep*) Conversely, the more monologic a discourse is, the more lucid and coherent it is likely to be, but at the expense of others' freedom to respond.
>
> Lodge (*to camera*): Take the narrated TV documentary, for instance. I speak to you in a style that has the superficial appearance of spontaneous speech, but in fact I am reading a text off an autocue. (*Cut to close-up of autocue*) A text that's been carefully written, revised, and polished to combine maximum information with economy of words. And, of course, to project me as a shrewd, reliable, amiable fellow. (*Back to Lodge*) Several people have had a hand in making this film, and many others are quoted within it. But the fact that it's all framed within *my* discourse gives me enormous power to impose my view of the event. —
>
> MacCabe: But look, David, it's just not good enough to point out the form, we've got to find some way of actually breaking it, of breaking your control of the material, I think.
>
> Lodge: Well, what have you got in mind?

---

[50] *Big Words… Small Worlds*, Channel 4, 22nd November 1987.

> MacCabe: Well, I think we should get some material that we didn't get at the conference, some of the arguments we didn't get at the conference, think a bit more about the television programme, and bounce those in at various points, to counterpoint your voice, counterpoint the action.
>
> Lodge: Well, what's it going to do to my narrative? They'll be commenting on me. Will they?
>
> MacCabe: Well, whatever they want to do. Something that breaks your complete control of the event.
>
> Lodge: But I don't get a chance to talk back to them?
>
> MacCabe: Not unless you want to.
>
> Lodge: This film could go on forever. I think what I'll do is I'll tell my story, and you can insert your new material when you like, okay?[51]

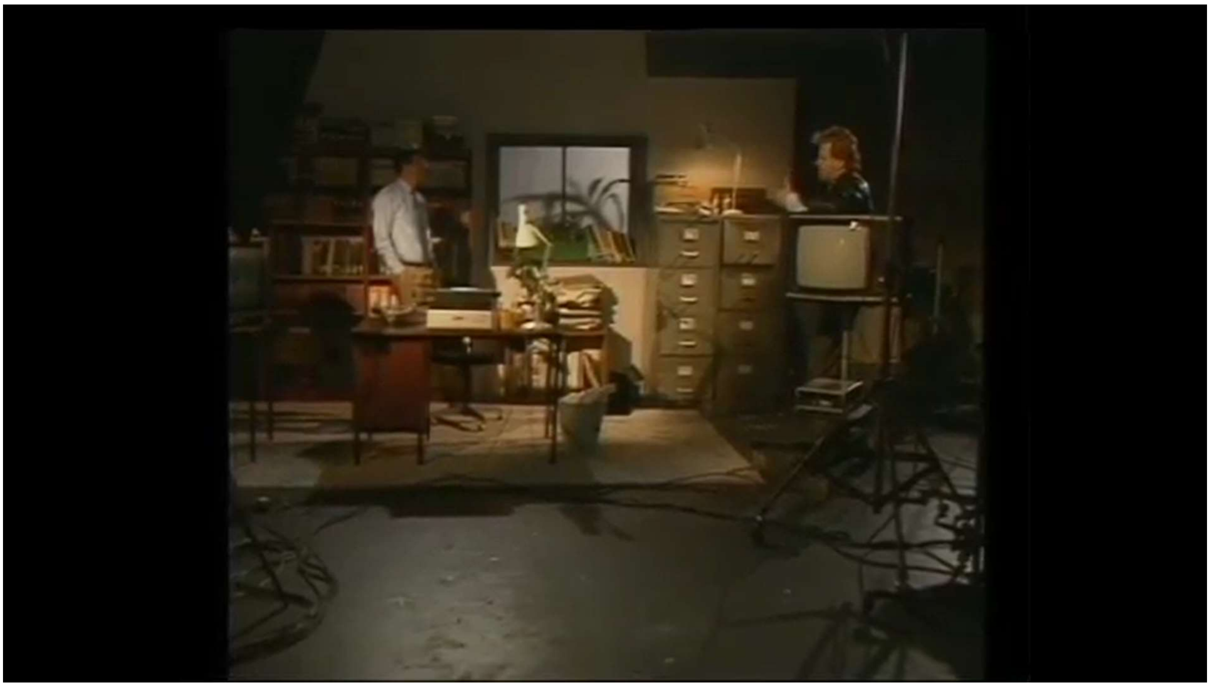


Figure 7. MacCabe (right) interrupts Lodge's monologue (1987).[52]

This entire scene, including Lodge's reluctance, is of course staged, and Lodge later wrote that the scene 'proved only that neither of us was a very good actor.'[53] But the scene also functions as a useful example of what Lodge does in his comic fiction: rather than simply 'bouncing in' the interviews, Lodge and MacCabe draw the audience's attention to the ideas of monologism and dialogism by staging these arguments dynamically – and amusingly – on screen.

---

[51] *Big Words… Small Worlds*, Channel 4, 22nd November 1987.

[52] *Big Words… Small Worlds*, Channel 4, 22nd November 1987.

[53] David Lodge, *Writer's Luck: A Memoir 1976-1991* [2018] (Vintage, 2019), p. 253.

Lodge's critical project is marked, then, by his attempts to bring literary knowledge, in particular the developments of literary theory, to an audience beyond the academy. Widdowson characterises this work as an attempt to de-politicise, and yet the political importance of this kind of democratising work should not be understated. The act of broadcasting the ideas of Derrida or Bakhtin into the living rooms of Britain at 8.45pm on a Monday evening is an incredible act of communication which goes beyond the peri-academic reader to a far wider audience. Rather than presenting a digested, devitalized summary of the work of these theorists, Lodge and MacCabe dialogise the film by including multiple voices, many of them in disagreement with Lodge's narration. In doing so they avoid a single, monologic, point of view.

II. The Academic-Novelist

Having considered Bakhtin's typology of fictional discourse and Lodge's theorisation of the novel as a dialogic 'reproduction and manipulation of voices', it would pay to briefly outline what is meant by the term 'novel of ideas'. According to Michael Lemahieu, 'the novel of ideas remains stubbornly difficult to define and consistently subject to denigration.'[54] One example of such denigration, which I referred to in the previous chapter, would be Northrop Frye's comment in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) that an 'interest in ideas and theoretical statements is alien to the genius of the novel proper, where the technical problem is to dissolve all theory into personal relationships.'[55] But surely all novels contain ideas? In *Ideas and the Novel* (1980) Mary McCarthy writes that 'in former days' the phrase 'novel of ideas' would have been 'a tautology', because '[n]ovels and ideas were once cut from the same cloth.'[56] Lemahieu explains that the idea of the novel of ideas 'emerges as a negative counterpart to the modernist, Jamesian aesthetic: the novel of ideas defined against the novel as art.'[57] Frye's statement would certainly apply to the fiction of Henry James, in which, as McCarthy puts it, 'the Jamesian people are reduced to a single theme: each other.'[58] More recently, Sianne Ngai has described the novel of ideas as 'a self-interpreting artwork', and argues that ideas are in fact inimical to the procedures of the novel as a form.[59] Ngai writes:

---

[54] Michael Lemahieu, 'The Novel of Ideas' in David James (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to British Fiction since 1945* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 177-191 (p. 177).

[55] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* [1957] (Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 308.

> the mission of presenting "ideas" seems to have pushed a genre famous for its versatility toward a surprisingly limited repertoire of techniques. These came to obtrude against a set of generic expectations – nondidactic representation; a dynamic, temporally complex relation between events and the representation of events; character development; verisimilitude – established only in the wake of the novel's separation from history and romance at the start of the nineteenth century.[60]

Character development in particular is singled out by various critics as one casualty of the novel of ideas. Frederick J. Hoffman writes that 'implicit in this type of novel is the drama of ideas rather than of persons, or, rather, the drama of individualized ideas.' Writing a novel of ideas is therefore simply a case of gathering 'these people, or as many of them as is possible, together in one place where circumstances are favorable to a varied expression of intellectual diversity. The drawing-room, the party, the dinner – these are favourite points of structural focus.'[61] Although plainly reductive, this would seem a fair description of Lodge's *Nice Work*, in which most of the interest is generated in the character-character dialogue between Robyn Penrose, a feminist university lecturer, and Vic Wilcox, managing director of a local foundry. Robyn and Vic clearly represent two opposing ideologies – contemporary literary theory and industrial capitalism respectively – or, as Aldous Huxley would put it, each is the 'mouthpiece' for a particular ideology.[62] But Lodge's novels, as we shall see in due course, are more theoretically and aesthetically interesting than the conventional academic hostility to the novel of ideas might allow for. In the close readings which follow, I will therefore be more receptive to the particular aesthetic and rhetorical strategies of the genre.

---

[56] Mary McCarthy, *Ideas and the Novel* (Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich, 1980), pp. 18-19..

[57] Lemahieu, 'The Novel of Ideas', p. 179.

[58] McCarthy, *Ideas and the Novel*, p. 15.

[59] Sianne Ngai, *Theory of the Gimmick: Aesthetic Judgment and Capitalist Form* (Harvard University Press, 2020), p. 126.

[60] Ngai, *Theory of the Gimmick*, p. 109

[61] Frederick J. Hoffman, 'Aldous Huxley and the Novel of Ideas', *College English* 8.3 (1946), pp. 129-137 (p. 133).

As well as 'the drama of ideas rather than of persons', another way that ideas seem to supplant characterisation in the novel of ideas is through the use of what McCarthy calls 'a spokesman'.[63] This is similar to Huxley's 'mouthpiece', although as Matthew Taunton points out, '"spokesman" implies a direct alignment with the author's opinions'.[64] Taunton instead uses the term 'chorus character' to describe a character in a political novel who 'steps into the diegesis to articulate arguments and ideas which are sometimes close to the author's own views, but also sometimes exceed or undermine this "spokesman" function.'[65] Morris Zapp is one such chorus character in *Small World*: although his lecture 'Textuality as Striptease' is an obvious parody of Barthes's essay 'Striptease' from *Mythologies* (1957), Zapp voices the hypothesis of the novel. Looking down upon the University of Rummidge from the top of a nearby hill, Zapp tells the protagonist Persse McGarrigle:

> The day of the individual campus has passed. It belongs to an obsolete technology – railways and the printing press. […] As long as you have access to a telephone, a Xerox machine, and a conference grant fund, you're OK, you're plugged into the only university that really matters – the global campus.'[66]

The 'global campus' is certainly the central idea of the novel, but this is not necessarily Lodge's author-narrator speaking. Zapp's dialogue is written in the 'gnomic present' which would suggest he is channelling the author's opinion, but the vocabulary – particularly the abbreviation ‘OK’ and the metaphorical use of ‘plugged into’ – are in keeping with the characterisation of Zapp as an easy-going American college professor. This is compounded by the fact that, immediately after this speech, Zapp, who has just been jogging with McGarrigle, gets a taxi back to his accommodation, immediately taking out ‘a fat cigar, a cigar clipper and a lighter’.[67] So while Lodge is voicing ideas through a character, the characterisation remains intact. The following readings will look more closely at the ways in which Lodge not only uses character-character dialogue to explore ideas, but also the direct report of an omniscient, third-person author-narrator, in particular through characterisation and essayistic digressions.

---

[62] Aldous Huxley, *Point Counter Point* [1928] (Dalkey Archive Press, 1996), pp. 294-295.

[63] McCarthy, *Ideas and the Novel*, p. 30.

[64] Matthew Taunton, 'Chorus and Agon in the Political Novel: Staging Left-Wing Arguments in H. G. Wells, Iris Murdoch, and Doris Lessing', *Modern Fiction Studies* 67.2 (2021), pp. 247-271 (p. 252).

[65] Taunton, 'Chorus and Agon in the Political Novel', pp. 252-253.

[66] David Lodge, *Small World* [1984] (Vintage 2011), pp. 43-44.

In thinking about these works as dialogic novels of ideas, this reading functions as something of a response to Terry Eagleton’s reading of Lodge’s fiction, originally published in *New Left Review* in 1988, which is worth quoting at length:

> The typical strategy of a Lodge novel is to place in caricatured antithesis the ideological poles of his world (theory and humanism, Zapp and Swallow, California and Birmingham, modernism and realism, technocrat and common man), allowing each to put the other into ironic question while the author himself disappears conveniently down the middle. The irony of this strategy, of course, is that its implied posture of Arnoldian disinterestedness places the text firmly on one side of the duality it is supposed to mediate. Lodge’s fictions guy the ineffectual academic liberal – but this, precisely, is testimony to the resilience of their liberalism, which thus rejects and retrieves itself at a stroke. The capacity to put itself into amused ironic question has been a commonplace of such thought since the days of Matthew Arnold, so that the position wrests its superiority from the very jaws of self-critical collapse. […] the helpless vulnerability of one’s case becomes the exact index of its complacent unassailability.[68]

Eagleton is right to identify Lodge’s ‘typical strategy’ as one of establishing an ironic binary contradiction between two different ‘ideological poles’, but the readings which follow seek to challenge the idea that Lodge ‘disappears conveniently down the middle’. The language of this jibe presents Lodge’s liberal pose as a kind of dereliction of duty, and yet there is surely something to be said for Lodge’s granting interpretative freedom to the reader and leaving it to them to draw their own conclusions. Lodge's novels give the ideas of literary theory a fair hearing – or, to quote Womack again, 'a fair crack of the whip'[69] – most notably in the conference papers of *Small World* and Robyn's teaching scenes in *Nice Work*. Eagleton is right to point out that this is a liberal move, and yet he fails to account for the ways in which Lodge's fictional engagements with, for instance, poststructuralism might also be interesting, enlivening, and genuinely challenging. In considering the discursive texture of Lodge's novels of ideas – where the conflicts, contradictions, and ironies are left deliberately unresolved – this chapter presents a more positive account of Lodge's liberalism.

---

[67] Lodge, *Small World*, p. 45.

[68] Terry Eagleton, ‘The Silences of David Lodge’, *New Left Review* 172 (1988), pp. 93-102 (pp. 97-98).

Changing Places

Changing Places is the first novel in which Lodge uses the contradiction of opposing ideas for comic effect. This is done primarily through characterisation rather than the character-character dialogue which might be expected of a novel of ideas. Published in 1975 but set in 1969, *Changing Places* tells the story of Philip Swallow and Morris Zapp's experiences as part of a campus exchange programme between the University of Rummidge, based on the University of Birmingham, and Euphoric State university in the city of 'Esseph', based on the University of California, Berkley in San Francisco. Swallow and Zapp are both academics in the English departments of their respective universities, and over the course of the exchange each of the men eventually sleeps with the other's wife. The title refers, in part, to the exchange itself, as the two men 'change places' with each other – both professionally and privately – but it also refers to the two university campuses: these are 'changing places' in the year 1969, a time of fervent student protest and an intense renegotiation of the values surrounding higher education. The central question of the novel, then, is the place and function of the university, in particular university English studies, in the changing societies of England and America.

---

[69] Womack, *Dialogue*, p. 6.

In the novel's opening, Lodge draws attention to the binary nature of the plot and characterisation, referring to the story as a 'duplex chronicle'.[70] Much of the comedy of the novel is generated by the opposition of Swallow and Zapp's characters and their actions, as told by the direct report of Lodge's author-narrator. This author-narrator operates much like the account Lodge would go on to give about the omniscient third-person narrator of Eliot's *Middlemarch* in his 1980 essay '*Middlemarch* and the idea of the classic realist text', which I discussed in the previous section. Rather than a dominating 'metalanguage' which 'control[s], interpret[s] and judg[es]' the multiplicity of discourses in the novel and in doing so 'tell[s] the reader what to think', Lodge's author-narrator, like Eliot's, combines direct report and represented speech in such a way that he 'constantly implicates [the reader] in the moral judgements being formulated.'[71] In *Changing Places*, Zapp and Swallow are presented as 'characteristic of the educational systems they had passed through', with Zapp a bombastic American scholar-teacher and Swallow an ineffectual liberal who is yet to publish a book. Lodge writes in the novel's first chapter:

> A colleague had once declared that Philip ought to publish his examination papers. The suggestion had been intended as a sneer, but Philip had been rather taken with the idea […] He visualized a critical work of totally revolutionary form, a concise, comprehensive survey of English literature consisting entirely of quotations, elegantly printed with acres of white paper between them, questions that would be miracles of condensation, eloquence, and thoughtfulness, questions to read and re-read, questions to brood over, as pregnant and enigmatic as *haikus*, as memorable as proverbs; questions that would, so to speak, contain within themselves the ghostly, subtly suggested embryos of their own answers. *Collected Literary Questions*, by Philip Swallow. A book to be compared with Pascal's *Pensées* or Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*…[72]

Two contradictions create humour here. The first is the contradiction between the obvious instrumental function of a question – to generate one or more statements in an answer – and the absolute function of the *Collected Literary Questions*: to be used, like *haikus*, as an object of study in themselves, something to 'read and re-read' and 'brood over'. Lodge's use of free indirect discourse is at work here, incorporating Swallow's humorous fantasy of what his readers might say about the book – such as the words 'elegantly' and 'miracles of condensation, eloquence, and thoughtfulness' – into the direct report of the narrator. The second, more pronounced contradiction is between the rather unglamorous and uninteresting academic work of writing exam questions, and the prospect of writing an academic book which is a major contribution to human knowledge, such as the *Pensées* or the *Philosophical Investigations*. In both cases the humour is dependent on the reader having at least some knowledge about the work of academics.

---

[70] David Lodge, *Changing Places* [1975] (Vintage, 2011), p. 3.
[71] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 9; p. 47; p. 53.
[72] Lodge, *Changing Places*, pp. 10-12.

All jokes are, in a sense, in-jokes, in that they depend on shared knowledge between the joke-teller and the joke-hearer. As Simon Critchley puts it:

> joking is a specific and meaningful practice that the audience and the joke-teller recognize as such. There is a tacit social contract at work here, namely some agreement about the social world in which we find ourselves as the implicit background of the joke. There has to be a sort of tacit consensus or implicit shared understanding as to what constitutes joking "for us", as to which linguistic or visual routines are recognized as joking. That is, in order for the incongruity of the joke to be seen as such, there has to be a congruence between joke structure and social structure – no social congruity, no comic incongruity. When this implicit congruence or tacit contract is missing, then laughter will probably not result[.][73]

A non-academic reader might therefore miss the ironies of the Swallow passage, and read it as a straightforward description. But Lodge uses the oppositional pattern of the novel to create further humour. Lodge describes Zapp's research as follows:

> Some years ago he had embarked with great enthusiasm on an ambitious critical project: a series of commentaries on Jane Austen which would work through the whole canon, one novel at a time, saying absolutely everything that could possibly be said about them. The idea was to be utterly exhaustive, to examine the novels from every conceivable angle, historical, biographical, rhetorical, mythical, Freudian, Jungian, existentialist, Marxist, structuralist, Christian-allegorical, ethical, exponential, linguistic, phenomenological, archetypal, you name it; so that when each commentary was written there would be simply *nothing further to say* about the novel in question. The object of the exercise, as he had often to explain with as much patience as he could muster, was not to enhance others' enjoyment and understanding of Jane Austen, still less to honour

---

[73] Simon Critchley, *On Humour* (Routledge, 2002), pp. 3-4.

> the novelist herself, but to put a definitive stop to the production of any further garbage on the subject.[74]

Again, this description is funny in isolation; its humour is generated by the central irony of an academic wanting to undertake a project containing so many opposing approaches with the end goal of exhausting the scholarship of a canonical writer altogether. This passage is again told through the direct report of Lodge's author-narrator, but also features elements of Zapp's represented speech, namely the American phrase 'you name it' as well as the word 'garbage', which is both an Americanism and the punchline of the paragraph. But both Lodge's description of Zapp and the Swallow passage are made funnier by their contradictory relation to each other: Swallow wants only to ask questions without saying anything, whereas Zapp wants to say everything and in doing so end the critical conversation completely. Swallow and Zapp are given their individual attributes not as part of mimesis or the representation of experience, but to create humour through a maximally exaggerated opposition. Separated by just over twenty pages, the reader holds these two corresponding yet opposing passages in their mind, and the humour of such an opposition can be appreciated by a far wider audience than those who might laugh at the passages in isolation. The characterisations of Swallow and Zapp are dialogic in that they are 'doubly-oriented', specifically through 'parody' and 'hidden polemic': the former because both passages co-opt the discourse of scholarly research for the purposes of humour, which is the opposite of the original intention of that discourse; and the latter because the two passages refer to each other without specific reference or invocation, and this is the source of their humour. Commenting on a similar passage from the first chapter of *Changing Places*, Bernard Bergonzi remarks: 'Such allusiveness is typical of campus novels by teachers of English literature; readers who pick up the references get additional pleasure, but those who do not need not be deflected from the story.'[75] This is certainly the case with *Changing Places*, with its humour created through the pattern of oppositions.

---

[74] Lodge, *Changing Places*, p. 35.

While Swallow and Zapp represent what Eagleton calls two 'ideological poles' – the one an English liberal humanist and the other an American scholar-theorist – they share just one scene of character-character dialogue over the course of the novel. In the final chapter, told by means of a screenplay, the two couples meet in a hotel in New York to decide whether to stay with their original partners or change to their new partners. But Swallow soon draws Zapp into a discussion about the ideology of fiction:

> Our generation – we subscribe to the old liberal doctrine of the inviolate self. It's the great tradition of realist fiction, it's what novels are all about. The private life in the foreground, history a distant rumble of gunfire, somewhere offstage. In Jane Austen not even a rumble. Well, the novel is dying, and us with it. No wonder I could never get anything out of my novel-writing class at Euphoric State. It's an unnatural medium for their experience. Those kids (*gestures at screen*) are living in a film, not a novel.[76]

This is another 'doubly-oriented' discussion, taking place within a novel and told as though it were a film. Zapp, invoking the language of structuralism, tells Swallow that 'The paradigms of fiction are essentially the same whatever the medium. Words or images, it makes no difference at the structural level.' Swallow counters this by bringing up, on the novel's penultimate page 'the question of endings', referring to Jane Austen's 'tell-tale compression of the pages' in *Northanger Abbey* (1817) to argue that a reader anticipates the end of a novel, whereas the ending of a film is much more sudden:

> The film is going along, just as life goes along, people are behaving, doing things, drinking, talking, and we're watching them, and at any point the director chooses, without warning, without anything being resolved, or explained, or wound up, it can just … end.
>
> PHILIP shrugs. The camera stops, freezing him in mid-gesture.[77]

---

[75] Bergonzi, *David Lodge*, pp. 16-17.
[76] Lodge, *Changing Places*, p. 232.
[77] Lodge, *Changing Places*, pp. 233-234.

So ends the novel, not necessarily ‘without warning’ – because the reader knows they are on the final page – but certainly ‘without anything being resolved, or explained, or wound up’. Not only is the fate of the couples frozen, but so is Swallow and Zapp’s discussion about the ideological context of the novel form. Rather than resolving the plot or the opposition between Swallow and Zapp on one side or the other, Lodge keeps the ideas frozen in dynamic tension.

How Far Can You Go?

Lodge’s next novel, *How Far Can You Go?* is similarly a novel of ideas which depends more on characterisation than character-character dialogue. The novel explores the effects of the sexual revolution and the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) on the lives of British Catholics. The direct discourse of a foregrounded or ‘intrusive’ omniscient narrator tells rather than shows the changes in the lives of ten principal characters: Angela, Adrien, Dennis, Edward, Michael, Miles, Polly, Ruth, and Violet, who meet at their university’s Catholic Society, and Father Austin Brierley, a Catholic priest. Lodge uses characterisation to explore the effect of the changes to society on different demographics within the population of British Catholics, but the characters are less ‘mouthpieces’ than hypothetical cases. Miles, for instance, is used as one example of the effect of sexual liberalisation on gay men, and Ruth, who becomes a nun, is used to explore how the wider social changes have impacted religious teaching. Much of the dialogism of the novel is created by Lodge’s use of this foregrounded author-narrator, who regularly breaks the fourth wall of the novel with digressions about historical events or Catholic theology.

How Far Can You Go? is not as funny a novel as *Changing Places*, but the principles of comedy still control its characterisations and its plot. Bakhtin’s idea of ‘reduced laughter’ is useful to an understanding of *How Far Can You Go?* as a dialogic novel of ideas. In *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Bakhtin describes reduced laughter as laughter which ‘continues to determine the structure of the image' while being 'muffled down to the minimum'; the reader sees, 'as it were, the track left by laughter in the structure of represented reality, but the laughter itself we do not hear'.[78] Lodge's omniscient author-narrator draws attention to this 'track left by laughter' as early as the first chapter, when the principal characters are at a Mass celebrated by Father Brierley:

> Looking, as it were, over his shoulder, at the congregation, you can remind yourselves who they are. Ten characters is a lot to take in all at once, and soon there will be more, because we are going to follow their fortunes, in a manner of speaking, up to the present, and obviously they are not going to pair off with each other, that would be too neat, too implausible, so there will be other characters not yet invented, husbands and wives and lovers, not to mention parents and children, so it is important to get these ten straight now. Each character, for instance, has already been associated with some detail of dress or appearance which should help you to distinguish one from another. Such details also carry connotations which symbolize certain qualities or attributes of the character. […] There is Dennis, Angela's slave, burly in his dufflecoat, the scar tissue on his neck perhaps proleptic of suffering, and Adrian, bespectacled (= limited vision), in belted gaberdine raincoat (= instinctual repression, authoritarian determination), not to be confused with Ruth's glasses and frumpish schoolgirl's raincoat, signifying unawakened sexuality and indifference to self-display. […] and a girl you have not yet been introduced to, who now comes forward from the shadows of the side aisle, where she has been lurking, to join the others at the altar rail. Let her be called Violet, no, Veronica, no Violet, improbable a name as that is for Catholic girls of Irish extraction, customarily named after saints and figures of Celtic legend, for I like the connotations of Violet – shrinking, penitential, melancholy – a diminutive, dark-haired girl, a pale, pretty face ravaged by eczema, fingernails bitten down to the quick and stained by nicotine, a smartly cut needlecord coat sadly creased and soiled; a girl, you might guess from all the evidence; with problems, guilts, hangups.[79]

This apostrophe to the reader draws attention to the fictionality of the novel and the controlling influence of the omniscient author-narrator. In its references to the probability of a name and the different, discrete details of physical attributes that 'carry connotations which symbolize certain qualities or attributes of the character', the passage is an example of what Bakhtin called 'hidden polemic', a kind of doubly-oriented discourse which refers to other discourses outside the text. In this case, the passage refers to the academic study of realist fiction and the analysis of character, which Lodge draws attention to with the brackets and the equals signs. The passage is therefore dialogic in its play with the ideas of literary realism: at once it is in alignment with the realist approach to character, while at the same time the author-narrator draws attention to this and problematises it. Eagleton has criticised Lodge's experiments with form, writing in the same *New Left Review* article that they 'rarely get beyond the odd self-reflexive flourish or experimental device within what remains a sedate, commercially acceptable realism.'[80] Such a reading fails to take into account the ways in which Lodge's experimentation draws attention to the devices of realism: far from a 'sedate' realism, the reader of *How Far Can You Go?* must recognise that the narration is not a mirror on the world, but a representation of it to be interpreted by the reader. In *After Bakhtin*, Lodge writes:

---

[78] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 164.

[79] David Lodge, *How Far Can You Go?* [1980] (Penguin, 1988), pp. 14-15.

> For me, and I think for other British novelists, metafiction has been particularly useful as a way of continuing to exploit the resources of realism while acknowledging their conventionality. And need one say that the more nakedly the author appears to reveal himself in such texts, the more inescapable it becomes, paradoxically, that the author as a *voice* is only a function of his own fiction, a rhetorical construct, not a privileged authority but an object of interpretation?[81]

In this way, Lodge's dialogic apostrophe to the reader does not simply draw attention to the author's construction of the text in the act of writing, but also – and more importantly – highlights the reader's construction of the text in the act of imagining. In her seminal study *Metafiction* (1984) – which was adapted from her 1980 PhD thesis 'The theory and practice of metafiction: with particular reference to the contemporary British novel', supervised by Lodge – Patricia Waugh writes that *How Far Can You Go?* 'flaunts' the convention of the omniscient author-narrator 'nervously',[82] however the effect of Lodge's dialogic play with academic theories of realism both in this passage and elsewhere are less anxious than comic.

The omniscient author-narrator of *How Far Can You Go?* also launches into several essayistic asides throughout the novel. The longest and most prominent of these comes in chapter four, where Lodge writes an eight-page summary of the Second Vatican Council and its relation to the wider social changes of 1968. In her 2020 monograph *Theory of the Gimmick*, Ngai describes a tradition within the novel of ideas in which '[d]irect and often didactic commentary by narrators and authors, as when *The Magic Mountain* lectures on techniques used for the fictional manipulation of time, […] evoke the form of the argumentative essay.'[83] Lodge dialogises his own essayistic digressions with further asides, such as when the narrator apostrophises the reader in the middle of an argument about conservative Catholic theology and the so-called 'Safe Method', writing: 'Let me explain. (Patience, the story will resume shortly).'[84] In part this is a comic remark about the obscurity of much Catholic theology, but it also draws the reader's attention again to their own experience of constructing the text. In treating the discussion of doctrine dialogically, Lodge encourages the reader to take their own view, rather than siding with the authoritarian – and therefore monologic – discourses of conservative or liberal theology.

---

[80] Eagleton, 'The Silences of David Lodge', p. 97.
[81] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 43.
[82] Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* [1984] (Routledge, 2001), p. 74.

The digressions and intrusions of the omniscient author-narrator are therefore dialogic, however – in the same way that Eagleton argues that Lodge's experiments with form 'rarely get beyond the odd self-reflexive flourish' – it could be argued that the dominance of the author-narrator's diegesis constitutes a monologic 'metalanguage' which controls the other discourses. Lodge anticipates this and undermines the potential monologism of his own author-narrator by reducing this discourse to the same 'plane' as the characters. In the final chapter, a television programme about the principal characters directed by Polly's husband, Jeremy, is presented in the form of a script transcribed by the character Michael. Jeremy's films are meant to comprise a plurality of voices, as Lodge describes earlier in the novel: 'The programmes were identical in technique. There was no explanatory commentary, just a montage of images and recorded voices.'[85] Unlike the screenplay in the final chapter of *Changing Places*, which is a representation of the speech and action of the novel's characters, the screenplay in *How Far Can You Go?* is meant to actually exist as a document within the world of the novel. The film features voiceovers from various characters, and before the transcript begins the author-narrator explains that because Michael transcribed the film after it was made, he was therefore only 'able to identify all but one of the voices over.'[86] The mystery voice is referred to by Michael in the transcript as 'VOICE OVER (*Who?*)', but the reader recognises this to be the voice of Lodge's author-narrator, speaking in the gnomic present tense:

---

[83] Ngai, *Theory of the Gimmick*, p. 120.
[84] Lodge, *How Far Can You Go?*, p. 115.

> VOICE OVER (*Who?*): But Christian belief will be different from what it used to be, what it used to be for Catholics, anyway. We must not only believe, but know that we believe, live our belief and yet see it from the outside, aware that in another time, another place, we would have believed something different (indeed, did ourselves believe differently at different times and places in our lives) without feeling that this invalidates belief. Just as when reading a novel, or writing one for that matter, we maintain a double consciousness of the characters as both, as it were, real and fictitious, free and determined, and know that however absorbing and convincing we may find it, it is not the only story we shall want to read (or, as the case may be, write) but part of an endless sequence of stories by which man has sought and will always seek to make sense of life. And death.[87]

This voiceover comes last in the transcript, but it does not constitute a 'final word' for the novel because Lodge's author-narrator is speaking on the same plane of discourse as the other characters. In this way, the author-narrator does not look down on the characters from a height, but speaks alongside them. As Robert A. Morace puts it: 'In the dialogic novel, not even the narrator/author enjoys privileged status; he too takes part in the dialogic interplay, the ultimately open-ended give and take of voices and views.'[88] The intrusion of the author-narrator into the documentary therefore actualises the relationship between the direct report of the narrator and the represented speech of the characters which is evident in all consciously dialogic novels.

---

[85] Lodge, *How Far Can You Go?*, p. 212.
[86] Lodge, *How Far Can You Go?*, p. 228.
[87] Lodge, *How Far Can You Go?*, pp. 239-240.
[88] Robert A. Morace, *The Dialogic Novels of Malcolm Bradbury and David Lodge* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), p. xvi.

Small World

Lodge's next two novels explore in more overt fashion the ideas of contemporary literary theory and the influence of these ideas on contemporary culture. *Small World* is Lodge's most carnivalesque novel and a comic treatment of academic conferences. A sequel to *Changing Places*, it again features Swallow, who has been promoted; Zapp, who is now a theorist of deconstruction; Hilary, whose career and enjoyment of life have been stymied by her domestic responsibilities; and Désirée, who has divorced Zapp and become a successful novelist. There are also a host of newer characters from universities spread across the globe who function, as Swallow and Zapp did in the previous novel, as 'characteristic' of the academic culture they come from: Michel Tardieu is a French narratologist and a thinly-veiled parody of Foucault, Siegfried Von Turpitz is a severe reader-response critic from Germany, and Fulvia Morgana is an affluent Italian Marxist. Lodge's omniscient author-narrator does not explore the inner lives of these ensemble characters, and for this reason the ridiculing humour of the cultural stereotypes has no other function than to belittle. The Japanese academic and translator Akira Sakazaki, for instance, is presented as no more than risible because he lives in a micro-apartment and struggles to understand the Northern English slang of the novel he is translating.

