INGFICT

THE FICTION ONE IS IN

Notes on the Late Twentieth Century British Novel

" … we are not personalities, but personages."
F. Scott Fitzgerald

"Postmodernism consists in essence of the view that nothing would ever again happen for the first time."
Christopher Hitchens

I. A BIRD'S EYE VIEW: NOTES ON BRITISH FICTION AT THE TURN OF THE MILLENNIUM

At the beginning of the third millennium, when even the post-modernist trend seems to have exhausted its possibilities, the question that has haunted writer and reader alike ever since the middle of the 20th century, whether the novel has any future and, if it does, where is it headed, seems as irrelevant and preposterous as Barthes's overrated theory of the 'death of the author'. Not only has this question been asked so frequently that its reiteration today makes any sensible reader or writer shrug and continue to read/write novels, but it has also become quite obvious that the novel is not going anywhere in particular, that it has chosen to dwell in the same old spheres of human interest and to stay faithful to its old allegiances. The postmodernist poetics of the novel, to the extent that it exists, has had a considerable contribution to the coming back in force of fiction, having countered many of the potentially destructive aesthetic tenets of high modernism, among which its banishment of traditional literary conventions, its elitist stance, its propensity towards high-blown experimentalism. Linda Hutcheon shows that postmodernism does not oust modernism completely, that "the modern is ineluctably embedded in the postmodern, but the relation is a complex one, of consequence, difference and dependence."[1] Postmodernism has been tolerant, democratic and ironic and, rather than operate a clean break with tradition – as the spirit of high modernism required –, it has been concerned with salvaging anything that can be re-used from that tradition, and also from the tradition of modernism. Hence a new life even for realist fiction, placed, nonetheless, in a different, more relativised, context and perspective.

A really important issue to tackle here, when discussing the relationship of postmodernism to modernism, is that of the canon, more precisely that of the modifications that occurred inside the canon after the consolidation of postmodernism and of the constitution of the postmodernist canon itself. The canon, Harold Bloom insists, "once we see it as the relation of an individual reader and writer to what has been

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[1] Linda Hutcheon, *The Poetics of Postmodernism. History, Theory, Fiction*, Routledge, New York and London, 1992 (1989), p. 38.

preserved out of what has been written" (and not as a list of books for required study) is "the Literary Art of memory".[2] It is the literay memory's way to preserve and transmit aesthetic value. In his influential book, Harold Bloom examines the Western canon in three epochs: the Aristocratic Age, the Democratic Age and the Chaotic Age, with some limited reference to the Theocratic Age, which precedes the Aristocratic. Ours would be the Chaotic Age, which, however, contains not only postmodernism, but also modernism, in fact the entire 20th. century. It results that one can only discuss the canon profitably if one assigns a given canon a precise historical delineation, as differences are considerable from one century to another and sometimes, as in the case of modernism vs. postmodernism, even within the same century. Postmodernist writers are, par excellence, anti-canonical; postmodernism itself is pluralist and relativist, willing to accept variety and consequently opposed to a unique canon, probably to the very idea of canon, but postmodernist novelists and the critics supporting them cannot fail to project a new light on the existing canon and to modify it through their own works. Many theoreticians maintain that postmodern literary works are necessarily situated at the periphery of the modernist canon, others think that they constitute a separate canon. The issue is still apt to genrate much heated controversy. The question is whether what Harold Bloom calls the "School of Resentment" (Feminists, Marxists, Lacanians, New Historicists, Deconstructionists, Semioticians etc.)[3] will manage to persuade the readership that the authors who constitute the canon are but "dead white European males" not worth reading any more (because they do not reflect the socio-political temper of the new age). Another question is whether the postmodernists have published sufficient significant new works to have a canon of their own. In that respect it is significant that, for all postmodern critiques of modernism, no postmodernist writer of comparable stature to Joyce, D. H. Lawrence or T. S. Eliot has yet emerged.

Despite the various ways in which the accomodating form of the novel has been stretched and twisted by ambitious technical innovators, despite the stunning diversity of texts on which the label 'novel' has been slapped, despite the great variety of personal visions informing it, the basic function of the novel has remained practically unchanged through the centuries: to tell a meaningful story about man in his social milieu. Radical fictional experiments that have attempted to ignore this fundamental imperative have, for the most part, ended in dismal failures.[4] Reversely, it has been noticed that when fiction

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[2] Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon*, Papermac, Macmillan, London, 1994, p. 17

[3] Idem. p. 527.

[4] The handiest example is that of the *nouveau roman*, very attractive in the sixties to practising novelists, but which predictably failed to arouse the interest of the public at large. A radical form of 'antiliterature', the *nouveau roman* was responsible, in our view, for the devitalization of mid-20th century West-European (especially French, but, through its influence, also English) fiction, for the declared preference of many fiction-makers (including those belonging to the Romanian 'textualist' school) for a species of plotless, structureless, indeed at times idea-less, fictional discourse. Anthony Burgess did not hesitate to hold Alain Robbe-Grillet responsible for the 'death of the novel'. In the global village in which we live, the vision and techniques of the *nouveaux romanciers* contaminated to a moderate extent American fiction (R. Coover, D. Barthelme, Thomas Pynchon, R. Sukenick), and echoes of it can be found in British fiction in W. Golding's work (*Pincher Martin, The Paper Men*) or in John Berger's. An intelligent commentary on the nature of Robbe-Grillet's texts was made by Matei Calinescu in *Rereading* (Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1993): "Unreadable under ordinary circumstances, Robbe-Grillet becomes a highly readable and rereadeble author […] under special, mostly didactic, circumstances: this would explain the *academic* [our italics] succes of such an otherwise difficult, artificial, quirky, often pretentious and sometimes absurdly

sticks to the function mentioned above and applies itself enthusiastically, with *gusto*, to its task (whether the vision be tragic, tragi-comic, allegorical, symbolical or what have you), it stands a fair chance to become noteworthy, even to stand out in the context of world literature.[5] Of course, the recent novel should be conceived as morphologically complex and thematically diverse. David Lodge describes it as ' … a new synthesis of pre-existing narrative traditions, rather than a continuation of one of them, or an entirely independent phenomenon – hence the great variety and inclusiveness of the novel form […] […] if Scholes and Kellog are right in seeing the novel as a new synthesis of pre-existing narrative modes, the dominant mode, the synthesizing element, is realism'.[6] It should be emphasized that "postmodernism has not replaced liberal humanism, even oif it has seriously challenged it."[7]

During the first half of the 20th century, English fiction lived under the sign of experimentalism. Taking advantage of the Protean genre's fantastic malleability, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, Ford Maddox Ford, James Joyce or Virginia Woolf freed the novel from its dependence on socio-historical contingency in order to refer the microcosm of individual psychology to myth and archetype. Their fresh visions and audacious approaches all but shattered the almost artisanal simplicity of old narrative conventions, making room for new ways of perceiving reality, in keeping with the mutations produced in the sensibility of 20th century man, consonant with the new theories in physics, philosophy, anthropology, psychology and, of course, linguistics. It is undeniable that the writers of 'high modernism' gave the form a new lustre, a new intellectual status and new substance, by annexing new territories (especially the 'inscapes', too superficially explored by the writers of the previous century) and by drilling to unsuspected depths. And yet, somber warnings about the imminent death of the novel could be heard in those very years. This, for two reasons. First, because the new

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contrived author.' (p. 219) Calinescu shows that readers conceive and pursue their games of make-believe primarily in terms of fictional truth, and that in the writings of Robbe-Grillet the markers of fiction within fiction are absent, whence the reader's difficulty in putting together a fictionally true narrative line. Robbe-Grillet indulges in 'a game with rules', consisting of a system of ingenious traps , snares and textual ambushes for the reader. 'But this cannot change the fundamental rule, without which one cannot speak of a fictional world (as opposed to a meaningless, arbitrary fictional chaos), namely that within a fictional world one should be, in principle, able to separate between fictional truth (or potential truth) and fictional types of fictitiousness' (p. 220). In the case of Robbe-Grillet and other *nouveaux romanciers*, the demarcation line between fictional truth and the self-delusions of the protagonists is not as clear as in Cervantes or Kafka. But 'without the dramatic ingredient of fictional truth, the literary reading of works of any great length is simply impossible. If the fictional truth is not there, unambiguously provided by the text, one will always look for signs by which to orient oneself in unknown territories. Thus, 'even in Robbe-Grillet's polemically anti-realistic novels there is actually more fictional truth (and quasi-realistic truth at that) than meets the eye' (p. 221). By unearthing elements of this fictional truth,Calinescu contends, we can forge a summary of the story and prove that it is fictionally true. It is not less true that such a double-crossing technique greatly contributed to the alienation of the reader from 'high-brow' fiction in that period.

[5] The Latin American novel, far from being a mere fad, as one could have believed in the sixties and seventies, has demonstrated its vigour and value based on precisely such qualities. Another interesting segment of postmodern fiction is the rural novel written in the erstwhile Soviet Union in the seventies and eighties, and the East European novel (written mostly in exile), firmly anchored in history and with an unflinching devotion to reality, even though receptive to formal experiment.

[6] David Lodge, *The Novelist at the Crossroads and Other Essays on Fiction and Criticism*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1971, p. 4.

[7] Hutcheon, *The Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 4.

novel, deliberately taking an elitist stance, made it impossible to perpetrate the harmonious relation between sender and receiver: it was, as it were, way ahead of its time. Running too far ahead of his readers, the writer became not only socially, but also culturally alienated. Second, these authors' experiments all but exhausted the possibilities of the form, leaving only dead-ends to the coming generations, which were more or less forced to fall back on traditional formulas, for after the total novel, what? Such thoughts, reinforced by a certain amount of professional jealousy, made Alberto Moravia refer irreverently to Proust, Joyce, Musil and their ilk as 'the gravediggers of the novel'. What is undeniable is that with the fiction of the 'high modernists' one witnesses a 'breaking down of traditional realisms' (Frederic Jameson) and an unballancing of the synthesis commended by Lodge. ' … the disintegration of the novel-synthesis should be associated with a radical undermining of realism as a literary mode.'[8]

However, reading the literary critics and literary historians, one is tempted to conclude that in 1941, with the passing away of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, the modernist novel was dealt the first mortal blow. This was partly confirmed by the rather precarious state of post-war fiction in most of the countries that had built, until World War Two, a fairly solid national narrative tradition. A certain tameness characterized, in the first decades after the war, the fictional output of such countries as England, France and Germany, a return of the flow of narrative to its natural course, after the violent dam-breaking of the first third of the century. However, when taking into consideration the contributions made by several national literatures – Latin American, Scandinavian, Central European – one is forcibly reminded of Mark Twain's reaction, on reading about his own demise in the papers: 'The news of my death is highly exaggerated …'. In what regards the state of the contemporary British novel, in the sixties and seventies the situation seemed to be rather disappointing, so one was tempted to take Malcolm Bradbury's wry remark, 'the novel is not dead, it has merely run away; it is safe and sound and lives in the United States'[9] at face value. However, as I hope to prove in the next chapters, since then not only has the situation changed, but, placed in a new perspective, even the fictional harvest of the fifties, sixties and seventies appears richer and more challenging.

For a period, nevertheless, in Great Britain fiction displayed the symptoms of exhaustion, of insularity, of a 'reaction against experiment', of a return to the traditional mimetic conventions that contrasted sharply not only with the narrative art of half a century before, but also with the significant mutations and renewals in other arts and in the humanities. Could the long and honourable tradition of English fiction have led to a devitalization of the genre, to a new 'Barren Age'? Could the crisis of the European novel have been deepest and most hopeless in the very heartland of fiction? Such questions were raised by leading literary critics in the United Kingdom and elsewhere[10], and it is difficult to say whether the arguments supporting this conclusion outnumber the ones infirming it. Bernard Bergonzi thinks that the insatisfaction caused by contemporary

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[8] Lodge, *The Novelist at the Crossroads*, p. 5.

[9] Malcolm Bradbury, *Possibilities*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1973, p. 167.

[10] It is not altogether pointless to remark that two of the few book-length studies of contemporary British fiction have been written by American scholars, Frederick R. Karl's *A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel* and Charles Shapiro (ed.), *Contemporary British Novelists*, whereas two Britishers, Tony Tanner and Malcolm Bradbury, were among the most astute students of American fiction. Geographical perspective probably helps.

novels to most critics (but not necessarily to most ordinary readers, our note) results from the inevitable comparison of the narrative performances of the after-war decades to those of the period 1900 – 1930.[11] If the novel that is closer to us in age, he shows, still possesses enough energy and vitality, 'there is not the sense of development and spectacular advance that was apparent between 1890 and 1930; by the latter date, the Modern Movement had largely exhausted itself, and the possibilities of the realistic novel had been fully exploited. In the last few decades, I think, the novel has abandoned freedom for genre, in various important but unremarked ways.'[12] According to Bergonzi, the heirs of James, Conrad, Joyce and Woolf were forced to give up creative anarchy and confine themselves to what he calls 'generic fiction', i. e. a kind of fiction that observes the conventions of the genre, as consecrated by tradition. This view is shared by David Lodge, who thinks that the resurgence of realism and of generic fiction is well within the English literary tradition, and in the spirit of liberal humanism: ' There is a great deal of evidence that the English literary mind is peculiarly committed to realism and resistant to non-realistic literary modes, to an extent that can be described as prejudice. It is something of a commonplace of recent literary history, for instance, that the 'modern' experimental novel, as represented diversely by Joyce, Woolf and D. H. Lawrence, which threatened to break up the stable synthesis of the realistic mood, was repudiated by two subsequent generations of English novelists. And, reviewing the history of the English novel in the 20th century, it is difficult to avoid associating the restoration of traditional literary realism with the perceptible decline of artistic achievement.'[13] Lodge, however, disagrees with those critics whe see in this return to tradition a sign of anemia and deplore the English novelists' inappetence for experiment: 'The picture we get by putting Rabinovitz's (*The Reaction against Experiment in the English Novel 1950 – 1960*, Columbia University Press, 1968) and Scholes's books together – of an incorrigibly insular England, defending an obsolete realism against the life-giving invasions of fabulation is, however, an oversimplification. For one thing, the consensus of English literary history as described by Mr Rabinovitz has been greatly shaken up since 1960; for another, fabulation is not the only alternative to traditional realism that is being explored by contemporary narrative writers.'[14] The other alternative that Lodge had in mind, *non-fiction*, need not concern us here. However, he then makes the metaphor of his title quite explicit, by saying that the situation of the novelist may be compared with that of a man standing at the crossroads. The road on which he is staying is the main road of the realistic novel, a 'compromise' between the fictional and the empirical modes. 'In the fifties, there was a strong feeling that this was the main road, the central tradition, of the English novel, coming down through the Victorians and Edwardians, temporarily diverted by modern experimentalism, but subsequently restored (by Orwell, Isherwood, Greene, Waugh, Powell, Angus Wilson, C. P. Snow, Amis, Sillitoe, Wain etc.) to its true course. That wave of enthusiasm for the realistic fiction in the fifties has, however, considerably abated.'[15]Further on, Lodge remarks that realistic novels are still being written in England, but 'the pressure of scepticism on the aesthetic and epistemological

[11] Bernard Bergonzi, *The Situation of the Novel*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1972, p. 23.
[12] Idem, p. 25.
[13] David Lodge, *The Novelist at the Crossroads*, p. 8.
[14] Idem, p. 9.
[15] Idem, p. 18.

premises of literary realism is now so intense that many novelists instead of marching confidently straight ahead are at least considering the two routes that branch off in the opposite directions from the crossroads. One of these routes leads to the non-fiction novel, the other to what Mr Scholes calls "fabulation"'.[16]

In the late forties and early fities, many young writers saw a straightforward, local, common-sense realism as the way to renew the novel and to align it with the political reality of post-war, welfare England. (The representative book in that respect is probably William Cooper's *Scenes From Provincial Life*, published in 1950.) The reappraisal of realism was accompanied by a mistrust of the modernist experiment. That is why the period is often seen as one of withdrawal from aesthetic adventure into literary conservatism. Foster and Orwell were strong influences and the novel turned toward the realism of cultural renewal. Many of the key books of the fifties tend to have plots of reform and conciliation, plots that modulate toward a critical but common-sensical acceptance of the world. If the novel had tended historically to oscillate between two poles, one of realist reporting of the material and social world, with a humanistic attititude to character, the other of experimental self-questioning, then it was the former that it was now drawn towards. But Bergonzi's assertion, if valid in its broad lines, is by no means universal. Experimental energies continued to exist in English fiction, though their form was latent for a while, and they were to assert themselves quite powerfully in the late sixties and the seventies, when one is truly entitled to talk about the emergence of postmodernist fiction. The consciousness of a long-drawn 'agony' of the novel made writers of an experimental disposition start an inquiry into the very nature and genesis of their art and due to that much of English postmodernist fiction took the road of "fabulation and metafiction", whereas the other possible route suggested by Lodge has been rather unconvincingly illustrated in England. Narcissism or self-referentiality is the most conspicuous mark of postmodernism in British fiction. According to Robert Alter, 'a fully self-conscious novel is one in which, from beginning to end, through the style, the handling of narrative viewpoints, the names and words imposed on the characters, the patterning of the narration, the nature of the characters and what befalls them, there is a constant effort to convey to us a sense of the fictional world as an authorial construct set up against a background of literary tradition and convention.'[17] Other theorists of narrative prefer to call this constant reference to the process of fiction-making 'metafiction'. Linda Hutcheon has found a catch-phrase by which to refer to novels that combine a traditional generic formula, that of the historical novel, and metafiction; she calls such narratives 'historiographic metafiction'. "By this I mean these well-known and popular novels which are both [*sic!*]intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages: *The French Lieutenant's Woman, Midnight's Children, Ragtime*" [18]etc. What should be noted is that *historiographic metafiction*, in Hutcheon's definition, incorporates in the narrative discourse three different domains, fiction itself, history and literary theory, and that "its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as *human constructs* is made the grounds for its re-thinking and re-working of

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[16] Idem, p. 19.

[17] Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre*, The University of California Press, Berkeley, 1975, p. XI.

[18] Hutcheon, *The Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 5.

the forms and content of the past."[19] For example, John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1967) is, on one level, a historical novel, as it seeks to examine the Victorian epoch from the point of view of the well-read 20th century man, but it also pointedly asks the reader to watch the author manufacture a Victorian epic and to see, as the action unfolds, what is theoretically, technically and stylistically implied in the concoction of such a romance. One of the characteristic reflexes of a self-conscious novel, according to Alter, is to 'flaunt' 'naïve' fictionality and rescue the usability of narrative devices by exposing their contrivance, working them into a highly-patterned narration which reminds one that all presentations of reality are, of necessity, stylizations.[20] The self-observing, ostentatious narrator is perhaps the most obvious element of such a fictional work. But the world of arts and literature itself may become an essentialized universe to which the tribulations of the protagonists are confined. Such a world occasionally casts its artificiality and contrivance upon the larger, unpatterned world, as happens in Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, the Sea* (1978, winner of the Booker Prize), or in John Fowles *The Magus* (1966), not to mention Lawrence Durrell's grand-scale experiment *The Alexandria Quartet* (1957 – 1960), which stands under the sign of the 'art novel' as conceived by Andre Gide and Aldous Huxley, rather than under that of metafiction. Oftentimes the characters of such fiction are an odd species of literary investigators who are after a different kind of 'fictional truth' than the one championed by Matei Calinescu: a fictional truth that borders on the biographical or the historical, as in *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984) by Julian Barnes or the 1990 Booker Prize winner, A. S. Byatt's *Possession*. It is possible, of course, to have fits and starts of self-consciousness in a novel that is for the most part conventionally realistic, and we can identify such elements in many contemporary works, for instance in Anthony Burgess's *The End of the World News* (1981). The new experimental fiction may also come in the wake of a long-established tradition (from Bunyan onward) of dealing with the reality of the human psyche from an abstract or allegorical perspective, as is the case of William Golding's novels.

On the other hand, as Malcolm Bradbury remarks, the "return to the liberal novel had generated a renewal of fiction and re-negotiated the relationship of contemporary British fiction to history. But the new fiction the writers had begun to record posed its own problems of relationship to the tradition, and that would become very apparent in the course of the 60's."[21] Somewhat intriguingly – for Fowles's novels are not normally considered historical – Bradbury thinks that John Fowles has done his best to encourage a 'problematic recovery of the historical subject' and that he did 'some *powerful work of historical recuperation* (italics mine)'.[22] Not only in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, with its salvaging of Victorian mentalities and reconstruction of Victorian intellectual life and backgrounds, but also in *A Maggot* (1985), a kind of murder mystery dealing with the 18th century beginnings of the Shaker sect, Fowles 'attempts to build a bridge, a serious artistic bridge, between the deconstructing present and the difficult past'. This is more than 'furtive nostalgia', Bradbury argues, it is a complex way not just of recovering the life of the past, but of relating fiction itself to an earlier tradition. Similar attempts

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[19] Idem, p. 6.
[20] Alter, *Partial Magic*, pp. 30-31.
[21] Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern English Novel*, Secker and Warburg, London, 1993, p. 333.
[22] Idem, p. 361.

were made by Peter Ackroyd in *Hawksmoor* (1985), D. M. Thomas in *White Hotel* (1981) and A. S. Byatt in *Possession* (1990). But novels inspired by a certain nostalgia for Britain's glorious (colonial and military) past and for her liberal-intellectual traditions continue to be produced. In Angus Wilson's *No Laughing Matter* (1967), 'modern history and the fortunes of British family life are followed through the saga of a single family from the First World War to the Sixties', and Iris Murdoch's *The Red and the Green* (1965) is set around the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin.[23] There is quite an impressive harvest of historical novels proper, such as Paul Scott's tetralogy *The Raj Quartet* (1964 – 1975) and his Booker Prize-winning novel of 1977 *Staying On*, to J. T. Farrell's *Empire Trilogy,* consisting of *Troubles* (1970)*, The Siege of Krishnapur* (1973) and *The Singapore Grip* (1978). Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy (*Regeneration*, 1991, *The Eye in the Door*, 1993 and *The Ghost Road*, 1995) covers the First World War and the inter-war period, using historical personages, such as the poets Wilfried Owen and Siegfiried Sassoon, alongside fictional ones, but "the blending of themes such as uncertain sexuality and class awareness, far more contemporaneous to the author's world, suggest a trans-historical perpective, and other modes of more internalized modernist awareness seem to mirror something of the emergent aesthetic consciousness of the period of its setting."[24] Similarly, in Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2002) historical cataclysms are rendered through the symbolic dissolution of a family who had not been prepared for the abrupt end of Britain's imperial epoch. A rather odd item in the series is Julian Barnes's *The History of the World in Ten and a Half Chapters* (1989), which humorously re-writes some of the lesser known events in world history, seen from a perspective that all but turns our knowledge of history upside down. 'They are works of contemporary consciousness, Bradbury comments, 'as well as large-scale historical re-creations, works of elaborate form and complex metaphor, as well as descriptive writing.'[25] Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983), with its core themes of history and memory, Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* or Stephen Fry's *Making History*, on the other hand, perfectly fit into Linda Hutcheon's notion of 'historiographic metafiction". Hutcheon, of course, makes a distinction between historical novels proper, which would fit Georg Lukacs's definition, and 'historiographic metafictions', which would fit her own. She was also among the first to remark that there was, in the British fiction of the nineteen-eighties, "a growing concern with re-defining intellectual history as the *study of social meaning as historically constituted*. [26] This was exactly what historiographic metafictions like *Waterland* or Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* (1885) were doing. However, a novel like Rose Tremain's *Restauration*, often invoked by Hutcheon as an example of historiographic metaficition, is clearly closer to Lukacs's traditional formula of the historical novel. The important ideas in Linda Hutcheon's discussion of the way in which the fictional and the historical discourses intermingle in postmodernist fiction are the following: 1. Postmodernism does not deny that the Past existed, but states that its accessibility to us today is entirely conditioned by textuality, as we cannot know the Past except through its texts (in the larger acceptation of the term, which includes eye-witness accounts, institutions, social structures and practices); 2. Postmodernist fiction establishes a dialogue with the Past,

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[23] Idem, p. 368.
[24] Philip Tew, *The Contemporary British Novel*, Continuum, London and New York, p. 167.
[25] Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern English Novel*, p. 369.
[26] Hutcheon, *The Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 16.

carried out in the light of the present, so the past is *presentified* (Linda Hutcheon borrows this term from Ihab Hassan); 3. History is revisited ironically (for details, see John Barth's essay "The Literature of Exhaustion"). 4. The historical discourse is *porous*, thereby allowing for considerable insertions of fictional discourse. 5. Postmodernism refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. "It refutes the view that only history has a truth-claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity."[27] If one can say that modernism shunned history up to a point, preferring to focus on the individual, it is probably safe to observe that there is a definite postmodernist return to history, as though novelists were inspired by Oscar Wilde's remark, "The only duty we owe to history is to rewrite it".

The existence of such works indicates to what degree the cauldron of creativity is still boiling in the British Isles, whether or not 'generic fiction' has taken the upper hand. From a historical perspective, nevertheless, it is undeniable that immediately after the great Modernist Age novelist seemed less eager to undertake narrative experiments merely for those experiments' sake. Most post-war novelists found it useful to reinstate traditional fictional modes and conventions, putting them to new (often ironical) uses, enriching them considerably by means of the great array of technical devices conceived by modernism, but shying away from using them abusively. In other words, they remained true to the English virtues of modesty and poise. An important feature of post-World War Two fiction, then, is that it reconsiders the mimetic mode, albeit from a new perspective, that it resorts unashamedly to older story-telling tricks and only accepts experiment to the extent that it can make the telling more interesting, without jeopardizing the basic functions of narration. "Recent fiction is indeed about life, but scarcely about life in a wholly unconditioned way; the movement toward the genre means that experience is mediated through existing literary patterns and types. This movement is particularly strong in English fiction; the French and many Americans may still feel impelled to strive for novelty, but the English, including the most talented among them, seem to have settled for the predictable pleasures of generic fiction."[28] Bergonzi's verdict seems only partly justified today, forty years after it was pronounced, when indeterminacy has become increasingly more popular and novels that defy taxonomy, such as Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), Lawrence Norfolk's *The Pope's Rhinoceros* (1996) or Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* (1981), offer a handy counter-argument. If writers give a cold shoulder to experiments that are liable to turn fiction into an arid cipher, totally divorced from reality and entrapped within its own mechanisms, they are willing to use the brand of moderate experiment that combines realism, impressionism and myth or allegory in order to create the illusion of wholeness. It is nevertheless true that with the newer generations the novel has become restrictive, rather than extensive.[29]

The post-war novelists' attitude towards tradition is also a result of their reconsideration of the usefulness of conventional moulds. In a way, one could state that the contemporary novel establishes a direct link with the Victorian and Edwardian ages, isolating the modernist period; today's writers look up to those authors of the first half of

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[27] Idem, p. 93.
[28] B. Bergonzi, *The Situation of the Novel*, p. 26.
[29] Frederick R. Karl, *A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel*, Longmans, London, 1968, p. 4.

the 20th century for whom 'realism', even if considerably modified, continued to be a workable formula: Conrad, Bennett, Galsworthy, Huxley. There is a manifest desire to work out a synthesis, at a superior level, of suggestions and motifs coming from the literature of all ages. Intertextuality reigns supreme, even though through subtle allusion, rather than through direct reference or distorted quotation. One could argue that there is intertextuality at a macro-level. With C. P. Snow and Anthony Powell one finds the screened influence of George Eliot, Trollope and Galsworthy; Graham Greene follows the path blazed by Stevenson, Kipling and Conrad; Kingsley Amis is descended from Huxley and Waugh, George Orwell from Swift and Huxley. Iris Murdoch once told the author of this essay (see *Steaua*, no. 6, 1979) that she read and re-read only 19th century authors. Countless other such filiations could be established.

Another common feature that has been often noticed regarding the fiction of the fifities, sixties and seventies is the greater and more straightfoward way in which English novelists refer themselves to England and the English way of life[30], i. e. the increasing insularity displayed by their fiction. Bernard Bergonzi even calls one of the chapters of his book 'The Ideology of Being English'. He demonstrates the thesis that the novels of the fifties and sixties focus mostly on English social history, examining its present specificity or the relevance of its past and providing few general configurations that a foreign reader might identify with. This is why this fiction has been called 'parochial' and has had little impact beyond the confines of the UK. It is built on a socio-cultural basis that often eludes the grasp of the non-English consumer. A good case in point is C. P. Snow, ranked by many, about three decades ago, as one of Britain's top novelists, but whose audience abroad was severily restricted, as his work treats, in the obscurest detail, mentalities and social and moral customs that are typically British, examining them within the framework of British institutions such as the Governement or the University. But a non-English reader will encounter unsurmountable difficulties also in understanding Anthony Powell or Angus Wilson properly, and a book like Margaret Drabble's *The Radiant Way* (1987) will fail to make him understand the mentality of the 'female chattering class'. Not even a very popular and somewhat Frechified novel, like *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, can register properly with the foreign reader who has not studied the Victorian Age thoroughly. On the contrary, Graham Greene, whose work comes in the long tradition of the 'cosmopolitan' novel and tackles directly some of the hottest political issues of the 20th century is probably England's best-known literary ambassador.

In more recent years, there has been a comeback to this type of novel, especially in the form that Dominic Head calls the "post-consensus novel."[31] In the opinion of the writer, the election of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister in 1979 signalled the end of the post-war consesnus in Britain. Thatcherism attacked consensus policies on every front, standing for privatization, a free-market economy, reform of trade-union laws. The changes in British culture and society were dramatic, and novelist lamented the imminent collapse of the welfare state, and the era of inequity and new social division. One of the novels of Martin Amis, Kingsley Amis's son, *The Money* (1984) is a transatlantic satire of the new Thatcher – Reagan era and its mood of acquisitiveness. The main character of

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[30] Idem, p. 5.
[31] Dominic Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950 – 2000*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 30.

the book pursues, relentlessly and remorselessly, success in a system modelled by ruthless competition and disregard for human values. "The protagonist's name, John Self, proclaims the author's intention to make him representative of the period. Self is a gross figure, 'addicted to the 20th century', particularly to alcohol, pornography and a mysogynistic world-view. He shuttles between London and New York in the process of making a movie, and leading a hedonistic life-style on apparently inexhaustible funds. The defining aspect of the urban junk culture he inhabits is its vicious triumvirate of money – power – sex. He confronts dehumanization, great population density, psychological confusion. John Self is an addict of the urban money culture from which he sometimes earns to escape."[32] In *Amsterdam* (1998, Booker Prize), Ian McEwan draws a satirical portrait of those who "had flourished under a government they had despised for almost seventeen years". The novel plays on the key-board of moral ambiguity, like a parable full of moral teachings on love, frienship, creativity and the petty satisfactions of professionalism, against the background of public life, politics and social ambition. The novel – or, better said, novella – is very close to fabulation, in the acceptation given this term by Robert Scholes, of an antonym to realism, but keeps the reader at a distance, through the artificiality of its composition. The symetry of the plot plays havoc with verisimilitude, and the story advances along a preposterous epic thread, involving incredible parallelisms, convergencens and breaks meant to produce tragicomical situations that can illustrate the ambiguity of the moral decisions taken by the two protagonists. Clive Liney, a composer, and Vernon Halliday, a newspaper manager, are engaged in a kind of grotesque dance of life and death – antic hay – which will take them both to catastrophe. Afraid of old age and of professional failure, they make a Faustian pact, after the death of their mutual mistress, Molly Lane, and eventually kill each other. There is no open discussion, let alone criticism, of Thatcherite principles and their impact on private life in Amsterdam. The comment is indirect, and it is made all the more powerful by the ironical twist at the end, when the really bad people, such as Minister Garmody, talk disparagingly about the two at their funeral. The mood and manners of Thatcher's Britain are transparent in the details of the story, in the importance assigned to success, in the brazen self-confidence and self-advancement of those in power.

A more recent phenomenon, which counter-balances the insularity of English fiction, is the one popularly known as 'the Empire writes back'. Since the mid-nineteen-eighties there has been an ever growing and increasingly more weighty presence of novelists of foreign extraction who have made Britain their literary home. Most of these come from Commonwealth countries, but others – like Kazuo Ishiguro or Timothy Mo - benefited from an English education and venture to write about subjects that are specifically English (see K. Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*). Some critics still say that such writers can in no way be seen as part of the literary scene of the UK, as their works are mostly set in far-off lands and deal with the history and customs of other nations.[33] It is, however, impossible to conceive the present-day scene of English fiction without thinking of the writers mentioned above, or of novelists like V. S. Naipaul (Nobel Prize laureate for 2001), Jean Rhys, Salman Rushdie, Ben Okri, Hannif Kureishi

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[32] Idem, p. 31.

[33] John Holloway, 'The Literary Scene', in *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*, vol. 8, *The Present*, ed. by Boris Ford, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1983. P. 128.

and many others.[34] As Homi K. Bhabha notices, 'The people from the periphery return to re-write the history and fiction of the metropolis' and, in current British fiction, 'the bastion of Englishness crumbles'.[35] (The term 'Nesbian', a word of Australian English referring to writers of a non-English-speaking background, is also used in connection with this phenomenon). The work of these writers, using English as a medium, brings to British fiction a great richness and variety, indeed an energy that may, one day, produce works of even greater interest and value than those created by the dyed-in-the-wool Englishmen. Also as a blow dealt the bastion of Englishness, one should consider the ever sharper lines of demarcation drawn – thematically, as well as stylistically and even linguistically – between the novels written in England and those of Scotland (the dialectal novels of James Kelman, for instance, the ludic fiction of Alasdair Gray, especially the Joycean *Lanark*, with its combination of picaresque narration, hallucinatory prose and graphic vignettes, or the fiction of Ron Butlin, Alexander McCall Smith or Irvine Welsh); of Ireland – with the Joycean excesses of Flann O'Brien (*The Third Policeman*, 1967), the stern prose of William Trevor [masterpieces: *Fools of*

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[34] V. S. Naipaul, winner of the 2001 Nobel Prize for fiction, was born in Trinidad and has made London his literary home. His works are at once autobiographical and deeply immersed in the problems engendered by the merging of cultures and the alienation and deracination inflicted upon Third World people by the culture of imperialism. . Amond the most prominent ones: *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961), *The Mimic Men* (1967), which undermines received ideas about Third World politics and politicians, *In a Free State* (1971), *A Bend in the River* (1979), *The Enigma of Arrival* (1985). His only novel with English characters is *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion* (1963), a study of human potentials blighted by commercial urban influences. R. K. Narayan is another important writer, whose excellence, unfortunately, has been rather overlooked in recent years. Technically an Indian writer, he wrote in a deceptively simple English, which made him accessible to Western readers. He created a fictional south-Indian town, Malgudi, similar to Marquez's Macondo, though Narayan does not use the 'magic realism' formula that has made the Colombian writer famous, but rather a direct realistic formula, with a wry moral thrust. This town provides the setting for a number of moral tales conveying the tragicomedy of human ambtitions and attainments – Narayan's interest in ordinary humanity is often compared with Gogol's and Chekhov's.. Among his novels: *The English Teacher* (1945), *The Printer of Malgudi* (1949), *The Financial Expert* (1952), *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1962), *The Painter of Signs* (1976). Jean Rhys also comes from the West Indies, from Jamaica, and her highly successful novel *The Wide Sargasso Sea* (1968) – conceived as complementary to Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* – unites the bold experimentalism of the Modernist period with the haunting and rich tropical reference to the realities of the Carribean, making brilliant new use of the resources of the interior monologue. The Indian-born novelist Salman Rushdie's reputation had already been established with *Midnight's Children* (1981) and *Shame* (1983), in which he uses'magic realism to tackle the problems of India after the 1947 independence , respectively those of Pakistan, when *The Satanic Verses* (1988), in which he was allegedly disrespectful of the Koran, brought him a death sentence (*fatwa*) from the ayatollah regime in Iran and forced him to go into hiding. The case produced an uproar in the literary and political world, engendering polemics on creative freedom, censorship, the intrusion of religion in literature. It also caused worl-wide Islamic protest, in the form of book-burning, demonstrations, publication bans in India and Pakistan, killings and assasination attempts directed against those associated with the publication or translation of the book. Though thus threatened, Rushdie managed to produce several more remarkable books: *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990),The *Ground beneath Her Feet* (1999) and *Fury* (2001) among others. Ben Okri, a Nigerian novelist, chose to desist from the Chinua Achebe school of fiction with historical and national dimensions, to focus on a more introspective kind of narrative. His novel *The Famished Road* won the Booker Prize in 1991. It goes without sayingthat this phenomenon deserves more than a footnote – it could, indeed (and it has) offer material for a dozen Ph. D. theses.