The novel is based on the structure of the medieval romance and is therefore organised not by a conventional plot but by a series of quests. The major quest of the book is Persse McGarrigle's pursuit of the elusive character Angela, but there is also the quest for the new UNESCO Chair of Literary Criticism, which has no duties and pays $100,000 a year. The recipient is to be chosen by the one-man selection committee of Arthur Kingfisher, and the climax of the novel takes place at the MLA Convention in Manhattan, where a panel discussion chaired by Kingfisher on ‘The Function of Criticism’ acts as a de facto interview process for this coveted prize. The panellists are Swallow, Tardieu, von Turpitz, Morgana, and Zapp, and each takes their turn to define the function of criticism, which Lodge summarises in the direct report of the author-narrator. Swallow, representing the liberal humanist approach to literature, ‘said the function of criticism was to assist in the function of literature itself, which Dr Johnson had famously defined as enabling us better to enjoy life, or better to endure it.’ This involves ‘a knowledge of history, a knowledge of philology, of generic convention and textual editing’, but ‘above all […] enthusiasm, the love of books. It was by the demonstration of enthusiasm in action that the critic forged a bridge between the great writers and the general reader.’ Tardieu, who represents structuralism, ‘said that the function of criticism was not to add new interpretations and appreciations of *Hamlet* or *Le Misanthrope* or *Madame Bovary* or *Wuthering Heights*’ but rather ‘to uncover the fundamental laws that enabled such works to be produced and understood.’ This would involve ‘ignor[ing] the distracting surface of actual texts’ and looking instead at ‘the deep structural principles and binary oppositions that underlay all texts that had ever been written and that ever would be written’. These ‘deep’ principles include ‘paradigm and syntagm, metaphor and metonymy, mimesis and diegesis, stressed and unstressed, subject and object, culture and nature.’ Von Turpitz, a reader-response critic, ‘sympathized with the scientific spirit’ of Tardieu’s argument, but ‘was obliged to point out that the attempt to derive such a definition from the formal properties of the literary art-object as such was doomed to failure, since such art-objects enjoyed only an as it were virtual existence until they were realized in the mind of a reader.’ Morgana, representing Marxism, ‘said that the function of criticism was to wage undying war on the very concept of “literature” itself, which was nothing more than an instrument of bourgeois hegemony’. In contrast to Swallow, Morgana’s approach sees literature as ‘a fetishistic reification of so-called aesthetic values erected and maintained through an elitist educational system in order to conceal the brutal facts of class oppression under industrial capitalism.' Finally, Zapp, who is now a post-structuralist, 'said more or less what he had said at the Rummidge conference.'[89] Taking place in the novel's first chapter, the Rummidge conference featured Zapp's paper 'Textuality as Striptease', in which he argued: 'meaning is constantly being transferred from one signifier to another and can never be absolutely possessed.' Zapp summarised this with the slogan, 'every decoding is another encoding'.[90]

Although Zapp's lecture is a clear parody of Barthes – and therefore an example of doubly-oriented discourse – Bergonzi points out that Zapp's lecture 'offers, in fact, a dazzling exposition of poststructuralist poetics'.[91] While Eagleton or Widdowson might conclude that Lodge's reader simply and passively recognises the parody and concludes that poststructuralism is therefore foolish, I instead argue that Lodge uses this comic exaggeration – emphasised by the contradiction of 'textuality' and 'striptease' – to demonstrate how poststructuralist work might lead us to interesting and enlivening conclusions about non-literary forms. To quote again from Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984), prose is marked by 'a very rich verbal palette', in which the prose artist brings 'other people's words […] into the plane of his own discourse, but in such a way that this plane is not destroyed.' The ideas parodied or invoked throughout the novel, even if they are travestied, are not reduceable to that travestying: Lodge brings them 'into the plane of his own discourse' and the reader is then free to engage with these ideas as they wish. It is entirely plausible for the peri-academic reader – who has, by 1984, emerged fully into British literary culture – to encounter this parody, have their interest piqued, and then upon finishing the novel take up any of the actual literary theorists who are named throughout the text, such as Barthes, Derrida, Jakobson, Iser, Richards, or Viktor Shklovsky. This is true also of the 'Function of Criticism' roundtable: the descriptions are both accurate and concise, maximising understanding for a peri-academic reader and thereby allowing for a more dynamic and active reading process. Lodge's treatment of contemporary literary theory in *Small World* is at once parodic and a genuine communication of the procedures of academic literary criticism and theory.

---

[89] Lodge, *Small World*, pp. 317-318.

[90] Lodge, *Small World*, p. 25. N.B., Zapp's motto 'every decoding is another encoding' is also a reference to the work of Lodge's colleague Stuart Hall, who was director of the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies from 1968 to 1979. An edited extract of Hall's paper 'Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse', presented to a CCCS colloquy in 1973, was later published as 'Encoding/Decoding' in Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis (eds), *Culture, Media, Language* (Hutchinson, 1980), pp. 128-38.

[91] Bergonzi, *David Lodge*, p. 19.

Interpretation and the agency of the reader are a major theme of *Small World*. Various conferences are referred to throughout the text, two of which are concerned with the developments of reader-response theory: 'Author-Reader Relations in Narrative' at Ann Arbor and 'Reception of the Literary Text' at Heidelberg.[92] Iser's seminal article of reader-response criticism, 'The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach' (1972) – which is collected in Lodge's *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* – provides a useful indication as to the importance of Lodge's exposition of ideas in his fiction. Iser's argument is that the literary work has a 'virtual' existence between 'the reality of the text' as written by the author and 'the individual disposition of the reader.' By way of illustration, Iser quotes from Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1767): 'The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself.' Iser then argues:

> If the reader were given the whole story, and there were nothing left for him to do, then his imagination would never enter the field, the result would be the boredom which inevitably arises when everything is laid out cut and dried before us. A literary text must therefore be conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader's imagination in the task of working things out for himself, for reading is only a pleasure when it is active and creative.[93]

Iser is not describing ideas specifically here, but rather all the imagining that a reader does, including for example the work of setting or characterisation. But Iser's argument does apply interestingly to Lodge's treatment of intellectual concepts in his dialogic novels of ideas. Just as Lodge demonstrated in his essay on the dialogism of *Middlemarch*, the dialogic novel of ideas does not dictate to the reader what they should believe, but rather presents various ideas or arguments in dialogic interplay with each other and leaves the reader to Iser's 'task of working things out'. The novel of ideas becomes, in this way, 'active and creative'.

---

[92] Lodge, *Small World*, p. 98, p. 108.

[93] Wolfgang Iser, 'The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach', *New Literary History* 3.2 (1972), pp. 279-299 (p. 280).

Nice Work

The fourth novel in this set of readings, *Nice Work*, is most obviously a novel of ideas as understood by Hoffman, Huxley, McCarthy and Ngai, where characters are 'mouthpieces' for particular ideas or arguments. The novel tells the story of a shadow scheme between the University of Rummidge and a local foundry, J. Pringle & Sons Casting and Engineering. Like *Changing Places*, the novel is a 'duplex chronicle', but unlike that novel, *Nice Work* explores ideas through a series of dialogues between the two principal characters, Robyn Penrose and Vic Wilcox. It is a novel of 'reduced laughter' which invokes the tradition of the Victorian industrial or 'condition of England' novel, particularly Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854), but also Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* (1849) and Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854). Quotations from these novels are used by Lodge as the epigraphs to each section, but they are also invoked through Robyn's characterisation: she has written a book about the industrial novel, titled *The Industrious Muse: Narrativity and Contradiction in the Industrial Novel*, and she gives a lecture on the subject in the novel's first section. This lecture constitutes one of the many teaching scenes of the novel. Robyn begins:

> In the 1840s and 1850s, […] a number of novels were published in England which have a certain family resemblance. Raymond Williams has called them 'Industrial Novels' because they dealt with social and economic problems arising out of the Industrial Revolution, and in some cases described the nature of factory work. In their own time they were often called 'Condition of England Novels', because they addressed themselves directly to the state of the nation. They are novels in which the main characters debate topical social and economic issues as well as fall in and out of love, marry and have children, pursue careers, make or lose their fortunes, and do all the

> other things that characters do in more conventional novels. The Industrial Novel contributed a distinctive strain to English fiction which persists into the modern period – it can be traced in the work of Lawrence and Forster, for instance. But it is not surprising that it first arose in what history has called ‘the Hungry Forties’.[94]

As with Zapp’s ‘Textuality as Striptease’ in *Small World*, Robyn’s lecture is ‘doubly-oriented’ in that she speaks both to her audience and to the reader. Even if the peri-academic reader does not realise this early on that Lodge is invoking the idea of the industrial novel precisely because *Nice Work* is itself part of that genre – its ‘main characters debate topical social and economic issues as well as fall in and out of love’ – they will realise this as the novel progresses. The content of the lecture includes a reference to Raymond Williams, which, as in *Small World*, enables the interested peri-academic reader to look further into the topic if they wish. As the lecture progresses, Robyn gives a compelling Marxist-feminist reading of the industrial novel, referring variously to *North and South*, *Shirley*, and *Hard Times*, as well as Benjamin Disraeli’s *Sybil; or, the Two Nations* (1845), George Eliot’s *Felix Holt the Radical* (1866), Gaskell’s *Mary Barton* (1848), and Charles Kingsley’s *Alton Locke* (1850); in doing so, Lodge provides the reader with what amounts to a reading list for a university module on the industrial novel, which they can then pursue at their leisure.

Amanda Anderson refers to the industrial novel as ‘the political or “social problem” novel’ and describes it as a Victorian ‘precursor to the novel of ideas’ characterised by ‘interludes of ideological debate among characters’ which constitute ‘dialogic argument’.[95] Lodge uses the ‘dialogic argument’ between Robyn and Vic to explore the function of the university and its place in an increasingly postindustrial Britain. One such conversation takes place when Robyn arrives for her first day of shadowing Vic at the foundry. Vic recognises Robyn from a picket line outside the university, which he had previously driven past on his way to work. Vic asks:

---

[94] David Lodge, *Nice Work* [1988] (Vintage, 2011), p. 45.

[95] Amanda Anderson, *Bleak Liberalism* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 16.

> “What were you striking about? Pay?”
>
> “Partly. That and the cuts.”
>
> “You want no cuts and more pay?”
>
> “That’s right.”
>
> “Think the country can afford it?”
>
> “Certainly,” said Robyn. “If we spent less on defence –”
>
> “This company has several defence contracts,” said Wilcox. “We make gearbox casings for Challenger tanks, and con-rods for Armoured Personnel Carriers. If those contracts were cancelled, I’d have to lay off men. Your cuts would become ours.”
>
> “You could make something else,” said Robyn. “Something peaceful.”
>
> “What?”
>
> “I can’t say what you should make,” said Robyn irritably. “It’s not my business.”
>
> “No, it’s mine,” said Wilcox.
>
> At that moment his secretary came into the room with two cups of coffee, which she distributed in a pregnant silence, shooting curious, covert glances at each of them. When she had gone, Wilcox said, “Who were you trying to hurt?”
>
> “Hurt?”
>
> “A strike has to hurt someone. The employers, the public. Otherwise it has no effect.”
>
> Robyn was about to say, “The Government,” when she saw the trap: Wilcox would find it easy enough to argue that the Government had not been troubled by the strike. Nor, as Philip Swallow had predicted, had the general public been greatly inconvenienced. The students’ Union had supported the strike, and its members had not complained about a day’s holiday from lectures. The University, then? But the University wasn’t responsible for the cuts or the erosion of lecturers’ salaries. Faster than a computer, Robyn’s mind reviewed these candidates for the target of the strike and rejected them all. “It was only a one-day strike,” she said at length. “More of a demonstration, really. We got a lot of support from other trade unions. Several lorry-drivers refused to cross the picket lines.”
>
> “What were they doing – delivering stuff?”
>
> “Yes.”
>
> “I expect they came back the next day, or the next week?”
>
> “I suppose so.”
>
> “And who paid for the extra deliveries? I’ll tell you who,” he went on when she did not answer. “Your University – which you say is short of cash. It’s even shorter, now.”
>
> “They docked our salaries,” said Robyn. They can pay for the lorries out of that.”
>
> Wilcox grunted as if acknowledging a debating point, from which she deduced that he was a bully and needed to be stood up to.[96]

When quoted at length, it becomes evident how little information is given to us through the direct report of Lodge’s omniscient author-narrator. Over half of the utterances appear without speech tags, many of them in quick succession. This not only adds an exciting pace to the exchange, but removes Lodge's author-narrator almost entirely from the scene. In a way this is the opposite to the technique of *How Far Can You Go?*, where most of the information is told to the reader in summary. As Anderson writes, the arguments of the political novel 'function as mediated telling': the reader is an 'addressee experiencing claims and counterclaims that are at once situated in the story and, as formal argument, elevated to the special status of what we might call dual (or multiple) narration by other means.'[97] But Lodge's author-narrator is not completely absent: the author-narrator is evident when Vic is referred to not by his forename but by the brusque surname 'Wilcox'. This is used by Lodge not only to emphasise Vic's sharp demeanour towards Robyn in this scene, but also to draw attention to the surname itself, 'Wilcox', which is a reference to E. M. Forster's classic novel of ideas *Howards End* (1910). In that novel, the Wilcoxes represent the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie, as opposed to the artistic and bohemian Schlegel sisters, an opposition which Lodge mirrors with the opposition between the industrial Vic and the bohemian Robyn.

---

[96] Lodge, *Nice Work*, pp. 74-75.

Although the longest paragraph of the scene is told from Robyn's point of view, the rest of the scene is equally weighted between the two characters. The tag 'irritably', for example, is ambiguous: it could signify either that Vic has noticed Robyn is growing irritable, or that Robyn has noticed this herself. The same applies to the interlude when Shirley enters the room: Robyn or Vic could equally have noticed that Shirley was 'shooting curious, covert glances at each of them', or we could be watching Shirley from a third point of view. In fact, the paragraph of free indirect discourse which describes Robyn's thoughts is itself similarly doubled: as Lodge writes in *After Bakhtin*, free indirect discourse is a doubled discourse, because 'without absenting himself entirely from the text' the third-person narrator 'communicates the narrative to us coloured by the thoughts and feelings of a character.'[98] This fusion of discourses is evident in the quoted paragraph: while ‘the trap’ and ‘then?’ are presumably Robyn’s words because they are consistent with both her attitude in this scene and the language of her represented speech elsewhere in the novel, she is thinking ‘Faster than a computer’, so the words cannot be her own.

---

[97] Anderson, p. 93.

[98] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 49.

In his discussion of the political novel, Taunton refers to Richard Sennett’s ‘two forms of productive verbal exchange’. These are:

> the “dialectical conversation”, where, through the “verbal play of opposites”, the parties will “come eventually to a common understanding”; and the “dialogical conversation”, a “discussion which does not resolve itself by finding common ground”, although “through the process of exchange people may become more aware of their own views and their understanding of one another.”[99]

The discussions between Robyn and Vic in *Nice Work* are examples ‘dialogical conversation’. The exchange quoted above ends in a state of tension where neither character has ‘come eventually to a common understanding’. As well as being absent throughout the substance of the conversation, Lodge’s author-narrator does not intrude at the end of the exchange to comment on who of the two is necessarily right or wrong. A comment Lodge makes in *After Bakhtin* about a passage of dialogue from D. H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love* (1920) applies well to the above-quoted scene: ‘[w]hat makes this scene dialogic in the ideological as well as the purely formal or compositional sense […] is that the narrator never delivers a finalizing judgemental word on the debate or its protagonists.’[100] Although the author-narrator draws attention to the fact that Robyn has to think carefully before she answers, she is still able to answer, and she certainly holds her own throughout the conversation. Alongside Robyn’s teaching scenes, these dialogic conversations function as seminars between the characters, where each presents a certain case or set of arguments that opposes the other. The reader also learns from these, and because Lodge's author-narrator 'never delivers a finalizing judgemental word', the reader is free to come to their own conclusion.

---

[99] Taunton, ‘Chorus and Agon in the Political Novel’, p. 253.
[100] Lodge, *After Bakhtin*, p. 64.

Conclusion

In *Rabelais and His World* (1965), Bakhtin himself makes an important defence of comedy as a progressive force, writing that 'festive folk laughter presents an element of victory not only over supernatural awe, of the sacred over death, it also means the defeat of power, of earthly kinds, of the earthly upper classes, of all that oppresses and restricts'.[101] And yet despite this, the laughter of Lodge's novels at times constitutes an anti-intellectual humour which is at best dated, and at worst politically reactionary. As Widdowson writes in a 1984 essay, '[b]eneath the "progressive" surface sophistication and brilliance' of Lodge's novels 'there are ideological implications of considerable reactionary force; or, at least, of a cleverly disguised neutralisation of the potentially disruptive and progressive developments which they themselves purport to deploy.'[102] Indeed it would be a mistake to equate the dialogism of Lodge's novels of ideas with an entirely neutral narrative about multiple perspectives. In three of the passages from Lodge's fiction highlighted in this chapter, we see a concerted attempt to stop the production of 'garbage' about a canonical female author in *Changing Places*, belittling swipes at a Japanese academic with a limited grasp of English in *Small World*, and an attempt to puncture the illusions of a female protestor arguing for more university funding and a reduction in government spending on military equipment in *Nice Work*.

Eagleton writes that '*Nice Work* heavily underwrites the old English empiricist prejudice that ideas are one thing and life another.'[103] For Bruce Robbins, this anti-intellectual tendency is inseparable from the campus novel itself: 'novelists who turned their attention to the university have arguably contributed more than a little to the acute lack of respect and understanding of which academics […] tend to complain.'[104] But this chapter has sought to argue that Lodge's fiction, like his criticism, is marked by an attempt to bring ideas to a wider audience. 'Novels of ideas do not simply report, describe, or communicate ideas,' writes Lemahieu, 'but instead alter, transform, and examine them.'[105] This is certainly the case with Lodge's dialogic novels of ideas: in treating intellectual concepts and theoretical arguments dialogically, Lodge's novels bring the reader into dialogue with those very ideas. In his study of comedy, Andrew Stott poses a 'question asked of comedy: what purpose does it serve, and what, if anything, is its social function or philosophical value, apart from giving pleasure?'[106] In the case of Lodge's novels, the pleasure gained from the interplay of ideas is their social function.

---

[101] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* [1965] (Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 92

[102] Widdowson, 'The Anti-History Men', p. 6.

[103] Eagleton, 'The Silences of David Lodge', p. 102.

The novel of ideas is, according to Ngai, a 'self-interpreting' artwork.[107] But Lodge's dialogic novels of ideas are written to be interpreted by an active reader. To return to a quotation from Bakhtin, referred to at the beginning of this chapter: 'The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer word. It provides an answer, anticipates it, and structures itself in the answer's direction.' Lodge structures his novels of ideas in the direction of the reader's answer, enabling them to draw their own conclusions. The intrusions of Lodge's omniscient author-narrator heighten this effect by drawing attention to the reader and their active engagement with the text. Lodge's novels are, in this way, seminars, though perhaps they are seminars from the '70s or '80s.

---

[104] Bruce Robbins, 'What the Porter Saw: On the Academic Novel' in James F. English (ed.), *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction* (Blackwell, 2006), pp. 248-266 (p. 249).

[105] Lemahieu, 'The Novel of Ideas', p. 189.

[106] Andrew Stott, *Comedy* (Routledge, 2014), p. 5.

[107] Ngai, *Theory of the Gimmick*, p. 126.

Part Two

The University and the Public

Chapter Three

Lorna Sage: writing life

Lorna Sage was made Professor of English Literature at the University of East Anglia in 1994, having begun her career as an assistant lecturer there in 1965.[1] One may have thought that three decades of unbroken academic service would have been an open-and-shut case for any promotions committee. Sage was also, at the time, a year into her second three-year stint as Dean of English and American Studies, her first being from 1985 to 1988. But the committee were hesitant. In a 2021 festschrift published in the journal *Hinterland* to celebrate twenty years since the publication of Sage's memoir *Bad Blood* (2000), Christopher Bigsby recounts the following:

> For the most part her [Sage's] energy did not go into the publication of books, which would present a problem when it came to her appointment as a professor in 1994. […] She did produce a book on Doris Lessing […] as well as a brief book on Angela Carter for the British Council's *Writers and Their Work* series in 1992, along with a study of women writers: *Women in the House of Fiction*. This was a time, though, when quantity seemed to count almost as much as quality with promotion committees. What tilted the balance when it came to her chair was her reputation as a reviewer, mainly, though not exclusively, for *The Observer* (she also wrote for the *New Statesman*, *The New Review* and the *New York Review of Books*, among others).[2]

Lorna Sage, Professor of Book Reviewing? This is the first time a literary critic had been made professor at a postwar university on the merit of their newspaper journalism. While the other subjects of this thesis – Bradbury, Lodge, Cox and Dyson – had themselves written for newspapers and magazines, Sage was a rare case, a figure much closer to the generalist 'man of letters' of the Victorian period who would, as Terry Eagleton puts it in *The Function of Criticism* (1984), 'assess each strain of specialist knowledge by the touchstone of a general humanism'.[3]

---

[1] Sage was hired, in part, to take over Ian Watt's teaching after he left UEA in 1964. 'According to Lorna,' writes Christopher Bigsby, Watt moved back to California 'because the climate of Norfolk failed to suit his pet boa constrictor.' (Christopher Bigsby, 'The Golden Age', *Hinterland* 7 (2021), pp. 44-58 (p. 44).)

[2] Bigsby, 'The Golden Age', pp. 46-48.

[3] Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism* [1984] (Verso, 2005), p. 55.

According to Bigsby, Sage 'would sometimes write her reviews on the two-hour train from Norwich to London.'[4] Though Sage spent her entire academic career at UEA, her journalistic career was based in the cultural centre of London, where the publications to which she most regularly contributed – the *London Review of Books,* the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *Guardian*, and the *Observer* – kept their offices. From the late 1970s, after she had met her second husband, Rupert Hodson, Sage lived in Norwich during termtime only. As Edmund Gordon describes, Sage 'went to Florence every holiday, writing endless articles and book reviews while she was there. Sharon [her daughter] remembered her constantly working – "like a crazy person" – in order to pay for this lifestyle.'[5] Sage was alarmingly productive: Sharon Sage and Victor Sage – Sharon's father and Lorna's first husband and close friend – speculate that her total back catalogue comes to 'perhaps a million and a half words written over thirty years';[6] and yet the pieces are by no means uniform, formulaic, or superficial. A number of them, including those Sage had photocopied for submission to the promotions committee, are collected in the posthumously published *Good as Her Word* (2003), edited by Sharon Sage and Victor Sage. The collection includes book reviews, profiles, obituaries and shorter essays, however the television reviews that Sage wrote semi-regularly for the *Times Literary Supplement* throughout the 1970s – including her pieces on Frederic Raphael's 1976 serial *The Glittering Prizes* ('All About Adam', 13th February 1976) or on ATV's twenty-six-part adaptation of Arnold Bennett's *Clayhanger* novels, broadcast the same year ('Scruts with everything', 27th February 1976) – remain uncollected.

---

[4] Bigsby, 'The Golden Age', p. 48.

[5] Edmund Gordon, *The Invention of Angela Carter* [2016] (Vintage, 2017), p. 295.

[6] Sharon Sage and Victor Sage, 'Introduction' in Lorna Sage, *Good as Her Word* [2003] (Harper Perennial, 2004), pp. xv-xxii (p. xv). N.B. There are a few too many people named Sage here: for simplicity, the surname on its own, 'Sage' will always denote Lorna both in the main text and in the notes, while 'Victor Sage' and 'Sharon Sage' will be given as full names. Where Sharon Sage publishes under her married name, 'Sharon Tolaini-Sage', the married name will be used as appropriate in the relevant notes, but 'Sharon Sage' will be used throughout the main text to maintain consistency.

Newspaper reviewers are often referred to with the term 'critic', but the procedures of newspaper reviewing and academic criticism are distinct: Sage, in her own writing, used the term 'reviewer' over 'critic' to describe her journalistic work. What, then, is the function of criticism in a newspaper review? In her 1998 essay 'Living on Writing', Sage explains the role of the reviewer: 'You swap words for money, you reprocess reading into writing and commentary. You describe, paraphrase, quote, reperform, "place" and help sell (or not) the books you're reviewing.'[7] Reviewers write about writing, and they judge writing: to 'help sell (or not) the book you're reviewing' is to praise or dispraise the work. But as well as evaluation, Sage argues that the literary journalist 'is interested in the life of the author', because 'for reviewers authors are first and last people who write.'[8] To a reviewer, there is not just a 'text' to be interpreted or deconstructed, but a person whose work is to be praised or dispraised, not least because the authors of newly-published books tend more often than not to still be alive. As Sage puts it:

> Reviewers collude with authors as they always did. Even when they abuse them, they single them out, pay them attention, characterize them and make a noise about them. Reviewers read, or try to, the author's other books, they sketch some sort of continuity. The piece will sometimes have a photograph of the author. And it may well be supported on other pages with an interview with the author, or – more grandly – a profile, or a "feature" of some sort connecting the author with the topical commentary, or the real estate, or the food, or the clothes that fill up the "life-style" section of papers and magazines.[9]

Sketching 'some sort of continuity' was part of Sage's academic project, too. As an academic, Sage wrote two single-author monographs: *Doris Lessing* in 1983 and *Angela Carter* in 1994, the latter of which is read closely in this chapter's second section. And when Sage produced group studies, notably *Women in the House of Fiction* (1992) and the posthumously-published *Moments of Truth* (2002), she maintained the same emphasis on the life of the author. It is not insignificant that the former is subtitled ‘Post-War Women Novelists’ rather than ‘Post-War Novels’, or that the latter is subtitled ‘Twelve Twentieth-Century Women Writers’ rather than ‘Seventeen Twentieth-Century Texts’.

---

[7] Lorna Sage, 'Living on Writing' in Jeremy Treglown and Bridget Bennett (eds), *Grub Street and the Ivory Tower: Literary Journalism and Literary Scholarship from Fielding to the Internet* (Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 262-276 (p. 262).
[8] Sage, 'Living on Writing', pp. 262-264.
[9] Sage, 'Living on Writing', pp. 263-264.

The title of this chapter is ‘Lorna Sage: writing life’. Its three sections are about three different meanings of that phrase, ‘writing life’. The first considers Sage’s own life spent writing, looking closely at the style of her journalistic reviews and articles, or what we might call her ‘public criticism’.[10] How does Sage write a review? How might we understand the style of her reviews? And how might we understand Sage’s reviewing in terms of a longer history of public criticism, going back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? The second section then looks at Sage’s teaching and academic criticism, in particular her teaching on UEA’s MA in Life Writing as well as her literary critical work on women writers, foremost her close friend Angela Carter. Sage’s central contribution to the discipline was her biographical work. But how did she think about writers’ lives in relation to their creative work? In what ways did Sage resist the implications of Roland Barthes’s ‘death of the Author’, and how did she integrate Barthes’s ideas into a feminist theory of literary creation? The third and final section comprises a close reading of Sage’s memoir, *Bad Blood* (2000). How does Sage write her own life? In particular, how does Sage combine the characteristic style of her journalism with the intellectual concerns of her academic teaching and research to create a reflexive work of life writing?

I. Living on writing

An understanding of Sage’s journalism is crucial to any understanding of her teaching, criticism, and creative work. The memoir *Bad Blood*, first published in 2000, began as a series of diary pieces for the *London Review of Books* – 'The Old Devil and His Wife', published 7th October 1993, would go on to become the first chapter; 'My Schooldays', published 21st October 1993, would go on to be the second; 'Grandma at home', published 4th November 1993, the third – and Sage's monograph *Angela Carter* (1994) began as the essay 'Death of the Author' published on 5th November 1992 in *Granta* 41, a special issue on biography. Sage's reviews are instantly recognisable, written as they are in what I call Sage's 'living style'. This is not simply a pun on the 'lifestyle' pages of British newspapers and magazines: 'living style' is apt to describe Sage's use of the active voice and the present participle alongside grotesque Dickensian description and gothic corporeal imagery. As Sage puts it in her 1998 essay 'Living on Writing':

---

[10] I take the term ‘public criticism’ from Samantha Purvis, ‘Fictive Institutions: Contemporary British Literature and the Arbiters of Value’, PhD thesis, University of East Anglia, April 2020 <https://ueaeprints.uea.ac.uk/id/eprint/77637/1/2020PurvisSJPhD.pdf/> [accessed 18th March 2024], *passim*.

> Reviewing is in an important sense *reading out loud*, rather like not being able to read without moving your lips. What literary editors like is an excited, vivid, dramatized response, whether it is positive or negative is less important than its power to arouse interest, to make the book in question twitch and show signs of life – for it's a dead blank to the real reader at this stage, so you can *galvanize* it by giving it a character with quirks.[11]

Sage's style, as we shall see shortly, does indeed 'twitch and show signs of life' – and that personifying verb 'twitch', with its closeness to death, is a characteristically gothic example of the living style – but this quotation also shows us the point or function of the style. This 'excited, vivid, dramatized prose' appeals to the power brokers of literary journalism: it is '[w]hat literary editors like'. It is also designed to appeal to, or at least engage, 'the real reader', by which Sage means the lay reader who is neither a 'journalistic reader' (that is, a newspaper book reviewer) or an academic reader. Of course, the grotesque imagery and twitching signs of life have just as much potential to entertain a professional reader, but it is important to note Sage's invocation of the non-university reader here, as well as her naming them the 'real' reader.

---

[11] Sage, 'Living on Writing', p. 262.

How, then, does Sage write a review? It would pay to quote, at length, the openings to some articles published throughout Sage's career. First, 'Waiting for the Bang', a review of Thomas Pynchon's novel *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in November 1973:

> Imagine a limbo, where death has come, but not the end – a breathless, frenzied, sickening, yet somehow moronically *cheerful* interval that seems to go on forever. That is about as close as one can come to a brief description of *Gravity's Rainbow*.[12]

Second, 'Daringly distasteful', a review of Christopher Ricks's study *Keats and Embarrassment* (1974), published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in April 1974:

> *Keats and Embarrassment* is about the continuous, prickling, warmth generated in human interchange, and it hands over its sensations without apology to the reader. Christopher Ricks is adept in stirring up the small, satisfactory, argumentative relations that make critical dialogue look alive. He draws Keats into a sticky web of responses and insights culled from all over the place, not just glossing the poems (though he does do that), but setting poems, case-histories, criticism, novels, into abrasive and productive contact.[13]

Third, 'A scribbler comes of age', a review of Jerome J. McGann's *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, volume I (1980), published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in January 1981:

> This first volume of the new Oxford English Texts *Complete Poetical Works* of Byron raises an old question: just how did the fat boy from Harrow turn himself into a poet? The flab is, of course, even more in evidence this time round, with thirty-five previously uncollected bits and pieces helping to swell the volume; and the daunting scale of the textual apparatus (the last "thorough scholarly edition" was done almost eighty years ago, as Jerome J. McGann points out) makes Byron's dreadful juvenilia look all the more dim.[14]

Fourth, 'Adventures in the old world', a review of Alison Lurie's novel *Foreign Affairs* (1984), published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in February 1985:

> Alison Lurie's *Foreign Affairs* gives this dim, dreary new year a sudden shine. It's warm, clever and funny – the kind of novel that elicits a conspiratorial glow from the start because it flatters the reader unmercifully. You're assumed to be witty and literate, you're told (indirectly, of course) how very wide awake you are, and you're congratulated for being (on the other hand and after all) so sensible as to prefer your

---

[12] Lorna Sage, 'Waiting for the Bang', *Times Literary Supplement* (16th November 1973), p. 5.

[13] Lorna Sage, 'Daringly distasteful' [*Times Literary Supplement*, 26th April 1974] in *Good as Her Word*, ed. Sharon Sage and Victor Sage [2003] (Harper Perennial, 2004), pp. 223-226 (p. 223).

[14] Lorna Sage, 'A Scribbler comes of age' [*Times Literary Supplement,* 23rd January 1981] in *Good as Her Word*, ed. Sharon Sage and Victor Sage [2003] (Harper Perennial, 2004), pp. 243-251 (p. 243).

> metafiction in traditional form. In short, the reader turns out to be a nicely rounded character, well-buttered with irony.[15]

Fifth, ‘Fear is the spur’, a review of Harold Bloom’s collection *Poetics of Influence*, edited by John Hollander (1988), published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in April 1989:

> *Poetics of Influence* is a Harold Bloom compendium, a fat cento of essays and excerpts which charts his revisionary progress over approximately thirty years (a true Gnostic, he erases the dates) from Shelley to the Hebrew Bible, and from battles with the New Criticism to Armageddon (“it is very late in the west”) and deconstruction. Bloom, as John Hollander points out in a long and tetchy introduction, is and has ever been an “antithetical critic”, at odds with prevailing orthodoxies, but in the name of an orthodoxy of his own.[16]

Sixth, ‘The ancient mariner’s baby’, a review of Harold Brodkey’s novel *The Runaway Soul* (1991), published in the *Guardian* in November 1991:

> This monster novel has been hyper mythologised in advance in quite a special way. Harold Brodkey has spent most of his writing life on it (he’s now 60) and its publication at long last will confirm or explode his conviction shared with admirers of his stories, and indeed of his story that he is a genius. Or will it?[17]

Seventh, ‘Dear Jean letters’, a review of Simone de Beauvoir’s *Letters to Sartre* edited by Quentin Hoare (1990), published in the *Observer* in December 1991:

> Simone de Beauvoir told people, when she published Sartre’s letters to her in 1983, that hers to him had been lost. It’s not clear whether she really thought so, or was fibbing. In any case, they turned up amongst her papers after her death, and here they are a fat, fascinating collection, as horribly revealing in their way as her account of Sartre’s physical and mental disintegration in *Adieux*.[18]

Eighth, and last, ‘The bright, ferocious flames of his internal ether’, Sage’s review of volume VII of Charles Dickens’s letters, published in the *Observer* in June 1993: ‘No wonder Dickens believed in spontaneous combustion. The three years covered by this volume are so absurdly full of life that he seems himself in danger of burning up or flying apart.[19]

---

[15] Lorna Sage, ‘Adventures in the old world’, *Times Literary Supplement* (1st February 1985), p. 5.

[16] Lorna Sage, ‘Fear is the spur’ [*Times Literary Supplement,* 14th April 1989] in *Good as Her Word*, ed. Sharon Sage and Victor Sage [2003] (Harper Perennial, 2004), pp. 290-294 (p. 290).

[17] Lorna Sage, ‘The ancient mariner’s baby’, *Guardian* (17th November 1991), p. 65.

[18] Lorna Sage, ‘Dear Jean letters’, *Observer* (29th December 1991), p. 42.

[19] Lorna Sage, ‘The bright, ferocious flames of his internal ether’ [*Observer*, 27th June 1993] in *Good as Her Word*, ed. Sharon Sage and Victor Sage [2003] (Harper Perennial, 2004), pp. 30-33 (p. 30).

Though these are the openings to just eight pieces published over twenty years – it is worth reminding ourselves of the estimate given by Sharon Sage and Victor Sage in the introduction to *Good as Her Word*, that Sage wrote 'perhaps a million and a half words [...] over thirty years' – Sage's characteristic style emerges. Whether Sage is writing about a novel, a critical study, or an edited collection, she uses the same demotic or colloquial English: Byron is 'the fat boy from Harrow' and his juvenilia is 'dim'. At points – such as when Sage jokes that Simone de Beauvoir, one of the major philosophers of the twentieth century, might be 'fibbing' – this usage brings to a piece the casual, flippant tone of schoolyard chit-chat. The effect of this is to create an easy intimacy with the reader, an intimacy increased by Sage's other vocalisations: the imperative verb 'Imagine' which opens the Pynchon piece, for example, or the intonation created by the italicised '*cheerful*' in the Keats piece. The short 'Or will it?' in the Brodkey piece does the same, functioning as a kind of verbal wink or curl of the lip. Sage made this same move four years earlier, in her obituary of Gore Vidal, which opens: 'Gore Vidal is on the brink of immortality. He must be, he has a biographer, and so will soon have a Life. Or will he?'[20]

This winking intimacy between Sage and the reader is further heightened by her use of brackets, such as in the Bloom piece, '(a true Gnostic, he erases the dates)'; in the Lurie piece, 'you're told (indirectly, of course) how very wide awake you are'; and in the Brodkey piece, '(he's now 60)'. In each of these three instances, the brackets function as an apostrophe where Sage turns away from the book to address the reader; the effect of this is a conspiratorial humour. A more general intimacy is created in the Lurie piece when Sage refers to the weather as '*this* dim, dreary year' (my emphasis), implying a shared situation and creating an illusion of proximity to the feelings of the reader, as well as when Sage uses the phrase 'well-buttered with irony', a compound adjective based on the idiomatic expression 'to butter [somebody] up'. This creative declension, which borders on wordplay, implies the original phrase despite Sage's not having used it in this review. This implication of a prior utterance which does not belong to Sage emphasises the fact that this review exists within a chain of discourse, invoking rather subtly a feeling of familiarity in the reader.