[35] Homi K. Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration*, Routledge, London & New York, 1990, p. 6.

Fortune (1883) and *Felicia's Journey* (1994)], the stark realism of John McGahern (*Amongst Women*, 1988).[36]

In spite of the great diversity and above-the-average quality of the fiction produced in Great Britain during the last fifty years or so, the period that has elapsed since the Second World War has not yet produced a novelist of comparable stature to that of Conrad, Lawrence or Joyce, but, as we hope to have shown in the preceding lines, the pessimism of those eager to lament the death of the British novel is seriously amended by its amazing variety and the constant flow of creativity. In the conclusion to his book on the contemporary English novel, Anthony Burgess says: "The contemporary novel is not doing badly. Soon, when we least expect it, it will do not merely better, but magnificently. Any one of us may astonishingly prove to be the vehicle of some great unexpected masterpiece, which will burn up the world [i.e. the people who still read, our note]. That dim hope sustains us.'[37]

It is difficult, if not altogether impossible, to find criteria that would allow one to classifiy Britain's recent novelists into groups, schools or trends, in order to obtain a clearly-patterned, well-structured and coherent image of post-war fiction. Today, one is less entitled than ever to talk of constituted affinities, of shared poetics, of pre-elaborated programmes. Never has criticism laid greater emphasis on the need that the work of each individual novelist be assessed for what it is, *per se*, as a function and product of that writer's personal prowess. Any classification – based on thematic, formal, ethnic or stylistic criteria – is subject to oversimplification, as no author's work can be evaluated exactly without an impressive number of cross-references, without identifying in it elements partaking of the most diverse fictional categories. Burgess divides the novelists he discusses into no fewer than fifteen groups, set up with the help of a sundry array of criteria, from the chronological to the purely formal, from age to sex, from political allegiance to religious faith. In a very comprehensive book detailing fifty years of fiction-making, Dominique Head identifies the following possible divisions:

- The "state of the nation" novel[38], reconfigured to impart a sense of social atomization. The political novel of public life has been largely eclipsed by the novel that concentrates on isolated individual lives.
- Novels of working-class and middle-class experience, showing the gradual waning of class-conscience;

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[36] For a thorough study of "postcolonial' literature, see Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, Routledge, London & New York, 2002.

[37] Anthony Burgess, *The Novel Now*, Faber and Faber, London, 1971, p 271. Unfortunately, Anthony Burgess passed away in 1993, so there is not much one can still expect from him. But he did make at least one heroic effort to meet his prediction: the novel *Earthly Powers* (1980), a fictional giant comparable only to Carlos Fuentes's *Terra Nostra* or Vassili Grossman's *Life and Destiny*. This novel contains greater intellectual substance, more power and grim humour than ten average books put together. Its action spans three quarters of the twentieth century and directly engages personalities, events, ideas that have played an important role in the intellectual life of our time, exploring, in the process, the way in which fiction intermingles with history and deals with the actual. An immensely readable, rich and moving piece of narrative.

[38] The syntagm echoes the label "state of England Novels", applied to to the 19th century fiction of E. Gaskell and to other writers interested in macro-aspects of English social life.

- Novels showing the shift in post-war gender relations. Feminist concerns: the fiction of Fay Weldon, which became manifest in the 1970's. The 1990's saw an emergence of post-feminism (Jeannette Winterston etc.);
- The fictional investigation of national identity (post-nationalism, post-colonialism);
- The most noteworthy engagements with Englishness emphasize either the constructed nature of the English persona, or the dissolution of the colonial self.[39]

In what follows, we consider ourselves lucky if we manage to suggest a few posssible (i. e. not outrageous) classifications, fully aware that they cannot be one hundred per cent functional and that many authors who deserve at least a brief mention will be *a contre coeur* omitted.

The extent to which novelists are still eager to find new ways of expression could be, as suggested earlier, one of the criteria for such a classification. In that case, two categories will be distinguished: a group of 'representationalists', i. e. people who, more or less, continue to embrace the mimetic-realistic formula: C. P. Snow, Graham Greene, Anthony Powell, John Wain, David Storey, Alan Sillitoe, John Braine, Iris Murdoch, Margaret Drabble, Pat Barker, William Trevor, and the list can continue *ad infinitum*, as they are certainly much more numerous than the second category, containing authors tempted by formal innovation, such as William Golding, John Fowles, Lawrence Durrell, Peter Ackroyd, Anthony Burgess, Julian Barnes, David Lodge, A. S. Byatt, Alasdair Gray. There are writers, of course, who migrate from one group to the other with each individual novel – Doris Lessing, for instance, belongs to the first group with *The Children of Violence* cycle or with *The Good Terrorist*, but to the second with *The Golden Notebook* – , and writers in whose work realism happily coexists with formal play, as in Stephen Fry (*Making History*) or Lawrence Norfolk (*Lampriere's Dictionary, The Pope's Rhinoceros*). Morover, within each of the two groups there are notable differences: the traditional formula, with its insistence on plot and character is used differently, but with equal skill, by a 'catholic' and 'political' writer like Graham Greene and by a detached, sardonic observer of the social scene like Anthony Powell: one and the same author with a bent toward formal experiment can produce a deeply moving work, rich in human interest, as is John Berger's *A Fortunate Man* (1967), or, on the contrary, a complicated book that will be admired mostly for its technical ingenuity, as is *G* (1972) by the same author.

We can adopt, for greater variety, the loose classification operated by Malcolm Bradbury in his book *Possibilities* (1973), with a few alterations. The criterion, this time, will be the narrative formula adopted, or, better said, the sub-genre; a certain outlook shared by several writers, a common viewpoint to which novelists subscribe to a variable extent. Five broad categories emerge that way:

1) The chronicle novel (Snow, Powell, Joyce Cary, Margaret Drabble, Angus Wilson);
2) The social novel with a restrictive area of investigation (Kingsley Amis, John Wain, John Braine, Alan Sillitoe, David Storey, Doris Lessing, William Trevor);

[39] Dominic Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950 – 2000*, pp. 8-9.

3) The comic-ironical novel (Kingsley Amis, Angus Wilson, J. P. Donleavy, Anthony Burgess, David Lodge, Malcolm Bradbury, Stephen Fry);
4) The philosophical, allegorical, visionary novel (George Orwell, Malcolm Lowry, William Golding, Iris Murdoch, Anthony Burgess, Nigel Dennis);
5) The experimental "art" novel (Lawrence Durrell, John Fowles, A. S. Byatt, Julian Barnes).

A sixth category might be that of the unclassifiables: Graham Greene, Ian McEwan, Patrick McGrath, Rose Tremain, Martin Amis. A very large category, after all.

1). Snow and Powell, just like Graham Greene, George Orwell or Evelyn Waugh on another plane, link together two generations. In their respective narrative cycles, they both aim to include and investigate a large sample of the English social life of the 20th century, rendering, as faithfully as possible, the historical mutations that persons, institutions and mentalities have undergone. The narrative performances of both these writers are supported by a clear and fairly simple literary ideology, aiming to reinstate realism in its acceptation of concern for external reality, after a period when it had been disavow ed by the experimental impressionist novel, with its roots in symbolism and aestheticism. A Cartesian in spirit and an outspoken advocate of the mimetic theory of art, Snow descends in direct line from last century's realists and moralists – Thackeray and George Eliot, especially – and is closely related to John Galsworthy, with whom he shares an interest in closely-knit, exclusivist social groups. In his fortnightly reviews for the *Sunday Times*, Snow "regularly lambasted the novelists who, at great cost to their work, he thought, had ignored the traditional forms and that hallowed figure, the "ordinary cultivated reader""[40]. His vast chronicle, *Strangers and Brothers* (1940 – 1970) reminds one of Balzac's *La Comedie humaine* due to a similar organization of material: it is a huge assemblage of novels, in which the characters and actions presented in one book are reinforced, in a sense confirmed, by their reappearance in the others (the same interlocking system to be found in Powell, William Faulkner, Roger Martin du Gard). Charles Percy Snow, First Baron Snow of Leicester (1905 – 1980) had a Cambridge Ph. D. in physics and was a Civil Service Commissioner as well as a Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Science and Technology. He became known with his Rede Lecture on *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (1959), in which he contrasted the culture of 'literary intellectuals' and that of 'scientists', arguing that the two had practically ceased to communicate. The remedy he suggested, a radical change in educational attitudes, was savagely attacked by the Cambridge critic F. R. Leavis for its utilitarian perspective on the study of the humanities. Lord Snow's fictional chronicle is made up of eleven volumes, from *Strangers and Brothers* to *Last Things*, to be perused acccording to the internal logic of the events. It draws up a detailed picture of an important section of English society (the administration and the intelligentsia) from 1927 to the end of the nineteen sixties. The novels borrow the structuring principle of the life of their protagonist, Lewis Eliot, who is followed from his birth in a poor working-class family in the Midlands to the apex of his political career. Eliot's social and professional advancement (punctuated by the events in the life of the nation), which takes him through practically all the social layers, gives Snow ample opportunity to sketch a paradigmatic

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[40] Harry Ritchie, *Success Stories: Literature and the Media in England, 1950 – 1959*, Faber and Faber, London, 1988, p. 11.

image of English social life. His books are written in an antiromantic manner, with great concern for accuracy, as they spring from a view on life called by Walter Allen ‘moral gnosticism’.[41] The novelist dissects the hero’s public and private life, analyzing the way in which England’s old-fashioned public institutions work at present, registering the conflict between personal ambition and social consciousness, between the public persona and inner truth, promoting, in a world of uncertainties, the moral virtues of honesty, equity, dignity and responsible discharge of duty.

Anthony Powell’s realism is of a different kind. Powell (1905 – 2000) was an ambitious tragi-comic chronicler of the 20th century. If Snow’s moral righteousness and seriousness recall Richardson, Powell is more akin to Fielding and to the Huxley of *Point Counter Point*. Like them, he is detached and ironical, but not satisfied with mere caricature. His career may easily be divided into two parts. Before the war, after being educated at Baliol College, Oxford, and having worked for a publishing firm, he wrote a number of novels about the people with whom he had rubbed shoulders, the aspiring artists of Chelsea and Bloomsbury, books like *Afternoon Men* (1931), *Venusberg* (1932), *From a View to a Death* (1933). *What’s Become of Waring?* (1939) is probably his best book of that first period, based on Powell’s publishing experience. It is an early example of a novel based on H. James’s idea of seeking out the motivation of the dead artist who created a living work of art. After the war, Powell began work on an ambitious sequence of 12 novels, *A Dance to the Music of Time*, begun with *A Question of Upbringing* (1951) and completed with *Hearing Secret Harmonies* (1975). His last novel (outside the series) was *The Fisher King* (1985). His massive (four volumes) autobiography, *To Keep the Ball Rolling* (1976 – 1982) is also worth mentioning. All Powell’s writings are characterized by precisely judged satire, economical writing and a fine ear for speech. His highly polished style makes for incisive social comedy. His thematically linked series of novels also deals with a specific section of English society, whose ‘behind the closed doors’ secrets had been made public, before him, by Huxley and Waugh: the fashionable world and the world of artists. “The sequence begins in 1921, though the entire enterprise embraces two world wars, and contains episodes that span the period 1914-1971. By virtue of its historical coverage and on account of the quarter century of composition, Powell’s cycle would seem a major contribution to the literature of social life, tracing the implications of 20th century life through to the contemporary period. In fact, *A Dance to the Music of Time* fails in this regard, setting itself the more limited goal of delineating the quirks of human character. It is precisely in this projection of a comic mode that eludes social change that Powell’s sequence now seems irredeemably anachronistic.”[42] The books are populated by a great array of Bohemian artists, bored aristocrats, businessmen, society women etc. Events are selected and discussed by a ‘reflector’ named Nicholas Jenkins, and the progress of the narrative goes hand in hand with the gradual enlargement of the hero’s social experience, which gives the author the possibility to unmask the growing inadequacy of the upper middle class and of the aristocracy in the 20th century. Powell’s social comedy, however, is coloured by an almost metaphysical sadness, induced by an awareness that it is not possible to regulate time, by a strong sense of the changing of life into a mirage, because of the swift, uncontrollable transformations worked into it by the passing of time. Though a master of

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[41] Walter Allen, *Tradition and Dream*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1965, p. 269.
[42] Dominic Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950 – 2000*, p. 23.

slow-motion comic scenes, Powell is not interested only in holding human actions up to ridicule, but also concentrates upon the existential aspects of man's social achievements, on the individual will caught in the network of social relations, eroded by the flow of time. If Snow observes the world with a cold scientist's eye in order to extract moral conclusions, Powell contemplates it mostly with an aesthete's eye and writes a 'pictorial' prose that vaguely resembles Proust's.

One could multiply the examples of 'chronicle novels' written in the second part of the century. Angus Wilson's already mentioned *No Laughing Matter* is a family saga, as the lives of the children of the Matthews family are followed from before World War One down to the Sixties. Thus, the plot incorporates two world wars, the Suez Canal crisis and the contemporary global village. But, as Malcolm Bradbury shows, Wilson only used the form to destabilize it, and much of the book is written as a pastiche or parody in the manner of other writers. For one thing, 'by the end of the book, the stable identities of the two Matthews children have gone – they have become the inhabitants of a postmodern world of mirrors, the world of fragmentary, multiple selves, and the global village.'[43]

2). One of the conspicuous characteristics of the fiction (and drama) of the fifties and early sixties is the sounding of a more vigorous note of protest, accompanied by a critical reassessment of the values and institutions of the Establishment. A new generation of writers, to be promptly called by the media the 'Angry Young Men', came under the spotlight, with a new set of ethical values, with a different sensibility from that of their predecessors, and, above all, with a sense of frustration which, though unfocussed, was quite adamant. The Fifities witnessed a more or less concerted emergence of a literature of social discontent and protest that did not depend for its coherenece on any group or party ideology, but focussed on the individual, especially on the indidividual coming from the lower walks of life, in his ambitious confrontation with a system of social priviledges, social castes and empty precepts that he considered obsolete. In his book *The Angry Decade* (1958), the only thorough study of the 'phenomenon', Kenneth Allsop defined this fiction as being characterized by 'irreverence, stridency, impatience with tradition, vigour, vulgarity, sulky resentment against the cultivated'. Colin Wilson's *The Outsider* (1956), inspired by the frustrations of the younger generation, is still considered an important manifesto of the movement, but John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* (1956) is generally taken to be the birth certificate of the Angry Young Men 'movement', and its classical embodiment in the theatre. It set the framework of such a story: a provincial, lower-middle class or working class setting, a solitary, rough male protagonist, whose persistent conflicts with and contempt of authority are rendered with sardonic humour, frequently verging on scorn. Posterity's critical judgements, however, have tended to regard the anger in such works merely as dissent, less the product of a coherent social critique than of the virtuoso indulgence of sensibility. As for the catch-phrase 'Angry Young Men', it was first used by John Barber in an article written for the *Daily Express* in the same fatidic year, 1956, in which he designated by it four young writers, Kingsley Amis, John Osborne, Colin Wilson and Michael Hastings, who, he thought, were reviving the spirit of Shavian iconoclasm (the feature was written for the centennary of Shaw's birth).

[43] Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern English Novel*, p. 367.

Kingsley Amis (1922 – 1994, knighted in 1990), was an ironic and anti-romantic writer, totally different in his attitude to fictional experiment from his son, the novelist Martin Amis. His novel *Lucky Jim* (1954) rang the first note of protest in the field of imaginative prose. Jim Dixon, 'the most popular anti-hero of the time'[44], rises from a modest condition to a priviledged social and professional status, incessantly venting, in a comic, but unattractive manner, his instinctive loathing of the existing class structure and of society's moral strictures. Amis gave his hero two major predicaments: he is trapped in a joyless relationship with Margaret ('the boring girl') and has to kow-tow to Professor Welch (the 'boring boss'). There seems to be no way out of either trap: economic necessity and the 'call of pity' commit Jim to his job and his girl respectively. In Harry Ritchie's opinion, 'in developing the story of Jim's predicaments, Amis created a comedy which actually dodged social themes that could have dominated the work. Instead, the novel raises issues that remain stubbornly personal. A distinct moral theme emerges: the need to find respect for oneself and for others. It is a theme which, as Amis's basic outline suggests, vindicates Jim's thorough decency. Self-respect is associated with self-confidence in *Lucky Jim*, which is founded on the premise that the hero does not possess enough of either.'[45] Apparently, Kingsley Amis and other 'angry' novelists took their cue from a novella written much earlier, in 1933, by Evelyn Waugh, entitled *Love Among the Ruins*, which depicts England in the not-so-remote future as an utterly joyless country, ruled by a complex hierarchy of bureaucrats working for an all-powerful state which has exterminated the old values and traditions.[46] Like a host of protagonists of novels written during that period, Jim Dixon is a rebel without a cause, a radical without a programme, a hopeless crusader against engulfing human stupidity, to a certain extent indifferent to his own lot. Jim actually fights for personal dignity. Yet, Amis's model was imposed by an existing social situation and the referential character assumed by his fiction is unmistakable: the proof is to be found in the publication of a legion of novels, each of which seemed to be a variation on the same topic – the fate of a young man of relatively humble origin, his struggle for social and professional status in which he deftly exploits his trumps as an outsider and iconoclast, his love for a girl above himself socially who often becomes the undeserving target of his ironies inspired by class-hatred, the mechanisms of premeditated or unpremeditated social climbing, the assertion of the dignity of the meek and humble, which may prove, in the final resort, as exclusive as that of the ruling classes. In short, all the paraphernalia of social realism, familiar since Balzac.[47] *Lucky Jim* can be seen as a 'highly accomplished, almost exemplary anti-modernist novel', showing the advantages of working within the traditional form and structure. Like all of Kingsley Amis's books, it is an 'eminently accessible work, clearly

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[44] Anthony Burgess, *The Novel Now*, p. 143.

[45] Harry Ritchie, *Success Stories: Literature and the Media in England, 1950 – 1959*, pp. 86-87.

[46] Idem, p. 8.

[47] According to Ritchie, Amis thought that one of the major defaults of the Modernists was that they ignored the 'prime literary subject, relations among human beings'.He advocated a return to the externally observed social reality, because the rejection of social experience had led, he thought, to deplorable tendencies in modern writing, such as 'gratuitous obscurity' or 'wilful self-indulgence'. In Amis's opinion, the Modernists had ignored their obligations to the readers and literature was 'led astray, losing sight of its proper function as a form of entertainment' (pp. 81-82). Amis entertained his readers with essays on science-fiction (*New Maps of Hell*, 1960), espionage novels (*The Anti-Death League*, 1968, and *Colonel Sun* , 1971, a continuation of the adventures of Agent 007), mysteries (*The Riverside Villa Murders*, 1973). A late return to the comic social novel, *The Old Devils*, earned him the Booker Prize in 1986.

written, very carefully constructed and very funny. *Lucky Jim* also shows the entertainment value of dealing with the contemporary social reality which Amis accused the modernists of ignoring.'[48] It is not without justification that many critics have seen this novel as initiating a new trend, that of the 'campus novel', in which the comic novel of manners functions in parallel with the satire of the *moeurs* of the academe.

Joe Lampton, John Braine's (1922 – 1986) yuppie protagonist of *Room at the Top* (1957) and *Life at the Top* (1962) is almost a twin brother of Jim Dixon's, except that he is much less likable, as he has no sense of humour and does not care if he destroys lives while climbing the social ladder. John Waine's novel *Hurry on Down* (1953) appears to be a reversal of the pattern, as the protagonist's dissatisfaction with middle class life pushes him into running away from it. The novel relates the 'picaresque adventures of a university graduate, Charles Lumley, whose deliberate flight down the social scale, away from all conventional expectations of self-advancement, leads him to work as a window-cleaner and thence into other, increasingly propitious, occupations.' Within this context, a very peculiar note is struck by Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958), one of the most truthful, and also cruellest, images of working-class life. In Sillitoe's book, class-struggle belongs to the past, the protagonist is a well-paid highly-skilled worker, content, in broad lines, with his life-style consisting of an inexorable alternation of work, reward and leisure, but still bearing society a grudge for the injustices of yesteryear and childlishly engaged in defying the taboos of the world around him. Another member of this group of dissatisfied young people is the protagonist of David Storey's *This Sporting Life* (1960), a particularly harsh and haples vision of the world of Rugby League.[49] The paradigm was still productive in 1985, when Doris Lessing published *The Good Terrorist*, a more personal and peculiar rejection of the consecrated values of the affluent society, in the name of anarchism and of the flower-power philosophy.   Even Iris Murdoch was for a time considered a member of the Angry Young Men (women, too) group, for her first novel *Under the Net* (1954), which, indeed, sounds a note of passive protest, though humour is its *forte*. The thematic movement common to all these novels is easily identifiable: the loss of working-class roots through upward social movement, and the crises of marriage and career arising out of mid-life stasis and the narrowing of future opportunity. The Angry Young Men movement, to the extent that it existed, was accompanied by a realist trend in the English film industry, quite suitably called Free Cinema, a trend that promoted stark realism, in the manner of the Italian *neo-realist* films. Its representative directors made motion pictures based on the plays and novels of the AYM, e. g. Tony Richardson directed *Look Back in Anger*, Jack Clayton *Room at the Top*, Karel Reisz *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, Lindsay Anderson *This Sporting Life*. The coalition of the two arts ensured the 'movement's' powerful impact on the sensibility and artistic consciousness of the sixties.

However, after their first angry outbursts, most of the novelists mentioned above lost interest in their social pursuits. 'Collectively and individually, the Angry Young Men could no longer arouse the astonishing high-brow and popular interest of 1956 and 1957, but paperbacks and the new wave of the English cinema were bringing a handful of their works to the general public. Meanwhile, the Angry Young Men had already been

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[48] Idem, p. 94.

[49] David Storey went on writing novels about middle-aged men facing moral and sentimental crises; one of these, *Saville*, won the 1976 Booker Prize.

preserved by a *myth-making process* (italics mine): the Fifties had its own literary identity as the Angry Decade.'[50] This, in spite of there being no shared characteristics of the writers, in spite of the inaccuracy of the label attached to them. Much later, reviewing Harry Ritchie's book, John Wain would observe that journalists, reviewers and gossip writers ('the collective mind of an army of middlemen') had become possessed of 'this absurd notion': 'Their starting point was that the Angry Young Men had enough common characteristics to be taken as a whole (which they had not), that they came from a shared social background (which they did not) and that they were attacking the existing state of society along certain agreed lines (which they were not)'[51]. John Wain goes on to explain the origin of the phenomenon, by showing that the readers were fed up with the meek tone of the fiction produced in the late Forties and wanted anger, impatience, explosions of frustration. So it was an expectation of the public that the novelists, sensing the pulse, rushed to meet. This also explains, Wain thinks, why the Fifties generation was so abruptly dropped when the Sixties came along and the spirit of revolt became real and solid: the new issues (Vietnam, student unrest, women's emancipation) were too ponderous not to dwarf the feeble individual protests in the books of the Young Angry Novelists. But John Wain was also among those who supported the trend of 'consolidation after experiment' in his Third Programme literary show *First Reading*.

3) Kingsley Amis also bridges together groups two and three. We have already seen that the comic spirit plays at least as important a role in his novels as the social attitudes, and that it grew to be ever more important in his late work. Irony and humour are, in fact, an inseparable part of the novels under discussion, including Powell's fresco, or Sillitoe's and David Storey's protest novels. In his second – and probably his best ever – novel, *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* (1956), Angus Wilson (1913 – 1991) cynically exposes a large section of British life, the academic circles, demonstrating his talent for caricature and derision. In *Late Call* (1964), a hearty, joyous humour prevails, resulting from the characters' spontaneous, albeit often inadequate, responses to the stimuli of society. In *The Old Man at the Zoo* (1962), Wilson's satirical gifts are used to render 'society as a whole' from an entirely different angle: the novel is a fable of the future and the author's concern is mostly ecological. A return to the complexity of present social life is the novel mentioned before, *No Laughing Matter*, which extends and elaborates on the historical dimensions sketched by the author in his first book, *Hemlock and After* (1952). *Setting the World on Fire* (1980) emphasises the literariness of fiction, in a quasi-postmodernist manner, showing that Wilson, though primarily a realist, was not

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[50] Harry Ritchie, *Success Stories*, p. 63.
The careers of some of these novelists took quite an unexpected course. If Amis allowed himself to be lured by the pleasures of popular fiction. John Braine lost all his vehemence in books like *The Crying Game* (1968) and *Stay with Me Till Morning* (1970), then tried his hand at metaphysical thrillers (*The Pious Agent*, 1979) or soft-key romances (*These Golden Days*, 1985). John Wain's *Strike the Father Dead* (1962) is a Freudian parable, and after *A Winter in the Hills* (1974) he turned increasingly to poetry and essays. Sillitoe made a not very successful attempt to explore the absurd with *The General* (1960), then his preoccupations diversified to include the political thriller [*The Death of William Posters*, 1964, which forms a trilogy, together with A Tree on Fire (1967) and The Flame of Life (1974)] and the romance of middle-age love (*Her Victory*, 1982). Doris Lessing went visionary with her five-volume outer-space saga, *Canopy in Argos*, but then resumed her shrewed realist mannner with *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* and other novels. Iris Murdoch's writing became allegorical, with metaphysical hues.
[51] 'Mr Wain Talks Angrily about the Angries', in *The Sunday Times*, 6 March 1988, p. G3.

altogether imune to the temptation of some of the trendier ways of telling (and twisting) a tale.

To include Anthony Burgess (1917 – 1993) among the comic writers may seem erroneous. Marked for life by a Catholic upbringing whose theological tenets he rejected, but whose cultural influence he could not rid himself of, Burgess wrote throughout the 1950s, but his productivity leaped in 1959, when doctors told him he only had twelve more months to live. Thereafter he kept up a steady flow of works, not only fiction, but non-fiction, journalism, memoirs, criticism, librettos etc. His work contains an amazing variety of writings, ranging from the grim visions on the near future of mankind (*A Clockwork Orange*, 1962, *Nineteen Eighty-Five*, 1982), to would-be historical novels (*Nothing Like the Sun*, 1964), from war novels (*The Malayan Trilogy*, 1956 – 1969) to the rewriting of myths (*M/F*, 1971). His Enderby books, however – *Inside Mr Enderby* (1965), *Enderby Outside* (1968), are often very funny and display, like all his other novels, an amazing capacity for wit, word-play and various other sorts of linguistic games. In an interview granted to Pierre Asouline (*Lire*, no. 153, July 1988), Burgess expressed his belief that 'literature is a difficult type of exercise. Each new book raises new problems. Every time you have to reinvent the language.' He actually reinvents the language in *A Clockwork Orange*, which is provided with a glossary of the 'newspeak' of the punk gangs, called *nadsat*, but also in his profetic stories or in his devastating political satires, such as *Devil of a State* (1965).

The comic novel is the favourite vehicle of a group of academic writers and critics who have given much thought to the art of narrative and have brought substantial contributions to a poetics of fiction, while also practising the undying art of the novel. Malcolm Bradbury (1932 - 2000) was Professor of American Studies at the University of East Anglia and led, together with Angus Wilson, Britain's only notable course in creative writing (Ian McEwan and Kazuo Ishiguro were among his students). Apart from *Possibilities* (1973), he wrote such academic studies as *The Modern American Novel* (1983), *The Modern British Novel* (1992), *No, Not Bloomsbury* (1987). He is virtually the creator of the 'campus novel', with a series of fictional works that was inaugurated with *Eating People Is Wrong* (1959), a fictionalized account of his time at the University of Leicester, and continued with *Stepping Westward* (1965), an account of the fortunes of an English university professor in America, similar, up to a point, with Davis Lodge's *Changing Places*. *The History Man* (1975), with its bitter portrait of the shallowness and trendiness of British academic life, was compared to *Lucky Jim*, and hailed as the definitive fictional response to the culture of the sixties. Bradbury wrote in the heyday of the Cold War, and one of his major fictional achievements was the creation of an imaginary communist country, Slaka, the culture and social customs of which are explored with hilarious results by a British Council visiting professor in *Rates of Exchange* (1981). The clash of civilizations is further explored in a pastiche tourist guide entitled *Why Come to Slaka?* (1986). The action in *Doctor Criminale* (1992) is set in the jet-set world of international academic meetings and conferences, and Bradbury's last novel, *To the Hermitage* (2000), is a fine and erudite satire, which tells two tales: that of the narrator, a novelist who has been invited to Stockholm and to Russia to take part in a programme enigmatically entitled the Diderot Project, and a recreation of Diderot's journey to Russia to entertain and enlighten the mind of Catherine the Great. In the 'Introduction' he wrote to the novel *To The Hermitage* after the death of his dear

collaborator and friend, David Lodge says: ' His masterpiece was *The History Man*, followed closely in my estimation by *Rates of Exchange*, but all his fiction will go on being read and relished for its witty and accute observation of contemporary life and thoughtful, sometimes dark insights into the plight of the liberal humanist in the modern, or postmodern, world. […] His fascination with the contrasts between the two great ideological empires of the postwar era , the American and the Soviet Russian, is reflected in his novels and their cosmopolitan range of reference. But his own literary temperament was quintessentially English and his acknowledged masters were E. M. Forster and Evelyn Waugh. Malcolm Bradbury produced an extraordinary range and quantity of writings in almost every other possible form: literary history and criticism, essays, newspaper columns, parodies, travelogues, television and film scripts, stage plays, radio plays, anthologies and reviews. […] Though he shared the high modernist belief in the importance of art and artistic experiment, he also enjoyed writing for a large popular audience on occasion, and took justifiable pride in having mastered the techniques appropriate to different media.'[52]

It goes without saying that David Lodge patterned himself, to a certain degree, on his mentor and friend's personality. The difference is that he was more inclined towards theorizing than Bradbury: if one reads their literary essays and criticism in parallel, one is bound to notice that Lodge is interested in aspects of structure, expression and narative modalities, rather than in literary-historical matters. The very titles of his critical studies warn the reader about it: *The Language of Fiction* (1966), *Working with Structuralism* (1981), *After Bakhtin* (1990), among others. In the novels he wrote, one often encounters a metafictional element: Lodge constatly tests, challenges or exploits the assumptions and conventions of narration, making his reader an accomplice of it, in a manner of speaking. Though he began by writing novels solidly grounded in his own experience, like *Ginger, You're Barmy* (1962), Lodge was quickly converted to the type of campus novel practised by Bradbury and wrote his famous university trilogy, *Changing Places* (1975), *Small World* (1983) and *Nice Work* (1988). He departed from the formula, introducing a metaphysical dimension in such books as *Paradise News* (1991) and *Therapy* (1995), only to return to it with his more recent work *Thinks …* (2001), a fictional approach to the problems raised by artificial intelligence and the fathoming of human consciousness. *Author, Author* (2004), a fictional biography recording the moment of crisis in Henry James's career when he failed dismally as a playwright, also emplots some of the major problems, creational and ethical, involved in the writing of fiction, while probing the delicate psychological balance of sanity/insanity in the creator's mind. Lodge is a Catholic (his book *How Far Can You Go?* [1978] looks at the problem of Catholic faith in Britain in the 1970s) and his work has often been discussed in relation with that of other co-religionaries, like Graham Greene or Iris Murdoch. David Lodge contributed greatly to the rather peculiar branch of social satire the foundations of which were set by Kingsley Amis and Angus Wilson. However, not everybody seems convinced that this fictional formula is really representative of the quality of postmodern British life. Some critics find it rather shallow and too eager to amuse and entertain. In this spirit, Harry Blamires comments in his *Twentieth Century English Literature*: ' .. in the absence of any unique illumination, any exciting stylistic

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[52] David Lodge, 'Malcolm Bradbury', in Malcolm Bradbury, *To the Hermitage*, Picador, London, 2000, pp. viii-ix.

finesse (*which is a howler, to say the least!*, our note), or any acute recognition of values that transcend ephemeral fashion (??), such novels cannot be regarded as potentially significant in a nation's literature.'[53] Blamires thinks that such books are a result of educational developments in Britain in the Postwar years, of the fact that an increasing number of men and women obtained an academic degree in English and acquired technical proficiency in presenting the attitudes and aspirations of the middle class. He also identifies such attitudes in the work of Margaret Drabble, whose books – *The Realms of Gold* (1975), *The Middle Ground*(1980), *The Radiant Way* (1987) – are 'representative of a now modish class of fiction that focuses on the lives of writers, academics, journalists, media-men, and the like, usually London-based and obsessed with problems peculiar to a social and intellectual class increasingly divorced from English, let alone British, life in the large.'[54] One may think that Harry Blamires concevies of the novels written by Bradbury, Drabble, Byatt and Co. as symetrically opposed to those produced during the Angry Decade, or by the very parochially English novelists of the first group, and that he finds this to be a demerit. In fact, these novelists combine the conventions of the social novel of manners with those of the comic novel, which has had a long-standing, respectable tradition in English literature, making it more complex and diversified stylistically and compositionally, but losing nothing of its richness, gusto and incissiveness.

4) In the work of Iris Murdoch (1919 – 1999), the most famous of the novelists that could be included in the fourth group, a comic vision of life is combined with philosophical meditation, as often as not enacted and projected through character and incident, rather than conveyed through theoretical propositions. After *Under the Net* (1954), whose protagonist, Jake is of the same ilk as the heroes of the novels of the Angry Young Men, and who solves the baffling problems of existence in good spirit and with philosophical resignation, she came closer and closer to conventional fictional strategies with *The Flight from the Enchanter* (1955) and *The Sandcastle* (1957). *The Bell* (1958) deftly fuses the realism of the background with a personal symbology, a characteristic easy to notice in virtually all the novels that followed, among which *The Severed Head* (1961), *The Unicorn* (1963), *The Red and the Green* (1965, the only book in which Murdoch attacks frontally the 'Troubles' of her native country, Ireland), *The Time of Angels* (1966), *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* (1970), *An Accidental Man* (1971), *The Black Prince* (1973), *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine* (1974), *A Word Child* (1975), *The Sea, the Sea* (1978, winner of the Booker Prize), *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983), *The Book and the Brotherhood* (1987), *Jackson's Dillema* (1995). These books, which are thematically very varied and have a great wealth of incident, show the author's predilection for allegory, for setting characters in symbolic relations against a background that is very convincingly drawn, even though it is on occasion too highly stylized. Although Murdoch repeatedly denounced the interpeters who persist in considering her novels disguised philosophical tracts, insisting that they be read for what they actually are, fictional works, it seems that she does not grasp the extent to which her various works rely on a sort of 20th century neo-Platonism. She believed, in fact, that for the late 20th century man fiction could provide a more comprehensive picture of life than

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[53] Harry Blamires, *Twentieth Century English Literature*, Schocken Books, New York, 1987, pp. 265.
[54] Idem, p. 266.

philosophy. In an early (1963) essay, “Against Dryness”, she wrote: ‘ … from my own knowledge of the scene I would doubt whether any (non-Marxist) account of human personality has yet emerged from phenomenology which is fundamentally unlike the one I have described and can vie with it in imaginative power. It may be said that philosophy cannot in fact produce such an account. [..] I express merely my belief that, for the Liberal world, philosophy is not in fact at present able to offer us any other complete and powerful picture of the soul.’[55] She believes that ‘the modern writer, frightened of technology and (in England) abandoned by philosophy and (in France) presented with simplified dramatic theories, attempts to console us by myths or by stories.’ Literature … has taken over some tasks formerly performed by philosophy. Through literature we can re-discover the density of our lives. Literature can arm us against consolation and fantasy and can help us to recover from the ailments of Romanticism. If it can be said to have a task, now, surely that is its task. But if it is to perform it, prose must recover its former glory, eloquence and discourse must return. I would connect eloquence with the attempt to spreak the truth.'[56] This question of literature performing the task of philosophy (and political discourse) is painfully familiar to readers from the former Socialist countries of Europe, though there it happened for different reasons.