---

[20] Lorna Sage, 'What a frightful bore it is to be Gore' [*Observer*, 15th November 1987] in *Good as Her Word*, ed. Sharon Sage and Victor Sage [2003] (Harper Perennial, 2004), pp. 52-57 (p. 52).

It is worth noting that this feeling of readerly intimacy created by Sage's living style shares a continuity with the style of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century periodicals like *The Spectator*, founded in 1711 by Joseph Addison (1672-1719) and Richard Steele (c.1671-1729). In particular, Sage's style resembles what Eagleton calls the 'easy amicability set up between the early periodicalist and his readers'.[21] This 'easy amicability' on the page was a result of the eighteenth-century periodical's origin in the discussion taking place in the coffee-houses and smoking rooms of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century London; as Denise Gigante reminds us, '[t]he art of conversation' fostered in these spaces 'in turn informed the conversational style of the literary periodical essays which flourished at this time.'[22] This public literary culture was entirely different from the literary culture of Sage's lifetime, not least because the university as we have come to know it in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries simply did not exist in the eighteenth century. Indeed, despite the fact that the universities of Bologna, Paris, Oxford, and Cambridge each claim a continuity with a medieval ecclesiastical institution of the same name, those earlier iterations, to quote Stefan Collini, 'chiefly trained future functionaries of state and church, or provided a kind of finishing school for the landed elite.'[23] The periodicalists like Addison and Steele were not based in universities, and there were no professional critics in the coffee-house, where discussion was general and ranging rather than focused on any particular area of specialism.

---

[21] Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism*, p. 33.

[22] Denise Gigante, 'On Coffee-Houses, Smoking, and the English Essay Tradition' in Thomas Karshan and Kathryn Murphy (eds), *On Essays: Montaigne to the Present* (Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 150-166 (p. 150).

[23] Stefan Collini, *What are Universities For?* (Penguin, 2012), p. 23.

Much work was done by the first generation of professional critics at the beginning of the twentieth century – namely F. R. Leavis and his *Scrutiny* movement – to create and maintain a distance between their specialised work in the university and the more amateur, generalised set of practices belonging to the periodicalists. As Eagleton writes, Leavis sought to make a case for 'the sociality of literature without playing into the hands of the frivolous non-specialism which discerns a bland continuum between Johnson's after-dinner talk and his literary judgements'.[24] The same is true of the so-called New Critics, whose key texts – such as W. K .Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley's 'The Intentional Fallacy' (1946) – began to appear in the 1940s and 1950s. To quote Michael W. Clune, 'the New Critics developed a method of approaching literary works that yielded a precise professional discourse that could be replicated in classrooms and debated in books and journals.'[25] Sage, on the other hand, acknowledged the continuity she shared with the early periodicalists and actively took part in literary discussion outside the university campus. As mentioned above, Sage would often write her reviews on the train to London,[26] and she invited literary discussion into her own home, as described by Sharon Sage and Victor Sage:

> She read, wrote and received visitors at the kitchen table, her ear almost imperceptibly turned towards the door. […] She liked to keep open-house, sixties-style, often passing the latest apparition at the door a draft of what she had just finished. You were expected to read it on the spot, while she watched your face keenly for reactions.[27]

Sage's kitchen was by no means a coffee-house – though she was indeed a lifelong smoker – but we see here that Sage was inclined to continue literary discussion outside the usual professional settings – including both the formal spaces of the lecture theatre and seminar room, as well as the less formal but still professional spaces like the Senior Common Room, the graduate bar, or the corridor – and in doing so blur the line between literary criticism and 'after-dinner talk'.

---

[24] Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism*, p. 73.
[25] Michael W. Clune, 'John Guillory's Distortions', *Genre* 57.1 (2024), pp. 77-88 (p. 78)
[26] Bigsby, 'The Golden Age', p. 48.
[27] Sharon Sage and Victor Sage, 'Introduction', p. xix.

But while Sage's living style does exhibit the 'easy amicability' of the earlier periodicals, it is more studied and heightened than speech. Sage writes with a grotesque corporeality comparable to the work of Dickens, revelling in exaggerated images that others would find disgusting. Examples taken from the passages above include that compound adjective 'well-buttered' in the review of Lurie's *Foreign Affairs*, evoking as it does a slippery, greased-up person; or the 'sticky web of responses' in the piece on Ricks, which reifies a plural and potentially chaotic discourse into a single abject image. Although Sage's repeated references to viscera like 'fat' and 'flab' could at first be read as her unduly poking fun at larger people, it is better understood as a portrayal of unstable physical distortion: the Byron book, for instance, is not passively fat, but rather the 'uncollected bits and pieces' of the Byron book cause the volume 'to swell'. Sage's language is not just physical but febrile: the 'limbo' that is *Gravity's Rainbow* is 'breathless, frenzied, sickening'. The Ricks piece opens with a 'continuous, prickling, warmth'. Brodkey's book is not just big: it is a 'monster novel'. The de Beauvoir collection is '*horribly* revealing' (my emphasis). Dickens is 'in danger of burning up or flying apart'. Sage's style is visual, febrile, grotesque, vocal: each of the pieces visualises distortion, distemper, disease, or destruction, and the use of the active voice and present participle is crucial to the style: these are not still images, but moving ones. Sharon Sage and Victor Sage describe Sage's writing as 'vivid and alive' and compare the metaphorical voice of Sage's reviews to her actual voice: 'It was not long […] before that's how she spoke. […] This voice was the one she wanted, the one that did for all purposes, including public speaking, and writing became a staging of her own mercurial speech.'[28] Sage may well have started speaking like her writing, but she did not write like speech: her style is too vivid, too grotesque, too stylised for the reviews to read like actual spoken discourse.

---

[28] Sharon Sage and Victor Sage, 'Introduction', p. xxiii.

The grotesque feverishness of Sage's living style sets her writing apart from the 'easy amicability' of the eighteenth-century periodicalists, despite the continuity of readerly intimacy. Sage herself acknowledged, in the 1998 essay 'Living on Writing', that the 'excited, vivid, dramatized response' in her writing is '[w]hat literary editors like'.[29] More than half a century earlier, in 1940 – three years before Sage was born – Cyril Connolly made a similar, though more negative, set of remarks in an early issue of his magazine *Horizon*:

> Journalism has certain very unpleasant defects. It condemns a writer to perpetual brightness, uniformity, brevity, and overproduction, to work which will not stand up to the board covers of a book while destroying the leisure and stamina necessary to write one. The author's curve, instead of mounting to its climax in a free parabola, is flattened out by the weight of the Press and often tailspins to a nervous breakdown.[30]

This 'perpetual brightness, uniformity, brevity, and overproduction' is recurrent in newspaper journalism because, as Eagleton reminds us, it is 'a literary mode of production ruled by the commodity'.[31] For this reason, the mercenary journalist or 'hack critic' must cultivate a 'flamboyantly individualist style'.[32] This shift in style from the easy amicability of the early periodicals to the heightened vividness of twentieth-century journalism can be attributed to the rapid expansion of the British press during the Victorian period, which exacerbated the commodification of public criticism. By way of illustration: in 1854 there were fifty thousand copies of newspapers printed in Britain every day; within fifteen years this figure had risen to one million.[33] This rapid expansion saw the emergence of a new figure: the so-called man of letters. The man of letters was, in Eagleton's words again, 'not quite synonymous with scholar, critic or journalist'.[34] Rather, this Victorian figure maintained the 'generalized ideological wisdom' of the eighteenth-century periodicalists but did so 'because material necessity compels him to be a *bricoleur*, dilettante, jack-of-all-trades, deeply embroiled for survival in the very commercial literary world from which [Thomas] Carlyle beat his disdainful retreat.'[35] The Victorian man of letters is 'at once source of sagelike authority and canny popularizer, member of a spiritual clerisy but plausible intellectual salesman.'[36] Sage, a woman of the twentieth century, was acutely aware of the more mercantile parts of the job; as quoted above, she described the job of the reviewer as one in which '[y]ou swap words for money, you reprocess reading into writing and commentary. You describe, paraphrase, quote, reperform, "place" and help sell (or not) the books you're reviewing.'[37]

---

[29] Sage, 'Living on Writing', p. 262.
[30] Cyril Connolly, 'Comment,' *Horizon*, 1.3 (1940), p. 149.
[31] Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism*, p. 32.
[32] Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism*, p. 32.
[33] Joel H. Wiener, *The Americanization of the British Press, 1830s-1914* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 102.
[34] Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism*, p. 45.

But if Sage's journalism is a commodity – which is used in turn to 'help sell (or not)' further commodities – can it be usefully called 'criticism'? What is the function of criticism in one of Sage's newspaper reviews? Principal in Sage's list of competencies for newspaper reviewing is description, and it would pay to think of Sage's journalistic practice in terms of recent critical debates about description, namely the work of Sharon Marcus. In a 2016 essay on Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* (1953), Marcus claims that 'many scholars of literature continue to belittle "mere description" and to champion interpretation'.[38] Sage had major misgivings about the forms of interpretation that we now call 'critique' or the 'hermeneutics of suspicion', and I will explore these misgivings in the following section on Sage's academic work. But it is worth, for the time being, acknowledging Marcus's distinction between description and interpretation – despite her pointing out that the boundaries between these two terms 'are contested and blurry'.[39] For Marcus, interpretation 'states not what things are or how they work but what they mean.'[40] Whereas 'description deals with what is in the text itself; interpretation does more.'[41] The '[r]adical skepticism about description stems from a tendency to equate it with the absence of any kind of perspective, viewpoint, hypothesis, or theory.'[42] What would such a viewpoint or theory look like? In a 2009 special issue of *Representations* titled 'The Way We Read Now', Marcus, writing with Stephen Best, refers to 'symptomatic reading': 'a mode of interpretation that assumes that a text's truest meaning lies in what it does not say, describes textual surfaces as superfluous, and seeks to unmask hidden meanings.'[43] In response to symptomatic reading practices – which Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick termed 'paranoid reading' in 2003,[44] but which we might also call the hermeneutics of suspicion – Best and Marcus theorise a set of practices they call 'surface reading'. One of these is 'Attention to surface as a practice of critical description'.[45] This practice 'assumes that texts can reveal their own truths because texts mediate themselves; what we think theory brings to texts (form, structure, meaning) is already present in them.'[46] Rather than seeking to identify latent psychological or ideological content, the function of criticism is instead 'to indicate what the text says about itself.'[47]

---

[35] Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism*, p. 45.
[36] Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism*, p. 51.
[37] Sage, 'Living on Writing', p. 262.
[38] Sharon Marcus, 'Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* and the Value of Scale', *Modern Language Quarterly* 77.3 (September 2016), pp. 297-319 (p. 299).
[39] Marcus, 'Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* and the Value of Scale', p. 304.

This theory of 'critical description' does to some extent apply to Sage's practice. As quoted above, Sage wrote in the 1998 essay 'Living on Writing' that '[r]eviewing is in an important sense *reading out loud*'.[48] Sage does not in her reviews perform a 'reading' of the book with reference to theory – for instance psychoanalysis – and she does indeed approach

---

[40] Marcus, 'Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* and the Value of Scale', p. 304.
[41] Marcus, 'Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* and the Value of Scale', p. 308.
[42] Marcus, 'Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* and the Value of Scale', p. 304.
[43] Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, 'Surface Reading: An Introduction', *Representations*, 108.1 (2009), pp. 1-21 (pp. 1).
[44] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 123-152 (*passim*).
[45] Best and Marcus, 'Surface Reading', p. 11.
[46] Best and Marcus, 'Surface Reading', p. 11.
[47] Best and Marcus, 'Surface Reading', p. 11.
[48] Sage, 'Living on Writing', p. 262.

‘what is in the text itself’ without speculating as to what it could ‘mean’. But we should make an important qualification. Here is the opening of the Pynchon review again:

> Imagine a limbo, where death has come, but not the end – a breathless, frenzied, sickening, yet somehow moronically *cheerful* interval that seems to go on forever. That is about as close as one can come to a brief description of *Gravity's Rainbow*.[49]

This is not really, as Sage puts it, a ‘brief description of *Gravity's Rainbow*’, but more precisely it is a brief description of the experience of reading *Gravity's Rainbow*. It is not a description of the novel's content – for instance its plot or characters – or of the book's form – for instance its style, narrative voice, and so on – but rather an elaborate analogy, an attempt to describe creatively not just ‘what is in the text itself’, but how it feels to read it.

There are two important conclusions to be drawn from this. The first is that Sage's pieces are written primarily for the immediate pleasure of the reader: hence Sage's amicability, the richness of her descriptions, the grotesque comedy of her language. As Marcus and Best write in a subsequent special issue of *Representations*, this time with Heather Love, titled ‘Description Across Disciplines’ (2016): ‘describing and descriptions can produce pleasure – granular, slow, compressed, attentive, appreciative – as when Roland Barthes reproduces, codes, interprets every sentence of a Balzac novella in *S/Z*, then reproduces the text again in its entirety.’[50] Secondly, any elaborate analogy of how it feels to read a book contains within it an implicit judgement, though Sage's pieces do not contain judgements, in the sense of, as Clune puts it, ‘the simple communication of an explicit “good/bad” verdict on the object’.[51] Although Sage does recognise in her 1998 essay ‘Living on Writing’ that part of the reviewer's task is ‘help[ing] to sell (or not)’ the book in question, this is qualified: ‘whether it is positive or negative is less important than its power to arouse interest, to make the book in question twitch and show signs of life'.[52] The implied judgements transmitted in Sage's pieces are part of a complex process in which Sage mediates between her own expertise and the opinion or taste of her readership. Despite the commercial nature of newspaper reviewing, Sage is not writing about books which are immediately commercially successful: the characteristic pieces quoted above include reviews of experimental novels (*Gravity's Rainbow*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *The Runaway Soul*), academic works (*Keats and Embarrassment* and the Bloom collection), obscure juvenilia (Byron's *Complete Poetical Works*), and collections of letters (the de Beauvoir and the Dickens). Whereas the task of the Victorian man of letters was, as Eagleton puts it, to 'reflect as well as consolidate public opinion, working in close touch with the broad habits and prejudices of the middle-class reading public',[53] Sage uses the pleasure generated by her living style to 'arouse interest' in important literature and in doing so shape public taste.

---

[49] Sage, ‘Waiting for the Bang’, p. 5.

[50] Sharon Marcus, Heather Love, and Stephen Best, ‘Building a Better Description’, *Representations* 135 (2016), pp. 1-21 (p. 14).

[51] Clune, ‘John Guillory's Distortions’, p. 80.

II. Writing Lives

Despite her prolific career as a literary journalist, Lorna Sage was also a lifelong academic. She joined the University of East Anglia as a lecturer in 1965, initially as a specialist in Elizabethan literature, and worked there until her death in January 2001. Partly as a result of her journalism, Sage developed a reputation over the course of her academic career as an expert in the burgeoning field of contemporary fiction, particularly contemporary women's writing, but her major contribution to the discipline was her developing with Janet Todd the MA in Life Writing at UEA, which she began teaching in Autumn 2000. This section will look closely at archived teaching notes from two modules Sage taught at UEA – 'Fiction and the Reality Effect', which was part of the MA in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Novel, and 'Autobiography', which was part of the MA in Life Writing – as well as Sage's short monograph, *Angela Carter* (1994). A close attention to Sage's academic work will complicate the account given by John Guillory in his recent monograph *Professing Criticism* (2022), which argues that the professionalisation of criticism in the university saw a 'divergence' take place between the 'old aim of criticism, to instruct the taste of the lay reader' and 'the new aim, to develop an autonomous, professional, interpretive reading practice'.[54] He goes on:

---

[52] Sage, 'Living on Writing', p. 262.

[53] Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism*, p. 47.

> The distinction between judgment and interpretation traces the line of demarcation between lay reading and professional reading, even today [Guillory writes in 2022]. All lay readers are judges of what they read and, when called upon to defend their judgements, can usually summon arguments. But lay readers are often resistant to interpretation, for reasons that are at once obvious and hard to address. It is just here that the gap between lay and professional readers yawns widest, enlarging a no man's land of mutual hostility. […] For professional critics, interpretation has *become* criticism.[55]

In a review of Guillory's book, Michael W. Clune calls this argument 'bizarre', not least because the New Critics 'vastly overemphasize[ed] judgment'.[56] Clune then goes on to explain that Guillory's argument is flawed because judgement is part of the very process of interpretation; in fact, interpretation begins from an act of judgement: 'We are animated, in approaching the work, by a working hypothesis that it knows something, or can do something, that we can't and that most works can't.'[57] Clune's critique is precise and useful, but in this section I take issue with Guillory's argument in a different way: Sage was a professional critic for her entire working life and yet her ideas about interpretation were much more nuanced than Guillory's rather blunt argument that '[f]or professional critics, interpretation has *become* criticism' could possibly allow for. How, then, did Sage theorise fiction, life writing, and their relation to the life of the writer? In what ways did Sage resist the implications of Barthes's 'death of the Author', and how did she integrate Barthes's ideas into a feminist theory of literary creation?

---

[54] John Guillory, *Professing Criticism* (Chicago University Press, 2022), p. 330.
[55] Guillory, *Professing Criticism*, p. 329.
[56] Clune, 'John Guillory's Distortions', pp. 78-79.
[57] Clune, 'John Guillory's Distortions', p. 79.

First, though, we should acknowledge that Sage would likely have agreed with Guillory that the practices of professional readers and lay readers are distinct. Sage voiced her misgivings about interpretation and the uses of literary theory in a short piece written for the *Times Literary Supplement*, titled 'The Women's Camp' (15th July 1994). In that piece, Sage makes the exaggerated claim that 'theory is the region where common sense dies'.[58] She explains:

> The language of theory gives its users the illusion that they are in charge, somehow, riding this authoritative discourse, when more of them are in truth closer to being its creatures. Talking about power becomes a kind of vicarious trip, especially when the prestige of intellectual life is so low in the world outside. Add to this the suspicion that teaching theory works out a lot cheaper than teaching even a truncated version of the history of literature – and it starts to look like a Nineties conspiracy, disseminating ignorance.[59]

Sage's language here is excessive, not least the charge that academics who teach theory are 'disseminating ignorance' – as we shall see further on, Sage in fact engaged with a wide range of theoretical work throughout her teaching career at UEA. But looking past the rhetorical performance, we see that Sage is making an important point about interpretation. Theory allows its 'users' to feel 'in charge' and 'authoritative'. Thirty years after this piece was written, we can still recognise this dynamic in contemporary debates about interpretation and method. Sage describes in the above quotation those procedures of academic reading that Marcus and Best defined in 2009 as 'symptomatic reading' – but which we might also call the hermeneutics of suspicion or paranoid reading – that 'mode of interpretation that assumes that a text's truest meaning lies in what it does not say, describes textual surfaces as superfluous, and seeks to unmask hidden meanings.'[60] With symptomatic reading, the reader is 'in charge' because they are able to identify the text's 'truest meaning' no matter how 'hidden' it may be. This 'truest meaning' might be very different from the author's intention: as Marcus puts it in 'Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* and the Value of Scale' (2016), we 'move closest' to interpretation when

---

[58] Lorna Sage, 'The Women's Camp' [*Times Literary Supplement*, 15th July 1994] in *Good as Her Word*, ed. Sharon Sage and Victor Sage [2003] (Harper Perennial, 2004), pp. 186-189 (p. 186).

[59] Sage, 'The Women's Camp', p. 188.

[60] Best and Marcus, 'Surface Reading', p. 1.

> we argue that the text means something very different from what it says or when we assert that a text's meaning and import lie in what it does not say, in blind spots and exclusions that only the interpreter can point out.[61]

A similar account is given by Jonathan Kramnick in his more recent monograph *Criticism and Truth* (2023), in which he writes that 'interpretation bends works of writing towards topics and questions at hand':

> The goal of the talented hermeneut is not so much to re-create the circumstances in which a work was written as to place aspects of the work within a field of inquiry. And to do that, the hermeneut has to make the work present in such a way that responds to her specific interests.[62]

These contemporary accounts of interpretation afford primacy to the reader, or as Kramnick calls them, the 'hermeneut'. The reader is free and able either to divine the 'truest meaning' of the text or to 'bend' the work to their own interests. Sage takes issue with this primacy because it positions the reader as 'authoritative'. If, as Kramnick writes, 'interpretation involves making as well as understanding',[63] then how or why could the reader's 'making' of their interpretation have any more authority than the writer's making of the text?

Sage's interest in this question of authority and authorship finds its origin in her feminism, which she expands on in the later piece, 'Living on Writing' (1998). Referring to the work of the feminist critic Nancy K. Miller, Sage writes:

> Miller argues that feminism needs to negotiate a reprieve for the author-function, however deconstructed, because women and men have had different histories, and unequal access to authorship: 'women … have not, I think, (collectively) felt burdened by *too much* self, ego, cogito, etc. Because the female subject has juridically been excluded from the polis, hence decentred, "disoriginated", deinstitutionalized, etc., her relation to integrity and textuality, desire and authority, displays structurally important differences from that universal position.'[64]

---

[61] Marcus, 'Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* and the Value of Scale', p. 305.

[62] Jonathan Kramnick, *Criticism and Truth: On Method in Literary Studies* (University of Chicago Press), p. 62.

[63] Kramnick, *Criticism and Truth*, p. 61.

[64] Sage, 'Living on Writing' p. 268.

Sage takes Miller's argument and applies it to contemporary literary culture, arguing that the effect of deconstruction upon 'the whole field of contemporary writing' is one in which

> the deconstructive doctrines aimed at demystifying the great (past) figures of the canon leave no real room for contemporary writers who are trying to make themselves a character and a space. In other words, the present is already accounted for. The quality of the attention given to contemporary writers and writing by the inhabitants of the Ivory Tower suffers in consequence.[65]

This argument is implicitly gendered: the academic work of male literary theorists and philosophers obstructs the creative practice of contemporary women writers. Eagleton makes a similar argument in *The Function of Criticism* (1984):

> The deconstructive gesture, [J.] Hillis Miller has argued, always fails, 'so that it has to be performed again and again, interminably…' This is certainly a reassuring kind of failure to run up against – one that promises to keep you in a job indefinitely, unlike those research programmes which frustratingly run out of steam just as you are about to gain promotion.[66]

The issue, for Sage as well as for Eagleton, is not simply that these academic readers are applying theory to 'bend' established literary works to their purposes, but that this way of reading takes up so much space – both figurative and literal – within both the university and contemporary literary culture.

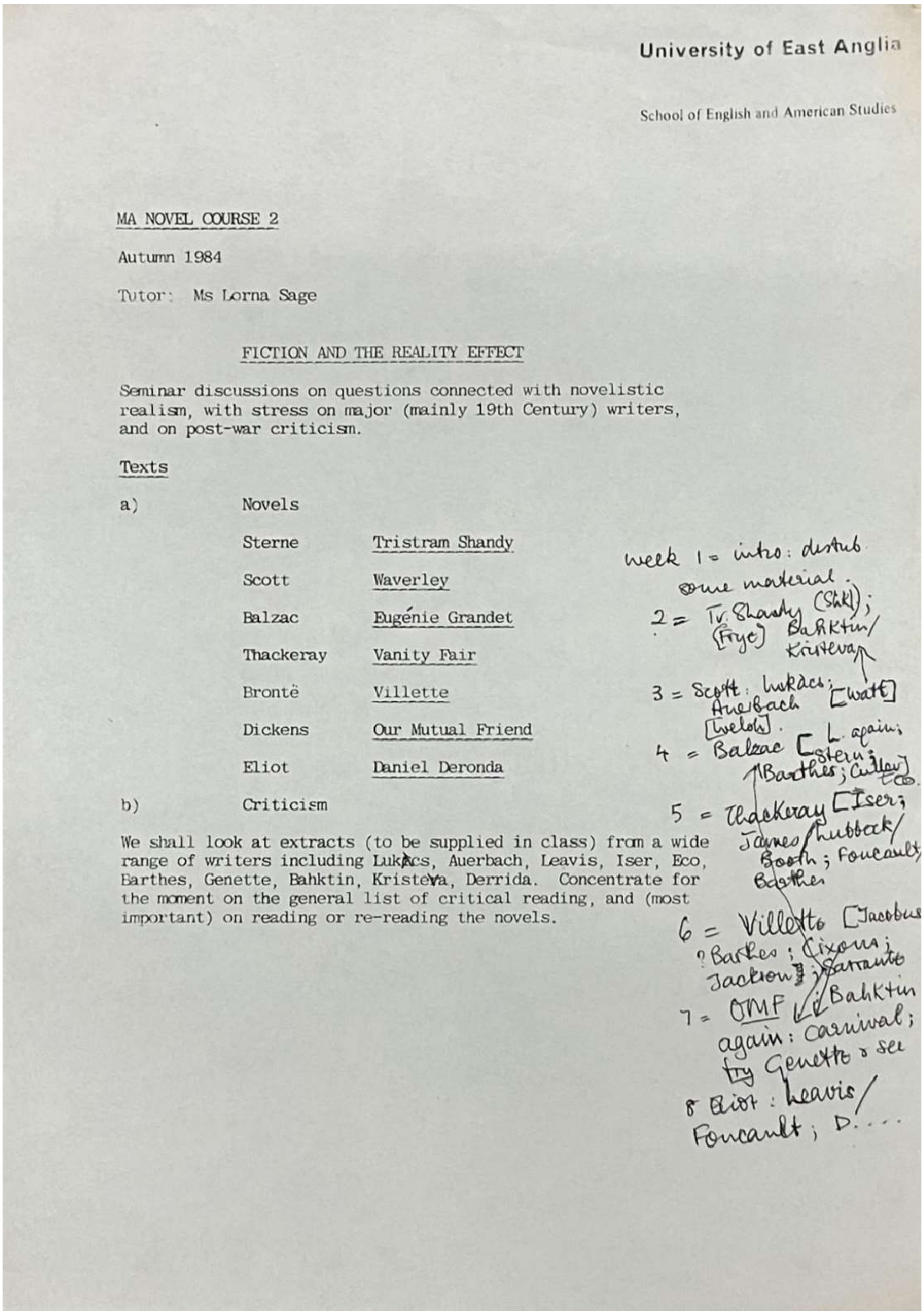
But Sage was much more amenable to theory in the classroom than the rhetoric of 'The Women's Camp' or 'Living on Writing' would otherwise suggest. One example is Sage's course on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels titled 'Fiction and the Reality Effect', which ran throughout the 1980s as part of UEA's MA in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Novel. Looking at the reading list for the Autumn 1984 iteration, Sage describes the course as: 'Seminar discussions on questions connected with novelistic realism, with stress on major (mainly 19th Century) writers, and on post-war criticism.'[67] By 'post-war criticism' Sage meant

---

[65] Sage, Living on Writing', p. 268.

[66] Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism*, p. 105. The quotation from J. Hillis Miller is taken from Paul A. Bové, 'Variations on Authority' in *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America*, ed. J. Arac, W. Godzich and W. Martin (University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 11.

[67] 'Fiction and the Reality Effect', LS/TC/3, Lorna Sage Archive, British Archive for Contemporary Writing, University of East Anglia.



University of East Anglia

School of English and American Studies

MA NOVEL COURSE 2

Autumn 1984

Tutor: Ms Lorna Sage

FICTION AND THE REALITY EFFECT

Seminar discussions on questions connected with novelistic realism, with stress on major (mainly 19th Century) writers, and on post-war criticism.

Texts

a) Novels

Sterne	Tristram Shandy
Scott	Waverley
Balzac	Eugénie Grandet
Thackeray	Vanity Fair
Brontë	Villette
Dickens	Our Mutual Friend
Eliot	Daniel Deronda

b) Criticism

We shall look at extracts (to be supplied in class) from a wide range of writers including Lukács, Auerbach, Leavis, Iser, Eco, Barthes, Genette, Bahktin, Kristeva, Derrida. Concentrate for the moment on the general list of critical reading, and (most important) on reading or re-reading the novels.

week 1 = intro: distrib. some material.
2 = Tr. Shandy (Shkl); [Frye] Bakhtin/Kristeva
3 = Scott: Lukács; Auerbach [Watt] [Welsh].
4 = Balzac [L. again; Stern; Barthes; Culler] too.
5 = Thackeray [Iser; James/Lubbock/Booth; Foucault/Barthes
6 = Villette [Jacobus ?Barthes; Cixous; Jackson]; Sarraute
7 = OMF Bakhtin again: carnival; try Genette & see
8 Eliot: Leavis/Foucault; D. . .

Figure 8. Handout for ‘Fiction and the Reality Effect’ (1984).[68]

---

[68] Handout for ‘Fiction and the Reality Effect’ (Autumn 1984), LS/TC/3, Lorna Sage Archive, British Archive for Contemporary Writing, University of East Anglia.

a diverse range of critical writing including, crucially, the work of continental literary theorists. The very title 'Fiction and the Reality Effect' is a translation of the title of Roland Barthes's 1968 essay, 'L'effet de réel'. The novels on the list in Autumn 1978 were: Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy* (1767); Walter Scott, *Waverley* (1814), Honoré de Balzac, *Eugénie Grandet* (1833); William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (1848); Charlotte Brontë, *Villette* (1853); Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (1865); George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (1876). The critical reading included 'extracts [...] from a wide range of writers including Lukács, Auerbach, Leavis, Iser, Eco, Barthes, Genette, Bakhtin, Kristeva, Derrida'. Each novel was paired with a particular combination of literary theorists: *Tristram Shandy* with Viktor Shklovsky, Northrop Frye, Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva; *Our Mutual Friend* with Bakhtin, Hélène Cixous, and Gérard Genette, and so on.[69] The rubric of the course was not to choose one thinker, for instance Bakhtin, and then 'bend' the novels to make them fit, or to choose one novel, for instance *Our Mutual Friend*, and then apply the work of various thinkers to divine the 'truest' meaning, but rather to bring the fiction and the theory into contact with each other. What happens when we read *Tristram Shandy* with Bakhtin? What happens, for instance, when we read Kristeva with *Tristram Shandy*? By including a broad list of novels and theoretical works, Sage prevents any one thinker or style of reading from becoming 'authoritative'.

It is worth noting that when Sage invokes in 'Living on Writing' Miller's feminist argument for a 'reprieve for the author-function', she makes a historical argument: she refers to the fact that 'women and men have had different histories, and unequal access to authorship'.[70] Sage's misgivings with deconstruction originate not only in her feminism, but her training as a literary historian; as Eagleton explains, '[t]he epistemological scepticism and historical relativism of certain militant forms of deconstruction are profoundly antithetical to academic orthodoxy, shaking as they do the very foundations of scholarly objectivity.'[71] Sage was initially hired by UEA in 1965 as a lecturer in Elizabethan literature, on the back of her book-length MA thesis 'Poems on Poetry from Sidney to Milton' – the title is mistakenly rendered 'Poems on Poetry in the 17th Century' in Victor Sage's *London Review of Books* 'Diary' piece and elsewhere[72] – which was awarded by the University of Birmingham in 1966. In her first few years at UEA, Sage taught a course on the nineteenth century with the historian Patricia Hollis, who later became a government minister. As Jon Cook writes in his 2001 obituary of Sage, this class 'was, at the time, a unique course on the urban landscapes of the 1830s and 40s', devised '[w]ell before the invention of "new historicism"'.[73] The method resembled the practices of cultural materialism, as Cook recounts: 'Questioning a simple-minded distinction between fact and fiction, they analysed the rhetoric of 19th-century fiction, philosophy and government reports, finding in the forms of language a guide to the mentality of a culture.'[74] Such a method 'appealed to Sage, precisely because it made teaching a form of research. She believed university teaching should open up fields of inquiry rather than deliver settled doctrines.'[75]

---

[69] 'Fiction and the Reality Effect', Lorna Sage Archive, British Archive for Contemporary Writing [LS/TC/3].
[70] Sage, 'Living on Writing', p. 268.

Sage's early practice as a literary historian and her interest in, as Cook puts it, '[q]uestioning a simple-minded distinction between fact and fiction' was the origin for her later interest in the theory and practice of biography. Sage was instrumental in setting-up UEA's MA in Life Writing – now the MA in Creative Writing (Non-Fiction) – with Janet Todd in the year 1999-2000. The MA began in October 2000, with the plan being for Sage to teach the first core module, 'Autobiography', in the Autumn and Todd to teach the second core module,

---

[71] Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism*, p. 98.
[72] Victor Sage, 'On Lorna Sage', *London Review of Books* 23.11 (7th June 2001) <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v23/n11/victor-sage/diary/> [accessed 26th April 2024].
[73] Jon Cook, 'Lorna Sage', *The Guardian*, 13th January 2001 <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2001/jan/13/guardianobituaries.books/> [accessed 26th April 2024].
[74] Cook, 'Lorna Sage'.
[75] Cook, 'Lorna Sage'.