The literary world was saddened by the fact that the final years in the life of this wonderful and prolific writer, with an inquisitive mind and a direct way of understanding human nature and vibrating to it, were darkened by an incurable illness, which gradually turned her into a helpless being, totally dependent on her husband, the Oxford professor and critic John Bayley, who described her sufferings in a book entitled *An Elegy for Iris* (1999), the moral opportuneness of which has been a matter of much argument.

The work of William Golding (1911 – 1993) stands out by its propensity for parable, its abstractness and its highly original technique, different from one novel to the next. Golding refuses to deal with conventional themes, characters or situations. Some critics dismiss him outright. Thus, Frederick R. Karl says, ‘Golding’s eccentric themes, unfortunately, rarely convey a sense of ripeness and balance.’ The writer V. S. Pritchett found Golding’s work ‘obscure, strained and monotonous’.

The question repeated obsessively is whether his books are novels or fables. In his early novels particularly, Golding presents the constant battle between primitive levels of response and deceptive consciousness, between the beast and the human. As he tends to view this conflict within one being or within one group, he does not portray complex social characters, but characters who are more aware of their elemental nature than of their social surroundings. They are, in E. M. Forster’s classification, flat characters. His allegorical novels have a common theme, which is only one step removed from being religious: good and evil fighting over possession of the human soul. The interesting aspect is that the novelist-cum-moralist seems inclined to believe that evil is more fascinating to man than good, that it is superior to good in its manifestations and endurance – a dangerous vision that tends to be integrated into a sort of metaphysics of evil and to lead Golding to a brand of ontological scepticism. *Lord of the Flies* (1954), a ‘cult’ novel, was conceived as a retort to the optimistic visions informing most English adventure stories for the young, stories that exalt the intrepridity and fairness of the

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[55] Iris Murdoch, ‘Against Dryness’, in *The English Novel: Developments in Criticism since Henry James. A Selection of Critical Essays*, edited by Stephen Hazell, Macmillan, London, 1998, pp. 221-222.
[56] Idem, pp. 224-225.

Englisman and end on a note of triumph. It has frequently been described in terms of the Original Sin, of the Freudian division of the psyche, or simply as a bitter parody to Ballantine's *Coral Island*: ' … the major characteristics are usually identified with certain imagery and talismanic objects: Jack with blood and dung, with the mask of primitive tribalism; Piggy with pig's meat, with his glasses that represent intellect and science; Ralph with the conch and the signal fire, with the call to duty, with communal hope.' (Leonard Maltin in *College English*). In that novel, Golding demonstrates the fragility of society's cohesive factors, man's readiness to cast off the shell of social education and to regress to a state of primitivism, in which he can give free reign to his instincts and indulge his lusts. It is also possible to consider the novel a sort of reply given by Golding to Defoe, across several centuries, as it follows the fortunes of a kind of collective Robinson, substituting a cynical, fatalistic view for the belief in the power of human reason and other Enlightenment notions that form the foundations of Defoe's work. The boys who are the heroes of *Lord of the Flies* are placed in an ironical situation: they are forced to return to the elements, to live 'naturally', but they are so deceived by the 'magical' quality of primitive life that they cannot judge their experience clearly. Because of that, *Lord of the Flies* has been called a novel of *faulty vision*. *The Inheritors* (1955) explores directly the Primitive Age manifestations of evil towards which the boys in *Lord of the Flies* are headed: the thinking capacity of the new, superior *homo sapiens* carries the seeds of destruction and violence in it. Like the four main characters in *Lord of the Flies*, the 'People' are fascinated by the elements, which they worship; their life is ritualized, they think concretely, in pictures. They cannot survive the battle with human beings (half savages) who have learned how to use their brains and have invented axes, canoes, bows and arrows. Golding's reader is caught between a rock and a hard place: his instincts tell him to sympathise with the primitives, his knowledge of history tells him that the superiorly endowed will inevitably triumph. For eleven chapters the author has us dwell in the 'no-minds' of the primitives, only to force us, in the last but one chapter, to recognize ourselves in the *homo sapiens*. Much of the power of the narrative resides in the tension between innocence and knowledge. *Pincher Martin* (1956) is a daring attempt at exploring the process of disintegration of the human mind, in which a specially adapted kind of stream-of-consciousness is used: coherent and logical at sentence level, it is meandering and difficult to grasp in larger text units. The workings of the mind that drowns – figuratively as well as physically – are brilliantly, if aridly, given linguistic body in a work that is certain to baffle the most experienced and knowledgeable reader. *Free Fall* (1959) is the tale of a man who searches for meaning in his life by reviewing his greed-consumed past; the problem of the freedom of the individual will to assert itself is subtly debated in this book. A sort of historical novel, permeated by symbolism, is *The Spire* (1964), in which Golding grapples with intractable notions such as God's will and man's ambition, sin and redemption, etc. *The Spire* is 'an intricately symbolic, highly organized, moralistic kind of novel that refuses to make concessions to our novel-reading expectations, a novel that intransingently belongs to its own tradition.'[57] Samuel Hynes is probably right to consider that this tradition is almost exclusively represented by Golding's work: each new novel by the writer – *Darkness Visible* (1979), *Rites of Passage* (1984) – adds new values to that tradition and significantly modifies it.

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[57] Samuel Hynes, *William Golding*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1965, p. 76.

A study of evil in its most malignant manifestations is Malcolm Lowry's (1909 – 1957) *Under the Volcano* (1947), considered to be the century's most Faustian book and *the* masterpiece of the 1940s. Like E. A. Poe, Lowry belongs to a family of writers tortured by the imagery of the dark, for whom the world is wrapped in a fantastic aura and populated by ghosts and revenants, teeming with symbols of death, violence and destruction. Lowry had an intuition of the terrifying dimensions of existence, and tried, just like the Richmond poet, to work out a cool, rational analysis of it. The most important achievement of his disorganized, ill-managed life is the above-mentioned novel, into the creation of which went long years of stubborn toil, and which can be compared with the works of Joyce, Faulkner, B. Traven, Kafka or Celine, writers to whom Lowry is akin in both manner and vision. The book relates, in a fascinating manner, a descent into hell – an earthly inferno symbolically guarded by the two Mexican volcanoes – and the slow but inexorable erosion of a life in the hallucinatory ambience of war-time Mexico. Consul Firmin's pathetic life and death become emblematic of the fate of the inefficient intellectual who cannot cope with reality, but continues to believe in the possibility of a dialogue between brutal force and reason. Lowry's narrative technique in this novel is similar to Joyce's: the action is concentrated in a single day, the story is circular, the main theme is that of a quest, and seemingly disconnected events, seen from several perspectives, situated on several planes, fall into a well-organized whole, the elaborate symbolism of which leads the reader to a tragic conclusion. Though Lowry wrote several other books – some of them, like *Lunar Caustic* (1963) or *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend Is Laid* (1968), published posthumously – his reputation lies almost exclusively on the power and magnitude of this tragic, indeed apocalyptic, vision of the pitiless Hell that the Garden of Eden has been turned into.

A subsection could be constituted by the many dystopian novels patronized, to a smaller or larger degree, by the genius of George Orwell (1903 – 1950). Orwell started out as a journalist, developed as an essayst – today, especially since the disappearance of the Iron Curtain, much critical opinion locates his genius in his essays – and finally turned novelist, although later in his life he repudiated most of his novels, except for *Burmese Days* (1933) and *Coming up for Air* (1937). His hard and variegated life, his knowledge of the conditions in which most of the sections of his society lived, his reaction to injustice inevitably led him to political action and commitment, but of an independent, intellectual sort. He might be called a sort of English Malraux, but one who had no institutional profit from the good consequences of his deeds. Orwell turned prophetic with *Animal Farm* (1945), an allegorical novel that can be read as a sort of political fable, describing with detatched directness and effective simplicity the degeneration into totalitarianism of the ideals of a socialist revolution. His crucially influential book, one that helped establish the feel of the second half of the 20th century, was *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), a dark vision of a totalitarian England of the future the symbol of which is a boot crushing a human face, forever, a masterpiece of political extrapolation which "is to the 20th century what Hobbes's *Leviathan* was to the 17th. He (Orwell) had characterized and shown the plausibility of, but had also parodied, totalitarian power, just as Hobbes had characterized and tried to justify autocratic power."[58]

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[58] Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1980, p. 570.

More modest in scope, Nigel Denis's *Cards of Identity* (1955) also deals with the confrontation of the individual with the system, but in a comic, at times burlesque manner, giving hyperbolic dimensions to the gap appearing between ordinary man and Authority. Also very close to Orwell is L. P. Hartley's book *Facial Justice* (1960), which presents the re-birth of England after several nuclear strikes; the newly-born civilization is disciplinarian and tolerates no individual whims. Such hybrid books that successfully marry fiction and the social or political pamphlet/essay had been rare up to a certain moment; of late, however, they have became an important sub-genre of science-fiction occasionally called 'political-fiction'.[59]

Anthony Burgess's cult novel *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) shares with Orwell and Nigel Denis a concern for the loss of humanist values in the near future and the concomitant growth of violence, institutional and anarchic. Alex, who narrates the story, leads one of the gangs of young delinquents who afflict an England of the future. Theft, rape and torture are the order of the day. The violence of the street gangs is an attempt at self-assertion, partly justified by the soulless, technological society, which has permitted advanced human decay and is marked by the unrestrained sale of drugs and crass commercialism. Alex's charm, vitality and wit are more attractive than the inertia of this society. His constant complicity with his readers – "my brothers", "my only friends" – also blunts the repulsiveness of the violence he perpetrates. The novel's most interesting feature is the gang's language, *nasdat*, which reflects the young people's enormous energy and style. Eventually Alex is arrested and sentenced to the 'humane' and 'liberal' Reclamation Treatment, which transforms him – via electric shocks – into an emotionally neutered creature, a piece of machinery, a 'clockwork orange'. There are two versions of the end, in both of which Alex recovers his humanity: marriage and a settled life, or a full and joyful return to evil-doing. A spectacular film based on *A Clockwork Orange* was made by Stanley Kubrick in 1971.

5) The 'art novel' with a symbolic layout is best represented by the fiction of Lawrence Durrell (1912 – 1990): the tetralogy *The Alexandria Quartet* (1957 – 1960), the two-volume Science-Fiction saga *Tunc* (1968) and *Nunquam* (1970), The *Avignon Quintet* (1978 – 1984). In the four novels forming the *Alexandria Quartet*: *Justine* (1957), *Balthazar* (1958), *Mountolive* (1958), and *Clea* (1960), the ethnically diverse Eastern Mediterranean, where Durrell spent much of his youth, forms the sensual background. Durrell borrows from Huxley the idea of a contrapuntal structure, which combines temporal and spatial simultaneity in order to organize the material of his narrative along the principle of Einsteinian relativity (Bakhtin's chronotope could be very well applied to his fiction). Durrell introduces charcaters in his novels who act as guides through the labyrinth of themes, motifs, incidents and metaphors. Such a character is Darley, the novelist who, like Huxley's Philip Quarles, observes and relates most of the happenings, but almost every character in the Quartet is a writer of sorts, be it only of personal diaries. The limits of our perspective upon the world, Durrell tells us, are not a function of our personality, but of the objective factors of space and time. As three of the novels in his *Quartet* are the verbal equivalents of the three spatial dimensions, the fourth is supposed to add the fourth dimension, that of time, which can structure the chaotic flow of life-impressions. One can only grasp the full meaning of the tetralogy after

[59] The term is slightly misleading, as not all 'political fiction' has the speculative quality of science-fiction.

repeated re-readings. As Walter Allen remarks, the *apparent* subject of *The Alexandria Quartet* is love, but its *true* subject is art, a symbolist view of art.[60] It is considered that Durrell built a heraldic universe of signs, meant to synthesize the nature of erotic and of artistic experience, while concomitently meditating upon the human being's relation to time and history.

Alongside Durrell, John Fowles (1926 - 2005) is the author most tempted by the 'art novel' and by metafiction. *The Aristos* (1964, revised 1980), a volume of essays, contains, *in nuce*, much of Fowles's life philosophy and is the expression of his aesthetic beliefs. It expounds a personal version of existentialism, which is the philosophical undercurrent of all of Fowles's books. "While *The Aristos* presents the issues, the novels are predicated on the supposition of individual free will and the ideal of self-realization. Their conceptual focus remains on the nature and limits of human freedom, the power and responsibility that freedom entails and the cruelty and necessity of conscious choice. The conditions of freedom and self-knowledge are everywhere conjoined in Fowles's work. Self-knowledge is the goal of life experience and education. It is the end toward which all his protagonists grope."[61] The great success he had with the psychological thriller *The Collector* (1963) enabled him to forsake a teaching career and to become a full-time writer. *The Collector* tackles the problem of individual and creative freedom in a kidnapper-victim relationship and offers the reader two complementary versions of the same sequence of events: Frederick Clegg's 'objective' first-person narrative is counterpointed by Miranda's (the victim's) diary. The psychological contorsions and intensity of the plot remind one of Ian McEwan's troubling visions of human cruelty.

John Barth wrote in "The Literature of Replenishment" (1980): "My ideal postmodernist author neither merely repudiates, nor merely imitates either his 20th century modernist parents, or his 19th century pre-modernist grandfathers." The type of novel thus defined seems to find a convenient illustration in John Fowles's work. Critics have pointed out a number of analogies between Fowles and his notable American contemporary. There are many similarities between his most reputed work, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), and Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*. The two novels are based on similar aesthetic assumptions and deploy almost identical narrative techniques. They are both perfect examples of 'historiographic metafiction', or mock-historical novels. The difference is that *The Sot-Weed Factor* is farcical, while Fowles's novel is not. The self-consciousness displayed by the narrator of Fowles's novel does not prevent it from being, among other things, a Victorian novel in its own right, no matter whether we refer to it as a Victorian novel coated in 20th century thought or a 'recreation of the mid-19th century'. In fact, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is an ingenous pastiche of a 19th century novel, undercut by 20th century literary and social insight. This novel does not only have a considerable literary interest, but also a very high general cultural one, as it is, in essence, a dialogue between two centuries, between two different civilizations, to which some of the best minds of the two epochs contribute. "Fowles recreates not only the Victorian world, but the Victorian novel as well, and the juxtaposition of historical periods described also has its stylistic counterpart. While the book provides an authentic pastiche of Victorian novelistic conventions, it also parodies these conventions and introduces some interesting variations on the most familiar structural features, especially the

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[60] Walter Allen, *Tradition and Dream*, p. 306.
[61] Barry N. Olsen, *John Fowles*, Fredirick Ungar Publishing Co., New York, 1978, pp. 11-12.

omniscient narrative voice. So, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is both an historical novel and an experimental one, aligned as much with the work of Alain Robbe-Grillet as with Charles Dickens, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy. The tension between fiction and reality and between the historical past and the present are manipulated from the first page to the last."[62] *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is probably the best example of historiographic metafiction with John Fowles. It also "crystallizes the gathering mistrust of authorial omniscience […] adding into the compositional equation a measure of self-consciousness appropiate to the 20th century."[63] Fowles's other books are also 'self-conscious' and flaunt literariness. Both *The Magus* (1965) and *Daniel Martin* (1977) investigate a much debated issue in 20th century fiction: the mingling of the real and the make-believe. In both books the protagonists undergo adventures, searching for the authenticity of their own beings and the authenticity of experience. In *The Magus*, like in Barth's *End of the Road*, the problem of choice is important, and both books draw heavily on existentialist thought. *The Magus* is a traditional quest story, made complex by its dillemas involving freedom, hazard and many existential uncertainities. Before going to the Greek island of Phraxos, where he was invited to teach English in a private school, the protagonist of the book, Nicholas Urfe, used to shape his response to the world strictly in aesthetic terms, avoiding all action that might involve him in a human relationship. As a consequence of his misreading of French existentialist novels, he valued personal freedom above anything else. Thinking that a sustained interest in any other person would jeopardize his life-style, he rejects Alison, the girl who really cares for him, thus making a serious existential mistake, of which he becomes aware only when the game (the Godgame) Conchis forces him to take part in on Phraxos comes to an end. By appealing to Urfe's aesthetic sense, every scene in Conchis's drama keeps his interest alive and gradually absorbs him, until he is no longer willing to see the mask of the actor as separate from the person who wears it. As Robert Scholes has pointed out, it is the awareness awaken in him by the aesthetic game that determines Nicholas Urfe to face life straight on, even though to do so means to accept pain. *Daniel Martin*, on the other hand, may be seen as a contemporary version of H. James's novels inspired by the 'international theme'. This time, John Fowles's protagonist is a script-writer who lives the present as well as the past with equal intensity. The plot of the novel covers a span of about forty years of his life. Fowles projects in him the feeling that the identity of the 20th century writer is in large measure a matter of cultural and literary awareness.

The novels, however, do not explore reality directly, but by means of metaphor, by a sort of artificial enacting of the problems, as in a game or in a stage play. The recurrent ideas are that of the writer as a demiurge, that of freedom of choice vs. predestination, that of the haphazard character of both life and fiction. In his numerous interviews, John Fowles pointed out that by writing such novels he intended to convey the ideas that 'fiction is the business of telling lies about people who don't even exist', that 'fiction is make-believe'. Extremely important, in that respect, is Chapter 13 of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, in which the author-narrator complains that the characters have rebelled and do what they like, rather than be ordered about by the author. He concedes that the traditional forms of omniscient narration are outmoded, that characters can no longer be handled as marionettes, nor can the author be a God substitute.

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[62] Idem, p. 65.

[63] Dominic Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction, 1950 – 2000*, p. 240.

Intelligent contemporary readers, he admits, deserve more trust than to be tricked by the manipulative illusions of reality used in traditional fiction. So, the metafictional dimension of these books is extremely important. They also rely heavily on intertextuality (with Shakespeare the main reference again; Conchis = Prospero etc.), and their formal aspects are often amplified to convey the idea of an artefact, of a construct that the sweeping power of Fowles's narrative makes acceptable. In *Mantissa* (1982), Fowles produced a good example of postmodernist fiction, having itself as its subject and trying to substantiate one of the characters' remarks that serious modern fiction can only have one subject: the writing of modern fiction. It is a parable on writing and creation. The famous writer Miles Green is cut off from reality by amnesia. His mind dwells in an eternal present. Fowles attempts to prove that fiction is a continuous metatext that writes itself as it springs out of the frame which the traditional writer imposed upon it. In mathematics, a *mantissa* is the decimal part of a common logarithm, therefore an *addendum*. Fowles's *Mantissa* becomes thus an addendum to fiction, a hypertext meant to reveal the workings of the author's mind. Fowles describes fiction as a game of love and of the hazard interspersed with games of the spirit. Here, however, the game of the spirit is replaced by the game of love. Miles Green's awareness can be reached only through sexual treatment. The woman who treats him, Dr. Delfie, turns into Erato, the muse of lyric poetry. The novel also mocks at contemporary structuralist literary ideology. Other books belonging to this writer are *The Ebony Tower* (1974) and *A Maggot* (1985), a crime story set in the 17th century, written as a pastiche transcript of subsequent interrogations.

Also tempted by the art novel, combined with the 'historiographic metafiction' formula, is Julian Barnes (born 1946), whose novels are all metafictional to a certain degree, in the sense that their main source of inspiration is not objective reality, but rather literature and history. *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984) is, as the author described it, "a book about grief and a man's inability to express that grief", but also an experiment in fictional biography which attempts to re-create an individual's destiny and his relationships with a world that now belongs to the past and refuses to be investigated with the tools of the positivist researcher. Barnes's narrator, Geoffrey Brathwaite, perfectly fits the definition of a writer provided by the author in the text: "The writer must be universal in sympathy and an outcast by nature: only then can he see clearly."[64] He has lost his wife – whom he had loved desperately, but who had been unfaithful to him –, has given up practising medicine and funnels both his intellectual curiosity and sympathy towards deciphering the real nature of Flaubert the writer and the man, possibly different from the image accredited by literary history (which can be grotesquely biased, as in the case of J. P. Sartre's book on Flaubert, *L'Idiot de la Famille*). As he loiters in search of the real parrot that Flaubert had kept on his writing table while composing "Un coeur simple" (a symbolic emplotment of the quest for literay-historical truth), Brathwaite meditates both on his own ruined life and on the life of the man behind such writings as *Madame Bovary* or *Bouvard et Pecuchet*. Brathwaite's interest is not only literary or historical, it is personal as well. His own plight is similar to that of Flaubert's character Charles Bovary, but the similitude is mentioned only superficially. Geoffrey relates the relations he had with his wife and, as he broods upon her suicide, he considers Flaubert's own death and the implications of suicide. Geoffrey Brathwaite's personal secrets are unveiled

[64] Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot*, Vintage International, New York, 1990, p. 131.

gradually, always by analogy to the reconstituted events in Flaubert's life, or by being contrasted to the narrator's hobby of gathering biographical information, so that the novel establishes a strange empathy between the subject and the object of the investigation, finding even points of contact between the two temperaments and the two biographies. Thus, we find out that Brathwaite had not been devoid of literary ambitions: "I thought of writing books myself once. I had the ideas; I even made notes. But I was a doctor, married, with children. You can do only one thing well: Flaubert knew that. Being a doctor was what I did well. My wife … died. My children are scattered now: they write whenever guilt impels."[65] Through such allusions and sparse references to his own life, Brathwaite lets the reader understand that what orients him so firmly towards the past is his present suffering. Through a kind of psychological transfer which protects him from trauma, he gets a better understanding of his own situation by dissecting Flaubert's personality. He looks mostly for alternatives, for interpretations and variants of the episodes in the French writer's life and activity that might contradict the accredited versions. The whole novel is imbued with the relativistic spirit of postmodernism, one might say. Only the chapter entitled "Pure Story", the most confessive one in the novel, gives us a straight account of what happened in the narrator's life and caused so much suffering. Brathwaite, the erudite, takes refuge in the history of mentalities, reviewing the stern attitude of French writers towards adultery. Personally, he is more inclined to accept it stoically, as a manifestation of difference. His overwhelming feeling is not one of hurt pride, of sadness induced by unrequitted love, but rather a strange sense that he could not establish a dialogue, that he had failed to know his spouse: "Ellen. My wife: someone I feel I understand less well than a foreign writer dead for a hundred years."[66] The obsession with the Other thus takes on immediate personal form, alongside the theoretical speculations concerning Flaubert. The need to get into his wife's mind is, perhaps, what prompts Brathwaite to imagine the "Louise Colet version" of the love between the two and to draw up three different chronologies. But the more you research it, the more distant and misty the past becomes: subjected to a close scrutiny, history crosses over from the sphere of the real into the sphere of the fictional; the certainty of historical truth is refused. Not even a petty enigma of the past – that of the authentic parrot – can be resolved, let alone the enigma of the human soul.

The novel consists of a bewildering juxtaposition of incongruent types of discourse, from the historical and biographical to the confessional and reminiscent, from the critical or metaliterary commentary to realistic observation, and the tone, subtly orchestrated for this syncopated narrative, moves from irony to nostalgia, from the curt, apodictic expression to metaphoric or rhapsodic passages, from understatement to the denotative language of the researcher in the archives. Through this confederacy of tonalities and styles, *Flaubert's Parrot* undoubtedly becomes a sample of postmodern kaleidoscopic narrative. We venture to say it is the most eloquent demonstration of postmodernist narrative in the British fiction of the last fifty years.

Quite similar in subject and treatment to Barnes's novel is A.S. Byatt's *The Biographer's Tale* (2000), whose protagonist, Phineas G. Nanson, like G. Brathwaite, abandons modern research and modern critical theory to collect the facts in the life of a traditional biographer, Scholes Destry Scholes. The ground explored by Byatt in this

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[65] Idem, p. 13.
[66] Idem, p. 168.

story is very similar to the one she had mapped ten years earlier in *Possession*. The motivation is again the obsession with the writer's personality, just like in *Flaubert's Parrot*. As Philip Tew has shown, such novels strive to reinstate, fictionally, the 'reality principle', i. e. to demonstrate that referentiality is necessary in order to locate the imaginary, and that texts, though a reality in themselves, are also part of a larger reality.[67] Facts and 'things' are the key words of this text, which A. S. Byatt seems to set in opposition to the tenets and abstractions of post-structuralist literary theory.

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II. GEORGE ORWELL: EMBLEMATIC WRITER OF THE COLD WAR (1903 – 1950)

Works:

Down and Out in Paris and London (1933)
Burmese Days (1934)
A Clergyman's Daughter (1935)
Keep the Aspidistra Flying (1936)
The Road to Wigan Pier (1937)
Homage to Catalonia (1938)
Coming Up for Air (1939)
Animal Farm (1945)
Critical Essays (1946)
Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949)
Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters (1968, in 4 volumes)

LIFE. Born Eric Arthur Blair in Bengal and educated in England, at St Cyprian's and Eton. Served for five years with the Imperial Police in Burma, before his accumulating dislike of imperialism forced him to resign. Held a series of ill-paid jobs in London and Paris, living in a state of 'fairly severe poverty' before he became a contributor of *The Adelphi*[68] from 1930. In 1936 he was commissioned by the publisher Victor Gollancz to produce a documentary account of unemployment in the north of England for the Left Book Club. The result, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, is a milestone in modern literary journalism. It established Orwell's political outlook as an unaligned democratic socialist. Went to Spain as a volunteer for the Republican forces. During the Second World War he worked for the BBC. He contributed to such papers as *The Observer* and *The Manchester Evening News* and was literary editor of *The Tribune*. Had a lucid, colloquial newspaper style which made him deem himself "a pamphleteer' rather than a novelist. But, he said, 'one has masses of experience which one passionately wants to write about … and no other way of using them except by disguising them as a novel.' He was married twice. He died of tuberculosis in 1949.

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[67] Philip Tew, *The Contemporary British Novel*, pp. 13-14.
[68] A literary and philosophical journal founded by John Middleton Murry in 1923, which appeared intermittently until 1955. It counted T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, George Orwell and W. B. Yeats among its contributors.

Orwell's Etonian and Burma police name was E. A. Blair, not to be abandoned until 1933 and the publication of *Down and Out in Paris and London*. Under his true name he published essays and articles in Henri Barbusse's weekly *Monde*, a cultural and literary front-publication of the French Communist party. The first such essay was a study of censorship in Britain. In *Le Progres Civique* he published an essay entitled "Comment on exploite une peuple: L'Empire britannique en Birmanie".

Jeffrey Meyers subtitled his 2000 Orwell biography *Wintry Conscience of a Generation*. But this gaunt and aloof person underwent his two crucial epiphanies in the torrid and sultry climates of Burma and Catalonia, and his work helped to melt the permafrost of Stalinism. Lenin's phrase, "the heart on fire and the brain on ice" perfectly suits Orwell, whose passion and generosity were rivaled only by his detacment and reserve.[69]

Orwell was not the only creative writer of the thirties and the forties who had political commitments. Christopher Hitchens mentions G. B. Shaw, H. G. Wells, J. B. Priestley and Ernest Hemingway, as well as the group of poets designated by the portmanteau name 'MacSpaunday' – Louis MacNeice, Stephen Spender, W. H. Auden and Cecil Day Lewis.

"His importance for the century just passed and therefore his status as a figure in history as well as in literature derives from the extraordinary salience of the subjects he 'took on', and stayed with and never abandoned. As a consequence, we commonly use the term 'Orwellian' in one of two ways. To describe a state of affairs as 'Orwellian' is to imply crushing tyrany and fear and conformism. To describe a piece of writing as 'Orwellian' is to recognize that human resistance to those terrors is unquenchable."[70]

The three great subjects of the 20th century were Imperialism, Fascism and Communism. Indeed, the historian Ernest Nolte sees the history of social conflict in the first half of the 20th century in Europe as a "Civil War" fought by Fascism against Stalinist Communism . Such 'issues', however, are not only of historical interest to us; they have bequeathed the whole shape and tone of our era. Most of the intellectual class was compromised by accomodation with one or another of these man-made structures of inhumanity. Orwell's decision to repudiate the unthinking Imperialism that was the family's meal ticket may be represented as Oedipal (his father was an executive in the opium trade between British India and China). He may or may not have felt guilty about the source of his family's income, but he undoubtedly came to see the exploitation of the colonies as the dirty secret of the whole enlightened British establishment, both political and cultural. This insight also allowed him to notice certain elements in what Nietzsche called the 'master – slave' relationship; his fiction manifests a continuous awareness of the awful pleasures and temptations of servility. This anti-imperialist attitude pervades the book *Down and Out in Paris and London*.

In Fascism he saw a distillation of everything that was most hateful and false in the society he already knew: "a kind of Satanic summa of military arrogance, racist solipsism, schoolyard bullying and capitalist greed".[71] His one special insight was to notice the frequent collusion of the Roman Catholic Church and of the Catholic intellectuals with this saturnalia of wickedness and stupidity.

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[69] Christopher Hitchins, *Orwell's Victory*, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, London, 2002, pp. 2-3.
[70] Idem, p. 4.
[71] Idem., p. 6.

He thought Fascism meant war and war against it should be joined as early as possible (he joined the Loyalists in Spain). But while fighting Fascism he came to understand Communism and began his combat with its ideology and its adherents – this is his greatest intellectual and moral legacy.

The first thing to notice about Orwell's work and personality is independence. His life had an erratic course, so did his convictions. He never enjoyed a stable social position or a stable income. Apparently he never could make up his mind whether to be a novelist or an essayist, but brilliantly contributed to both genres. He earned his independence the hard way, by struggling with inner conflicts and repressing some unworthy instincts (suspicion of Jews, dislike of the masses, misogynism, anti-intellectualism). By teaching himself in theory and practice he became a great humanist. Only one of the inherited prejudices – dislike of homosexuality – appears to have resisted the process of self-mastery.

Contradictions: the egalitarian and socialist sees simultaneously the fallacy of state-ownership and centralization. The hater of militarism becomes the advocate of a war of national survival. The fastidious and solitary schoolboy dosses down with tramps and tarts. (The extraordinary thing about his *nostalgie de la boue* is that it is undertaken with a humorous self-consciousness and without any tinge of religious abjection or mortification.) The foe of jingoism and muscular Christianity is one of the finest writers about patriotic verse and liturgical tradition.

Hitchens identifies the following issues through which Orwell remains our contemporary:

- his work on the 'English question' and the related matters of regional nationalism and European integration;
- his views on the importance of language and anticipation of bureaucratic speech and 'political corectness';
- his interest in demotic or popular culture and in what now passes for 'cultural studies';
- his fascination with the problem of objective or verifiable truth – central problem in the discourse of post-modern theorists;
- his influence on later fiction, including the 'Angry Young Men' novel;
- his concern with the environment, anticipating the views of environmentalists;
- his acute awareness of the dangers of 'nuclearism' and the nuclear state.

However, he failed to see the emergence of the United States as a dominant culture. The American critic Lionel Trilling made two observations of great acuity about him:

1. " … he is not a genius – what a relief! What an encouragement! For he communicates to us a sense that what he has done, any one of us could do."
2. "Orwell clung with a kind of wry, grim pride to the old ways of the last class that had ruled the old order. He must sometimes have wondered how it came about that he should be praising sportsmanship and gentlemanliness and dutifulness and physical courage. He seems to have thought, and very likely he was right, that they might come in handy as revolutionary virtues …

" … his writings on colonialism are an indissoluble part of his lifelong engagement with the subjects of power and cruelty and force, and the crude yet subtle relationship between the dominator and the dominated. Since one of the great developments of his time and ours is the gradual emancipation of the formerly colonized world, and its increasing presence through migration and exile in the lands of the West, Orwell can be read as one of the founders of the discipline of post-colonialism, as well as one of the literary registers of the historic transition of Britain from an imperial and monochrome (and paradoxically insular) society to a multicultural and multi-ethnic one."[72]

In the essay 'Politics and the English Language' (1946), Orwell wrote: 'In our age there is no such thing as "keeping out of politics." All issues are political issues, and politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred and schizophrenia …' This was considered, by Salman Rushdie and Edward Said, among others, a 'quietist option (an exhortation to submit to events) and therefore a conservative one. Although Orwell had socialist views, expressed in the essay *Inside the Whale*, he was criticized by the Left, being considered an anarchist and a defeatist. Thus, Raymond Williams wrote in his *George Orwell* (1971): "Orwell prepared the orthodox political beliefs of a generation … By viewing the struggle as one between only a few people over the heads of an apathetic mass, Orwell created the conditions for defeat and despair." If Williams accused him of having spoiled the morale of a whole generation, Isaac Deutscher said that he moved millions to despair and apathy. In his immensely influential book *Culture and Society* (1958), Raymond Williams, who introduced several generations of readers to the concept of 'cultural studies', wrote that Orwell " … is the spokesman of another kind of despair, the despair born of social and political disillusion.' 'The total effect of his work', he continues, 'is an effect of paradox. He was a humane man who communicated an extreme of inhuman terror; a man commited to decency who actualized a distinctive squalor'.[73] Raymond Williams also identifies Orwell as an instance of the 'paradox of the exile'.

In his book *The Captive Mind* (1953), Czeslaw Milos, a former East-European cultural official, who had seen Stalinization from the inside, wrote that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was 'known only to certain members of the inner party. Orwell fascinates them through his insights into details they know well and through his use of Swiftian satire. [..] Even those who know Orwell only by hearsay are amazed that a writer who never lived in Russia should have so keen a perception into its life.'[74]

The nearest that Orwell ever came to anything that might be termed Trotskyism was in Spain, when he enlisted in the militsia of the POUM, Partido Obrero de Unification Marxista, which belonged to the left-wing opposition. Most foreign anti-fascists either enlisted in, or were selected for, the International Brigades, which operated under very strict Communist party discipline. Orwell's signing up with a dissident band allowed him to see at first hand the real story in Catalonia, which was one of a revolution betrayed. In *Homage to Catalonia*, Orwell told the truth about the deliberate subversion of the Spanish Republic by Stalin's agents, and about the ruthless way in which they tried to destroy Catalonia's independent left. He was an eye-witness of the attempted Communist coup in Barcelona in May 1937, when the Catalan leader Andres Nin was kidnapped, tortured and killed. He and his wife managed to escape; if they had not, they

[72] Idem, p. 25.
[73] Idem, p. 35.
[74] Idem, p. 40.

might have been placed in the dock as exhibits of a show-trial, as a secret report of the NKVD described them as 'pronounced Trotskytes' operating with clandestine credentials.

Christopher Hitchins thinks that Kim Il Sung's regime in North Korea was a good illustration of the totalitarian state described in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, but infinitely more forbidding.[75]

Orwell wrote in 'Politics and the English Language' (1945): *'Political language – and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists – is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable and to giver an appearance of solidity to pure wind.'* Orwell's contention here is that thought (political or not) can corrupt language, but language can also corrupt thought.

Conservative intellectuals and critics have had a fluctuating and uneven attitude towards Orwell's life and work. Attempts have been made to use him and annex him altogether. It is true that Orwell was one of the founding-fathers of anti-Communism, that he had a strong patriotic sense and a very potent instinct for what can be called elementary right and wrong; he despised government and bureaucracy and was a stout individualist; he distrusted intellectuals and academics and reposed a faith in popular wisdom; he upheld a traditional orthodoxy in sexual and moral matters, looked down on homosexuals; preferred the country to the town.

Orwell is credited with coining the phrase 'cold war', in an esay of 1945, 'You and the Atom Bomb': *' We may be headed not for general breakdown, but for an epoch as horribly stable as the slave empires of antiquity. James Burnham's*[76] *theory has been much discussed, but few people have yet considered its ideological implications – that is, the kind of world view, the kind of beleifs and the social structure that would probably prevail in a State that was at once unconquerable and in a permanent state of "cold war" with its neighbours.'*[77]

Orwell's reputation as a left-wing icon took a body-blow when it was revealed in 1996 that he had cooperated closely with the IRD's (Information Research Department of the Foreign Office) 'Cold Warriors', offering his own black list of 86 communist 'fellow-travellers'. In fact, Orwell's list of Stalinized intellectuals appeared as early as Bernard Crick's biography of 1980. It was a list of people he thought would sell out in the event of an invasion or a dictatorship. He had a life-long hatred for all forms of censorship, proscription and blacklisting and felt disgust for a culture of betrayal.