‘Biography’, in the Spring, but Sage was only able to teach one cohort before she died in January 2001. It was not the first course of its kind: Hermione Lee had established a life-writing course with Hugh Haughton at the University of York in 1995.[76] But Sage and Todd’s MA was still a major development, not least because UEA had by 2000 established a global reputation for its original MA in the writing of prose fiction. Speaking in 2022, Lee explained that she and Haughton took the phrase ‘life writing’ for the title of their course from Virginia Woolf’s autobiographical essay ‘A Sketch of the Past’ (1939).[77] The term is, however, much older than Woolf: as Laura Marcus points out, ‘life writing’ appears ‘in the 18th century, alongside “biography”, whose usage can be dated from the 17th century.’[78]

That both of these courses were not developed until the 1990s is hardly surprising given the relative hostility to biography which developed throughout the twentieth century, alongside the development of the university English school. ‘The literary case against biography’ begins, as Lee explains in *Biography* (2009), in the nineteenth century, with ‘roots in aestheticism, in the idea of the separateness and purity – or amorality of the work of art’; examples given by Lee include the work of the novelist Gustave Flaubert and the French symbolist poet Charles Baudelaire.[79] From there the Anglo-American modernists – T. S. Eliot, Henry James, W. B. Yeats, and Ford Madox Ford – share a ‘high claim for artistic separateness’ and seek to construct ‘their own original, free-standing, authoritative aesthetic systems, masks, and pattens’.[80] The modernist separation of art and life ‘had a lasting effect’ on the New Critics – not least W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, who published ‘The Intentional Fallacy’ in 1946 – as well as postwar literary theory, most notably in Roland Barthes’s essay ‘The Death of the Author', which appeared in 1967.[81] By the 1990s, however, Sage identifies a renewed interest in literary biography, as she writes in 'Living on Writing':

---

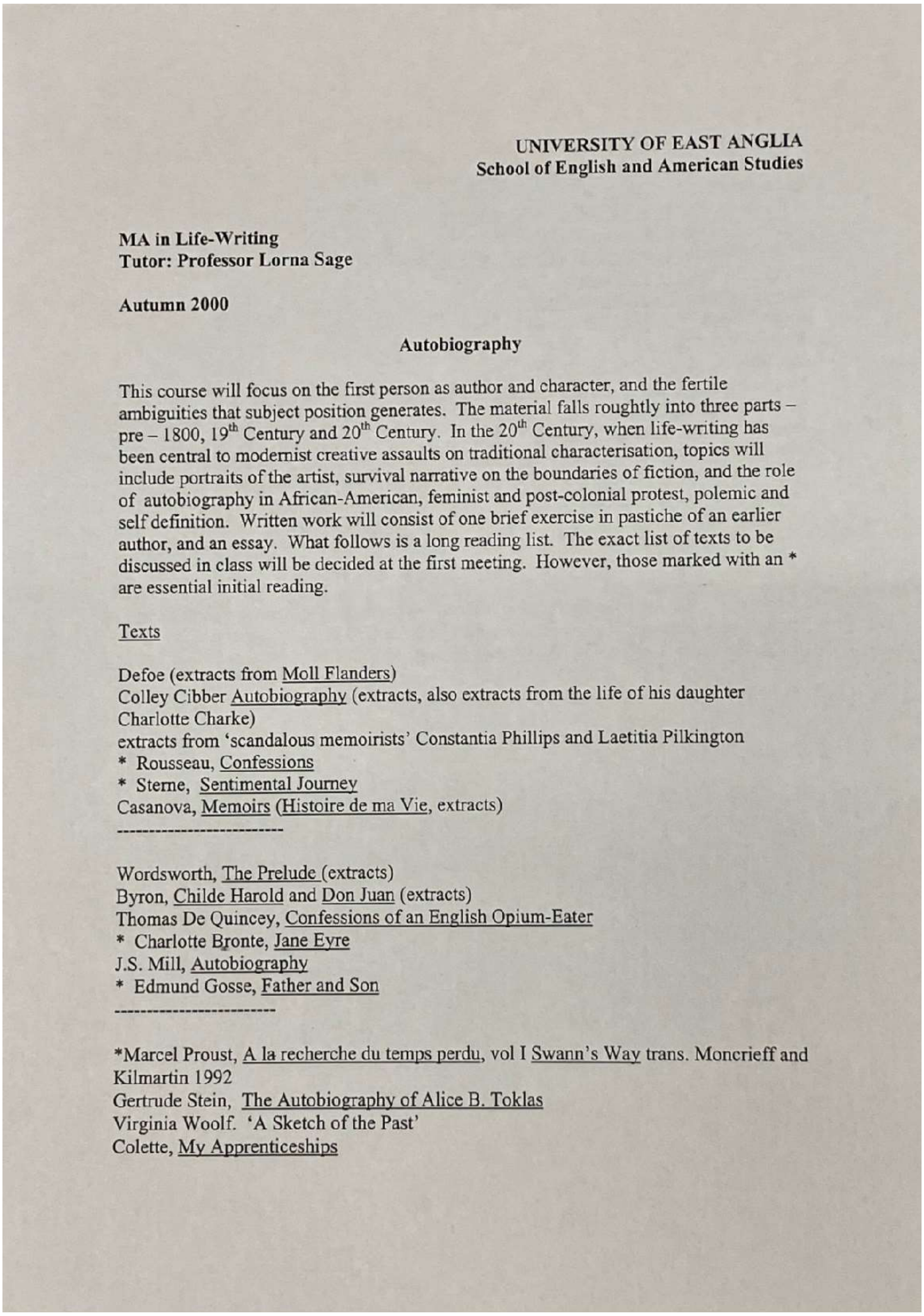
[76] Nina Ellis and Emily Dorothea Hull, ‘A Conversation with Professor Dame Hermione Lee’, *The Cambridge Quarterly* 53.1 (2024), pp. 2-10 (p. 5).
[77] Ellis and Hull, ‘A Conversation with Professor Dame Hermione Lee’, p. 5.
[78] Laura Marcus, *Autobiography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 1-2.
[79] Hermione Lee, *Biography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 93.
[80] Lee, *Biography*, p. 93.

> The rise and rise of literary biography in the age of the (theoretical) death of the Author cannot be attributed to the influence of literary journalism, but it's certainly true that Grub Street has welcomed it, given it space and helped it to happen. The person of the author has never been more on display than it is now, and the popularity of Virginia Woolf's term "life-writing" is explained by the extraordinary variety of kinds of writing now barely covered by the biography label.[82]

The handout for the first and only iteration of Sage's course on 'Autobiography', dated October 2000, is curious in that four of the ten texts marked as 'essential initial reading' are novels: Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey* (1768); Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1847); Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way* (1913); Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (1957).[83] The relative looseness of the term 'life-writing' allows for Sage to choose a *roman-à-clef* like *On the Road* or a novel like *Jane Eyre* for consideration alongside other forms, including more conventional works of memoir. As Sage explained in the course description, this module brings its focus to bear not only on first-person biographical narratives, but on 'the first person as author and character' more generally. A central theme of the course is 'the inter-relation between autobiography and fiction' and, as in her 'Fiction and the Reality Effect' class, Sage sets the work of the French structuralist Gérard Genette as initial reading. As Lee reminds us, 'biography is a form of narrative, not just a presentation of facts',[84] and Sage's 'Autobiography' module draws attention to the ways in which works of self-written life writing construct and potentially fictionalise the events of lived experience. As we shall see in the next section, Sage plays with these ambiguities and tensions in the composition of her own dialogic and playful memoir, *Bad Blood*.

---

[81] Lee, *Biography*, p. 93.
[82] Sage, 'Living on Writing', p. 265.
[83] 'Autobiography', recto, LS/TC/1, Lorna Sage Archive, British Archive for Contemporary Writing, University of East Anglia.
[84] Lee, *Biography*, p. 5.



UNIVERSITY OF EAST ANGLIA
School of English and American Studies

MA in Life-Writing
Tutor: Professor Lorna Sage

Autumn 2000

Autobiography

This course will focus on the first person as author and character, and the fertile ambiguities that subject position generates. The material falls roughtly into three parts – pre – 1800, 19th Century and 20th Century. In the 20th Century, when life-writing has been central to modernist creative assaults on traditional characterisation, topics will include portraits of the artist, survival narrative on the boundaries of fiction, and the role of autobiography in African-American, feminist and post-colonial protest, polemic and self definition. Written work will consist of one brief exercise in pastiche of an earlier author, and an essay. What follows is a long reading list. The exact list of texts to be discussed in class will be decided at the first meeting. However, those marked with an * are essential initial reading.

Texts

Defoe (extracts from Moll Flanders)
Colley Cibber Autobiography (extracts, also extracts from the life of his daughter Charlotte Charke)
extracts from ‘scandalous memoirists’ Constantia Phillips and Laetitia Pilkington
* Rousseau, Confessions
* Sterne, Sentimental Journey
Casanova, Memoirs (Histoire de ma Vie, extracts)

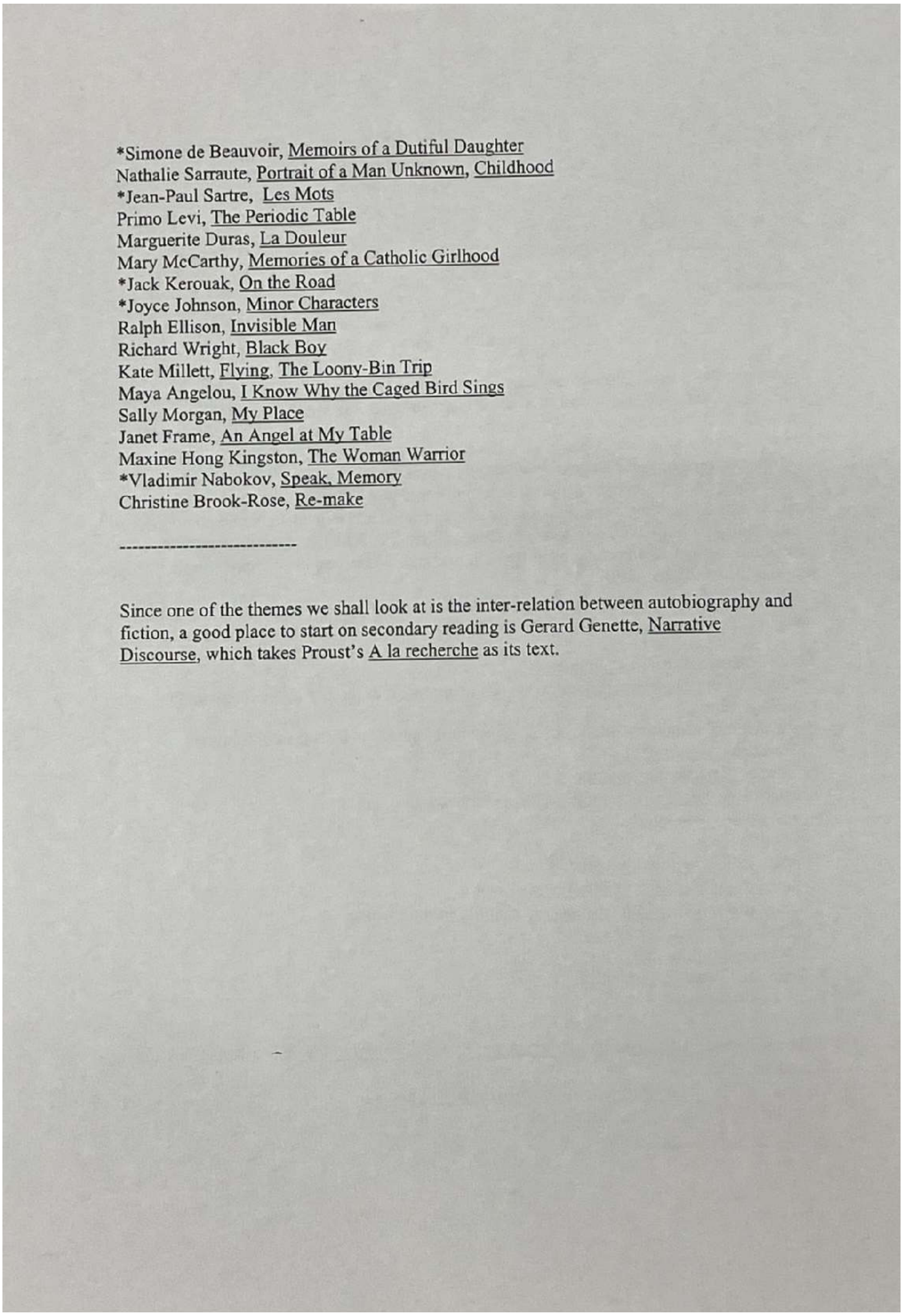
Wordsworth, The Prelude (extracts)
Byron, Childe Harold and Don Juan (extracts)
Thomas De Quincey, Confessions of an English Opium-Eater
* Charlotte Bronte, Jane Eyre
J.S. Mill, Autobiography
* Edmund Gosse, Father and Son
----

*Marcel Proust, A la recherche du temps perdu, vol I Swann’s Way trans. Moncrieff and Kilmartin 1992
Gertrude Stein, The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas
Virginia Woolf. ‘A Sketch of the Past’
Colette, My Apprenticeships

Figure 9. Handout for ‘Autobiography’ (2000), recto.[85]

---

[85] Handout for ‘Autobiography’ (Autumn 2000), recto, LS/TC/1, Lorna Sage Archive, British Archive for Contemporary Writing, University of East Anglia.



*Simone de Beauvoir, Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter
Nathalie Sarraute, Portrait of a Man Unknown, Childhood
*Jean-Paul Sartre, Les Mots
Primo Levi, The Periodic Table
Marguerite Duras, La Douleur
Mary McCarthy, Memories of a Catholic Girlhood
*Jack Kerouak, On the Road
*Joyce Johnson, Minor Characters
Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man
Richard Wright, Black Boy
Kate Millett, Flying, The Loony-Bin Trip
Maya Angelou, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
Sally Morgan, My Place
Janet Frame, An Angel at My Table
Maxine Hong Kingston, The Woman Warrior
*Vladimir Nabokov, Speak, Memory
Christine Brook-Rose, Re-make

Since one of the themes we shall look at is the inter-relation between autobiography and fiction, a good place to start on secondary reading is Gerard Genette, Narrative Discourse, which takes Proust's A la recherche as its text.

Figure 10. Handout for 'Autobiography' (2000), verso.[86]

---

[86] Handout for 'Autobiography' (Autumn 2000), verso, LS/TC/1, Lorna Sage Archive, British Archive for Contemporary Writing, University of East Anglia.

The key innovation of Sage's MA seminar on Autobiography, however, is the mode of assessment for the course: 'Written work will consist of one brief exercise in pastiche of an earlier author, and an essay.'[87] This is a major departure from the other programmes offered at UEA, which were either assessed by a critical essay or an original creative submission which had been workshopped earlier in the semester. The requirement to produce a piece of writing which imitates the work of a previous author pushes against one of the most enduring ideas about creative writing: that the work is original. As the Oxford English Dictionary defines it, the transitive verb 'create' means '[t]o bring into being, cause to exist; *esp*. to produce where nothing was before.'[88] The idea that a truly creative writer makes their text out of nothing – or at most from introspection and inspiration – is an enduring one. In the nineteenth century, as Robert Macfarlane explains, originality was understood chiefly as 'a resistance to influence from other writers.'[89] Rather, '[i]t was felt was felt that the writer – as Wordsworth would put it in his "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" (1815) – should "owe nothing but to nature and his own genius".'[90] These Romantic ideas about originality and influence continued long into the twentieth century, when writing programmes started to become established in American colleges. As Mark McGurl points out in *The Program Era* (2009), one of the slogans of the writing courses of 'the neo-romantic 1960s' was 'find your voice'.[91] Sage, however, set exercises in pastiche to encourage students to consider what they might learn from writing in other people's voices. An expert in Elizabethan literature, Sage would have been well aware of the much older pedagogic practice of teaching through imitation, which, as Thomas Karshan explains, ‘was known to Renaissance humanists such as Petrarch and Erasmus as *imitatio*.’[92] Shakespeare had been taught to write in Latin this way at the King’s New School in Stratford-upon-Avon, as had Milton at London’s St Paul’s School.[93]

---

[87] 'Autobiography', recto and verso, LS/TC/1, .Lorna Sage Archive, British Archive for Contemporary Writing [LS/TC/1], University of East Anglia.

[88] 'Create', v. 1a., *Oxford English Dictionary* <https://www.oed.com/dictionary/create_v/> [accessed 10th July 2024].

[89] Robert Macfarlane, *Original Copy: Plagiarism and Originality in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 21-22.

[90] Macfarlane, *Original Copy*, p. 22.

[91] Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 34.

But Sage would also have been aware of the contemporary significance of pastiche, not least after modernsim – we need only think of the ‘Oxen of the Sun’ episode in James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) – and the work of poststructuralists such as Roland Barthes and Hélène Cixous, which brought into question the Romantic idea of original creative genius. This is most obvious in ‘The Death of the Author’ (1967), where Barthes defines the text as ‘a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.’[94] As was the case with her reservations about interpretation, Sage’s interest in the notion of original genius, as well as potential methods to resist such an idea, finds its origin in her feminism. Towards the very end of her monograph *Angela Carter* (1994), Sage quotes at length from Hélène Cixous’s ‘La Sexe ou la tête?’ first published in French in 1976 and translated into English as ‘Castration or Decapitation?’ in 1981. The quotation reads:

> The origin is a masculine myth. […] The question “Where do children come from?” is basically a masculine, much more than feminine, question. The quest for origins, illustrated by Oedipus, doesn’t haunt a feminine unconscious. Rather it’s the beginning, or beginnings […] starting on all sides at once, that makes a feminine writing. […] When a woman writes in nonrepression she passes on her others, her abundance of non-ego/s in a way that destroys the form of the family structure. […] She writes of not-writing, non-happening.[95]

Sage invokes Cixous here to account for Carter’s own use of pastiche, parody, and quotation in her fiction, but the argument that ‘origin is a masculine myth’ has useful implications beyond Carter’s work. As Sage writes elsewhere in the book: ‘The notion of the “genius”, the “godlike and inspired creator”, Carter read as a piece of modernist mystification, which made the practitioners of art into a priestly caste, and put about the myth that creativity was *very scarce*.'[96] Thinking of 'genius', 'originality', and 'creativity' in this way, precisely as a set of myths, opens up reading and writing to various possibilities, not least an acknowledgment of the importance of influence and the various ways that such influence might be expressed or explored in a writer's work.

---

[92] Thomas Karshan, ‘Teaching through Imitation, Parody and Play’, *creativecritical.net* (2023) <https://creativecritical.net/teaching-through-imitation-parody-and-play/> [accessed 10th July 2024].
[93] Karshan, ‘Teaching through Imitation, Parody and Play’.
[94] Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’, p. 146.
[95] Hélène Cixous, ‘La Sexe ou la tête?’, *Les Cahiers du GRIF* 13 (1976), pp. 5-15, trans. A. Kuhn, ‘Castration or Decapitation?’ *Signs* 7 (1981), pp. 41-55 (pp. 53-54).

Angela Carter is the second of two single-author monographs that Sage wrote during her career, the first being *Doris Lessing* (1983). Sage had also edited the collection *Peacock: The Satirical Novels* (1976), published as part of A. E. Dyson's Casebooks series. The book on Carter warrants particular attention, not least because Sage and Carter were such close friends. As Edmund Gordon writes in his biography, *The Invention of Angela Carter* (2016), Sage invited Carter to teach at UEA in 1978, taking over from Angus Wilson on the MA in Creative Writing.[97] Gordon offers the following vignette:

> She [Carter] would take the train to Norwich, do a day's teaching, stay overnight with Lorna and her daughter Sharon – in a house whose atmosphere she satirised as 'teabags, Tampax, and the *TLS*' – and take the train back to London the following afternoon. Students remember her sitting with Lorna in the graduate bar, in a constant haze of laughter and smoke.[98]

Despite this close friendship, Sage wrote about Carter and her work both as a journalist and an academic. One such piece is 'Mirror images', a review of Carter's novel *Love* (1971) and short story collection *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces* (1974), published in *The Guardian* (22nd May 1987); another is the 1992 interview between Sage and Carter which was published as part of Malcolm Bradbury and Judy Cooke's *New Writing: An Anthology* (1992).

The proximity between Sage and Carter might seem a conflict of interest, but we should remember that close professional and personal relationships were common enough between the modernists of the early twentieth century, for instance Joyce, T. S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound. In

---

[96] Sage, *Angela Carter*, p. 44.
[97] Gordon, *The Invention of Angela Carter*, p. 287.
[98] Gordon, *The Invention of Angela Carter*, p. 287.

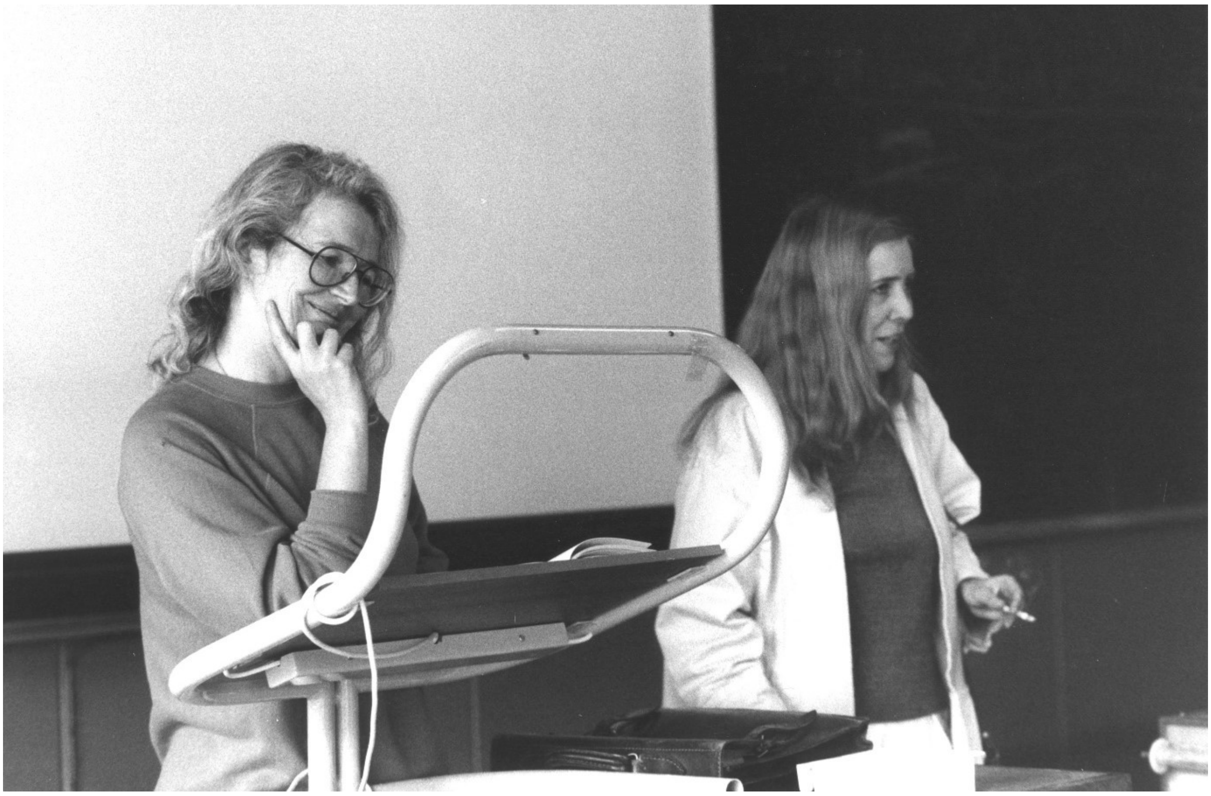


Figure 11. Angela Carter and Lorna Sage delivering a lecture (undated, mid-1980s).[99]

Angela Carter, Sage does not flinch from this proximity, but rather incorporates her personal knowledge of her friend into her arguments about the writer. Throughout the book Sage refers to personal correspondence – not just letters, but postcards too – as well as Carter's answers from interviews conducted by Sage for other pieces. As part of her discussion of Carter's second novel, *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), Sage writes: 'Ten years after its publication she [Carter] said to me in interview – I had asked, "Do you think your environment shaped you?"', and then quotes Carter's response at length:

> Well, my brother and I speculate endlessly on this point. We often say to one another, How is it possible such camp little flowers as ourselves emanated from Balham via Wath-upon-Dearne and the places my father comes from, north Aberdeenshire, stark, bleak and apparently lugubriously Calvinistic, witch-burning country? But obviously, something in this peculiar rootless, upward, downward, sideways socially mobile family, living in twilight zones.[100]

---

[99] Angela Carter and Lorna Sage delivering a lecture (undated, mid-1980s), LS/AC/16, Lorna Sage Archive, British Archive for Contemporary Writing, University of East Anglia.

[100] Sage, *Angela Carter*, p. 8. The interview is Lorna Sage, 'The Savage Sideshow', *New Review* 4.39-40 (1977), pp. 51-57.

Then follows Sage's analysis:

> The operative phrase here is "camp little flowers". In one sense, it simply signals "artiness": her elder brother Hugh became a musician (he taught music for many years), and she herself, after a brief apprenticeship in journalism, went to university (Bristol) and became, of course, a writer. But there is more to it than that. In *The Magic Toyshop* sinister Uncle Philip is surnamed "Flower", as if she was making a private joke along these lines; and in her third book, *Several Perceptions* (1968), the limping anti-heroine, an obdurate orphan, has been given the thoroughly inappropriate surname "Blossom". "Camp" repays further attention, too: it was one of the 1960s names for the taste for excess and mockery that characterized her early books, and a notoriously slippery term.[101]

Sage is not just writing about *The Magic Toyshop* and *Several Perceptions* (1968): she is also writing about Carter's answers, taking the phrase 'camp little flowers' and using this as the point of departure for her reading. This is not so much a case of the 'intentional fallacy' as it is of Sage using Carter's own utterances about her work, as well as facts about her life – including biographical details as mundane as her brother's occupation – as yet more 'texts' to be brought into the analysis of the work. Carter is not an authority here, and neither is Sage.

As an academic, Sage was seemingly self-contradictory. She wrote that 'theory is the region where common sense dies' and yet taught literary theory in her seminars. She taught a module on autobiography and yet the students were assessed by their ability to write in the voice of another. She questioned notions of creativity, originality, and genius and yet referred to interviews with Carter in her analysis of the work. But if these contradictions cannot be resolved, they can at least be understood as a commitment to questioning authority: both the authority of the interpreter and the authority of the writer. The origin of this, as with so many of Sage's vast array of critical and scholarly insights, is to be found in Sage's feminism. As she wrote in ‘Living on Writing’: ‘women and men have had different histories, and unequal access to authorship’.[102] They have had unequal access to authority, too.

---

[101] Sage, *Angela Carter*, p. 8.

III. Life writing

How do Sage’s journalistic practice and her academic teaching and research relate to her 2000 memoir *Bad Blood*? When Sage wrote, in her November 1994 review of Janet Malcolm’s *The Silent Woman*, that ‘Biography has long escaped the reflexiveness that afflicts serious fiction, and makes realistic writing look irresponsibly innocent’,[103] she was referring to writing about other people’s lives. But Sage had, by that point, written and published the first three chapters of *Bad Blood* as diary pieces for the *London Review of Books*: ‘The Old Devil and his wife’ (7th October 1993), ‘My Schooldays’ (21st October 1993) and ‘Grandma at home’ (4th November 1993). *Bad Blood* is a work of autobiography, in which Sage writes about her own life, specifically her childhood and delinquent teenage years in the Welsh border village of Hanmer and the market town of Whitchurch in Shropshire, culminating in her teenage pregnancy, young marriage to Victor Sage, and graduation from Durham University with a first in English. The prefix ‘auto’, meaning ‘self’, implies an element of self-reflection, and this prompts us to ask: how is *Bad Blood* a reflexive work of biography? More specifically: how does Sage combine the Dickensian style of her journalism with the ideas behind her feminist academic work on literary realism, postmodern fiction, and life-writing, to create a reflexive biography which is at once a work of social history and a work of introspective memoir?

The book begins with an arresting opening sentence: ‘Grandfather’s skirts would flap in the wind along the churchyard path and I would hang on.’[104] We see here not only what

---

[102] Lorna Sage, ‘Living on Writing’ in Jeremy Treglown and Bridget Bennett (eds), *Grub Street and the Ivory Tower: Literary Journalism and Literary Scholarship from Fielding to the Internet* (Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 262-276 (p. 268).

[103] Lorna Sage, ‘Surviving in the Wrong’ [*Times Literary Supplement*, 4th November 1994] in *Good as Her Word*, ed. Sharon Sage and Victor Sage [2003] (Harper Perennial, 2004), pp. 104-111 (p. 104).

[104] Lorna Sage, *Bad Blood* [2000] (Fourth Estate, 2020), p. 3.

Victor Sage calls the ‘knowing gender-subversion’ of the male grandparent in skirts,[105] but also the comically exaggerated image of the narrator, presumably a child, hanging on. We presume Sage is a child here because biographical works tend to begin at the subject’s early childhood. The sequencing of events in *Bad Blood* is broadly chronological although, like Martin Amis’s *Experience* (2000), the events are not told with a simple chronology. Instead, Sage plays with temporality, primarily through the use of polyphony and prolepsis. As Victor Sage puts it, *Bad Blood* is ‘a layered text’ of ‘creative anachronism’: the book is written ‘with a wry articulacy which filters the picture of a “Gothic” child-hood through a series of mature reflections’.[106]

Looking at the opening paragraph, we can see how this polyphony and prolepsis operate locally to complicate and add nuance to the scene:

> Grandfather’s skirts would flap in the wind along the churchyard path and I would hang on. He often found things to do in the vestry, excuses for getting out of the vicarage (kicking the swollen door, cursing) and so long as he took me he couldn’t get up to much. I was a sort of hobble; he was my minder and I was his. He’d have liked to get further away, but petrol was rationed. The church was at least safe. My grandmother never went near it – except feet first in her coffin, but that was years later, when she was buried in the same grave with him. Rotting together for eternity, one flesh at the last after a lifetime’s mutual loathing. In life, though, she never invaded his patch; once inside the churchyard he was on his own ground, in his element. He was good at funerals, being gaunt and lined, marked with mortality. He had a scar down his hollow cheek too, which Grandma had done with the carving knife one of the many times when he had come home pissed and incapable.[107]

Although the whole paragraph is authored by the same individual – the adult Lorna Sage – Victor Sage points out that there is more than one point of view ‘embedded’ here: it begins with the retrospecting Sage, then shifts to the ‘wary consenting voices of [her] parents’ (‘so long as he took me he couldn’t get up to much’), then back to the retrospecting Sage (‘I was a sort of hobble; he was my minder and I was his’), then to ‘a paraphrase of Grandfather’s own way of thinking’ (‘He’d have liked to get further away, but petrol was rationed. The church was at least safe’) and then to the retrospecting Sage again, ‘suddenly declining into her abrasive gallows humour and mimicry' ('My grandmother never went near it – except feet first in her coffin, but that was years later, when she was buried in the same grave with him', and so on).[108] But there are also, here, subtler shifts within the retrospecting Sage's point of view. The first mention of Hilda Thomas, the mother of Sage's mother, uses the generic, uncapitalised 'My grandmother', but then the more intimate 'Grandma' is used in the casual description of the assault with the carving knife. The capitalisation of 'Grandma' makes this a moniker for a specific individual, rather than a more general description of how two people are related. 'My grandmother' is the expression of the adult, retrospecting Sage, whereas the childish 'Grandma' is contemporaneous to the events themselves. 'Grandma had done with the carving knife' is, therefore, an imagined paraphrase of an explanation given to the child Lorna, most likely by Sage's mother, Valma, before a subtle shift to the grandmother's own point of view, with the expletive reproach 'pissed and incapable'. The subtle polyphony of the above paragraph, with at least six shifts in point of view, emphasises the variousness of subject position and individual viewpoint: both socially and in time. The shifts are combined with prolepsis, where future events are narrated earlier than their appearance in the actual chronology. Prolepsis is most obvious when it is flagged with a temporal phrase, such as, in the quoted paragraph, 'but that was years later'. But the shifts in point of view are themselves proleptic, as they can only happen if the narrating voice 'speaks' from outside the chronological order of events. These shifts in point of view and other instances of 'creative anachronism' – such as references to books or films that Sage would go on to read as an adult – imply certain facts or attributes about Sage's biography before their chronological occurrence. This creative anachronism leads the reader to accumulate an awareness of the life and consciousness of the actual Lorna Sage of the early-to-mid-1990s, when she wrote most of the book. The reader experiences this second, ambient biography as they move through the actual chronology of the book.

---

[105] Victor Sage, ‘Writing, Reading and Witnessing’, *Hinterland* 7 (2021), pp. 60-73 (p. 67).
[106] Victor Sage, ‘Writing, Reading and Witnessing’, p. 61.
[107] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 3.

---

[108] Victor Sage, 'Writing, Reading and Witnessing', pp. 72-73.

In an early review, the novelist Rachel Cusk wrote that *Bad Blood* 'is full of the strange atmosphere of an intersection between the real and the unreal'.[109] James Fenton, writing in the *New York Review of Books*, also commented on this 'strange atmosphere', writing: 'Gothic would be the word for this kind of story if we thought that Sage was making it up'.[110] Fenton recognises the gothic in Sage's portrayal of her grandfather, the Reverend Thomas James Meredith-Morris, a charismatic and rakish vicar who had a number of affairs before Sage was born. Sage refers to her grandfather as 'the Old Devil', invoking not just a gothic note of sinfulness but, crucially, repeated and habitual sinfulness: he is the *old* devil, the familiar devil. The moniker also carries with it an association with Kingsley Amis's Booker-winning novel *The Old Devils* (1986), which is set in Wales and includes its fair share of marital unhappiness and cuckoldry. Spending her early years at the vicarage leads Sage to feel as though she had been 'programmed with a love of dark corners and ingrained with disrespect. I knew how to hide in books. […] The taste for words Grandpa had given me was thoroughly promiscuous.'[111] The choice of the word 'promiscuous' here is significant, as it equates Sage's literariness with her more general delinquency, that pattern of behaviour which culminates in her teenage pregnancy. These traits are assumed, foremost by Valma, to have been passed down from the Old Devil to the child Lorna through his teaching her to read. The book's title, 'Bad Blood' refers to this, and the attendant 'mood of ancestral doom' (to use Boyd Tonkin's phrase) could quite plausibly have been lifted from the pages of a nineteenth-century novel.[112]

And yet *Bad Blood*'s strangeness is not only gothic; it is Dickensian, too. Although the personages in *Bad Blood* are representations of 'real' people, Sage takes full advantage of their more grotesque attributes, and while Sage has not necessarily created these attributes, she has certainly selected them: she has, after all, chosen to write about her stranger-than-fiction maternal grandparents – the lascivious vicar and his violent, blackmailing wife – rather than her more innocent paternal grandparents. The maternal grandparents are grotesque, not as in ‘ugly’ but rather the older sense of the word, as when the sixteenth-century French essayist, Michel de Montaigne, uses ‘grotesque’ to describe those ‘fantastical paintings whose attractiveness consists merely in variety and novelty.’[113] The vicar and his wife are certainly novel: he comes home drunk and she attacks him with a knife. In Hanmer more widely, the names of villagers seem to obey a Dickensian nominative determinism: ‘The gravedigger was actually called Mr Downward. The blacksmith who lived by the mere was called Bywater.’[114] It is only because Sage anticipates the reader’s scepticism by drawing attention to the unreal, fable-like qualities of these names with the word ‘actually’ that they seem in any way plausible.

---

[109] Rachel Cusk, quoted in Victor Sage, 'Writing, Reading and Witnessing', p. 61.

[110] James Fenton, 'The Woman Who Did', *The New York Review of Books*, 13th June 2002, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2002/06/13/the-woman-who-did/> [accessed 9th September 2024].

[111] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 90.

[112] Boyd Tonkin, '*Bad Blood*, by Lorna Sage', *Independent*, 8th October 2010 < https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/bad-blood-by-lorna-sage-2100672.html/> [accessed 9th September 2024].

Sage’s description of her grandmother, Hilda Thomas, warrants closer attention, as Sage employs the same grotesque attention we have come to know through a close reading of her journalism. Originally appearing in the *London Review of Books* piece ‘Grandma at home’ (4th November 1993), the passage reads:

> Her Welsh accent was foreign – sing-song, insidious, unctuous, converting easily to menace. Asthma lent a breathy vehemence to her curses and when she laughed she’d fall into wheezing fits that required a sniff of smelling salts. She had a repertoire of mysterious private catchphrases that always sent her off. If anyone asked what was the time, she’d retort “just struck an elephant!” and cackle triumphantly. […] She had lost her teeth and could make a most ghoulish face by arranging the false set, gums and all, outside her lips, in a voracious grin. This clownish act didn’t conceal her real hunger, however. She projected want. During the days of rationing she craved sugar. Its shortage must have postponed some of the worst ravages of the diabetes that martyred her later, for once the stuff was available again she couldn’t resist it at all. She was soft and slightly powdery to the touch, as though she’d been dusted all over with icing sugar like a sponge cake. […] Her ill-health had aged her into a child again in a way: a fat doll tottering on tiny swollen feet.[115]

---

[113] Michel de Montaigne, *On Friendship* (Penguin, 2004), p. 1.
[114] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 4.
[115] Sage, *Bad Blood*, pp. 31-32.