Orwell and America. Orwell was an admirer and a student of Thomas Paine, but never visited the US and showed little curiosity about it. He was suspicious of its culture,

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[75] Idem, p. 54.

[76] James Burnham was an American intellectual who gave form and definition to the ideology of the Cold War. An ex-Stalinist associated for a while with Leon Trotsky, he abandoned Socialism altogether and became a chief theorist of the idea of America as an empire. His wartime book *The Managerial Revolution* was a best-seller, prefiguring the volumes written about the end of history or ideology, such as Francis Fukuyama's. When William Buckley opened his magazine *The National Review*, giving an intellectual expression to the utterances of senator Joseph McCarthy, Burnham contributed a regular column entitled 'The Third World War', in which he urged Americans to understand that they were involved in a global life-or-death conflict with atheist Communism. Before his death in 1987, Burnham was awarded the Medal of Freedom by President Ronald Reagan, as the godfather of anti-Communism.

[77] Christopher Hitchins, *Orwell's Victory*., p. 62

considering it commercial and mercenary. He was somewhat resentful of its imperial ambitions and somewhat fastidious about its scale and vulgarity. 'America, in other words, is the grand exception to Orwell's prescience about the century in which he lived.'[78] During his brief career as film critic for *Time and Tide*, in the early years of the war, he deplored the grossness of the cultural product named an American film, while extolling the technical superiority of the Americans. He thought American novels were cruder, rawer an more violent than the British.

In 1990 Professor Peter Davidson, from Leicester University, completed the publication of a twenty volume edition of the *Complete Works of George Orwell*, the last 11 volumes of which contain chronologically-arranged miscellanea, i. e. pieces written for the newspapers, essays, letters, radio-scripts and personal notes. Orwell's personality transpares from these marginalia even better than it does from his major books or the biographies dedicated to him. He was a hard-working journalist and, most of all, a witness and student of his time, whose original left-wing ideas were greatly tempered by his personal experience and disillusionment.

THE NOVELS

There are four great motives for writing, Orwell states in his essay "Why I Write":

1. *Sheer egoism – desire to seem clever, to be talked about, to be remembered after death.*
2. *Aesthetic enthusiasm. Perception of beauty in the external world. Desire to share this experience, which is too valuable to be lost.*
3. *The historical impulse. Desire to see things as they are, to find out true facts and store them uip for the use of posterity.*
4. *Political purpose: desire to push the world in a direction, to alter other people's ideas of the kind of society they should strive after. No book is genuinely free of political bias.*[79]

In Orwell's case, the desire to push the world in one direction was replaced by a desire to prevent it from going in the wrong direction, but the motivation is certainly political, as he himself explained:

…looking back through my work, I see that it is invariably where I lacked a political purpose that I wrote lifeless books …[80]

During his lifetime, Orwell considered himself a mediocre novelist. Upon his death, he directed that at least two of his novels, *A Clergyman's Daughter* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* should not be reprinted. 'He blamed the times in which he lived for his failure to become a serious literary contributor instead of a "sort of pamphleteer".'[81] F. R

[78] Idem, p. 75.
[79] George Orwell, *A Collection of Essays*, Doubleday & Co., Garden City, New York, 1954, pp 315-316.
[80] Idem, p. 320.
[81] Christopher Hitchins, *Orwell's Victory*, p. 123.

Leavis said: *'I have read three or four novels by him and the only impression these dreary books left on me is that nature did not intend him to be a novelist. Yet his equivalent works in non-fiction are stimulating.'* His first novels, Christopher Hitchens believes, can now be seen as the forerunners of the 'Angry Young Men' literary productions of the 1950s, and also to the absurdist and existentialist works of the period. *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* have many things in common.

The more fully realized *Coming Up for Air* is a reworking of certain themes more fully treated in the essays: suburban complacency, political sloganiying, the sense of impending and terrifying war. Its relative success as a novel is in the profound exploration of nostalgia, in its original sense, as an incurable longing for home. Orwell wrote this melancholy hymn to the Edwardian Thames Valley when he was living in Morocco.

Animal Farm was, as Orwell later wrote, '*the first book in which I tried, with full consciousness of what I was doing, to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose in one whole.'* The fable has beautiful simplicity and brevity, as well as an unusual lightness of touch. Since the opening picture is not one of unrelieved gloom, the gradual emergence of a tragedy assumes a due proportion. The analogies have charm; each beast is well-cast in its respective role.

Another unremarked element of the book is its prescience. […] by the closing sentence, the frightened and famished beasts are unable to distinguish between the men and the pigs. But, in the scene which culminates with this line, Napoleon has actually invited Mr Jones to retake his property and changed the name of the enterprise back into 'Manor Farm'. Trotsky in exile predicted that the Stalinist bureaucrats would one day sell off the socialized property that they had expropriated, and go into business on their own account. So, not only did Orwell produce a brilliant satire on the self-negation of Communism, he even anticipated its eventual terminus in a robber-barron Mafia capitalist state.'[82]

Nineteen Eighty-Four

Nineteen Eighty-Four is the only English contribution to the literature of twentieth-century totalitarianism able to stand comparison with Silone and Koestler and Solzhenitsyn. Orwell, a well-read man if there ever was any, was, of course, aware of the ways in which the dystopian formula had been employed before him. In the essay "Freedom and Happiness" he talks about E. Zamiyatin's novel *We* , comparing it to A. Huxley's *Brave New World*: "Both books deal with the rebellion of the primitive human spirit against the a rationalised, mechanised, painless world [..] though Huxley's book shows less political awareness and is more influenced by recent biological and psychological theories."[83] The working title of this book was, suggestively enough, *The Last Man in Europe*. It is a summa of what Orwell learned about terror and conformism in Spain, what he learned about servility and sadism at school and in the Burma police, what he discovered about squalor and degradation in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, what he

[82] Idem, p. 134.
[83] George Orwell, *A Collection of Essays*, p. 213.

learned about propaganda and falsity in decades of polemical battles. It contains absolutely no jokes. In the 1947 essay “Why I Write” he explains his concern with political issues as folows:

> *The Spanish War and other events in 1936-37 turned the scales and thereafter I knew where I stood. Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly,* against *totalitarianism and* for *democratic socialism, as I understand it. It seems to me nonsense, in a period like our own , to think that one can avoid writing of such subjects. Everyone writes of them in one guise or another. It is simply a question of which side one takes and what approach one follows. And the more one is conscious of one’s political bias, the more chance one has of acting politically without sacrificing one’s aesthetic and intellectual integrity.*
> *What I have most wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political wrtiting into art. My starting point is always a feeling of partnership, a sense of injustice.*[84]

It is the first and only time that his efforts as a novelist rise to the level of his essays.’[85]

Winston Smith addresses his doomed text thus:

> *To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone – to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone;*
> *From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the age of Big Brother, from the age of doublethink – greetings!*

When the New York newspaper *Daily News* printed an editorial saying the novel was an attack on the British Labour Government, Orwell was asked to make a statement and he wrote:

> *My recent novel is not intended as an attack on socialism or on the British Labour Party (of which I am a supporter) but as a show-up of the perversions to which a centralized economy is liable and which have already been partly realized in Communism and fascism. … The scene of the book is laid in Britain in order to emphasize that the English-speaking races are not innately better than anyone else and that totalitarianism if not fought against, could triumph anywhere.*[86]

In “The Fiction of Anti-Utopia”, Irwing Howe calls such books as *We, Brave New World or Nineteen Eighty-Four anti-utopian novels*’. Today we prefer the more modern term *dystopias*, but Howe’s name for the sub-genre more explicitly draws one’s attention to the antinomic position taken by such writings. *‘Behind the anti-utopian novel lies not merely the frightful vision of a totalitarian world, but something that seems more alarming. The minds raised on the assumptions, whether liberal or Marxiast, of*

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[84] Idem, p. 318.
[85] Christopher Hitchins, *Orwell’s Victory*, p. 134.
[86] Idem, p. 61.

nineteenth century philosophies of history, assumptions that the human enterprise has a purposive direction, or a telos, and an upward rhythm, or progress. There is also the fear that history itself has proved to be a cheat. And a cheat not because it has turned away from our expectations, but because it betrays our hopes precisely through an inverted fulfilment of those expectations. <u>Not progress denied, but progress realized is the nightmare haunting the anti-utopian novel</u>. *And behind this nightmare lies a crisis of thought quite as intense as that suffered by 19*th*. century minds.'*[87]

Further on, relying on Northrop Frye's categories, Howe sees in anti-utopian novels Menippean satires, because they deal less with people and more with mental attitudes, they handle abstract ideas and theories, while characterization is stylized rather than true-to-life, people being presented as mouthpieces of the ideas they represent. At its most concentrated, Howe maintains, the Menippean satire presents one with a vision of the world in terms of a single individual pattern.

'*The will to command and dominate is one thing, but the will to obey and be prostrate is a deadly foe as well. At one point in a short earlier article, Orwell asked himself if decency and powerlessness were inversly related. Nobody has ever made this point more forcibly that he does in* Nineteen Eighty-Four*, just as nobody since Dostoyevsky has come so close to reading the mind of the Grand Inquisitor. With a part of themselves, humans relish cruelty and war and absolute capricious authority, are bored by civilized and humane pursuits and understand only too well the latent connection between sexual repression and orgiastic vicarious collectivized release. Some regimes have been popular not in spite of their irrationality and cruelty, but because of it. There will always be Trotskys and Goldsteins and even Winston Smiths, but it must be clearly understood that the odds are overwhelmingly against them and that as with Camus's rebel, the crowd will yell with joy to see them dragged to the scaffold. This long and steady look into the void was Orwell's apotheosis of the 'power of facing'.*"[88]

III. WILLIAM GOLDING – THE MYTHMAKER (1911 – 1993)

WORKS:

Poems (1934)
Lord of the Flies (1954)
The Inheritors (1955)
Pincher Martin (1956)
The Brass Butterfly (1958)
Free Fall (1959)
The Spire (1964)
The Hot Gates (1965) essays

[87] Irwing Howe, "The Fiction of Anti-Utopia", in *Orwell's* Nineteen Eighty-Four. *Text, Sources and Criticism*, edited by Irwing Howe, Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., New York, 1963, p. 176.
[88] Christopher Hitchins, *Orwell's Victory*, p. 136.

The Pyramid (1967)
The Scorpion God (1971) short fiction
Darkness Visible (1979)
Rites of Pasage (1980)
A Moving Target (1982) essays
The Paper Men (1984)
An Egyptian Journal (1985) travel book
Close Quarters (1987)
Fire Down Below (1989)

LIFE: Golding was born at St Columb Minor, in Cornwall, in 1911. He enrolled at Brasenose College, Oxford, as a science student, but changed over to literature before graduating in 1935. Hiis first book, *Poems*, which he later repudiated, was published in 1934. He married in 1939 and became a schoolmaster, like his father, teaching English and the Classics, but also worked as a stage-manager and producer. During WWII he joined the Royal Navy, in which he served until 1945. He served on mine-sweepers, destroyers and cruisers and eventually became a lieutenant. The horrors of war made him query the scientific, rationalistic picture of the world he had acquired from his father. He wrote of his war experiences in the essay 'Fable': "*I must say that anyone who moved through these years without understanding that man produces evil, as a bee produces honey, must have been blind or sick in the head.*"[89]. His first novel, *Lord of the Flies*, though initially rejected by 21 publishers, became an outstanding international success and became, like *The Catcher in the Rye* in the US, a cult book. Golding continued to live and work in Salisbury, but eventually moved to Truro, in Cornwall. In 1955 he was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. He quit teaching in 1962 to concentrate on writing. In 1966 he was awarded CBE (Cross of the British Empire). In 1980 he received the Booker Prize for *Rites of Passage*. In 1983 Golding was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. He was knighted in 1988 and died in Cornwall in June 1993.

"William Golding's work was always slightly out of step with that of his fellow writers who were publishing novels in the early and middle 1950s. While novelists such as Kingsley Amis, John Wain, and Iris Murdoch seemed, initially at least, to be describing parochial worlds of considerable limitations, Golding was writing bold, visionary fables which claimed for themselves a universal applicability. [His novels] address auch issues as rationalism, evil, evolution, and religion …"[90]
"One of Golding's principal interests in his early fiction is examining the ways in which humanity projects its internal evil onto something external. It is this issue of 'projection' that accounts for the stress Golding lays in these early novels upon the scapegoat, human sacrifice, and, in *The Inheritors*, upon cannibalism.[91]

William Golding extended the formal boundaries of fiction and made a significant contribution to England's literature. […] Like an earlier literary innovator, T. S. Eliot, Golding returned to the past in search of the stories that still reverberate through our

[89] Quoted by Kevin McCarron, *William Golding* (Writers and their Work), Northcote House (in association with the British Council), London, 1994, p. 2.
[90] Idem, p. 3.
[91] Idem, p. 10.

culture, which he then used to create myths for the modern age. Golding's characters are rarely helpless victims of socio-economic forces beyond their control. They live in a world where tragedy is not just present, but actively inscribed in the nature of things, a world in which one must choose and where the consequences of the wrong choice can be fatal. Golding's mythical and allegorical universe is one where damnation and salvation are still possible and where the actions of a single individual have an effect on the world. For all its tragedy and pessimism, therefore, it can be seen as a world that has meaning; one which affirms and celebrates the unique humanity of every individual.[92]

THE NOVELS:

Lord of the Flies (1954) A goup of young boys are marooned on an uninhabited island when their plane is shot down during what one assumes is a future nuclear war. The boys' age ranges from 6 to 12. Immediately a battle for supremacy takes place among the survivors, led by the principal characters. Violence, superstition and death follow. The book can be called a dystopia, like George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. The boys attempt to re-create civilisation, by electing a rational leader, Ralph, who has a conch as a power symbol. Their plans are, however, soon thwarted by Jack and his party who, exploiting the boys' fear of the'beast', assumes dominance. When Simon, a visionary youth, realizes that the 'beast' is just a dead parachutist and attempts to communicate his knowledge to the others, Jack's 'tribe' ritualistically murder him. Piggy, the first of Golding's rationalist figures, is murdered by Jack's lieutenant, Roger, while he pathetically holds on to the conch, still beleieving in civilization. Ralph, now completely alone, is hunted like an animal by the other boys, the forest is set on fire in order to smoke him out, but just as he is about to be killed an English ship sees the fire and sends a rescue party.
Lord of the Flies is a re-writing of R. M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* (1858), a grim rebutal of Ballantyne's Victorian optimism. Golding overturns Ballantyne's optimistic portrait which equates English with good and foreign with evil, and suggests that evil is more likely to reside within humanity, including the English, that external evil is a projection of an inner evil. Golding even uses the same names for his central characters as Ballantyne does for his trio of brave, clean, young Englishmen.
The Inheritors tells the story of a small group of Neanderthalers – who call themselves 'the People' – who are systematically hunted and killed by a larger and more powerful group of 'New Men', Homo sapiens. The difficulty experienced by the reader comes from the fact that the narrative adopts the perspective of one Neanderthal man, Lok, who does not really comprehend what he is seeing. Thus, it becomes "impossible to separate Golding's manipulation of an extraordinarily limited perspective from the novel's thematic structure."[93] According to Kevin McCarron, Golding forces us to understand that, much as we sympathize with Lok and his tribe, we belong with the 'New Men' – we are the inheritors. The reader is cleverly manipulated into a position of guilt and the human race to which we belong has inherited disruption, violence and death. The novel has been read as an evolutionary fable, but some critics argue that it can also be considered a religious allegory. Critics have also pointed out the differences between

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[92] Idem, p. 59.
[93] Idem, p. 7.

Golding's novel and H. G. Wells's story "The Grisly Folk", with a similar subject, which, however, inoculates optimism through the belief that evolution, in the Darwinian sense, is ultimately good.

Pincher Martin. During the Second World War, Christopher Martin, a lieutenant in the navy, is thrown from the bridge of his ship when it is hit by a torpedo. The novel describes him finding a little rock in the middle of the ocean and then recounts, in great detail, his struggle for survival. The final chapter offers us a shift in perspective: we discover that the protagonist has been dead since the opening paragraphs of the book. Christopher Martin creates "from his egotistical and perverse refusal to die a heroic struggle for survival".[94]

In ***Free Fall*** for the first time Golding describes a recognizably modern world, with a social dimension, in a first-person narrative. The protagonist of this novel, Samuel Mountjoy, is an artist and Golding uses his hero's profession to comment on the general nature of artistic production. The novel was intended as a parody of Dante's *La Vita Nuova*, a collection of lyrical poems celebrating the beauty and virtue of Dante's muse Beatrice. Mountjoy's lover is also called Beatrice and there are quite a number of other similitudes. The novel describes Mountjoy's attempts to locate the specific moment in his life when he lost his freedom, and to that extent can be seen as a 'quest narrative'".[95] Free Fall is as much concerned with the act of writing as it is with the act of painting and raises questions about the artist's ability to actually 'portray' reality.

The Spire is an allegory on human ambition and man's attempt to communicate with Divinity. The story is set in the 15th century, when Jocelin, Dean of Barchester Cathedral, believes that he has been chosen by God to build a 400-foot-tall spire on top of the cathedral. Despite the harsh conditions and the many evil deeds perpetrated on the building site, Jocelin persists with his dream. The novel ends with the death of most characters, but the spire, against all odds, stands. Analogies are possible with Ibsen's play *The Master Builder* and with Lucian Blaga's *Meşterul Manole*. Sacrifice is intrerwoven throughout the novel with revelation and vision. The theme of sacrifice in the reaching of an ideal is paramount.