The bizarre catchphrase 'just struck an elephant!' – which is peculiar to Hilda and has no other documented occurrence besides this passage – and the triumphant cackle could both quite plausibly belong to a minor character from a Dickens novel, as could the effluence involved in Hilda's fit of wheezing laughter 'that required a sniff of smelling salts'. The external description of Hilda's 'ghoulish' face and 'soft and slightly powdery' texture brings to mind at once the gothic spinster Miss Havisham from *Great Expectations* (1861), as well as the more sinister villain Quilp from *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840): if Hilda were a fictional character, we could read her warped size – she is 'a fat doll tottering on tiny swollen feet' – as an outward expression of her inward greed. In his well-known *New Republic* piece on Zadie Smith's 2000 novel *White Teeth* – which won the Whitbread Award for First Novel in 2000, the same year that *Bad Blood* won the Whitbread Award for Biography – James Wood compares the characters of Smith's novel to those of Dickens. Wood writes that Dickens's caricatures are 'theatrically alive', but that the entertainment created by these 'cartoonish' figures comes at the expense of 'characters who are fully human'.[116] As Wood puts it, 'Dickens's world seems to be populated by vital simplicities'.[117] While the idea of 'fully human' characters is spurious – Gustave Flaubert's Emma Bovary is no more 'human' than Dickens's Quilp – we can use Wood's remarks to consider how Sage's use of caricature is reductive. The exaggerated names, habits, and behaviours of the characters get in the way, preventing the reader from constructing a sense of the person's interior life: Miss Havisham or Quilp, or indeed Hilda, Mr Downward or Mr Bywater, are characters rather than people.

Sage is not naïve to the reductive nature of caricature; rather, she uses caricature to draw attention to the problematic nature of characterisation itself. As Wood puts it, 'Dickens shows that a large part of characterization *is* the management of caricature.'[118] Throughout *Bad Blood*

---

[116] James Wood, 'Hysterical realism' in *The Irresponsible Self: On Laughter and the Novel* [2004] (Pimlico, 2005), pp. 167-183 (pp. 173).

[117] Wood, 'Hysterical realism', p. 174.

[118] Wood, 'Hysterical realism', p. 174.

Sage plays with the ideas of realism and representation, an interest previously explored in her academic work: the preface to *Women in the House of Fiction* – which was first published in 1992, a year before the first chapters of *Bad Blood* appeared in the *London Review of Books* – carries the following line: 'Representations fix and reproduce a world of "'types' of flesh and blood human beings" (this is Nathalie Sarraute) and conspire to naturalise us in it'.[119] Literature, or more specifically literary representation, is really the major theme of *Bad Blood*, and as such the book contains various scenes of reading. This begins early on, with the following scene from the first chapter:

> One day we stopped to watch the gravedigger, who unearthed a skull – it was an old churchyard, on its second or third time round – and grandfather dusted off the soil and declaimed 'Alas poor Yorick, I knew him well …' I thought he was making it up as he went along. When I grew up a bit and saw *Hamlet* and found him out, I wondered what had been going through his mind. I suppose the scene struck him as an image of his condition – exiled to a remote, illiterate rural parish, his talents wasted and so on. On the other hand his position afforded him a lot of opportunities for indulging secret, bitter jokes, hamming up the act and cherishing ironies, so in a way he was enjoying himself.[120]

As we saw in the opening paragraph – and, indeed, as is the case with the rest of the book – there is prolepsis here, signposted with the phrase 'When I grew up a bit', as the retrospecting Sage, who knows the play, reflects back on what must have been an enigma to the child Lorna. But there is also, crucially, a moment of literary criticism: Sage 'reads' her grandfather's performance – or, more accurately, Sage reads the performance *as she remembers it* – and she offers an interpretation of this act as though it were a scene in a novel. The retrospecting Sage identifies a metaphor in the Old Devil's choice of play: 'I suppose the scene struck him as an image of his condition'. Attentive readers will notice that the Old Devil's performance is very slightly wrong: the actual line is 'I knew him, *Horatio*.' It is unclear whether this is what Sage is referring to when she says she 'found him out': it may refer simply to the Old Devil's attempt to pass off Shakespeare's line as an original improvisation. In any case, the mistake emphasises the fallibility of memory, how even our recollection of a short line from one of the most famous plays in the Western canon can be mistaken.

---

[119] Lorna Sage, *Women in the House of Fiction: Post-War Women Novelists* (Palgrave, 1992), p. viii.
[120] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 4.

Those who knew the actual Lorna Sage, which is to say the woman who existed outside of the text of *Bad Blood*, were impressed by her particularly good memory. Sharon Sage and Victor Sage describe, in their introduction to *Good as Her Word*, Sage's 'habit of accuracy' which 'was like a religious devotion', as well as 'her unusual memory, into which books sank, apparently whole, not a feather of their print disturbed'.[121] Writing on *Bad Blood*, Victor Sage endorses the reliability of the book, not only because he 'can exactly corroborate the accuracy of much of the narrative', [122] but also because, as he puts it, 'Lorna held the early world of this book like an undisturbed crystal in her memory; partly because she never went back to Whitchurch or Hanmer after we left.'[123] And Edmund Gordon, who did not meet Sage, claims in his thoroughly-researched biography of Carter that Sage 'had an eidetic memory'.[124] But to emphasise the reliability or factuality of the narrative events and local details is to miss the point of *Bad Blood*, which is ultimately a book about literature and the ways in which reading, particularly reading narrative literature, can shape our life and consciousness. The Old Devil's seeing, in *Hamlet*, 'an image of his condition' is just one example of this. As Laura Marcus writes: 'any narrative of the self and its life-story will entail a reconstruction, subject to the vagaries of memory, which renders the division between autobiography and fiction far from absolute.'[125] Sage, an expert in life writing, was well aware of this: we need only think back to the list of novels included on her 'Autobiography' course, as well as that class's interest in 'the inter-relation between autobiography and fiction.'

---

[121] Sharon Sage and Victor Sage, 'Introduction', p. xvii.
[122] Victor Sage, 'Writing, Reading and Witnessing', p. 62.
[123] Victor Sage, 'Writing, Reading and Witnessing', p. 61.
[124] Gordon, *The Invention of Angela Carter*, p. 246.
[125] Marcus, *Autobiography*, p. 4.

But Sage did not write *Bad Blood* from memory alone: she had the Old Devil's diaries as well. In 1933 and 1934 – a decade before Sage was born in January 1943 – the Old Devil kept details of his extramarital liaisons in two appointment diaries. These were then discovered by Hilda, who promptly blackmailed him: 'The diary has a couple of scathing marginal comments in her hand,' writes Sage: '*Here the fun begins* (Friday, 25 August) and *Love begins (fool)* exactly a week later.'[126] Sage read the diary as she wrote *Bad Blood*, but her author-narrator also 'reads' the diary as she narrates the events preceding her birth in 1944. Sage's work with these diaries forms the central image of reading and interpretation in *Bad Blood*: she does not defer to the contents of the diaries with reverence to the authority or reliability of a historical 'source', but rather dramatizes, on the page, her interaction with these texts:

> The great shock of opening this compromising little book, for me, was that for the first half […] it was the record of a pottering, Pooterish, almost farcically domesticated life. The sinner I was expecting was guilty of pride, lust and spiritual despair, not merely of sloth and ineptitude. This was the diary of a nobody. So I nearly censored January to June 1933 in the interests of Grandpa's glamour as a Gothic personage. But in truth this is what we should be exposed to – the awful knowledge that when they're not breaking the commandments, the antiheroes are mending their tobacco pipes and listening to the wireless.[127]

It is curious that Sage's reaction to her grandfather's lack of rakishness is one of disappointment rather than relief. Sage acknowledges here not only how we fictionalise ourselves and others – in part by referring to George and Weedon Grossmith's comic novel *The Diary of a Nobody* (1892) and its protagonist Charles Pooter – but also how we desire those fictional personages: so much so that Sage nearly censored the mundane sections so as to preserve the unreal 'glamour' she had expected. But this scene comes with a lesson: 'we should be exposed to' the banalities of life, 'the awful knowledge' that our 'antiheroes' had lives as mundane as ours. Sage punctures not only the kinds of representations we know and expect from fiction, but also the 'unreal' nature of supposedly 'real' people off the page: even in life outside of writing, we construct fictions about ourselves and others. While Sage reflects here on her own process of writing the book as she writes it, she does also treat the diaries as a novel with a definite main character, the Old Devil. A local man's death by drowning is 'the beginning of a tragic sub-plot' and his girlfriend's bereavement, obviously central to that young woman's experience of her own life, is no more than 'a kind of background thrumming' for the Old Devil, a distraction from the main events.[128] At once Sage problematises the Old Devil's fictionality and emphasises it.

---

[126] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 46.

[127] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 47.

Those 'main events' in the Old Devil's life took place a decade before Sage was born. If the Old Devil's diary functions as a kind of primary evidence for Sage, it is not primary evidence about her own life. *Bad Blood* is as much about other people – the Old Devil, Hilda, Sage's mother Valma, the other residents of Hanmer and later Whitchurch – as it is about the formation of Sage's adult life and consciousness. It is in this way that *Bad Blood* comes to resemble a work of social history, in that it provides an account of changing life in rural Wales and England after the Second World War. Alongside Sage's narrative are published twenty photographs, mainly of the principal characters – Sage, her grandparents, Victor Sage, their baby Sharon, and others – but also images of Hanmer church, Hanmer mere, Hanford Stores, and a Coronation Day parade. The photographs illustrate life in the British provinces at a time when, as Victor Sage puts it, those places 'retained the strict religious mores and rigid social structures of the Victorian period almost untouched.'[129] *Bad Blood*, Victor Sage continues:

> narrates the impact on that lost, mythic, yet *historical* world, of both the new Labour government's building of public, council-housing estates, and the materialist (American-derived), optimistic values of the post-war recovery; all of which is associated in the latter parts of the text with a new fascination with aesthetic, economic, and philosophic realism. The struggle between those values and the lost world of significances she had inherited as a child, which includes her own literacy, reaches far down into the language of the book[.][130]

---

[128] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 53.
[129] Victor Sage, 'Writing, Reading and Witnessing', p. 60.
[130] Victor Sage, 'Writing, Reading and Witnessing', p. 60.

Changing attitudes to sex and women's rights are a significant part of both this social history and the young Lorna's lived experience of that history. It would pay to refer here to Hélène Cixous's seminal work of feminist literary theory, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', which first appeared in English in 1976. As referred to in the previous section, Sage referred to Cixous's work both in her 'Fiction and the Reality Effect' class in Autumn 1984 as well as in her 1994 monograph *Angela Carter*. In 'The Laugh of the Medusa', Cixous coins the term 'écriture féminine' or women's writing. 'In woman,' writes Cixous, 'personal history blends together with the history of all women, as well as national and world history.'[131] The same could be said for *Bad Blood*, which 'blends' personal life with a broader social history. Much of Cixous's idea of *écriture féminine* is centred on the female body. The essay opens with the following declaration:

> Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement.[132]

The final third of *Bad Blood* is concerned with Sage's complicated experiences of sexualisation through the male gaze of local men and boys – including her Uncle Bill – which begins early in her teenage years. Sage describes her adolescent desire as 'the mesmerising compulsion to get boys, almost any boys, to acknowledge my existence, to *make me exist*.' This compulsion 'was a force like gravity, ineluctable.'[133] Sage's candid acknowledgment of this desire is another example of the 'creative anachronism' used throughout the book: though the feeling described occurred in the late 1950s, it is articulated from a distance with the knowledge of a woman who has lived through the second wave feminism of the sixties, seventies and eighties.

---

[131] Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1.4 (1976), pp. 875-893 (p. 875).
[132] Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', p. 882
[133] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 216.

To take two phrases from ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, Sage portrays the ‘infinite and mobile complexity’ of female sexuality, with its ‘abrupt and gradual awakenings’.[134]

But whereas Cixous likened creativity to the ‘infinite and mobile complexity’ of the female libido, Sage patterns the recollections of her adolescent sexual encounters with a pastiche of a more male tradition of romantic imagery. The result is a play of different styles, as a down-to-earth realism is met by a more poetic, figurative use of language. Sage’s encounter with her adolescent boyfriend Victor takes place on ‘a flattened patch in the long grass going to seed on the bank of the towpath along the Shropshire Union Canal’, but this is not a scene of bucolic lovemaking: ‘[t]here are no leisurely caresses, no long looks, it’s a bruising kind of bliss mostly made of aches.’[135] We notice in the latter sentence how Sage anticipates the reader’s expectation of romance by referring to ‘leisurely caresses’ and ‘long looks’, and yet punctures this with the repeated ‘no’. Instead, this is a moment of physical pain. The passage then shifts to a highfalutin style: ‘We’re dissolving, eyes half shut, each other’s hands at arm’s length, crucified on each other, butting and squirming.’[136] The euphemistic ‘dissolving’, used to denote the approach to climax, is comparable to the treatment in writing about love – and sexual intercourse in particular – by the Romantic poets, for instance John Keats. In an 1819 letter to his lover, Fanny Brawne, Keats writes: ‘You have absorb’d me. I have a sensation at the present moment as though I was dissolving – I should be exquisitely miserable without the hope of seeing you.’[137] Similarly, in Keats’s ‘The Eve of St Agnes’ (1820), the sex act is euphemistically rendered as: ‘he arose / Ethereal, flush’d, and like a throbbing star […] Into her dream he melted’.[138] This is, once again, a ‘creative anachronism’: the adult Lorna Sage, an expert in Anglophone literature, patterns this treatment of her formative experiences using knowledge gained many years later.

---

[134] Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, p. 885.

[135] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 234.

[136] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 234.

[137] John Keats to Fanny Brawne, 13th October 1819 in John Keats, *Selected Letters* ed. Robert Gittings (Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 334-335 (p. 334).

[138] John Keats, ‘The Eve of St Agnes’ in John Keats, *The Poetical Works of John Keats* (Taylor and Walton, 1840), pp. 139-151 (p. 150).

The title of Sage's reflexive memoir is not only a reference to the 'bad blood' she inherited from the Old Devil. The phrase first appears in Sage's body of work as the title of a review written for the *London Review of Books* of 7th April 1994. In that piece, Sage describes Jenny Diski's *Monkey's Uncle* (1994) as 'a compendious, layered novel – see "historiographic metafiction" in the narratology handbook'.[139] This is not to say that the memoir *Bad Blood* is anything like *Monkey's Uncle*, a book which, as Sage puts it, 'intercuts time zones and genres of fiction (realism, fantasy)'.[140] But the term 'historiographic metafiction', coined by the theorist Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), is apt to describe the play of texts, genres, and associations which occurs throughout *Bad Blood*.[141] Like a metafictional novel, Sage draws attention to the narrativization of her life, and how literature can be used to shape and pattern lived experience in history. As a young teenager starting at Whitchurch Girls' High School, Sage could not tell the time or ride a bike. She describes the school, where her mother was a student, as a 'scary blank', continuing:

> *Getting on in the world* seemed impossible. I was at a loss, at a loose end. It was like being inside one of the books I devoured. You could feel the momentum of the plot carrying you along, but you couldn't tell what came next and the sensation of powerlessness was horribly baffling. Since I couldn't skip to the end, I averted my eyes, changed focus, looked somewhere else. Before I got out of the sticks, I would get further in. I found a place to hide.[142]

Sage's technique of literary patterning has a wider significance: the central theme of the book is the idea that literature can provide shape, pattern and meaning to the inchoate flow of lived experience. Sage's play between life and literature emphasises not only the power of representations to shape and structure our life experiences, but also the possibility we have to comment on, play with, and transform those representations and, by doing so, change life as well.

---

[139] Lorna Sage, 'Bad Blood', *London Review of Books* (7th April 1994), https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v16/n07/lorna-sage/bad-blood/ [accessed 8th September 2024].

[140] Sage, 'Bad Blood'.

[141] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (Routledge, 1988), *passim*.

[142] Sage, *Bad Blood*, p. 131.

Conclusion

In her review of Sage's posthumously published collection *Moments of Truth*, published in the *Times Literary Supplement* (21st September 2001), Alex Clark advises us that '[o]ne way to read *Bad Blood* […] is to see it as a coming together of reader and writer.'[143] The same applies to Sage's journalism and to her academic teaching and writing: these different parts of Sage's career each demonstrate the same 'coming together'. Clark's piece was titled 'A reader's writer', and this phrase serves as another useful summation of Sage's intellectual project, if only for its emphasis on Sage's committed attention to and interest in different procedures of reading. Sage was as interested in the interpretative practice of her academic colleagues as she was the pleasures of the lay reader. In *Criticism and Truth*, Kramnick makes his case for the discipline of literary criticism, which he describes as 'one academic endeavour among others, each involved in the effort to explain and so transform the world.'[144] Whereas Kramnick's remarks are oriented towards our future, Sage maintains her focus on the present and the past. Sage's reviews regularly introduced readers to a variety of experimental novels and scholarly works which they could then go on to enjoy later, but her grotesquely comic living style was firstly and fundamentally a form of entertainment to be enjoyed in the present moment. In *Bad Blood*, Sage shows how literature provides pattern and meaning to our lives, both to the immediate moment but also to our past experiences, as we look back and remember. While contemporary debates on the future of the discipline tend to ask or overstate what literature and criticism can do for our future, Sage demonstrates what literature and criticism can do for our now and then.

---

[143] Alex Clark, 'A reader's writer', *Times Literary Supplement* (21st September 2001), p. 28.
[144] Kramnick, *Criticism and Truth*, p. 99.

Some of the most pleasurable passages of *Bad Blood* occur early on in the book, as Sage describes the gothic world of the vicarage, the grotesque strangeness of her Dickensian grandparents, and what Victor Sage calls ‘the lost world of significances she [Sage] had inherited as a child’.[145] But looking at Sage from our position in 2024, when the humanities have been so travestied by a press which increasingly prioritises online engagement over thoughtful and considered book reviewing, we might consider Sage’s career to constitute a similar ‘lost world’.

---

[145] Victor Sage, ‘Writing, Reading and Witnessing’, p. 60.

Chapter Four

‘Literature is for everyman’? *Critical Quarterly’s* democratic literary culture

The inaugural issue of *Critical Quarterly*, published in March 1959, began with a short foreword in which C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson stated their aims for the journal. It concluded:

> We are hoping, then, that *The Critical Quarterly* will be mainly constructive in its emphasis […] If we can help to keep alive the belief that literature is for everyman – for everyman, that is, who will pay it the courtesy of a creative response – and that it is still one of the major pleasures of life, we shall feel we have achieved at least one of our aims.[1]

The word ‘everyman’, taken as it is from the medieval morality play, was dated enough in 1959, and it is emblematic of what James Robert Wood has called ‘the dominance of male voices’ at *CQ* under Cox and Dyson’s editorship.[2] But the motto ‘literature is for everyman’ was meant to be a bold statement of intent for a democratising project. As the pair write in a later essay, titled ‘Literary Criticism’, first published in 1972: ‘The aim of our journal was to promote high standards in common educated discourse, to make literature accessible to any student with goodwill, and, in Northrop Frye’s words, to prevent it from “stagnating among groups of mutually unintelligible élites”.’[3] Rather than establishing an organ for the sharing of knowledge between specialists, Cox and Dyson sought to use *CQ* to bring the specialist knowledge of an academic journal to a wider audience beyond the university, a readership which included schoolteachers, sixth-formers and interested general readers. Indeed, one of the titles originally considered for the journal was ‘Communication’, although in the end they decided this was ‘too dull’.[4]

---

[1] C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson, ‘Foreword’, *Critical Quarterly* 1.1 (1959), pp. 3-4 (p. 4).

[2] James Robert Wood, ‘Upward mobility, betrayal, and the Black Papers on education’, *Critical Quarterly* 62.2 (2020), pp. 79-104 (p. 93).

[3] C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson, ‘Literary Criticism’ in C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson (eds) *The Twentieth-Century Mind: History, Ideas, and Literature in Britain*, 3 vols. (Oxford University Press, 1972), vol. 3 (1972), pp. 440-63 (p. 441).

[4] Brian Cox, *The Great Betrayal: Memoirs of a Life in Education* (Chapmans, 1992), p. 109.

In the motto 'literature is for everyman' as well as the arguments of the 1972 essay, Cox and Dyson were consciously defining themselves in opposition to F. R. Leavis's Cambridge-based journal *Scrutiny*, which ran from 1932 until it folded in 1953, as well as the Oxford-based *Essays in Criticism*, established by F. W. Bateson in 1951. It would pay to briefly sketch out this intellectual context. The 1950s was a decade when, as Matthew Taunton puts it, 'the powerful influence of F. R. Leavis could be felt everywhere in the discipline of English Literature',[5] and while Cox and Dyson had both been trained in Leavisite practical criticism at Cambridge's Pembroke College from 1949 to 1954, they rejected Leavis's pessimism about contemporary culture. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Leavis had articulated his cultural pessimism in the 1930 essay 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture' (1930), in which he argued 'culture is at a crisis'.[6] For Leavis, the future of culture – which was, in essence, the literary tradition – depended on 'a very small minority' of expert critics with specialist knowledge about literature. Leavis argued: 'The minority capable not only of appreciating Dante, Shakespeare, Donne, Baudelaire, Conrad (to take major instances) but of recognizing their latest successors constitute the consciousness of the race'.[7] Cox and Dyson found Leavis's cultural pessimism to be stifling for contemporary writers: as Dyson puts it in a 1960 editorial, Leavis 'adopted towards contemporary literature an unfortunately negative approach; his standards of excellence are such that only a few writers in any century could hope to come up to them'.[8] In his 1992 memoir, *The Great Betrayal*, Cox recalls the profound effect of Leavis's negativity: '[d]uring our years at Cambridge Tony [Dyson] and I were typical in taking almost no interest in contemporary verse. We read Dylan Thomas, of course, but our attitude tended to be one of contempt.'[9] As referred to earlier, this contempt for contemporary poets had a deeply negative effect on Cox's own creative practice: 'Leavis's scorn was easy to imitate, and made my own personal writing seem feeble (as they were, but they were beginnings on which I might have built.).'[10]

---

[5] Matthew Taunton, '*Critical Quarterly*, Leavisism, and UEA', *Critical Quarterly* 61.2 (2019), pp. 5-14 (p. 5).

[6] F. R. Leavis 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture' [1930] in F. R. Leavis, *Education and the University* (Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 141-171 (p. 145).

[7] Leavis 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture', p. 144.

[8] A. E. Dyson, 'Editorial', *Critical Quarterly* 2.1 (1960), pp. 3-5 (p. 5)

[9] Cox, *The Great Betrayal*, p. 111.

Cox and Dyson inherited from Leavis the model of an elite of literary experts who interpret the great works and 'recognis[e] their latest successors', but they did not share Leavis's negative views about contemporary culture. Instead, as Taunton has argued, Cox and Dyson 'modified the Leavisism of *Scrutiny* and *Essays in Criticism*' by adding an 'emphasis on celebrating the best of contemporary culture'.[11] As Cox and Dyson themselves put it in the 1972 essay: '*The Critical Quarterly* took over the *Scrutiny* emphasis on the value of past traditions, but refused to accept its entire cultural pessimism about the present. *The Critical Quarterly* rejected the "waste land" mentality, both in theory and in practice.'[12] As Cox and Dyson set out in their inaugural editorial, their emphasis was to be on contemporary writing and criticism, 'because contemporary writers inevitably set us the greatest critical challenge […] they deprive us of traditional and familiar judgments, and throw us back inescapably on our own experience, our own sense of what is true and valuable.'[13] Cox and Dyson were committed not only to the criticism of contemporary writing but also to contemporary writing itself; the journal published contemporary poetry from the very first issue, and fiction as early as 1968.[14] As editors, Cox and Dyson published work by new poets such as Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes, Thom Gunn, R. S. Thomas and Sylvia Plath, as well as new work by international writers like Kamau Brathwaite. This active engagement with new writers and commitment to publishing contemporary work was one of the ways in which Cox and Dyson sought to democratise Leavis's minority culture. As the pair wrote in 1972: 'From the beginning, we committed ourselves optimistically to faith in the possibility of an expanding élite'.[15] The term 'expanding élite' is, to a great extent, an oxymoron – and it is certainly less ambitious an idea than 'literature is for everyman' – but it is still illustrative of the modification Cox and Dyson were trying to make to Leavis's minority culture. While acknowledging the place of canonical writers such as Dante, Shakespeare, Donne, Baudelaire and Conrad, Cox and Dyson also sought to do what Leavis never actually did: to 'recogniz[e] their latest successors'. While *Essays in Criticism* did also publish contemporary poetry, Cox and Dyson nonetheless describe Bateson's journal as being 'written by academics for academics'.[16] It was not enough simply to publish contemporary writing and criticism in an academic journal read only in universities. As Taunton writes: '*CQ* conceived of its readership in a completely different way' to *Essays in Criticism* and *Scrutiny* before that. 'Rather than being "by academics, for academics", the magazine [*CQ*] sought a much wider audience and emphasis was placed in particular on the need to address readers in schools.'[17]

---

[10] Cox, *The Great Betrayal*, p. 79.

[11] Taunton, '*Critical Quarterly*, Leavisism, and UEA', p. 7.

[12] Cox and Dyson, 'Literary Criticism', p. 441.

[13] Cox and Dyson, 1.1, p. 3.

[14] See C. P. Snow, 'Character Sketches from an Unpublished Novel', *Critical Quarterly* 10.1-2 (1968), pp. 176-183.

Carol Atherton has written that Cox and Dyson 'explicitly courted' a readership of secondary school English teachers as part of an attempt 'to bridge the gap between those working in university departments of English and their colleagues in secondary education.'[18] In addition to their work as editors, Cox and Dyson put a sizeable amount of time and effort into organising various projects beyond the usual functions of an academic journal. From 1961 to at least 1992, Cox and Dyson organised on average two conferences a year for schoolteachers and young people, with speakers including poets such as Plath and Hughes, novelists such as Angus Wilson and David Lodge, and influential academics such as William Empson and Stanley Fish. These were organised through the 'Critical Quarterly Society', which also published a second journal for schoolteachers, *Critical Survey*, from 1962 to 1973. For UEA's Victor Sage, seeing the audience at the 1966 conference at Keele University was a moment of realisation, so taken aback was he by the sight of 'masses and masses of sixth formers from up and down the country and their teachers.'[19] Later, Dyson founded the Macmillan Casebooks series as well as the Norwich Tapes, a series of recorded lectures for A-Level students given by prominent writers and academics including Hughes, Wilson, Frank Kermode and Muriel Bradbrook. These other projects were not secondary to the business of the journal but rather an important part of Cox and Dyson's overall project to broaden the constituency of literature. As Cox recounts in *The Great Betrayal*, these literary events were about 'trying to put my humanist ideals into practice'.[20]

---

[15] Cox and Dyson, 'Literary Criticism', p. 441.
[16] Cox and Dyson, 'Literary Criticism', p. 440.
[17] Taunton, '*Critical Quarterly*, Leavisism, and UEA', p. 7.
[18] Carol Atherton, 'Public Intellectuals and the Schoolteacher Audience: The First Ten Years of *Critical Quarterly*', *English* 58.220 (2009), pp. 74-94 (p. 78).

Raymond Williams was an early contributor to *CQ* and a member of the journal's honorary committee. Also trained at Cambridge, Williams was more fundamentally critical of Leavis throughout his career, most notably in the highly-influential study *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (1958). In its conclusion, Williams writes of the importance of contemporary culture:

> A culture, while it is being lived, is always in part unknown, in part unrealized. The making of a community is always an exploration, for consciousness cannot precede creation, and there is no formula for unknown experience. A good community, a living culture, will, because of this, not only make room for but actively encourage all and any who can contribute to the advance in consciousness which is the common need.[21]

It is in this way that Cox and Dyson rejected the pessimistic tendences of Leavisism in order to be 'mainly constructive in [their] emphasis'.[22] This chapter will chart the continuities they share with Leavis, the crucial changes they made, and the ways in which these changes shaped both the discipline of English Literature – at university and in the schools – as well as the national literary culture more widely. This chapter does not aim to provide a comprehensive history of *CQ*, *Critical Survey*, the Critical Quarterly Society, or its hundreds of members and contributors; it will, however, identify the main emphases of Cox and Dyson's project. The first section will ask where the expanding élite idea comes from, who Cox and Dyson thought this term described, and how the expanding élite idea shaped *CQ*. The second section then asks how Cox and Dyson looked beyond the literary review and the university by establishing various projects with schools, in particular their regular conferences, and how these projects provided young people with real access to literary culture and higher education. In asking these questions, I argue that Cox and Dyson's individual and collaborative works set a major example of how to democratise literary culture by – to borrow Williams's phrasing – 'not only mak[ing] room for but actively encourag[ing] all and any who can contribute to the advance in consciousness which is the common need.'[23]

---

[19] Victor Sage, 'Kindness and its limits: Tony Dyson, the *Critical Quarterly* and the *Critical Survey*', *Critical Quarterly* 61.2 (2019), pp. 15-25 (p. 19).
[20] Cox, *The Great Betrayal*, p. 107.
[21] Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* [1958] (Vintage, 2017), p. 438.
[22] Cox and Dyson, 1.1, p. 4.

I. The idea of an expanding élite

How did Cox and Dyson use *CQ* to democratise literary culture by expanding F. R. Leavis's minority elite? Cox and Dyson looked beyond the university in general, beyond Cambridge in particular, and even beyond the British Isles more widely in their efforts to establish *CQ* as the organ for a national and international community of thought that connected writers, academics, students, schoolteachers, sixth-formers and general readers. The *CQ* emphasis was positive and democratic; as Cox writes in a 2008 retrospective, 'enjoyment of the arts is one of the great blessings of human life, and should be available to the maximum number of people.'[24]

As mentioned above, *CQ* was founded as a conscious successor to Leavis's *Scrutiny*, which had ceased publication in 1953. Cox and Dyson had been students at Pembroke College,

---

[23] Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 438.

[24] Brian Cox, '*Critical Quarterly* and Hull', *Critical Quarterly* 50.1-2 (2008), pp. 1-4 (p. 3).

Cambridge from 1949 to 1954, a time when, as Cox puts it in *The Great Betrayal*, 'Leavis still dominated Cambridge thinking about literature.'[25] The two men were products of this environment, and Cox later remarked that they 'shared his [Leavis's] belief that understanding of great literature creates tolerance and wisdom.'[26] Indeed the third issue of *CQ* carried a symposium titled 'Our Debt to Dr Leavis', with contributions from Raymond Williams, R. J. Kaufmann and Alun Jones. All three were broadly positive about Leavis's work, at times even glowing. Williams, for instance, writes that Leavis 'is the most interesting critic of his generation, […] his educational influence has been central to the best work of the period, and […] his life's work is a major contribution to our culture.'[27] But Cox and Dyson rejected Leavis's pessimism towards the present, and were instead determined 'to turn literary criticism away from puritanism and towards intelligent celebration of creative achievements.'[28] A 1962 letter sent from Cox to C. P. Snow – written at the height of Snow's 'Two Cultures' dispute with Leavis – explains:

> I know that many people think that most lecturers in English are in the Scrutiny tradition, morally arrogant and teaching their students to feel contemptuous towards larger sections of English literature; but during the last ten years a very powerful opposition to such attitudes has emerged, and I like to think that The Critical Quarterly is assisting this movement to restore sanity (and magnanimity!) to the teaching of English.'[29]

'Magnanimity' is the key word here, and Cox and Dyson were determined to be magnanimous editors in two ways: firstly by publishing new writing, and secondly by providing a space where that writing – as well as those great works which contain 'the finest human experience of the past' – could be read and discussed by a constituency of readers beyond the university. It was in this way that Cox and Dyson sought to create an expanding élite: by expanding the terms of what might be considered 'literature' as well as its potential audience. As Cox wrote in 1992: 'We believed that it is worth devoting a life to presenting, teaching, and celebrating great art, of both past and present, and that academic criticism can be of benefit to the general reader.'[30]

---

[25] Cox, *The Great Betrayal*, p. 79.

[26] Cox, '*Critical Quarterly* and Hull', p. 3.

[27] Raymond Williams, 'Our Debt to Dr Leavis', *Critical Quarterly* 1.3 (1959), pp. 245-247 (p. 245).

[28] Cox, *The Great Betrayal*, p. 121.

[29] C. B. Cox to C. P. Snow, 8th August 1962, CQA1/1/127/1, Critical Quarterly Archive, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

Despite the positive tributes in the third issue, *CQ* never published an article by Leavis. He was also not invited to be a member of *CQ*'s honorary committee, whose names were published on the journal's masthead and promotional material. Its members included Williams, who wrote the opening tribute in the Leavis symposium, as well as poets Philip Larkin and R. S. Thomas, the novelist Angus Wilson, and a number of academic literary critics, including William Empson, Richard Hoggart, Frank Kermode, and L. C. Knights, who had been a founding editor of Leavis's *Scrutiny*.[31] Basil Willey, who taught Cox and Dyson at Pembroke, was also asked to join the honorary committee. His reply read:

> Has Leavis been approached, & has he consented to be on the Hon. Committee? If so, you can put me on straight away. If not, I should want to think again, & perhaps talk to him about it first. Perhaps I'm being absurdly squeamish, but the relationships here in Cambridge are so delicately poised that I should not want even to seem to be "cashing-in", so to speak, on the demise of Scrutiny. I was never a Scrutineer (though I subscribed to it & took it in all through), & if I appeared without F. R. L. on your committee it might look to him like a cry of triumph: "our chance at last! – we'll show you how it ought to have been done", etc.[32]

Despite Willey's noble effort at diplomacy, the full list of the honorary committee would certainly have read to Leavis 'like a cry of triumph'. Indeed, Cox and Dyson were more than happy to show Leavis and the Scrutineers 'how it ought to have been done'. In January 1960,

---

[30] Cox, *The Great Betrayal*, p. 112.