Darkness Visible was published more than a decade after Golding's previous novel, *The Pyramid*, when everybody thought his talent was spent. It was, therefore, greeted with enthusiasm. It can be considered Golding's 'condition of England' novel, presenting the country's moral dissolution in the yearts after WWII. The novel can be divided into three parts. The protagonist of the firtst part, Matty, acts throughout the story as an Old Testament prophet, representing Good. The protagonist of the second part is a criminal woman, Sophy, the anthisesis to Matty, therefore standing for Evil. In the third part the two characters come together: Sophy intends to kidnap for ransom a child from the school where Matty works as a caretaker, Matty prevents this from happening with the sacrifice of his life. Mr Pedigree, a pedofile who has been both a comic and a tragic figure in the novel, and Matty's teacher, also dies at the end. Milton – from whose poem the title of the novel is borrowed – saw Hell as 'darkness visible' so it is asumed that Golding's novel presents a sort of modern Hell.

The Paper Men – considered one of Golding's less successful novels – has as a protagonist an elderly novelist, Wilf Barclay, who tries hard to escape the predatory

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[94] Idem, p. 15.
[95] Idem, p. 19.

attention of a young American academic, Rick Tucker, who intends to write his biography. The novel was seen as a disproportionate attack on literary criticism and scholarly pursuits, and most readers assumed that Barclay spoke for Golding himself. The binary opposition denied in this novel is the one said to exist between 'creative' and 'critical' writing. Whereas the creator, Barclay, claims that he has always relied on the truth rather than on invention, the critic, Tucker, is presented as a mythomaniac, a compulsive teller of lies. Tucker eventually kills Barclay (see Barthes's 'the death of an author') for writing his autobiography, instead of letting him, the critic, do it. "The declining authority of both art and the artist is a central theme of the novel. […] *The Paper Men* further rejects the belief that art can provide an alternative meaning to life in the absence of spiritual truth and suggests that only the spiritual reality at the centre of life is of any importance."[96]

Rites of Passage is the first installment of a trilogy. It is a first person narrative recounting the adventures of Edmund Talbot, a well-educated man of the upper classes who is on his way to Australia in 1812- 1813, during a lull in the Napoleonic Wars. As the journey progresses, Talbot changes from an arrogant, priggish young aristocrat into a more thoughtful and considerate member of the human race. The person who brings about this change is Colley, a young clergyman from a lower social class who gets sodomized and dies while on a hunger strike of sorts. The novel is conceived as Talbot's diary, and within it there are large extracts from Colley's diary, so Golding manages to intertwine two first-person narratives. "With its use of the dual narrative perspective, *Rites of Passage* can be viewed as a novel which is structured around the conflict between Augustanism and Romanticism. Talbot's elegant, learned, and affected prose-style shows him as an Augustan, a Neo-Classicist, the literary heir of Dryden and Pope. The vibrant, spiritual energy of Colley's prose recommends him, conversely, as a Romantic. […] By the novel's conclusion, Talbot has learned enough to see that, irrespective of class, Colley was a highly gifted writer, and his own prose style becomes more flexible as a result. This stylistic development in Talbot is paralleled by a comparable moral development."[97]

Close Quarters describes Talbot's further adventures, amongst which his meeting with Miss Chumley, with whom he becomes so smitten he almost has a nervous breakdown. The rivalry between two lieutenants, Summers and Benet, provides the most interesting conflict wirthin the novel. "As the title implies, this second novel has a more claustrophobic atmosphere than its predecessor and , as the world begins to shrink to the confines of the ship, the sailor's language gradually dominates ordinary social discourse. […] *Close Quarters* is a novel of overcompensation, of excess."[98]

Fire Down Below brings the trilogy to its conclusion. The Britannia lands safely in Australia, only to be destroyed by fire. Talbot meets Miss Chumley again, and she accepts his proposal of marriage. Talbot will return to England and become a prosperous public man. It seems like a happy ending, but Golding implies that appearances can be deceptive. The power of language – extensively discussed in the middle novel, when Talbot was fascinated by 'Tarpaulin', the sailor's language – remains a major theme with ***Fire Down Below***.

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[96] Idem, pp. 48-49.
[97] Idem, pp. 52-53.
[98] Idem. p. 54.

While ***Rites of Passage*** dwells on Talbot's spiritual development, and ***Close Quarters*** focuses on Miss Chumley's lessons in love and poetry, ***Fire Down Below*** begins Talbot's political education. ***Fire Down Below*** is written as an autobiography and in its final pages there is a sadness which undermines all references to 'happy endings'.

IV. GRAHAM GREENE: THE WRITER AND THE ANTAGONISTIC WORLD

(1904 – 1991)

WORKS:
Babbling April (1925)
The Man Within (1925)
The Name of Action (1929)
Rumour at Nightfall (1931)
Stamboul Train (1932)
It's a Battlefield (1934)
England Made Me (1935)
The Basement Room (1935)
Journey without Maps (1936)
A Gun for Sale (1936)
Brighton Rock (1938)
The Lawless Roads (1939)
The Confidential Agent (1939)
The Power and the Glory (1940)
The Ministry of Fear (1943)
Thje Heart of the Matter (1948)
The Third Man (1950) film script
The End of the Affair (1951)
The Lost Childhood (1951) memoirs and essays
The Living Room (1953) play
Twenty-One Stories (1954)
The Quiet American (1955)
Loser Takes All (1955)
The Potting Shed (1958) play
Our Man in Havana (1958)
The Complaisant Lover (1959) play
A Burnt-Out Case (1961)
In Search of a Character: Two African Journals (1961)
A Sense of Reality (1963)
Carving a Statue (1964) play
The Comedians (1966)
May We Borrow Your Husband? (1967) stories
Collected Essays (1969)
Travels with My Aunt (1969)

A Sort of Life (1971) autobiography
Collected Stories (1972)
The Pleasure Dome: Collected Film Criticism (1972)
The Honorary Consul (1973)
Lord Rochester's Monkey (1974)
The Human Factor (1978)
Dr Fischer of Geneva or the Bomb Party (1980)
Ways of Escape (1980) autobiography
Monsignor Quixote (1982)
Getting to Know the General (1985)
The Tenth Man (1985)
The Captain and the Enemy (1988)
The Last Word (1991)
A World of My Own: A Dream Diary (1992 – posthumous)

LIFE: Graham Greene was born at Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, where his father was a school master, teaching the Classics and History. After elementary education in his native town he studied at Balliol College, Oxford, and in 1926 joined the staff of *The Times*. In the same year he was converted to Roman Catholicism under the influence of his wife-to-be, Vivien Dayrell-Browning. Upon publication of his first novel, *The Man Within*, he resigned from *The Times* to become a full-time novelist. He also wrote film reviews for *The Spectator* an co-edited the short-lived magazine *Night and Day*. Popular success came with *Stamboul Train*. He travelled to Africa and – commissioned by the government to report on the religious persecution there – to Mexico, which made a deep impression on him, as seen from the travelogue *Lawless Roads* and the novel *The Power and the Glory*, considered to be Greene's best work. During WWII he worked for the British Intelligence in Sierra Leone. After the war he travelled widely to Indo-China, Africa, South and Central America, Spain, writing incessantly novels, stories and plays. In 1961 he met Yvonne Cloetta, who became his companion until the end of his life. From 1966 he lived mostly in Paris and Antibes, and he died at Vevey, in Switzerland.

During his lifetime, Greene was regarded as Britain's greatest novelist, a master of ingenuity and excitement, a writer whose ambivalent moral equations and compromised characters invaded the consciousness of millions of readers throughout the world. Since his death, his relevance seems to have shrunk; his Catholicism is less fascinating, his political seriousness has failed to sustain the stature of Orwell. John le Carre once deprecated him, describing him as a "thirties writer". Nevertheless, Greene outlives literary fashion, as a writer who is steeped in experience, in worldliness, in shades of moral grey. He was the first British writer to turn genre into a serious style, with high ethical and aesthetical aims. In his 28 novels, which treat subjects of worldly if not everyday importance – politics, espionage, religion, world affairs, sex, religion – he raises central questions about what the novel's concerns should be. "*Graham Greene's life covered 87 years of the 20th century. Travel was essential to him, in particular to places where danger existed. His gifts as a story-teller were inspired by the political and moral conflicts of the 20th century. In style he regarded simplicity as the central virtue.*

This combination of representativeness and accessibility gave him an immense popular appeal, enabling him to invade the public imagination as few writers in our time have done."[99]

Greene wrote political thrillers which he called 'entertainments' and serious novels, investigating the human psyche and Christian (particularly Catholic) moral law. One of his central topics was "the appalling strangeness of the mercy of God".

His interest in the planet's 'hot spots', the political dimension of his 'entertainments', the mixture of religion, high adventure, suffering and doubt are features characteristic of Greene's fiction. As a 'witness of the century's turmoil', Greene is the British counterpart of novelists such as Andre Malraux and Ernest Hemingway. "Greene's career shows a kind of Kirkegaardian development, not in the strict erotic – ethical – religious stages of life, but with a similar arc, as thriller writer (the erotic stage) gave way to an anguished realist novelist (religious stage) and, finally, in the 60s, to a calmer political novelist. In fictional terms, politics became preferred to religion."[100]

Greene's choice of settings on the edge of of political stability is in accordance with the statement that "If I were to choose an epigraph for all the novels I have written, it would be from *Bishop Blougram's Apology*: 'Our interest is on the dangerous edge of things/The honest thief, the tender murderer,/The superstitious atheist …'".[101] "The dangerous edge of things" in particularly tulburent parts of the world often provides an ideal context for the moral dilemmas experienced by Greene's characters, both heightening and reflecting their restlessness and tension. Along with the interest in the sort of contradictory figures mentioned in the epigraph, however, his choice of such apparently exotic locations may seem to invite the criticism the Catholic Church made of *The Power and the Glory*, which the Vatican considered was 'paradoxical' and 'dealt with extraordinary circumstances'. In fact, the most extraordinary aspect of Greene's settings is not their exoticism, so much as its absence. The dreary, dispirited Greeneland […] seems to continue as a homogenious context throughout his fiction: the grim London of *It's a Battlefield* is surprisingly similar to the shabby South America of *The Honorary Consul*. Any specific sense of locale is partly subordinate to the weary feeling of waste and human failure which provides the distinctive background of all Greene's fiction …"[102]

THE NOVELS:

Brighton Rock. Graham Greene's first explicitely Catholic novel tells the story of a young gangster, Pinkie Brown, who leads a dangerous life in a starkly realistically depicted Brighton of the nineteen-thirties. Therefore the book has all the makings of a thriller. The author himself described the novel as an examination of "the effect of faith on action". The book centers on the conflict between rival gangs: the Colleoni gang and a mob led, since the death of its former head, Kite, by the 17-year-old Catholic Pinkie Brown. Pinkie plans to murder Fred Hale, a journalist who has indirectly caused the death

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[99] Peter Mudford, *Graham Greene* (Writers and their Work), Northcote House (in association with The British Council), London, 1996, p. 1.
[100] Julian Evans, "Graham Greene", in *Prospect*, September, 2004, p. 51.
[101] Apud Randall Stevenson, *The British Novel since the Thirties*, Institutul European, Iasi, 1993, p. 115.
[102] Idem, pp. 115-116.

of the gang's former boss. Hale dies of a heart attack, but Pinkie knows there is evidence that will incriminate him. While Pinkie is pursued by members of the Colleoni gang, he enters a relationship with a dim little waitress called Rose, who suspects him of having murdered Hale. Pinkie is repelled by sex, having, as a child, witnessed his parents' weekly extorsions, but arranges to marry Rose to prevent her from testifying against him in court. Even then he cannot trust her and attempts to set up a suicide pact in which Rose will kill herself first. Rose is persuaded, because she, like Pinkie, is Catholic and believes herself to be in mortal sin (their marriage is not consecrated by the Church). She would prefer eternal damnation with him to salvation without him. Rose is prevented from killing herself by another woman, Ida, who is determined to establish the truth about Hale's death. Pinkie, burning already with the effects of the acid he had attempted to throw in another gangster's face, topples over the cliff. The novel ends with the pregnant Rose at the confessional, where she is told by the priest that Pinkie's love for her might prove to be his redemption, this being part of the "appaling strangeness of the mercy God". But she returns home toward "the strangest horror of all": a recorded message from Pinkie in which she expects him to declare his love, but which will reveal his hatred of her. As a thriller, the book is effective, cynical and brutal, but its ultimate success depends on the reader's acceptance of the theology behind it. It suggests that Pinkie's grasp of the reality of eternal good and evil – the acceptance of the latter presupposing the existence of the former – is, paradoxically, preferable to Ida's cheerful, wordly, sense of right and wrong.

The Power and the Glory was inspired by Greene's visit to Mexico in 1937, when he was commissioned to write about religious persecution in one of the revolutionary Mexican states, Tabasco. The Church was banned in that state and priests were forced to abjure. Frontera (a town renamed in the novel Obregon) was his first sight of dictator Garrido Canabal's isolated, swampy, puritanical state, where every church had been destroyed and every priest had been driven out. Garrido Canabal was the governor of Tabasco. He organized a 'Red Shirts' private army of 6000 youths and established a godless state, with rigorous persecution of the church and of the priests. *"To the authorities, he [Greene] had given as his real reason for visiting that he wished to see the ruins at Palenque. His real purpose was to visit the only two states left where Catholics could not receive the Sacrament except secretly. His intention was to discover the extent of the persecution of the church and the secularization imposed on the people."*[103] Greene's documentary book is called *Lawless Roads.* In it, the author says: *"I have never been in a country where you are more aware all the time of hate. Friendship there is skin-deep; a protection gesture. [...] There has always been hate, I suppose, in Mexico, but now it is the official teaching: it has superseded love in the school curriculum."*[104] Greene hated Mexico, calling it 'an evil land', and 'a godless (and Puritan) socialistic state.'[105] His protagonist in *The Power and the Glory*, which draws heavily on the previous book, is an unnamed "whisky priest" with a vocation for martyrdom, who, while being pursued by the revolutionary army, continues to carry out his mission as confessor and shepherd, though relentlessly hunted, homeless and hungry. Although guilty of

[103] Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene, vol. I, 1904 – 1939*, Viking, New York, 1989, pp. 677-678.
[104] Quoted in Idem, p. 698.
[105] Idem, p. 679.

drunkenness and lechery, the “whisky priest” discovers the dignity of his original commitment and even puts his life on the line in order to bring solace to the poor peasants, until he is framed up by a Judas figure, a mestiso who pretends to be his friend, and who sets him up and delivers him to his enemy. This enemy is the other protagonist of the story, an army lieutenant who represents secular humanism and the ethics of the opressed class, who is kind-hearted by nature but as much a fanatic as the priest is. The lieutenant is characterized by honesty and a sort of unbending Puritanism: his atheism is itself a kind of deeply-felt mysticism. The antagonists are memorable: the drunken priest continues to pass life on, whilst the idealistic army officer tries to stifle it for the best possible motives. The novel is full of Christian symbols and the priest’s fate and his final sacrifice for a no-good ‘gringo’ thug forcibly remind one of Christ’s plight. His life is contrasted to that of Padre Jose, a cowardly priest who has given in to the regime. *The Power and the Glory* is the best treatment of Greene’s favourite topic, that of the bonds developing between hunter and hunted, between the pursuer and the pursued.

The Heart of the Matter (1948) was inspired by Catherine Walston, with whom Greene – a lady’s man – had an affair and who revived his religious sense, on which, he thought, all art depended.

The novel is located in typical Greene territory – “Greeneland” – during WWII. The harsh climate and the cruel fight for survival in West Africa furnish the background to an intense moral drama. The protagonist, Scobie, a Roman Catholic, becomes the victim of his own compassion for others: first for his fragile wife, Louise, then for the young widow Helen, the survivor of a shipwreck, with whom he has an affair. Finding himself in debt, Scobie borrows money. This initiates a progressive ‘descent into hell’ which is observed throughout by a a young intelligence agent, Wilson. Increasingly, Scobie’s attempts to retreive his life only compromise him further, and he inadvertently causes the death of his servant, Ali. He decides to commit suicide, a mortal sin for a Catholic, and endeavours to conceal this from his wife by fabricating his diary. Wilson, who is in love with Louise, but acts in his official capacity, uncovers the deceit after Scobie’s death, thereby exposing the final tragic paradox in the latter’s life.

In this novel the influence of faith over action becomes internalized: a matter of the salvation or damnation of the individual soul. The drama of the novel arises out of Scobie’s relation to God and to the two women whom in different ways he claims to love. He cannot, as a good Catholic, look after his own soul at whatever cost to another, because Scobie is also a good man. His soul is torn apart. He resolves the conflict by violating the Catholic code and committing suicide. Pemberton, a young district officer, who has killed himself and whose body Scobie goes up-country to identifiy, imprints himself upon Scobie’s imaginings, reducing his defenses against the self-destructive impulse, which the fear of eternal damnation otherwise bolsters. He tells his wife: ‘Pemberton’s suicide upset me.’ She reassures him: ‘How silly, dear. Nothing like that could ever happen to us. We’re Catholics.’ (HM 96)[106]

“The skill of the novel exists in its probing of the gap between what belief enjoins and and the emotional disorder with which it cannot hold discourse. The ‘heart of the matter’ turns out to be the disintegration of Scobie’s personality under stresses he cannot

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[106] Peter Mudford, op. cit., p. 32.

resolve. His desire to think well of himself is gradually eroded by his loss of integrity as police-officer and husband.'[107]

The Heart of the Matter – declared too sentimental and far-fetched by George Orwell and Walter Allen, and in which Evelyn Waugh detected falsity– epitomizes Greene's fiction and has been one of his most discussed works.

IV. IRIS MURDOCH: PATTERNS OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE (1919 – 1999)

WORKS:

Sartre, Romantic Rationalist (1953) non fiction
Under the Net (1954)
The Flight from the Enchanter (1965)
The Sandcastle (1957)
The Bell (1958)
A Severed Head (1961)
The Unoficial Rose (1962)
The Unicorn (1963)
The Italian Girl (1964)
The Red and the Green (1965)
The Time of Angels (1966)
The Sovereignty of God and Other Concepts (1967)
The Nice and the Good (1968)
Bruno's Dream (1969)
A Fairly Honourable Defeat (1970)
An Accidental Man (1971)