[31] A 1962 leaflet advertising the new Critical Quarterly Society lists the following: *Critical Quarterly* Editorial Advisory Board: R. L. Brett, John F. Danby, Richard Hoggart; Honorary Committee: Francis Berry, J. E. H. Blackie, Margaret Bottrall, Geoffrey Bullough, John Butt, R. G. Cox, David Daiches, Bonamy Dobrée, William Empson, M. J. C. Hodgart, Graham Hough, A. R. Humphreys, A. N. Jeffares, J. D. Jump, Frank Kermode, Arnold Kettle, James Kinsley, G. D. Klingopulos, Philip Larkin, J. Lawlor, Clifford Leech, E. C. Llewellyn, Kenneth Muir, W. R. Niblett, J. Pilley, V. de S. Pinto, F. T. Prince, James R. Sutherland, G. Tillotson, R. S. Thomas, E. M. W. Tillyard, Enid Welsford, Raymond Williams, Angus Wilson; American Honorary Committee: Meyer Abrams, Saul Bellow, R. P. Blackmur, Reuben A. Brower, Francis Fergusson, Robert Heilman, Louis Martz, Herbert J. Muller, Bernard Schilling, Willard Thorp, AED/1/4/21, Papers of Tony Dyson and Cliff Tucker, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

[32] Basil Willey to A. E. Dyson, 29th September 1958, CQA2/1/3/38, Critical Quarterly Archive, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

Dyson wrote two letters to *The Spectator* which made clear his own rejection of Leavis's 'contempt' as well as *CQ*'s commitment to 'magnanimity'. These are worth quoting at length. The first read:

> Leavis is a critic for whom I have much admiration (what serious reader these days has not?), yet I can think of no one of similar talents who has wasted more space and energy scolding, who has offered a larger number of dubious judgments on major writers, who has twisted his native language into odder shapes and who has given birth to a more gloomily Olympian breed of lesser followers. […] Those trained in the *Scrutiny* tradition often think, it seems, that one has only to take over Leavis's attitudes, prejudices and nuances of disapproval *en bloc* to see through everything written in the past thirty years and to inherit the 'cutting edge' of a routine and ubiquitous contempt. It is against arrogance of this kind that the *Critical Quarterly* is prepared to stand: not with indiscriminate good will to all men (no vows of loving kindness have been taken) but in the belief that the critic's responsibility to modern writers is rather more than that of scotching them on principle.[33]

The second, published in the next week's issue, read:

> I would agree, of course, that there is much bad writing today: when has there not been? But readers of a literary quarterly are likely to know a hawk from a handsaw without having always to be told, and I cannot see that nagging about the bad has much claim on space. This is exactly the point the *Critical Quarterly* wants to make. One of the shortcomings of *Scrutiny* was that it recognised precious few writers of the past thirty years who *could* be treated to anything but irascibility. The effect, I believe, has been to turn the major masterpieces of the past into a norm, and to use them as a discouragement to lesser creative talents. Those who do this, whilst not exactly being 'bogeymen', certainly exist; and the less constructive aspects of Leavis's own criticism cannot be exonerated from blame.[34]

Sometime after these very public statements, Kermode wrote to Dyson, joking: 'A small effigy of you is doubtless at this moment melting over a Downing fire.'[35]

As part of what Dyson described in the first *Spectator* letter as their 'responsibility to modern writers', *CQ* published contemporary poetry from its first issue. As mentioned above, however, it was also the case that Bateson's *Essays in Criticism* published contemporary poetry, in a regular section titled 'The Critical Muse'. The title implies a similar emphasis on critical engagement with new literary works, and *Essays in Criticism* published poetry by regular *CQ* contributors such as Larkin, Donald Davie, D. J. Enright, and even Malcolm Bradbury.[36] But the kinds of poetry published in the two journals were starkly different, with *Essays in Criticism* publishing poetry that was, to use that phrase of Cox and Dyson's, written 'by academics, for academics'. We see this in a typical example, Edwin Morgan's 'Letter to a Young Rhetor, Studying at Oxford' (1960), which opens:

---

[33] A. E. Dyson, 'Critical Quarterly' (letter to the editor), *The Spectator*, 29th January 1960, p. 12.
[34] A. E. Dyson, 'Critical Quarterly' (letter to the editor), *The Spectator*, 5th February 1960, p. 16.
[35] Frank Kermode to A. E. Dyson, undated [1960], AED/1/2/23/7, Papers of Tony Dyson and Cliff Tucker, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

> You may judge me a joculator, jerrybuilt in this jagged jib,
> But speech may still be salutary shorn of a syllabary
> And left with letters and lilt alone to live with.[37]

The 'rhetor' is, of course, a distinctly Oxbridge title, and while the poem is written with wry, ironic humour – evident in Morgan's alliterative phrase 'a joculator, jerrybuilt in this jagged jib' – such humour is only really funny to those familiar with the daily atmosphere and minutiae of Oxford or Cambridge. Cox and Dyson published poetry that avoided the twee navel-gazing evident in the poetry of *Essays in Criticism*. *CQ*'s second issue published three poems by Ted Hughes, including 'Hawk Roosting', a lyric poem with the bird of prey as its speaker:

> My feet are locked upon the rough bark.
> It took the whole of Creation
> To produce my foot, my each feather:
> Now I hold Creation in my foot
>
> Or fly up, and revolve it all slowly—
> I kill where I please because it is all mine.[38]

Hughes's urgent language – 'I kill where I please because it is all mine' – and his imaginative vision – evident in the Hawk's arrogant claim that 'I hold Creation in my foot' and 'revolve it all slowly' – are from an entirely different tradition to the donnish 'Letter to a Young Rhetor, Studying at Oxford'.

---

[36] See variously Philip Larkin, 'Fiction and the Reading Public', *Essays in Criticism* 4.1 (1954) p. 86; Donald Davie, 'The Poet-Scholar', *Essays in Criticism* 5.1 (1955), p. 43; D. J. Enright, 'The Poet in Retirement', *Essays in Criticism* 5.2 (1955), p. 151; and Malcolm Bradbury, 'A Song of Toads and Gardens', *Essays in Criticism* 10.4 (1960), p. 440, among others.

[37] Edwin Morgan, 'Letter to a Young Rhetor, Studying at Oxford', *Essays in Criticism* 10.4 (1960), pp. 434-435 (p. 434).

[38] Ted Hughes, 'Hawk Roosting', *Critical Quarterly* 1.2 (1959), p. 124.

CQ's openness to contemporary literature also meant being responsive to a more geographically diverse body of writing. From its first issue, *CQ* would feature regular international contributions, beginning with the Swiss academic Richard Gerber's essay on the 'English Island Myth' in fiction. This was the first of *CQ*'s 'Overseas Viewpoints', which Cox and Dyson included in an effort to prevent 'any tendency to critical inbreeding'.[39] While Gerber's was the only article to be labelled an 'Overseas Viewpoint', the magazine regularly published contributions written by international critics or about international writing. Particular attention was also devoted to North American writers, which provided yet another point of contrast with Leavis's own focus on the literature of England in particular. *CQ* also pioneered the study of postcolonial literature by publishing Kamau Brathwaite's critical essays about Caribbean literary culture, beginning with 'West Indian Prose Fiction in the Sixties' in *Critical Survey* in 1967, which Brathwaite remarked in a letter to Cox 'could be regarded as *CQ*'s contribution to the Caribbean Artists Movement.'[40] The essay, which was subsequently reprinted in *Caribbean Quarterly* in 1970 and *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* in 1972, had in place of a bibliography a list of 'Further Critical Writing on West Indian Literature'.[41] In 1969, *CQ* published Brathwaite's 'Caribbean Critics', a review-essay of Louis James's *The Islands in Between: Essays in West Indian Literature* (1968). Brathwaite describes the book as 'terrifyingly simple and Eurocentric',[42] writing that its reader is 'faced with the strange situation where the work of a body of writers […] is examined in a more or less "academic" fashion by a body of critics trained to respond almost exclusively to European influences'.[43] Writing from the perspective of a Barbadian poet educated at Cambridge and living and working in Kingston, Brathwaite demands that

---

[39] Cox and Dyson, 1.1, p. 4.

[40] Kamau Brathwaite to C. B. Cox, 16th September [1967], CQA1/1/16/8, Critical Quarterly Archive, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

[41] Edward Brathwaite, 'West Indian Prose Fiction in the Sixties: A Survey', *Critical Survey* 3.3 (1967), pp. 169-174 (p. 174).

[42] Edward Brathwaite, 'Caribbean Critics', *Critical Quarterly* 11.3 (1969), pp. 268-276 (p. 269).

> the mind be left open for the discussion of the possibility that the Caribbean, in spite of the operation upon it of 'the European System', in spite of – indeed, *because of* – 'the peculiar circumstances' of its history, contains within itself a 'culture' different from, though not exclusive of Europe.[44]

Brathwaite was pleased with the article, as well as Damian Grant's 'Emerging Image: The Poetry of Edward Brathwaite' published in issue 12.2 (1970), and subsequently wrote to Cox and Dyson to thank them 'for allowing me this kind of doorway into the thoughts and awareness of your readers, […] because like you I realize that some cultural understanding of the Caribbean and its problems is essential in our day and age.'[45] Looking at these 'Overseas Viewpoints', we see that the expansion of the literary élite which Cox and Dyson sought to achieve was as much geographical as it was social.

Brathwaite, like Hughes, was a contemporary of Cox and Dyson's at Pembroke College, and their professional relationship was based on a close personal friendship. As James Robert Wood has remarked, one result of Cox and Dyson's reliance on close friends as collaborators is the 'dominance of male voices' in the pages of *CQ* and *Critical Survey*, as well as in the subsequent Black Paper campaigns.[46] The *CQ* of Cox and Dyson is certainly dominated by male voices, though we should remember that many of the *CQ* men – including Bradbury, Kermode, Lodge, Hoggart, Williams, and Hughes – were, like Cox and Dyson, 'scholarship boys' from working- and lower-middle-class backgrounds who were entering into an academic sphere that had until then been dominated by the privately-educated upper classes. It should also be noted that Cox and Dyson did work to discover new voices: from 1960 to 1975 the journal published an annual poetry supplement, as well as an annual poetry competition, with the two winning poems published in that year's supplement. The first of these competitions was judged by Larkin, and the two winning poets were Alan Brownjohn and Sylvia Plath. *Poetry 1960* was highly successful: according to Cox's memoir, it sold a staggering twelve thousand copies.[47] Cox and Dyson then invited Plath to edit the second of these supplements, *American Poetry Now*, which again demonstrated the journal's openness to American writing. As Jeremy Noel-Tod writes, *CQ* maintained a 'dedication in principle to discovering new poets' as well as a 'dedication in practice to those poets once discovered.'[48]

---

[43] Brathwaite, 'Caribbean Critics', p. 272.
[44] Brathwaite, 'Caribbean Critics', p. 269-270.
[45] Kamau Brathwaite to C. B. Cox, 14th November 1970, AED/1/2/7, Papers of Tony Dyson and Cliff Tucker, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.
[46] Wood, 'Upward Mobility, Betrayal, and the Black Papers on Education', p. 93.

As well as 'expanding' their base of contributors, Cox and Dyson also sought to broaden *CQ*'s audience to include readers from outside the university. As Atherton writes, Cox and Dyson 'explicitly courted' a readership of secondary school English teachers as part of an attempt 'to bridge the gap between those working in university departments of English and their colleagues in secondary education.'[49] As part of this, they published a range of articles of varying depth and specialisation. In the first issue, for instance, short close readings of single poems by Philip Larkin and William Blake appeared alongside longer articles of academic literary criticism, such as Bernard Bergonzi's re-reading of Chesterton and Belloc. As Bradbury writes in a 1960 article on *Scrutiny*'s successors published in the *Guardian*, 'you feel it [*CQ*] would willingly forgo the definitive article on *Moby Dick* for a general introduction on Melville and his thought. The essays are short, and sweet – it is determined not to be irascible.'[50] The inaugural issue also contained contributions which were clearly intended for the journal's schoolteacher audience, such as G. K. Hunter's short article 'Hamlet Criticism', which provided a brief historical survey of the reception and criticism of the play that could be easily adapted into a lesson for sixth formers, and from there into the kind of short essays they would be expected to write for their A level exams. The first issue concluded with a symposium titled ‘Why Teach Literature?’, with contributions on teaching ‘In the Far East’ by D. J. Enright, ‘In the Training College’ by G. H. Bantock, ‘In Adult Education’ by Douglas Hewitt, ‘In the Grammar School’ by Douglas Brown and ‘In the Secondary Modern School’ by David Holbrook. In publishing these pieces, Cox and Dyson were attempting to mark their affiliation with a diverse range of English teachers based outside the university, including – but not limited to – those in schools. As Cox remarks in a 2008 retrospective, ‘throughout the 1960s we were selling [subscriptions to *CQ*] to more than half the grammar schools in Britain’.[51] The *CQ* archive at the John Rylands Library in Manchester holds a tattered exercise book with the subscriber data for the years 1963 to 1966. A single page illustrates *CQ*’s variety of readers: two professional academics, one university library, one comprehensive school, seven grammar schools, one direct grant grammar school – which is now private – and eleven members of the public.[52]

---

[47] Cox, *The Great Betrayal*, pp. 115-116.

[48] Jeremy Noel-Tod, '*Critical Quarterly* and modern poetry', *Critical Quarterly* 61.2 (2019), pp. 26-31 (pp. 30-31)

[49] Atherton, 'Public Intellectuals and the Schoolteacher Audience', p. 78.

[50] Malcolm Bradbury, 'Surveying the gap left by *Scrutiny*', *Guardian*, 12th May 1960, p. 10.

As well as this English teacher audience, Cox and Dyson believed ‘that academic criticism can be of benefit to the general reader.’[53] The two men shared a distinct ambition to cultivate an audience beyond those whose job it was to think and talk about literature. If literary culture did contain, as Leavis argued, ‘the finest human experience of the past’, then it was imperative that this experience was communicated to as wide a readership as possible. Cox and Dyson’s term ‘everyman’, like ‘general reader’, is a vague one, but it is useful to compare *CQ*’s imagined non-specialist, non-university ‘everyman’ with the implied reader of Hoggart’s *The*

---

[51] Cox, ‘*Critical Quarterly* and Hull’, p. 3.

[52] Volume of Subscribers, CQA3/6/1, Critical Quarterly Archive, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester. The page lists Bonamy Dobrée and J. E. H. Blackie (both members of the honorary committee); St David’s College, Lampeter (university); Foxford Comprehensive School; Lurgan College, Derby School, Carlton le Willows Grammar School, Ashton in Makerfield Grammar School, Manor Park School, Reading School, Tiffin School (all grammars); Bristol Grammar School (direct grant grammar school, now private).

[53] Cox, *The Great Betrayal*, p. 112.

Uses of Literacy (1957), published the year before *CQ* was founded. Hoggart writes in the preface that his work addresses 'first of all the serious "common reader" or "intelligent layman" from any class.' This reader

> is an elusive figure, and popularization a dangerous undertaking: but it seems to me that those of us who feel that writing for him is an urgent necessity must go on trying to reach him. For one of the most striking and ominous features of our present cultural situation is the division between the technical languages of the experts and the extraordinary low level of the organs of mass communication.[54]

There is an obvious parallel between Hoggart's 'technical languages of the experts' and Cox and Dyson's aim, articulated in the 1972 essay quoted earlier, 'to promote high standards in common educated discourse, to make literature accessible to any student with goodwill, and, in Northrop Frye's words, to prevent it from "stagnating among groups of mutually unintelligible élites".'[55] Hoggart, like Cox and Dyson, sought to broaden the audience for specialist literary and cultural criticism to include those from outside the university. But whereas Hoggart expresses – or at least hints at – a doubt as to whether this 'elusive' figure really does exist at all, Cox and Dyson do not put forward any extended argument about the real existence or specific location of this 'everyman' or 'general reader', beyond their being outside of the university. While Atherton is right to note that these terms have 'a rhetorical vagueness that would presumably allow any of the journal's readers to imagine themselves part of this group',[56] the end result of that 'vagueness' – the inclusion of anybody who wants to join – is surely a good thing.

As part of their aim to cultivate a non-professional audience including university students, schoolchildren, non-specialist teachers, and general readers, Cox and Dyson published shorter articles analysing single lyric poems. The series, titled 'Featuring…' began in the first issue with Cox's reading of Larkin's 'No Road', but it was later moved over to the pages of *Critical Survey* in 1965. These pieces might best be described using Jonathan Culler's term 'interpretive criticism': as opposed to scholarship – which is described by Culler as 'an attempt to bring supplementary and inaccessible information to bear on the text and thus to assist understanding' – 'interpretive criticism' is the kind of writing 'which in principle if not in practice requires only the text of a poem and the *Oxford English Dictionary*, [and] offers but a more thorough and perceptive version of what every reader does for himself.'[57] Cox and Dyson published these shorter pieces for their educative function. As Culler puts it: 'Citing no special knowledge which it deems to be crucial and from which it might derive its authority, interpretive criticism seems best defended as a pedagogic tool which offers examples of intelligence for the encouragement of others.'[58] Despite the name, 'interpretive criticism', this idea is distinct from the practices of reading which we now associate with the terms 'interpretation' or 'critique'; it is closer, in fact, to what Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus call 'critical description', in which the critic's aim is 'to indicate what the text says about itself'.[59] *CQ*'s 'Featuring…' pieces, which anticipate Best and Marcus's 'critical description', were the target of some derision by the more committed Leavisites. In his biography of Leavis, Ian MacKillop mentions that 'a very Leavisian issue' of the Cambridge student magazine *Delta* carried 'a mocking parody of the *Critical Quarterly* by John Newton.'[60] Titled 'Mr Hughes'[s] Poetry', the piece is a short analysis of Hughes's 'November', which had been published in *CQ* the year before. Newton impersonates the non-specialist language of the *CQ* articles and mocks their brevity, calling his own piece 'unduly lengthy' at six quarto pages.[61] Similarly, Andor Gomme, then a fellow at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, describes *CQ* in a 1960 letter to *The Spectator* as 'a collection of squibs about the intellectually fashionable writers of the day' and 'a stuffy offshoot of Sunday reviewing'.[62] Such reactions demonstrate not only the clear modifications that Cox and Dyson had made to Leavisism, but also the enduring pessimism of those who had remained Scrutineers.

---

[54] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* [1957] (Penguin, 2009), pp. xxix-xxx.
[55] Cox and Dyson, 'Literary Criticism', p. 441.
[56] Atherton, Public Intellectuals and the Schoolteacher Audience', p. 84.

---

[57] Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* [1975] (Routledge, 2002), pp. xiii-xiv.

[58] Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*, pp. xiii-xiv.

[59] Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, 'Surface Reading: An Introduction', *Representations*, 108.1 (2009), pp. 1-21 (pp. 11).

[60] Ian MacKillop, *F. R. Leavis: A Life in Criticism* (Allen Lane, 1995), p. 312.

[61] John Newton, 'Mr Hughes' Poetry', *Delta* 25 (1961), pp. 6-12.

Cox and Dyson's effort to publish a 'teaching' literary criticism for a non-university audience was accompanied by an attempt to redefine the university itself – in particular the university English school – within the pages of the journal. The second issue, dated June 1959, published an article by Dyson titled 'Literature – in the Younger Universities' as part of the wider symposium on teaching literature in various settings mentioned earlier in this chapter. In that piece, Dyson argues that the university should function as a centre of culture and liberal values, and that the English Literature degree should be central to an idea of the university as 'a living and civilising force'.[63] Dyson argues that the university – in particular the provincial university – should be a 'cultural centre for the whole community, a guardian of values, and an inspirer of humane activity in local and national affairs'.[64] The university could be 'a place where all those interested in education, ideas and human beings can join together for study, discussion, and if necessary for action.'[65] This would serve an important social function for our 'mechanised society', as Dyson argued:

> it remains true that most parts of Britain are still rich in cultural and traditional resources—architecture, song, history, drama, local skills—and that a modern university ought to recognise a living responsibility for these which no-one else (landed families, the Church, even the Ministry of Works) is any longer able to bear.[66]

Although Dyson does here appreciate – unlike Leavis – the importance of cultural activity beyond literature, he still positions the university English faculty as central to his social model for a democratic culture, seeing it as

---

[62] Andor Gomme, 'Critical Quarterly' (letter to the editor), *The Spectator*, 12th February 1960, pp. 15-17.
[63] A. E. Dyson, 'Literature – in the Younger Universities', *Critical Quarterly* 1.2 (1959), pp. 116-123 (p. 117).
[64] Dyson, 'Literature – in the Younger Universities', p. 117.
[65] Dyson, 'Literature – in the Younger Universities', p. 120.
[66] Dyson, 'Literature – in the Younger Universities', p. 117.

> the core from which a revival of liberal values could emerge. […] I personally should like to see develop a number of close liasons [*sic.*] which ought to exist, but seldom do. First, between junior staff and students […] Then, there might well be a link between the university itself, both staff and students, and those in the town and locality who attend W.E.A. [Workers' Education Association] or Extra-Mural classes, school teachers, voluntary workers in sociology and local government, sixth formers, clergy, foreigners visiting under British Council or other auspices, political workers of all parties, and anyone interested in world affairs. […] The types of cultural activity sponsored by a healthy English department, especially drama, film and debating, could provide an initial meeting ground; and a bar or coffee bar for formal and informal meetings would provide the atmosphere of a club.'[67]

There is an obvious resemblance here between the community of thought which Dyson describes above and the 'expanding élite' that *CQ* sought to establish. The university is, in this ideal, an institutional base for 'cultural activity' which crosses the boundary from the professional academics of the university campus to interested members of the public. The term 'cultural centre' anticipates a term that Leavis himself would use a decade later in the introduction to *English Literature in Our Time and the University* (1969), which collects the six Clark Lectures he gave at Cambridge in 1967. In those lectures, Leavis describes the idea of a university as a 'creative centre, for the civilized world,'[68] but he does not suggest as Dyson did the same kind of practical connections between the university and the wider social world. Leavis and Dyson had reached this same conclusion that the university should be a 'creative centre' or a 'cultural centre' by following the same line of thought originating from 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture', namely the question of how to communicate what Leavis called the 'subtlest and most perishable parts' of a specifically literary culture to the wider society and in so doing make possible 'our power of profiting by the finest human experience of the past'.[69] Leavis never offered as a concrete suggestion as Dyson's, in part because he believed that the preservation of the literary tradition among a minority of professional academics was sufficient. Dyson, on the other hand, attempts here to imagine how the specialist cultural activity preserved in the English department might benefit the wider community beyond the university. Though difficult to achieve in practice, this ideal model of how the ‘cultural centre’ might interact with its periphery gave Cox and Dyson something to work towards.

---

[67] Dyson, 'Literature – in the Younger Universities', pp. 120-121.
[68] F. R. Leavis, *English Literature in Our Time and the University* (Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 9.
[69] Leavis, 'Mass Civilization and Minority Culture', p. 144.

As academics, Cox and Dyson saw teaching and education as their priority. As such, they sought to reconcile the specialist procedures of academic literary criticism with a more general audience. They were broadly successful in their aim to democratise literary culture by expanding Leavis’s minority elite, but the project did not last: Cox’s appointment of Colin MacCabe as editor in 1986 marked a change in tone and content, as the journal shifted away from the non-university audience and towards the academy. ‘As time went on,’ writes Atherton, ‘the nature of both the journal and its audience changed, and there is no journal today that attempts to forge connections between teachers of English in the two sectors in the way that the *Critical Quarterly* once did.’[70] Rather than writing for a ‘general reader’ beyond the university, Atherton suggests that the journal now appeals ‘to the class of readers who make up what Stefan Collini has described as the “academic public sphere”’.[71] This constituency is distinct from the peri-academic reader I described in the introduction in that it comprises ‘specialists in one subject [who] are part of the “non-specialist audience” for certain kinds of writing about other subjects’.[72] The journal of the academic public sphere exists to facilitate conversation between academic specialties, rather than facilitate conversation between specialists and a reading public beyond the university.

Despite Cox and Dyson’s efforts, Atherton is right to point out that the relationship between *CQ* and its wider audience was limited. Non-university teachers ‘occupied a relatively restricted space within the ideal community that Cox and Dyson envisaged.’[73] They were not seen as 'potential contributors', but rather the 'overwhelming majority of articles were written by academics'.[74] To Atherton, *CQ* was limited to 'a process in which professional academics and writers carried on a dialogue that schoolteachers could only spectate on, with opportunities to participate being restricted to attendance at conferences.'[75] This 'restricted' role as a spectator is also true of the more general reading public that Cox and Dyson sought to reach. Writing on communication in the conclusion to *Culture and Society*, Williams reminds us that 'much of what we call communication is, necessarily, no more in itself than transmission: that is to say, a one-way sending. Reception and response, which complete communication, depend on other factors than the techniques.'[76] *CQ* was, then, often merely transmitting ideas to these non-university audiences, rather than including them in a truly democratic conversation.

---

[70] Atherton, ‘Public Intellectuals and the Schoolteacher Audience’, p. 78.
[71] Atherton, ‘Public Intellectuals and the Schoolteacher Audience’, p. 92.
[72] Atherton, ‘Public Intellectuals and the Schoolteacher Audience’, p. 92.
[73] Atherton, ‘Public Intellectuals and the Schoolteacher Audience’, p. 91.

II. *CQ* and the schools

In a 1962 letter to *CQ*'s Honorary Committee, Cox wrote: 'We believe that there should be more contact between universities and schools'.[77] Interestingly, Leavis himself – despite his reputation for pessimism – had enacted a similar project at *Scrutiny*. As Ian MacKillop points out, '*Scrutiny* went out of its way to interest teachers and recruit them to "The *Scrutiny* Movement in Education". It was militant: the Leavisian mission was to build a public and foster a minority.'[78] Leavis did so, MacKillop writes, because he recognised that '*Scrutiny* needed a professional constituency: it could not rely on simply being a magazine for "literary people".'[79] As editors at *CQ*, Cox and Dyson did, like Leavis, work to 'recruit' a schoolteacher audience, but whereas for Leavis that was the end of the matter, Cox and Dyson sought closer contact.

---

[74] Atherton, 'Public Intellectuals and the Schoolteacher Audience', p. 91.
[75] Atherton, Public Intellectuals and the Schoolteacher Audience', p. 91.
[76] Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 396.
[77] C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson to *Critical Quarterly* Honorary Committee, 10th April 1962, CQA2/1/3/48, Critical Quarterly Archive, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.
[78] MacKillop, *F. R. Leavis*, p. 208.
[79] MacKillop, *F. R. Leavis*, p. 208.

As well as seeking to communicate specialist literary criticism to an audience of schoolteachers and sixth-formers through the editorial policies of the journal, Cox and Dyson further engaged with this audience through the Critical Quarterly Society conferences, which they ran twice a year from 1961 until at least 1992.[80] Rather than a conventional academic conference, where academic research is presented within or between specialisms, the *CQ* conferences were a forum for 'the general discussion of literary questions' between academics and schoolteachers, students, or interested general readers.[81] This section will begin by looking at these conferences and their engagement with these non-university audiences, before considering Dyson's Casebooks and Norwich Tapes, two commercial ventures which shared a similar motivation of broadening access to the understanding of literature. I will then move to consider how Cox in particular contributed to the introduction of creative writing into formal education, at first through the Association for Verbal Arts and then through the National Curriculum for English. Finally I will consider Cox's own thinking about the personal benefits of writing, with reference to his own practice as a poet.

In 1961, *CQ* held its first conference for English teachers at Bangor, where Dyson was still working at the time. A brochure for the conference was enclosed with the March 1961 issue, and Dyson's editorial explained that the conference 'is intended, in the first place for professional teachers of literature.'[82] This was an extension of their established editorial policy of publishing short pieces of criticism that might be useful to schoolteachers planning lessons. But this residential conference 'with full board and lodging at University Hall for the five-and-a-half days' was also open to *CQ*'s general readers: 'some of our regular readers might also be interested, and so we are throwing open the score or so of remaining places to anyone who would like to come.'[83] According to Atherton, this inaugural conference 'was attended by over

---

[80] Cox, *The Great Betrayal*, p. 119.
[81] Cox, *The Great Betrayal*, p. 119.
[82] A. E. Dyson, 'Editorial', *Critical Quarterly* 3.1 (1961), p. 3.
[83] A. E. Dyson, 3.1, p. 3.

160 people'. Building on this success, Cox and Dyson held conferences at Bangor and Scarborough in 1962, and in July 1963 they held their first four-day conference 'For Young People under Twenty-One' at Manchester.[84] As Atherton points out, this age range 'encompassed both A-level students and undergraduates.'[85] These conferences for young people – which were held during the Christmas and Easter holidays – would go on to become immensely popular. In October 1972, Joan Darlington, who was employed to handle the general administration of the conferences, wrote to Cox: 'You will be interested to know that the January course is now fully subscribed and I have already refused nearly 200 applications. I have accepted the maximum number of 460'.[86] A subsequent letter from Darlington sent after the conference estimates, 'I must have turned down about four hundred applications for January.'[87] In 1983, Dyson wrote to the poet R. S. Thomas to recount that the March conference that year was attended by 'about 375 sixth-formers & five battered dons'.[88] In his 1992 memoir, Cox writes that the conferences 'continue to the present day' and 'attendance is usually over 400.[89] If we made a conservative estimate that an average of 300 sixth formers attended each of the two conferences on offer between 1963 and 1992, that would work out to a total of more than 17,000 sixth formers over the twenty nine years; however, no formal record of the exact numbers, including how many pupils were from grammar, comprehensive, or private schools, remains.

---

[84] 'Manchester Course on Literature' (January 1970), Critical Quarterly Society, CQA2/2/4/156, Critical Quarterly Archive, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

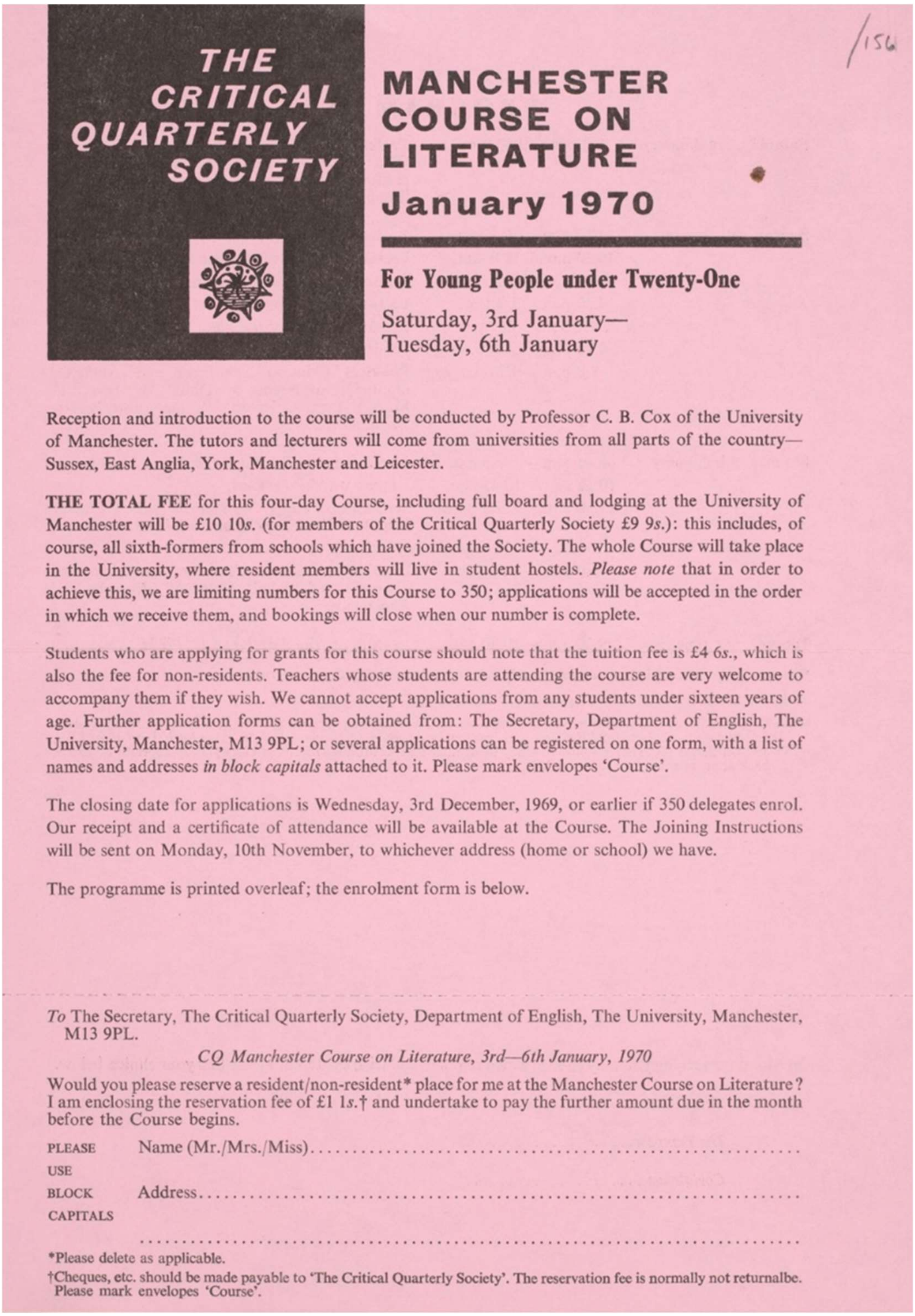
[85] Atherton, 'Public Intellectuals and the Schoolteacher Audience', p. 87.

[86] Joan Darlington to C. B. Cox, 30th October 1972, CQA2/2/4/95, Critical Quarterly Archive, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

[87] Joan Darlington to C. B. Cox, 9th January 1973, CQA2/2/4/67, Critical Quarterly Archive, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

[88] A. E. Dyson to R. S. Thomas, dated 31st March 1983, AED/1/1/4/2/2, Papers of Tony Dyson and Cliff Tucker, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

[89] Cox, *The Great Betrayal*, p. 119.



/156

THE CRITICAL QUARTERLY SOCIETY

MANCHESTER COURSE ON LITERATURE

January 1970

For Young People under Twenty-One

Saturday, 3rd January—
Tuesday, 6th January

Reception and introduction to the course will be conducted by Professor C. B. Cox of the University of Manchester. The tutors and lecturers will come from universities from all parts of the country—Sussex, East Anglia, York, Manchester and Leicester.

THE TOTAL FEE for this four-day Course, including full board and lodging at the University of Manchester will be £10 10*s.* (for members of the Critical Quarterly Society £9 9*s.*): this includes, of course, all sixth-formers from schools which have joined the Society. The whole Course will take place in the University, where resident members will live in student hostels. *Please note* that in order to achieve this, we are limiting numbers for this Course to 350; applications will be accepted in the order in which we receive them, and bookings will close when our number is complete.

Students who are applying for grants for this course should note that the tuition fee is £4 6*s.*, which is also the fee for non-residents. Teachers whose students are attending the course are very welcome to accompany them if they wish. We cannot accept applications from any students under sixteen years of age. Further application forms can be obtained from: The Secretary, Department of English, The University, Manchester, M13 9PL; or several applications can be registered on one form, with a list of names and addresses *in block capitals* attached to it. Please mark envelopes ‘Course’.

The closing date for applications is Wednesday, 3rd December, 1969, or earlier if 350 delegates enrol. Our receipt and a certificate of attendance will be available at the Course. The Joining Instructions will be sent on Monday, 10th November, to whichever address (home or school) we have.

The programme is printed overleaf; the enrolment form is below.

To The Secretary, The Critical Quarterly Society, Department of English, The University, Manchester, M13 9PL.

CQ Manchester Course on Literature, 3rd—6th January, 1970

Would you please reserve a resident/non-resident* place for me at the Manchester Course on Literature? I am enclosing the reservation fee of £1 1*s.*† and undertake to pay the further amount due in the month before the Course begins.

PLEASE USE BLOCK CAPITALS

Name (Mr./Mrs./Miss)..

Address...

....

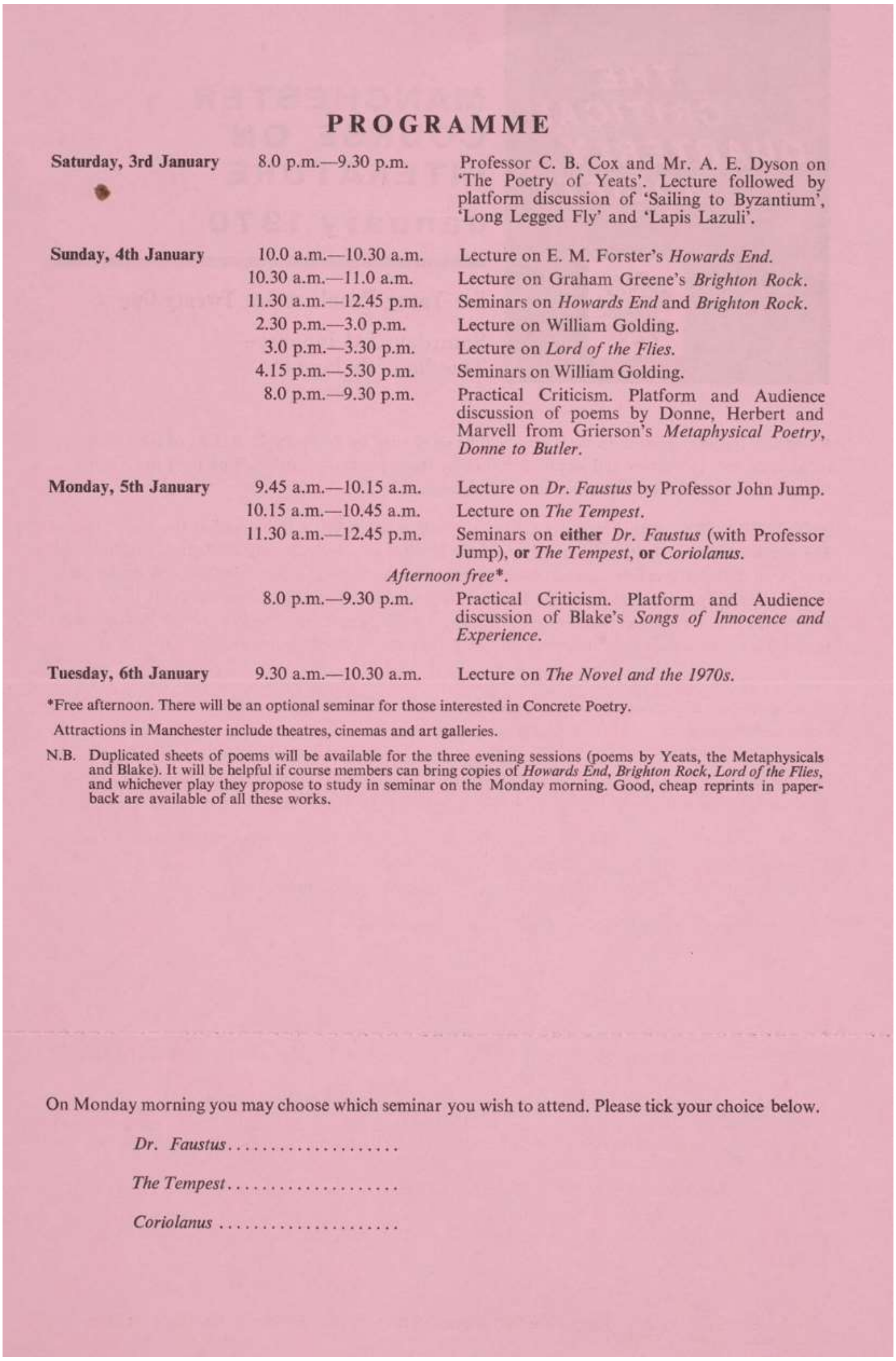
*Please delete as applicable.

†Cheques, etc. should be made payable to ‘The Critical Quarterly Society’. The reservation fee is normally not returnalbe. Please mark envelopes ‘Course’.

Figure 12. ‘Manchester Course on Literature’ (1970), recto.[90]

---

[90] ‘Manchester Course on Literature’ (January 1970), Critical Quarterly Society, CQA2/2/4/156, Critical Quarterly Archive, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.



PROGRAMME

Saturday, 3rd January	8.0 p.m.—9.30 p.m.	Professor C. B. Cox and Mr. A. E. Dyson on 'The Poetry of Yeats'. Lecture followed by platform discussion of 'Sailing to Byzantium', 'Long Legged Fly' and 'Lapis Lazuli'.
Sunday, 4th January	10.0 a.m.—10.30 a.m.	Lecture on E. M. Forster's *Howards End.*
	10.30 a.m.—11.0 a.m.	Lecture on Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock.*
	11.30 a.m.—12.45 p.m.	Seminars on *Howards End* and *Brighton Rock.*
	2.30 p.m.—3.0 p.m.	Lecture on William Golding.
	3.0 p.m.—3.30 p.m.	Lecture on *Lord of the Flies.*
	4.15 p.m.—5.30 p.m.	Seminars on William Golding.
	8.0 p.m.—9.30 p.m.	Practical Criticism. Platform and Audience discussion of poems by Donne, Herbert and Marvell from Grierson's *Metaphysical Poetry, Donne to Butler.*
Monday, 5th January	9.45 a.m.—10.15 a.m.	Lecture on *Dr. Faustus* by Professor John Jump.
	10.15 a.m.—10.45 a.m.	Lecture on *The Tempest.*
	11.30 a.m.—12.45 p.m.	Seminars on **either** *Dr. Faustus* (with Professor Jump), **or** *The Tempest*, **or** *Coriolanus.*
	Afternoon free.*	
	8.0 p.m.—9.30 p.m.	Practical Criticism. Platform and Audience discussion of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience.*
Tuesday, 6th January	9.30 a.m.—10.30 a.m.	Lecture on *The Novel and the 1970s.*

*Free afternoon. There will be an optional seminar for those interested in Concrete Poetry.

Attractions in Manchester include theatres, cinemas and art galleries.

N.B. Duplicated sheets of poems will be available for the three evening sessions (poems by Yeats, the Metaphysicals and Blake). It will be helpful if course members can bring copies of *Howards End, Brighton Rock, Lord of the Flies,* and whichever play they propose to study in seminar on the Monday morning. Good, cheap reprints in paperback are available of all these works.

On Monday morning you may choose which seminar you wish to attend. Please tick your choice below.

Dr. Faustus....................

The Tempest....................

Coriolanus ....

Figure 13. 'Manchester Course on Literature' (1970), verso.[91]

---

[91] 'Manchester Course on Literature' (January 1970), Critical Quarterly Society, CQA2/2/4/156, Critical Quarterly Archive, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

The popularity of the conferences was due in part to the calibre of the visiting speakers Cox and Dyson managed to attract. For the August 1963 conference in London, titled 'Literature Today', Cox wrote to T. S. Eliot and Cecil Day-Lewis inviting them to speak 'on any aspect of modern literature or on any other suitable subject.'[92] Cox also wrote to C. P. Snow on 8th August 1962 – at the height of the infamous 'Two Cultures' debate – with a similar invitation.[93] Curiously, there is no evidence that Leavis himself was ever invited. In the end, the visiting speakers at that conference were Richard Hoggart, Angus Wilson, Stephen Spender, and R. S. Thomas.[94] We should note here the presence of esteemed living writers at a conference of sixth formers and undergraduates. As in the pages of *CQ*, contemporary critical work and contemporary creative work were presented side by side. As Bradbury recounts, the conferences were

> notable and well-attended affairs held in various universities, where critical interpretation was leavened with visits by leading writers. I particularly recall visits by Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath and by L. P. Hartley, who gloomily came to a conference held in Scarborough, and then discovered he was enjoying himself in critical company after all.[95]

By inviting living writers of different generations – from young poets such as Hughes and Plath to elder statesmen like Eliot and Day-Lewis – Cox was creating a continuity which is otherwise absent in Leavis's model.

The conferences were also popular due to their direct relevance for sixth formers hoping to go on to study English at university. The conferences were held at universities with lectures, seminars, meals and accommodation all based on campus, which, along with the presence of undergraduates aged under 21, exposed sixth formers to university life. Similarly, each conference featured a 'Practical Criticism Game' in which the lecturers would 'try to date unseen passages sent in by course members.'[96] Candidates were often asked to date unseen passages in Oxford and Cambridge entrance exams and interviews, and as Wood points out, 'the implicit rationale' behind this game at the conferences was that

---

[92] Jane Morley to C. B. Cox, 19th July 1962, CQA1/2/2/48; C. B. Cox to Cecil Day-Lewis, 13th August 1962, CAQ1/2/7/18, Critical Quarterly Archive, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

[93] C. B. Cox to C. P. Snow, 8th August 1962, CQA1/1/127/1, Critical Quarterly Archive, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

[94] Leaflet. The Critical Quarterly Society: London Conference 1963, CQA2/2/4/168, Critical Quarterly Archive, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

[95] Malcolm Bradbury, 'Critical years: some thoughts on Brian Cox and *CQ*', *Critical Quarterly* 35.4 (December 1993), pp. 31-35 (p. 32). N.B. Jeremy Noel-Tod notes that 'the last appearance of Hughes and Plath together in public before he left her and their two children was the Critical Quarterly summer conference for English teachers at Bangor in 1962.' (See Jeremy Noel-Tod, '*Critical Quarterly* and modern poetry', p. 28).

> if students were to perform well at this task themselves, [then] when it was no longer a game but a question in a Cambridge scholarship examination, it might make the difference between them winning a place at a college and being shut out.[97]

As well as this, the A level English set texts were covered at the conferences because of their specific relevance to sixth formers. Part of Darlington's job as conference secretary was researching and preparing reports for Cox with 'details of the "A" level courses of the various [exam] Boards',[98] and Dyson would regularly write to Cox with suggestions of how to devise 'a programme to maximise A. Level usefulness for the main boards'.[99] The conferences therefore helped sixth formers access the university in two ways: first, it made the university a less daunting environment for sixth formers, in particular those whose parents had not been to university; secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the focus on A level set texts made the conferences relevant to the sixth formers' exams and assisted their chances of gaining the necessary grades to be accepted onto university courses. In the same way, the conferences also met a specific need for schoolteachers at the time. As Atherton writes:

> Teachers of English at secondary level would have come from a range of different backgrounds, and would have had a range of different needs. Some, particularly in the independent and grammar schools, would have been English graduates with BA degrees. Others would not have been university graduates at all, but holders of the Certificate of Education, a non-degree teaching qualification awarded after two years of study at a teacher-training college. […] Their own intellectual abilities and interests

---

[96] Leaflet. The Critical Quarterly Society: London Conference 1963, CQA2/2/4/168, Critical Quarterly Archive, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

[97] Wood, 'Upward mobility, betrayal, and the Black Papers on education', p. 86.

[98] Joan Darlington to C. B. Cox, 26th July 1976, CQA2/2/4/16, Critical Quarterly Archive, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

[99] A. E. Dyson to C. B. Cox, [undated, 1976], CQA2/2/4/61, Critical Quarterly Archive, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

> would have differed widely, and their priorities would have been similarly varied, ranging from the teaching of functional literacy to the preparation of a very small number of students to read English at university.[100]

In contrast to Leavis's efforts to 'recruit' teachers to the *Scrutiny* cause so that his journal would have a reliable base of support, Cox and Dyson were holding these conferences for the benefit of the English teachers themselves, and by extension for the benefit of their students.

The *CQ* conferences were especially important to Cox, who spent as much time corresponding with teachers and their pupils as he did editing journal proofs or writing to academics or creative writers. In 1969, on the Friday before Christmas, a Cheshire schoolgirl wrote to Cox to ask if she could attend the Manchester conference which was due to begin on January 3rd: 'I am anxious to attend the course, and I understand that you had promised to see whether a few extra pupils could be admitted'.[101] Cox wrote straight back on the Monday to let her know that whilst it was too late to enrol her officially, 'there is no reason why you should not come to the lectures and seminars.'[102] This exchange is emblematic of Cox's generosity towards these sixth formers and his willingness to make concessions so that as many students as possible could benefit from these projects. And while this particular student, one Hilary Mantel, went on to study Law at university rather than English, it would be unfair to see that as a failing on Cox's part.

Two projects with a similar dedication to sixth formers taking English A level were Dyson's two commercial ventures, the Casebooks and the Norwich Tapes. Published by Macmillan, the Casebooks series was launched in 1968, with Dyson serving as General Editor. Each volume of the series was edited by a different academic, for instance Bradbury edited a Casebook on E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, Frank Kermode edited one on *King Lear*,

---

[100] Atherton, 'Public Intellectuals and the Schoolteacher Audience', pp. 85-86.

[101] Hilary Mantel to C. B. Cox, 19th December 1969, CQA2/2/4/128, Critical Quarterly Archive, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

[102] C. B. Cox to Hilary Mantel, 22nd December 1969, CQA2/2/4/127, Critical Quarterly Archive, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

Sage – as mentioned in the previous chapter – edited one on Thomas Love Peacock's satirical novels, and Priscilla Martin – who also taught at UEA – edited one on *Troilus and Cressida*. The series tended to focus on canonical authors and texts, but there were also some volumes with a more general theme or a contemporary focus, such as Peter Barry's Casebook on *Issues in Contemporary Critical Theory* or Dyson's *Three Contemporary Poets: Thom Gunn, Ted Hughes & R. S. Thomas*. Dyson explained in the General Editor's Preface:

> Each volume in the central category deals either with one well-known and influential work by an individual author, or with closely related works by one writer. The main section consists of critical readings, mostly modern, collected from books and journals, a selection of reviews and comments from the author himself. The Editors' Introduction charts the reputation of the work or works from the first appearance to the present time.[103]

The Casebooks therefore provided a similar function to the shorter pieces of interpretive criticism published in *CQ* and *Critical Survey*, and could be used either by schoolteachers planning their lessons or by sixth formers and undergraduates preparing for exams or essays which required references to relevant criticism. Much of the correspondence held at the John Rylands Library between Dyson and his contact at Macmillan, Derick Mirfin is concerned with A level English set texts, specifically which novels were used by which exam boards.[104]

The Norwich Tapes were a similar commercial venture, organised by Dyson and former UEA student Julian Lovelock, with whom Dyson had also co-edited the collection *Education and Democracy* (1975). Each tape lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, and featured an academic or writer speaking on a relevant topic, for example William Empson on 'Ben Jonson: *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*', Barbara Hardy on 'Chaucer: Fresh Perspectives on the Knight, the Clerk and the Franklin', or Dyson on 'Practical Criticism: Reading Skills and the Enjoyment of

---

[103] A. E. Dyson, *Three Contemporary Poets: Thom Gunn, Ted Hughes & R. S. Thomas* (Macmillan, 1990), p. 7.
[104] See, for instance, 'Papers related to Casebooks', AED/2/1/1/5, Papers of Tony Dyson and Cliff Tucker, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

Novels'.[105] The series was, again, specifically marketed at schools. A leaflet advertising 'Norwich Tapes: The Critical Forum' read:

> Are you – looking for good revision material for 'A' level candidates?
> – planning those vital final lessons before examinations?
> – preparing pupils for university interviews?
> – investigating sixth form resources for the coming academic year?[106]

Dyson was also interested in producing tapes of contemporary poets or novelists reading from and speaking about their work. In July 1985, Dyson wrote to Ted Hughes – by that time Poet Laureate – to propose a 90-minute tape on his creative process. He asked Hughes to consider

> a talk on writing poetry (why not concentrate on poetry?), addressed to young poets (sixth formers, or undergraduates, or that age group anyway, in so far as we could reach it) – or indeed anyone under (say) 30, who was seriously attempting the art. I know, from experience, how many people do write poems – mostly badly; though I suspect that quite a few, with guidance, have potential with words. My own mind remains confused. Intense experiences don't make poetry alone (the most common error?) – but I suppose that sorting out language, and experience in harness, can help?
>
> I don't know if useful hints could be given on a 90 minute tape – or how useful the medium can be made, even; […] Obviously, you are the man who would carry most weight -- & do it best. Any hope?[107]

The tape was never made, though the letter is interesting in that it shows an academic interest in creativity and the writing process, despite the fact that Dyson was himself a literary critic who did not teach creative writing within the university. Dyson is himself 'confused' as to what the creative process really entails, and while he is sure that 'Intense experiences don't make poetry alone' he is unable to suggest any approach that goes beyond simply looking at the writer's biography. In a similar way, when Dyson asked the poet R. S. Thomas to record a tape about his poetry a few years earlier, Thomas was also unsure what a tape on the creative process might mean: ‘I would be glad to hear from you more explicitly what I am expected to prepare for the tape – drivel on about my life and work and illustrate with an occasional poem?’[108]

---

[105] Leaflet. 'Norwich Tapes: The Critical Forum', AED/2/1/1/6/40, Papers of Tony Dyson and Cliff Tucker, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.
[106] Leaflet. 'Norwich Tapes: The Critical Forum', AED/2/1/1/6/40, Papers of Tony Dyson and Cliff Tucker, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.
[107] A. E. Dyson to Ted Hughes, 3rd July 1985, AED/1/1/3/2/1, Papers of Tony Dyson and Cliff Tucker, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

Bradbury recorded a tape in conversation with Angus Wilson before Wilson’s death in May 1991. This was advertised as ‘Sir Angus Wilson, C.B.E., Talks About His Life and Work (formerly Professor at the University of East Anglia, and one of the most respected novelists of the twentieth century)’,[109] but sales were low. Dyson wrote to Bradbury:

> Alas. Our tape of his [Wilson’s] excellent discussion with you won’t sell – even tho’ we advertise it to all FE/HE, university & sixth forms regularly, & sometimes feature it.
>
> I’m forced to feel that even the teachers who use our tapes (& these are quite a few, each year, for the whole list) WILL NOT go to creative writers directly… In fact, they buy almost wholly to syllabus… With more & more of the past falling by the wayside.’[110]

It is curious to note that secondary school teachers were less interested in the tapes by creative writers, though this is explained by the lack of creative writing provision in schools at the time, not least in A level English.

Cox had also shown an interest in creativity and the writing process in these other projects taking place outside formal university teaching. The Easter conference for schoolteachers in April 1984 was titled ‘The Teaching of the Verbal Arts’, with speakers including Cox, Ted Hughes, the poet Anne Cluysenaar, and David Craig of Lancaster University.[111] According to a 1992 letter to the *Times Literary Supplement*, Cluysenaar and Craig had previously ‘proposed a BA course’ in Creative Writing at Lancaster ‘in December 1969 and taught it from October 1970, not knowing at first that an MA was starting at

---

[108] R. S. Thomas to A. E. Dyson, 29th November 1977, AED/1/1/4/1/9, Papers of Tony Dyson and Cliff Tucker, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester. Thomas was subsequently invited by Dyson to come to Norwich in February 1978 to record the tape and give a reading at the university. Thomas’s reply was characteristically cantankerous: ‘I don’t mind fulfilling the rest of the engagement while in Norwich, but please don’t say in the handout that I’m available for schools. I’m not.’ (R. S. Thomas to A. E. Dyson, 29th November 1977, AED/1/1/4/1/9).

[109] Leaflet. ‘Norwich Tapes: The Critical Forum’, AED/2/1/1/6/40, Papers of Tony Dyson and Cliff Tucker, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

[110] A. E. Dyson to Malcolm Bradbury, 12th April 1991, Box 3, 1968-1977, Bradbury M. mss. II., Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

[111] ‘The Teaching of the Verbal Arts’ brochure, Easter 1984, COX4/9/3, Brian Cox Papers, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

Norwich.'[112] Cox had worked with Cluysenaar, Craig, and Peter Abbs to produce a 'Verbal Arts Manifesto', which was published in *The Times Higher Education Supplement* in October 1983 and signed by a number of Cox's collaborators including Bradbury, Lodge, Hughes, Hoggart and Williams.[113] The manifesto had also been published in the twenty-fifth anniversary issue of *CQ* in March 1984. It argued 'that verbal skills are neglected by the education system':

> Precise and creative use of language is of major importance for the maintenance of our complex intellectual, industrial and democratic structures. Practice in verbal arts develops emotional and intellectual discrimination and provides the individual (and through the individual, society) with a vital tool of discovery and communication.
>
> In recent years many English teachers have grown uneasy at the split between academics and professional writers. No discipline concerned with an art should divide those who study from those who practice it. The number of writers' fellowships, residences and part-time posts should be increased, on a par with the situation in other arts, while the role of academics in the encouragement of verbal skill and creativity should be greatly expanded.
>
> Practice in the verbal arts is valuable not only for its own sake, but because it helps students appreciate the achievement of writers of the past and take an informed interest in contemporary writing. […] The aim of verbal arts courses, however, is not to train professional writers (any more than courses in criticism aim to train professional critics). Their aim is, more generally, to expand the range and improve the quality of the language used by students.[114]

'Verbal Arts', then, is not exactly like the UEA MA in Creative Writing, which was, as discussed in chapter one, devised by Bradbury and Wilson as a cultural intervention into, as Bradbury puts it, 'the state of serious fiction in Britain at the time, by which both of us were dismayed.'[115] In the same way, 'Verbal Arts' not exactly like 'Freshman Comp' as taught in American colleges, in which the sole focus is syntax and grammar. The Verbal Arts Manifesto instead describes a subject which sits between 'Creative Writing' and 'Freshman Comp', and combines both what D. G. Myers refers to as the practice of 'examin[ing] writing seriously from within'[116] with what Andrew Cowan calls 'the increasingly vocational orientation of many undergraduate programmes (with their emphasis on skills appropriate to employment in the "creative industries")'.[117] Cox had high hopes for the 1984 Verbal Arts conference, and even wrote to Hughes that he was 'hoping this will prove a useful occasion for making contacts and starting the Revolution.'[118] While his revolution did not happen, the conference did provide a major forum for sixth form teachers to take part in the intelligent discussion and theorisation of creative writing and the 'verbal arts'.[119]

---

[112] David Craig, 'Creative Writing courses' (letter), *Times Literary Supplement*, 31st January 1992, p. 17.
[113] Cox, *The Great Betrayal*, pp. 274-276.
[114] Cox, *The Great Betrayal*, pp. 274-276.
[115] Malcolm Bradbury, 'The Bridgeable Gap: Bringing Together the Creative Writer and the Critical Theorist in an Authorless World', *Times Literary Supplement*, 17th January 1992, pp. 7-9 (p. 7).

Cox's interest in the 'verbal arts' would also inform his most significant contribution to English teaching in schools, the National Curriculum for English. Cox was Chair of the National Curriculum English Working Group in 1989, and his findings – dubbed 'the Cox report' – were well received by teachers, academics, and the public more broadly. As the literary critic Marilyn Butler writes in a 1993 essay, 'Brian Cox had achieved, remarkably, virtual consensus.'[120] The Cox report included the teaching of writing within the national curriculum, with the justification that 'writing can have cognitive functions in clarifying and supporting thought.'[121] This resembles the argument of the Verbal Arts Manifesto, that writing can develop 'emotional and intellectual discrimination' and provide 'the individual (and through the individual, society) with a vital tool of discovery and communication'. The Cox report concluded:

> We should transform our students from passive consumers into active makers. They would become members of a working community. They would look forward to next

---

[116] D. G. Myers, *The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880* [1996] (University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 149.

[117] Andrew Cowan, 'The Rise of Creative Writing' (2018), *National Association of Writers in Education* <https://www.nawe.co.uk/DB/wip-editions/articles/the-rise-of-creative-writing.html/> [accessed 1st April 2021].

[118] C. B. Cox to Ted Hughes, 7th March 1984, COX4/9/5, Brian Cox Papers, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

[119] David Craig to C. B. Cox, 5th March 1984, COX4/9/31, Brian Cox Papers, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

[120] Marilyn Butler, 'Ambush: the politics of National Curriculum English, 1990-3', *Critical Quarterly* 35.4 (1993), pp. 8-12 (p. 8).

[121] Brian Cox, *Cox on Cox: An English Curriculum for the 1990s* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), p. 140.

> week, when they might publish a magazine or take part in a play or complete a piece of writing which they have discussed with friends.[122]

For Cox, teaching writing in this way would not, as the Manifesto states, 'train professional writers', but it would provide schoolchildren with a valuable pursuit which they could enjoy at their leisure. For Cox, writing creatively encourages a particular sensibility of 'emotional and intellectual discrimination'. We might compare this to Raymond Williams's comment in *Marxism and Literature* (1977) that 'literary production […] is "creative" […] in the material sense of a specific practice of self-making [and] self-composition'.[123] Whereas a postgraduate writing course for adult learners does to an extent aim to 'train professional writers', Cox instead advocated for teaching children to write creatively from early on in their education, so as to develop 'emotional and intellectual discrimination' and a reflective sensibility.

Cox understood the personal benefits of creative writing from his own practice as a poet. As he recounted in the preface to his *Collected Poems* (1993), he began writing poetry regularly after his brother's death by suicide in 1975.[124] The need to interrogate and try to make sense of life events is an understandable grief reaction, not least to the suicide of a close family member. Cox used poetry primarily as a way of understanding or questioning the meaning of his own experience as an individual, as he explained in the preface to his final collection, *My Eightieth Year to Heaven* (2007):

> I believe it's important to record unique, individual moments. Celebration of the variety of human life is an admirable aim for all writers. I called my first book *Every Common Sight* […] a quotation from Wordsworth. Like him, I feel even the most ordinary experiences can be filled with wonder. I've no faith in large-scale political solutions. Like Karl Popper, I'm unsympathetic to blueprints for total change, to 'holistic' solutions, and think we must try to solve immediate small problems rather than set out on some utopian revolutionary path to change the world.[125]

---

[122] Cox, *Cox on Cox*, p. 154.
[123] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 210.
[124] Brian Cox, *Collected Poems* (Carcanet, 1993), p. xi.
[125] Brian Cox, *My Eightieth Year to Heaven* (Carcanet, 2007), p. 10.

One such 'unique, individual moment' is recounted in the anecdotal 'Sergeant Smith', first published in *Every Common Sight* (1981). The events of the poem – in which Cox, then attached to the Royal Army Education Corps, is approached in private by a sergeant who asks him to proofread a letter he had written – are also mentioned briefly in *The Great Betrayal*.[126] The poem, however, begins by juxtaposing the tyrannous sergeant with Cox the speaker. Sergeant Smith is

> Tall, straight as a trouser press,
> He stalks about like a khaki robot:
> Once put a friend on a charge
> For coming off leave just minutes late.

This is contrasted with the speaker in the teaching building:

> As I've no teaching till half past eight
> I settle down with *War and Peace*,
> Dishevelled blankets round me on the floor.

A '[s]heepish' Smith then enters Cox's room and asks him to read the draft 'to check it's right'. But Smith is illiterate, like over thirty percent of soldiers in wartime Britain.[127] The final stanza reads:

> Ill at ease in dust and clutter,
> He shuffles about, surprisingly shy.
> "It's fine," I say, "Just needs polish."
> I rewrite completely, correcting each mistake.
> He looks at my copy, knows what I've done.
> In silence he gives me his hand to shake.[128]

The poem is not simply an indirect boast about how kind and generous Cox was in that moment, but rather a nuanced portrayal of the various social forces at play in the postwar British Army: in this moment, Cox's knowledge grants him power over his superior. The poem is about tact, kindness, and generosity, as well as class, literacy, and above all knowledge, and how one can use that knowledge to help others within and outside their own social existence.

---

[126] Cox, *The Great Betrayal*, p. 65.
[127] Butler, 'Ambush', p. 9.
[128] Brian Cox, 'Sergeant Smith' in *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1993), p. 78.

The obvious parallels between the events described in many of Cox's poems and real events from his life – or, at least, versions of those real events as told in archived letters and *The Great Betrayal* – make it tempting to focus solely on the surface of the poems, reading them as direct pieces of memoir. This is compounded by the fact that – although Cox did make use of imagery, rhyming, and different metrical patterns – the poems are written mostly in straightforward, denotational language resembling realist prose. Larkin noticed this, remarking in a 1981 letter to Cox that the poems of *Every Common Sight* 'are all like you, breathing goodness of the heart, but I was interested to see how many are about people. Ever thought of short stories? Or a novel?'[129]

Another anecdotal poem based on Cox's own life is 'Larkin in the 1960s', which was first published in the *Collected Poems*. Here Cox writes about taking Larkin to see Manchester United at Old Trafford, as the poem begins: 'When George Best scored a tricksy goal / Philip Larkin raised his bowler hat.'[130] Again, Cox did actually take Larkin to Old Trafford on more than one occasion. Larkin enjoyed these visits, and wrote to Cox to thank him for the 'wonderful time' he had in November 1969: 'I read the football pages now with great interest: Kirkpatrick, Best and other names are vivid to me now.'[131] But 'Larkin in the 1960s' does also subvert this autobiographical element in Cox's poetry. The fourth stanza reads:

> In Manchester that night he told me
> The Whitsun railway ride
> In fact took place in July heat.
> He chose the title for the sound,
> His liking for linking of words.[132]

---

[129] Philip Larkin to C. B. Cox, 13th January 1981, COX6/1/5, Brian Cox Papers, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

[130] C. B. Cox, 'Larkin in the 1960s' in *Collected Poems* (Carcanet, 1993), pp. 92-93 (p. 92).

[131] Philip Larkin to C. B. Cox, 5th December 1969, CQA1/1/76/15, Critical Quarterly Archive, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

[132] Cox, 'Larkin in the 1960s', p. 92.

Amusingly, a 1986 typescript of the poem sent to Michael Schmidt – who was Cox's editor at Carcanet – has 'August heat', which Cox has then crossed out, adding 'July' in pen. Schmidt wrote a reply in support of the change, telling Cox: 'I think the word 'July' is a great improvement on the word 'August', giving exactly the kind of reversal I hunger for!'[133] The 'reversal' Schmidt refers to is the change in stress from the second syllable of 'July' to the first syllable of 'August', which disrupts the iambic pattern of the line. As the poem itself describes, Cox made the change 'for the sound' rather than biographical accuracy.

The *CQ* conferences, the Casebooks, the Norwich Tapes, the Verbal Arts Manifesto and the Cox report constitute an important set of interventions which Cox and Dyson sought to make into the broader landscape of education in Britain. Though Cox and Dyson did theorise the university and its relation to society in the pages of *CQ* and *Critical Survey*, projects such as the Casebooks and the Norwich Tapes made actual contributions to the democratisation of the university English school. Similarly, Cox's work with the Association for Verbal Arts provided an opportunity for the intelligent discussion of writing in formal education and the National Curriculum brought these ideas to the attention of the general public. Foremost among these, though, was the conferences, which were attended by approximately 17,000 young people over at least twenty-nine years. This is an outstanding achievement – one which is unparalleled in the entire history of postwar literary culture – however such a project would be more difficult to institute today: as Atherton writes, A-level exams have changed considerably since the 1990s, and are no longer as 'homogenous' as they were in Cox and Dyson's time.[134]

---

[133] Michael Schmidt to C. B. Cox, 19th June 1986, COX6/10/103, Brian Cox Papers, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

[134] Atherton, 'Public Intellectuals and the Schoolteacher Audience', p. 85.

Conclusion

The *CQ* project had two major shortcomings. The first was that the ongoing interaction with schools and schoolteachers favoured the grammar schools to an overwhelming degree. Most of the archived correspondence sent between Cox and various headteachers shows this. When Cox remarked in a somewhat triumphalist tone that ‘throughout the 1960s we were selling [subscriptions to *CQ*] to more than half the grammar schools in Britain’, he made no mention of the secondary moderns or comprehensives.[135] As individuals, Cox and Dyson each saw the increase of free grammar school places between the wars as the catalyst for their own trajectory from childhood poverty to secure, well-paid positions as university academics – as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Dyson described them as ‘the generation that, as it seems, had the luck’.[136] But in depending on the grammar school in this way, Cox and Dyson fell for what Williams calls ‘the ladder version of society’. In the conclusion to *Culture and Society*, Williams writes that ‘the ladder is a perfect symbol of the bourgeois idea of society, because, while undoubtedly it offers the opportunity to climb, it is a device which can only be used individually: you go up the ladder alone’.[137] Williams continues: ‘the boy who has gone from a council school to Oxford or Cambridge is of course glad that he has gone, and he sees no need to apologize for it, in either direction. But he cannot then be expected to agree that such an opportunity constitutes a sufficient educational reform.’[138] Cox and Dyson seemingly did view their own individual social mobility in this way. We should note, however, that despite teaching at Oxford’s Delegacy for Extra-Mural Studies from 1946 to 1961, Williams did not engage with audiences beyond the university, in particular schoolteachers and sixth-formers, on anywhere near the same scale.

---

[135] Cox, ‘*Critical Quarterly* and Hull’, p. 3.

[136] A. E. Dyson to C. B. Cox, 5th October 1987, COX1/2/7/33, Brian Cox Papers, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

[137] Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 433.

[138] Williams, *Culture and Society*, p. 434.

This faith in the idea of the grammar school was one of the motivations behind Cox and Dyson's 'Black Papers', a series of six polemical special issues of *CQ*'s sister journal, *Critical Survey*, published between 1969 and 1977. Named as a play on government 'white papers', the Black Papers took aim at progressive education reform, in particular Anthony Crosland's initiative to replace the tripartite system instituted by the 1944 Education Act with a comprehensive system. The second Black Paper, titled *Black Paper Two: The Crisis in Education* (1969), included two controversial contributions: 'The Mental Differences Between Children' by Cyril Burt and 'The Rise of the Mediocracy' by H. J. Eysenck.[139] Both Burt and Eysenck had controversially claimed intelligence – as measured by 'IQ' scores – to be hereditary, a claim which has since been widely discredited in the fields of psychology and medicine. Cox and Dyson's proximity to this eugenicist thinking both contradicts and undermines the democratic charge behind the 'literature is for everyman' idea; indeed, the Black Papers were so infamous during the 1970s that even today they still overshadow Cox and Dyson's many other projects to broaden the constituency of literary culture. A typical assessment of *CQ* is given by Alexander Hutton, who describes the journal's pages as 'steeped in pessimism and reaction against over-experimentation in the classroom and the attempts to broaden, or rather dissolve, the subject into wider cultural or media studies.'[140] While this would accurately describe the Black Papers themselves, such an account is complicated by Cox and Dyson's obvious commitment to contemporary culture and their attempts to communicate 'élite' literary knowledge to audiences beyond the university.

The second major shortcoming of the *CQ* project was that its non-university audience was, as alluded to at the end of this chapter's first section, a fundamentally passive one. As Atherton points out, the schoolteacher audience 'occupied a relatively restricted space within the ideal community that Cox and Dyson envisaged'; they were not seen as 'potential contributors' to the journal and the 'overwhelming majority of articles were written by academics'.[141] To Atherton, *CQ* was limited to 'a process in which professional academics and writers carried on a dialogue that schoolteachers could only spectate on, with opportunities to participate being restricted to attendance at conferences.'[142] But even when they did attend conferences, their participation was limited to discussion periods, group activities, and the practical criticism game. Teachers, students, or members of the public were not invited to give presentations, lead their own seminars, or address the conference as a whole, and there was no mechanism in place for them to challenge or enter into a dialogue with the visiting speakers. In the conclusion to *Culture and Society*, Williams reminds us that 'much of what we call communication is, necessarily no more in itself than transmission: that is to say, a one-way sending.' To 'complete communication' there must also be 'active reception' and 'living response'.[143] Cox and Dyson were, then, both in the journal and in their other projects, simply *transmitting* ideas to these wider audiences, rather than engaging them in an active conversation. Cox and Dyson's efforts – publishing shorter pieces of interpretive criticism, putting on huge conferences for sixth-formers, and so on – were only democratising reception, not response.

---

[139] *Black Paper Two: The Crisis of Education*, *Critical Survey* 4.3 (1969)

[140] Alexander Hutton, 'An English School for the Welfare State: Literature, Politics, and the University, 1932-1965' in *English: Journal of the English Association*, 65.248 (2016), pp. 1-32 (p. 30).

In light of this, we can see that when *CQ*'s first issue proclaimed 'literature is for everyman', this in fact meant that the enjoyment and understanding of creative works is for everyone, reading is for everyone, reception is for everyone; but Cox and Dyson failed to realise the importance of response to the democratisation of culture. There is an important link between *CQ*'s cultural transmissions and the phrases 'expanding élite', 'cultural centre', and 'core': each depends upon a spatial metaphor which places at the centre a singular body of knowledge, in this case the literary canon. While Cox and Dyson did make important modifications to Leavis's minority culture, any project which is based on the idea of a singular cultural tradition leaves little room for – or, indeed, actively prevents – the flourishing of contemporary cultural activity in areas beyond that centre. A model which begins to embrace 'living response' would therefore have to begin by moving away from the idea of a 'cultural centre' and instead theorise a more pluralist construction, where various points, none of them centred or central, are put into contact with one another.

---

[141] Atherton, 'Public Intellectuals and the Schoolteacher Audience', p. 91.
[142] Atherton, 'Public Intellectuals and the Schoolteacher Audience', p. 91.
[143] Williams, *Culture and Society*, pp. 396, 415.

Today *CQ* has a different emphasis and a different readership, and few academic journals have attempted to reach a non-university audience in the same way. Perhaps the most visible is *English,* published by the English Association, an organisation which, as they put it on their website, 'represents teachers of English across the education sector'. *English* is described as 'a platform for scholars and educators to reflect on the key questions facing our discipline today', and the journal has a readership made up of 'schoolteachers as well as academics'. Membership fees are modest: £50 a year for an individual standard membership and £25 a year for concessions, including students, postdoctoral researchers, early-career teachers, retirees, and the unwaged.[144] However, as was the case with *CQ*, the project undertaken by *English* is yet another example of democratic transmission rather than democratic conversation: the contributors are, largely, trained academics – both salaried members of faculty and postgraduate researchers – rather than schoolteachers or interested general readers.

How might we enact a similar project to democratise literary culture, albeit one which incorporates active reception and living response? In some ways the conditions are more favourable in 2024 than they were in 1958. Cox and Dyson set their valuable example long before the advent of the internet. An online publication could share contemporary criticism and writing to a large audience without the difficulties – or indeed the overheads – of running a quarterly print journal. In the same way, online conferencing software has, since the coronavirus pandemic, been made widely available and affordable: Zoom, for instance, can be downloaded and used without paying a subscription fee. But again, without active participation an online journal or online conference is still no more than an exercise in popular transmission. Organisers and tutors would have to make an effort to involve any non-specialist, non-university readers in the conversation by inviting them to make their own contributions. This could be as simple as publishing a series of short close readings written by teachers, students, or general readers, or inviting these non-university participants to give shorter spoken addresses at a conference. Put simply, unless non-university readers are conceived of not just as an audience but also as a base of contributors, then there is no option for a 'living response'.

---

[144] 'English: The Journal of the English Association' (2023) <https://englishassociation.ac.uk /english/> [accessed 1st October 2023].

And yet despite the technological advances, there are many more pressures facing academic workers in 2024 than there were in 1958. Much of the labour that goes into producing a quarterly journal is unpaid and undertaken by academics at a time when social, political, and financial pressures have brought the university – and the humanities in particular – to a point of crisis. Conversely, when Cox was hired at Hull in 1954, he was told 'that [the] three-year probationary period was only a formality, and that [he] had a safe job for life.'[145] Once hired, his duties were similarly relaxed:

> When I arrived I was asked to prepare lectures on the novel from Defoe to the present day, and I had a great deal of preparation to complete. But once I had broken the back of this work, I enjoyed an easy life. My total teaching load was about seven hours a week. On a typical day I would take a tutorial at 9.30 am, adjourn for coffee and possibly talk to friends until lunch. After lunch I might give a lecture. Older lecturers rarely published; many left the university after degree day in mid-June for a vacation in France or Italy, and would not return until the first week in October. Philip Larkin once said to me that the English middle classes always look after their own. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries they found younger sons comfortable posts as

---

[145] Cox, '*Critical Quarterly* and Hull', p. 2.

> curates and vicars in the Church of England. In the twentieth century they found them sinecures in universities.[146]

Not only are the sinecures gone, but the British media is now more than ever marked by a broader philistinism which routinely undermines the work done in universities. *The Times*, for instance, published in June 2023 a column by Emma Duncan titled ‘We should cheer the decline of humanities decrees’.[147] In this context, any project to democratise literary culture is made not only far more difficult, but far more urgent, too.

---

[146] Cox, ‘*Critical Quarterly* and Hull’, p. 2.

[147] Emma Duncan, ‘We should cheer decline of humanities degrees’ (15th June 2023) <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/we-should-cheer-decline-of-humanities-degrees-5pp6ksgmz> [accessed 1st October 2023].

Conclusion

In a 2022 essay for the *New Left Review*, Anahid Nersessian argues that 'the problem at hand' for English studies in the era of the method wars 'arguably has less to do with the content or style of literary criticism than with the fraying of its social purpose.'[1] Nersessian identifies this social purpose to have previously been 'to provide access to class power and acculturate individuals to it.'[2] As part of this argument, Nersessian goes back to the eighteenth century to argue, quoting John Guillory's *Cultural Capital* (1993), that 'the ends served by a literary education were transparently ideological […] an interest in "polite letters" was "a means of exhibiting status" at a time when traditional markers of social prestige were being replaced by more abstract signifiers.'[3] With this in mind, Nersessian tells us, 'it is not surprising that literary study has been the subject of hostile or histrionic scrutiny from nearly the moment of its institutionalization.'[4] What we see here is an enormous transhistorical conflation of the practices of an insurgent bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century with a much different situation in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Though there is indeed a continuity between the forms of discussion and criticism which were developed in the coffee-houses of the eighteenth century and the institution of the university in the twentieth and twenty-first (as I argue in my chapter on Lorna Sage), to say that the social purpose of criticism and reading has been consistently and perpetually a case of 'exhibiting status' is entirely inaccurate – we need only consider the changing social purpose of the café or the roll-up cigarette to see this. To argue as much is to offer an exceedingly impoverished view of what a university can or indeed should be. Nersessian relents that 'this does not mean that criticism has not gratified other human needs, or provided insight into an array of problems' but then suggests that this gratification and insight was possible ‘precisely because there was, for a time, no conflict between an education in the principles of literary criticism and the going concern of class advancement.’[5]

---

[1] Anahid Nersessian, 'For Love of Beauty? Literary Criticism in Troubled Times', *New Left Review* 133/134 (2022), pp. 179-196 (p. 181).
[2] Nersessian, 'For Love of Beauty?', p. 181.
[3] Nersessian, 'For Love of Beauty?', p. 186.
[4] Nersessian, 'For Love of Beauty?', p. 186.

What Nersessian is unable to account for is that an individual might wish to learn about the procedures of literary criticism and read the great works of the past and present while at the same time remaining content with, or even unphased by, their position as part of the working or lower-middle class. Indeed the social purpose of literary criticism is far simpler, and closer to us, than Nersessian’s rather blunt directive ‘to provide access to class power and acculturate individuals to it’. We need only turn to a single letter, held at the *CQ* archive at the John Rylands Library in Manchester, to see this. In 1969, a man named Elwyn Hughes wrote to Cox and Dyson with overdue payment for his subscription to the journal. The letter, sent from a farmhouse in rural Wales, reads: ‘I was a member of Mr Dyson’s “extra mural” class in Wrexham some years back, and will never forget the experience. His lectures were tremendously inspiring and quite brilliant.’ Mr Hughes concludes: ‘As humbly and as modestly as I dare, may I add that your publications have helped to make my life here very rich and rewarding.’[6] The social purpose of literary criticism is foremost to improve, by degrees, the quality of our written culture, in both aesthetic and intellectual terms, for no end other than to make the lives of as many people as possible as rich and rewarding as the life of Mr Hughes.

Though varied in their local thematic concerns, the intellectual projects of Malcolm Bradbury, David Lodge, Lorna Sage and *Critical Quarterly* demonstrate an enormously successful set of engagements with non-university audiences, most notably the peri-academic reading public which I described in the introduction to this thesis. But these projects have, until now, been broadly neglected by previous histories of the discipline. This is perhaps because their major concerns – the comic novel, the novel of ideas, biography, explanatory criticism –

---

[5] Nersessian, ‘For Love of Beauty’, p. 181.

[6] Elwyn Hughes to the Critical Quarterly Society, 16th June 1969, COX1/1/3/64, Brian Cox Papers, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester.

have broadly speaking been met by derision or even hostility by academics working in Britian and America. But the work of these figures is important and a renewed attention to Bradbury's serious novel, Lodge's novel of ideas, Sage's reflexive life writing, and *CQ*'s democratising project can offer us a number of ways out of the current impasse facing the discipline of English in 2024.

It must, however, be noted that the intellectual projects explored in the four chapters of this thesis were historically specific. Bradbury, Lodge, Sage, Cox and Dyson all became academics when the British university was at its peak culturally, socially, politically and financially. Bradbury's MA, Lodge's documentary on Channel 4, the various conferences they both attended, Sage's lucrative career as a journalist, Cox's sinecure at Hull, *CQ*'s commercial viability: all of this depended on a number of external factors – foremost money – which now no longer exist. In a 2019 festschrift marking *CQ*'s move from Cambridge to UEA, Jeremy Noel-Tod writes: 'If a pair of academics nowadays launched a magazine and managed to sell 10,000-plus pamphlets of new poetry off the back of it annually, we would say they had one hell of an impact case study on their hands.'[7] In the same festschrift, Matthew Taunton argues that *CQ*'s engagements with non-university audiences are 'basically impossible to put into practice in the contemporary academic landscape'. Today, 'over-specialisation is practically mandated by the institutional culture of higher education', particularly by modes of assessment such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF). The arts and humanities 'have borrowed a model of research from the sciences, which has proved incredibly successful as a way of justifying research funding' but the price of which 'has been to place a high value on specialised knowledge at the expense of a broad engagement with culture as such.'[8]

---

[7] Jeremy Noel-Tod, '*Critical Quarterly* and Modern Poetry', *Critical Quarterly* 61.2 (2019), pp. 26-31 (p. 27).

[8] Matthew Taunton, '*Critical Quarterly*, Leavisism, and UEA', *Critical Quarterly* 61.2 (2019), pp. 5-14 (pp. 9-11).

In the same *New Left Review* essay quoted above, Nersessian claims that 'the competition over who shall save criticism may appear as little more than a struggle over who can make the best apology for the broken promise of a university degree.'[9] Indeed, as Nersessian puts it: 'staring down budget cuts, privatization and other existential threats,' the university 'has had to ratchet up its claims to deliver phantom benefits and so to cast about for new arguments for why it should exist at all.'[10] Jonathan Kramnick makes one such claim in his recent monograph *Criticism and Truth* (2023), in which he writes that literary criticism is 'one academic endeavour among others, each involved in the effort to explain and so transform the world.'[11] Nersessian and Kramnick are both American critics writing about the American context. In Britain, justifications for the humanities in general and English in particular have typically had to make do with arguments which aim a lot lower: as Joe Moran points out, the 'traditional line of defence' for the English degree now is that it 'teaches useful, real-world skills, producing graduates who are accomplished writers, fluent communicators and creative thinkers equipped to service a flexible knowledge economy.'[12] This is no doubt true, and as Moran writes, '[f]ew English lecturers would disagree with this',[13] but it is hardly the case that STEM subjects produce graduates who are in the main unaccomplished writers, convoluted communicators, or staid thinkers ill-equipped for a flexible knowledge economy.

Nersessian's phrase 'phantom benefits' is useful in that it denotes a vague positive which may well be there, if only you can believe it. Rather than depending on arguments which aim either far too high (*an English degree can transform the world*) or far too low (*an English degree can teach you vocational skills*), we have to make an argument for a creative and critical discipline which makes use of the literary-critical knowledge of the past so as to produce more than anything else a corpus of new works which are 'serious' in the sense described by Bradbury: writing which functions as 'a form of enquiry, into the grammars and orders, the means and structures, by which we build up sufficient fictions of the world.'[14] The process for producing such works may well be a direct result of university Creative Writing programmes, but it could also be the indirect result of democratising and popularising literary-critical knowledge and foremost a readerly taste for work which asks important questions about our inherited modes of thought and ways of living, our fictions of the world. Pleasure is an important part of this: Bradbury, Lodge and Sage wrote seriously, but they wrote prose which was above all entertaining and a pleasure to read.

---

[9] Nersessian, 'For Love of Beauty?', p. 180.
[10] Nersessian, 'For Love of Beauty?', p. 180.
[11] Jonathan Kramnick, *Criticism and Truth: On Method in Literary Studies* (University of Chicago Press, 2023), p. 99.
[12] Joe Moran, 'Delivering the Undeliverable: Teaching English in a University Today', *English* 71.273 (2022), pp. 140-160 (p. 143).
[13] Moran, 'Delivering the Undeliverable', p. 143.

Cox and Dyson wrote in March 1959 that literature 'is still one of the major pleasures of life'.[15] Sixty-five years later it still is, and it still can be, but an account of the value of literature based on pleasure alone is not enough: some people take pleasure in burning down libraries.[16] Indeed perhaps our greatest challenge in 2024 is the fact that so many people take such great pleasure in harbouring prejudices against others. But all prejudices are, like novels, fictions of the world, and to democratise and popularise both a training in the processes of fiction and a taste for reading books which question those fictions is to draw attention to this fact. Indeed, as Bradbury writes in the introduction to *No, Not Bloomsbury* (1987): 'an awareness of our most powerful fictions is as profound an insight into our lives and condition as there is.'[17]

---

[14] Malcolm Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury*, (Arena: 1987), pp. 372-373.

[15] C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson, 'Foreword', *Critical Quarterly* 1.1 (1959), pp. 3-4 (p. 4).

[16] Ella Creamer, 'Liverpool library torched by far-right rioters raises repair funds', *The Guardian*, 6th August 2024 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/article/2024/aug/06/liverpool-library-torched-by-far-right-rioters-raises-repair-funds-spellow-hub/> [accessed 11th August 2024].

[17] Bradbury, *No, Not Bloomsbury*, p. x.

Bibliography

Amis, Martin. *The War Against Cliché: Essays and Reviews 1971-2000* [2001] (Vintage, 2002)

Anderson, Amanda. *Bleak Liberalism* (University of Chicago Press, 2016)

Arac, J., W. Godzich and W. Martin. *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America* (University of Minnesota Press, 1983)

Arnold, Matthew. *Culture and Anarchy* [1869] (Oxford University Press, 2009)

Atherton, Carol. *Defining Literary Criticism: Scholarship, Authority, and the Possession of Literary Knowledge, 1880-2002* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)

——. 'Public Intellectuals and the Schoolteacher Audience: The First Ten Years of *Critical Quarterly*', *English* 58.220 (2009), pp. 74-94

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World* [1965] (Indiana University Press, 1984)

——. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (ed.), (University of Texas Press, 1981)

——. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. Caryl Emerson (University of Minnesota Press, 1984)

Baldick, Chris. *Criticism and Literary Theory 1890 to the Present* (Longman, 1996)

Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text* (Fontana, 1977)

Benson, Stephen and Clare Connors. *Creative Criticism: An Anthology and Guide* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014)

Bergonzi, Bernard. *David Lodge* (Northcote House, 1995)

Best, Stephen and Sharon Marcus. 'Surface Reading: An Introduction', *Representations*, 108.1 (2009), pp. 1-21

Bewes, Timothy. 'Reading with the Grain: A New World in Literary Criticism', *differences* 21.3 (2010), pp. 1-33

——. *Free Indirect: The Novel in a Postfictional Age* (Columbia University Press, 2022)

Big Words… Small Worlds, Channel 4, 22nd November 1987

Bigsby, Christopher. ‘The Golden Age’, *Hinterland* 7 (2021), pp. 44-58

Black Paper Two: The Crisis of Education, *Critical Survey* 4.3 (1969)

Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence* [1973] (Oxford University Press, 1997)

Bradbury, Malcolm. ‘The Rise of the Provincials’, *The Antioch Review* 16.4 (1956), pp. 469-477

——. ‘Surveying the gap left by *Scrutiny*’, *Guardian*, 12th May 1960, p. 10.

——. ‘A Song of Toads and Gardens’, *Essays in Criticism* 10.4 (1960), p. 440

——. *Stepping Westward* [1965] (Picador, 2012)

——. *Possibilities: Essays on the State of the Novel* (Oxford University Press, 1973)

——. *The History Man* [1975] (Picador, 2017)

——. *The After Dinner Game* [1982] (Arena, 1984)

——. *No, Not Bloomsbury* (Arena, 1987)

——. *Mensonge* [1987] (Penguin, 1993)

——. ‘The Bridgeable Gap: Bringing Together the Creative Writer and the Critical Theorist in an Authorless World’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 17th January 1992, pp. 7-9

——. *Doctor Criminale* [1992] (Picador, 2011)

——. ‘Critical years: some thoughts on Brian Cox and *CQ*’, *Critical Quarterly* 35.4 (1993), pp. 31-35

——. *Class Work: The Best of Contemporary Short Fiction* (Sceptre, 1995)

——. *The Atlas of Literature* (De Agostini, 1996)

——. ‘Just Why Do We All Love David Jason?’, *Daily Mail*, 12th February 1997, p. 8.

——. *To the Hermitage* [2000] (Picador, 2001)

Bradbury, Malcolm and James McFarlane (eds). *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930* [1976] (Penguin, 1991)

Bradbury, Malcolm and David Palmer (eds). *Contemporary Criticism* (Edward Arnold, 1970)

Brathwaite, Edward. 'West Indian Prose Fiction in the Sixties: A Survey', *Critical Survey* 3.3 (1967), pp. 169-174

——. 'Caribbean Critics', *Critical Quarterly* 11.3 (1969), pp. 268-276

Butler, Marilyn. 'Ambush: the politics of National Curriculum English, 1990-3', *Critical Quarterly* 35.4 (1993), pp. 8-12

Buurma, Rachel Sagner and Laura Herrernan. *The Teaching Archive: A New History for Literary Study* (University of Chicago Press, 2020)

Byatt, A. S. 'Reading, writing, studying', *Critical Quarterly* 35.4 (1993), pp. 3-7

Cixous, Hélène. 'The Laugh of the Medusa' trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1.4 (1976), pp. 875-893

——. 'La Sexe ou la tête?', *Les Cahiers du GRIF* 13 (1976), pp. 5-15, trans. A. Kuhn, 'Castration or Decapitation?' *Signs* 7 (1981), pp. 41-55

Clark, Alex. 'A reader's writer', *Times Literary Supplement* (21st September 2001), p. 28.

Clune, Michael W. 'John Guillory's Distortions', *Genre* 57.1 (2024), pp. 77-88

Collini, Stefan. *What are Universities For?* (Penguin, 2012)

Conquest, Robert. 'Christian Symbolism in *Lucky Jim*' in *Critical Quarterly* 7.1 (March 1965), pp. 87-92

Connolly, Cyril. 'Comment,' *Horizon*, 1.3 (1940), p. 149

Connor, Steven. *Giving Way: Thoughts on Unappreciated Dispositions* (Stanford University Press, 2019)

Cook, John. 'Lorna Sage', *The Guardian*, 13th January 2001 <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2001/jan/13/guardianobituaries.books/> [accessed 26th April 2024]

Cox, C. B. ‘Editorial’, *Critical Quarterly* 7.3 (1965)

——. *Cox on Cox: An English Curriculum for the 1990s* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1990)

——. *The Great Betrayal: Memoirs of a Life in Education* (Chapmans, 1992)

——. *Collected Poems* (Carcanet, 1993)

——. *My Eightieth Year to Heaven* (Carcanet, 2007)

——. *Critical Quarterly* and Hull’, *Critical Quarterly* 50.1-2 (2008), pp. 1-4

Cox, C. B. and A. E. Dyson. ‘Foreword’, *Critical Quarterly* 1.1 (1959), pp. 3-4

——. *The Twentieth-Century Mind: History, Ideas, and Literature in Britain*, 3 vols. (Oxford University Press, 1972, vol. 3 (1972)

Cowan, Andrew. ‘Blind Spots: What Creative Doesn’t Know’, *TEXT* 15 (2011) <http://www.textjournal.com.au/april11/cowan.htm> [accessed 30th June 2022]

Craig, David. ‘Creative Writing courses’ (letter), *Times Literary Supplement*, 31st January 1992, p. 17

Creamer, Ella. ‘Liverpool library torched by far-right rioters raises repair funds’, *The Guardian*, 6th August 2024 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/article/2024/aug/06/liverpool-library-torched-by-far-right-rioters-raises-repair-funds-spellow-hub/> [accessed 11th August 2024]

‘Create’, v. 1a., *Oxford English Dictionary* <https://www.oed.com/dictionary/create_v/> [accessed 10th July 2024]

Critchley, Simon. *On Humour* (Routledge, 2002)

Culler, Jonathan. *Structuralist Poetics* [1975] (Routledge, 2002)

Davie, Donald. ‘The Poet-Scholar’, *Essays in Criticism* 5.1 (1955), p. 43

Drabble, Margaret. *Angus Wilson: A Biography* (Secker & Warburg, 1995)

Duncan, Emma. ‘We should cheer decline of humanities degrees’ (15th June 2023) <https://www. thetimes.co.uk/article/we-should-cheer-decline-of-humanities-degrees-5pp6ksgmz> [accessed 1st October 2023]

Dyson, A. E. ‘Literature – in the Younger Universities’, *Critical Quarterly* 1.2 (1959), pp. 116-123

——. ‘Editorial’, *Critical Quarterly* 2.1 (1960), pp. 3-5

——. ‘Critical Quarterly’ (letter to the editor), *The Spectator*, 29th January 1960, p. 12

——. ‘Critical Quarterly’ (letter to the editor), *The Spectator*, 5th February 1960, p.16

——. ‘Editorial’, *Critical Quarterly* 3.1 (1961), p. 3

——. *Three Contemporary Poets: Thom Gunn, Ted Hughes & R. S. Thomas* (Macmillan, 1990)

Eagleton, Terry. *The Function of Criticism* [1984] (Verso, 2005)

——. ‘The Silences of David Lodge’, *New Left Review* 172 (1988), pp. 93-102

Eco, Umberto. *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge University Press, 1992)

Ellis, Nina and Emily Dorothea Hull. ‘A Conversation with Professor Dame Hermione Lee’, *The Cambridge Quarterly* 53.1 (2024), pp. 2-10

English, James F. (ed.), *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction* (Blackwell, 2006)

‘English: The Journal of the English Association’ (2023) <https://englishassociation.ac.uk /english/> [accessed 1st October 2023]

Enright, D. J. ‘The Poet in Retirement’, *Essays in Criticism* 5.2 (1955), p. 151

Felski, Rita. ‘Suspicious Minds’, *Poetics Today* 32.2 (June 2011), pp. 215-234

——. ‘Introduction’, *New Literary History* 45.2 (2014), pp. v-xi

——. *The Limits of Critique* (University of Chicago Press, 2015)

Fenton, James. ‘The Woman Who Did’, *The New York Review of Books*, 13th June 2002, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2002/06/13/the-woman-who-did/> [accessed 9th September 2024]

Ford, Boris. *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature: From Orwell to Naipaul* (Penguin, 1995)

Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism* [1957] (Princeton University Press, 2015)

Gomme, Andor. ‘Critical Quarterly’ (letter to the editor), *The Spectator*, 12th February 1960, pp. 15-17

Gordon, Edmund. *The Invention of Angela Carter* [2016] (Vintage, 2017)

Graff, Gerald. *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (University of Chicago Press, 1987)

Gray, Chris. ‘Sir Malcolm Bradbury, Novelist, Critic and Teacher, Dies at 68’, *The Independent*, 28th November 2000, p. 1

Guillory, John. *Professing Criticism* (University of Chicago Press, 2022)

Hall, Stuart, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis (eds). *Culture, Media, Language* (Hutchinson, 1980)

Hoffman, Frederick J. ‘Aldous Huxley and the Novel of Ideas’, *College English* 8.3 (1946), pp. 129-137

Hoggart, Richard. *The Uses of Literacy* [1957] (Penguin, 2009)

Holeywell, Kathryn. ‘The Origins of a Creative Writing Programme at the University of East Anglia, 1963-1966’, *New Writing* 6.1 (2009), pp. 15-24

Hughes, Ted. ‘Hawk Roosting’, *Critical Quarterly* 1.2 (1959), p. 124

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (Routledge, 1988)

Hutton, Alexander. 'An English School for the Welfare State: Literature, Politics, and the University, 1932-1965' in *English: Journal of the English Association*, 65.248 (2016), pp. 1-32

Huxley, Aldous. *Point Counter Point* [1928] (Dalkey Archive Press, 1996)

Iser, Wolfgang. 'The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach', *New Literary History* 3.2 (1972), pp. 279-299

Jaillant, Lise. *Literary Rebels: A History of Creative Writers in Anglo-American Universities* (Oxford University Press, 2022)

James, David (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to British Fiction since 1945* (Cambridge University Press, 2015)

Karshan, Thomas. 'Teaching through Imitation, Parody and Play', *creativecritical.net* (2023) <https://creativecritical.net/teaching-through-imitation-parody-and-play/> [accessed 10th July 2024]

Karshan, Thomas and Kathryn Murphy (eds). *On Essays: Montaigne to the Present* (Oxford University Press, 2020)

Kaufmann, R. J. 'The Morality of Mind', *Critical Quarterly* 1.3 (1959), pp. 247-252

Keats, John. *The Poetical Works of John Keats* (Taylor and Walton, 1840)

——. *Selected Letters* ed. Robert Gittings (Oxford University Press, 1970)

Kermode, Frank. *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* (Faber, 1975)

Koch, Kenneth. *The Art of Poetry* (University of Michigan Press, 1996)

Kramnick, Jonathan. *Criticism and Truth: On Method in Literary Studies* (University of Chicago Press, 2023)

Larkin, Philip. 'Fiction and the Reading Public', *Essays in Criticism* 4.1 (1954) p. 86

Lawson, Tracey. 'Malcolm Bradbury Dies', *The Scotsman*, 28th November 2000, p. 1

Leavis, F. R. *Education and the University* [1943] (Cambridge University Press, 1979)

——. *The Great Tradition*, *George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (George W. Stewart, 1948)

——. *Two Cultures? The Significance of C. P. Snow* (Chatto and Windus, 1962)

——. *English Literature in Our Time and the University* (Cambridge University Press, 1969)

Lee, Hermione. *Biography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2009)

Lodge, David. *Language of Fiction* [1966] (Routledge, 2001)

——. *Out of the Shelter* [1970] (Vintage, 2011)

——. *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism: A Reader* (Longman, 1972)

——. 'Metaphor and Metonymy in Modern Fiction', *Critical Quarterly* 17.1 (1975), pp. 75-93

——. *Changing Places* [1975] (Vintage, 2011)

——. *Working with Structuralism* [1981] (ARK, 1986)

——. *How Far Can You Go?* [1980] (Penguin, 1988)

——. *Small World* [1984] (Vintage 2011)

——. *Nice Work* [1988] (Vintage, 2011)

——. *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* [1988] (Routledge, 2008)

——. *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (Routledge, 1990)

——. *The Art of Fiction* [1992] (Vintage, 2011)

——. *Writer's Luck: A Memoir 1976-1991* [2018] (Vintage, 2019)

MacCabe, Colin. 'The revenge of the author', *CQ* 31.2 (1989), 3-13

Macfarlane, Robert. *Original Copy: Plagiarism and Originality in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2007)

MacKay, Marina and Lyndsey Stonebridge. *British Fiction after Modernism: The Novel at Mid-Century* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)

MacKillop, Ian. *F. R. Leavis: A Life in Criticism* (Allen Lane, 1995)

Majumdar, Saikat and Aarthi Vadde (eds). *The Critic as Amateur* (Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2019)

Marcus, Laura. *Autobiography: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2018)

Marcus, Sharon. 'Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* and the Value of Scale', *Modern Language Quarterly* 77.3 (September 2016), pp. 297-319

Marcus, Sharon, Heather Love, and Stephen Best. 'Building a Better Description', *Representations* 135 (2016), pp. 1-21

McCarthy, Mary. *Ideas and the Novel* (Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich, 1980)

McEwan, Ian. *First Love, Last Rites* [1975] (Picador, 1976)

——. 'Intersection', *TriQuarterly* 34 (1975), pp. 63-86

McGurl, Mark. *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Harvard University Press, 2009)

Montaigne, Michel de. *On Friendship* (Penguin, 2004)

Morace, Robert A. *The Dialogic Novels of Malcolm Bradbury and David Lodge* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), p. xvi.

Moran, Joe. 'Delivering the Undeliverable: Teaching English in a University Today', *English* 77.273 (2022), pp. 140-160

——. 'The Humanities and the University: a Brief History of the Present Crisis', *Critical Quarterly* 64.3 (2022), pp. 5-28

Morgan, Edwin. 'Letter to a Young Rhetor, Studying at Oxford', *Essays in Criticism* 10.4 (1960), pp. 434-435

Moretti, Franco (ed.). *The Novel*, 2 vols. (Princeton University Press, 2006), vol. 1 (2006)

Myers, D. G. *The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880* [1996] (University of Chicago Press, 2006)

Nersessian, Anahid. ‘For Love of Beauty? Literary Criticism in Troubled Times’, *New Left Review* 133/134 (2022), pp. 179-196

Newton, John. ‘Mr Hughes’ Poetry’, *Delta* 25 (1961), pp. 6-12

Ngai, Sianne. *Theory of the Gimmick: Aesthetic Judgment and Capitalist Form* (Harvard University Press, 2020)

Noel-Tod, Jeremy. ‘*Critical Quarterly* and modern poetry’, *Critical Quarterly* 61.2 (2019), pp. 26-31

North, Joseph. *Literary Criticism: A Concise Political History* (Harvard University Press, 2017)

O’Brien, Philip. *The Working Class and Twenty-First-Century British Fiction: Deindustrialisation, Demonisation, Resistance* (Routledge, 2020)

Potter, Rachel. ‘*CQ* and the invention of modernism’, *Critical Quarterly* 61.2 (2019), pp. 32-37

Potter, Rachel and Matthew Taunton. *The British Novel of Ideas: George Eliot to Zadie Smith* (Cambridge University Press, 2025)

Purvis, Samantha. ‘Fictive Institutions: Contemporary British Literature and the Arbiters of Value’, PhD thesis, University of East Anglia, April 2020 <https://ueaeprints.uea.ac.uk/id/eprint/77637/1/2020PurvisSJPhD.pdf/> [accessed 18th March 2024]

Quality Assurance Association for Higher Education, ‘Subject Benchmark Statement: Creative Writing’, February 2016

Quality Assurance Association for Higher Education, ‘Subject Benchmark Statement: Creative Writing’, April 2024

Ransom, John Crowe. ‘Criticism, Inc.’, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 13.4 (1937), pp. 586-602

Robson, Leo. ‘Jameson after Post Critique’, *New Left Review* 144 (2023), pp. 111-132

Sage, Lorna. ‘Waiting for the Bang’, *Times Literary Supplement* (16th November 1973), p. 5

——.‘The Savage Sideshow’, *New Review* 4.39-40 (1977), pp. 51-57

——.‘Adventures in the old world’, *Times Literary Supplement* (1st February 1985), p. 5

——. ‘The ancient mariner’s baby’, *Guardian* (17th November 1991), p. 65

——. ‘Dear Jean letters’, *Observer* (29th December 1991), p. 42

——. *Women in the House of Fiction: Post-War Women Novelists* (Palgrave, 1992)

——. Lorna Sage, ‘Bad Blood’, *London Review of Books* (7th April 1994), <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v16/n07/lorna-sage/bad-blood/> [accessed 8th September 2024]

——. *Bad Blood* [2000] (Fourth Estate, 2020)

——. *Good as Her Word*, ed. Sharon Sage and Victor Sage [2003] (Harper Perennial, 2004)

Sage, Victor. ‘On Lorna Sage’, *London Review of Books* 23.11 (7th June 2001) <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v23/n11/victor-sage/diary/> [accessed 26th April 2024]

——. ‘Kindness and its limits: Tony Dyson, the *Critical Quarterly* and the *Critical Survey*’, *Critical Quarterly* 61.2 (2019), pp. 15-25

——. ‘Writing, Reading and Witnessing’, *Hinterland* 7 (2021), pp. 60-73

Sanderson, Michael. *The History of the University of East Anglia, Norwich* (Hambledon Continuum, 2002)

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Duke University Press, 2003)

Shorer, Marl. ‘Technique as Discovery’, *The Hudson Review* 1.1 (1948), pp. 67-87

Snow, C. P. ‘Character Sketches from an Unpublished Novel’, *Critical Quarterly* 10.1-2 (1968), pp. 176-183

Stott, Andrew. *Comedy* (Routledge, 2014)

Taunton, Matthew. '*Critical Quarterly*, Leavisism, and UEA', *Critical Quarterly* 61.2 (2019), pp. 5-14

——. 'Chorus and Agon in the Political Novel: Staging Left-Wing Arguments in H. G. Wells, Iris Murdoch, and Doris Lessing', *Modern Fiction Studies* 67.2 (2021), pp. 247-271

Tonkin, Boyd. '*Bad Blood*, by Lorna Sage', *Independent*, 8th October 2010 <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/bad-blood-by-lorna-sage-2100672.html/> [accessed 9th September 2024]

Treglown, Jeremy. and Bridget Bennett (eds). *Grub Street and the Ivory Tower: Literary Journalism and Literary Scholarship from Fielding to the Internet* (Clarendon Press, 1998)

Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* [1984] (Routledge, 2001)

Widdowson, Peter. 'The anti-history men: Malcolm Bradbury and David Lodge', *Critical Quarterly* 26.4 (1984), pp. 5-32

Wiener, Joel H. *The Americanization of the British Press, 1830s-1914* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)

Williams, Raymond. *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* [1958] (Vintage, 2017)

——. 'Our Debt to Dr Leavis', *Critical Quarterly* 1.3 (1959), pp. 245-247

——. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* [1976] (Fontana, 1988)

——. *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1977)

Wolff, Robert Paul. Barrington Moore and Herbert Marcuse (eds), *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Beacon Press, 1965)

Womack, Peter. *Dialogue* (Routledge, 2010)

Wood, James. *The Irresponsible Self: On Laughter and the Novel* [2004] (Pimlico, 2005)

Wood, James Robert. ‘Upward mobility, betrayal, and the Black Papers on education’, *Critical Quarterly* 62.2 (2020), pp. 79-104

Archives and Special Collections

AED. Papers of Tony Dyson and Cliff Tucker, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester

COX. Brian Cox Papers, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester

CQA. Critical Quarterly Archive, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester

DL. The David Lodge Papers, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

LIT/CW. MA Creative Writing Course, LIT/CW/10, British Archive for Contemporary Writing: MA Creative Writing Course, University of East Anglia

LS. Lorna Sage Archive, British Archive for Contemporary Writing, University of East Anglia

UEA/BRAD. UEA Collection: Malcolm Bradbury, British Archive for Contemporary Writing, University of East Anglia

Bradbury M. mss. II., Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington

Bradbury, M. mss. III., Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington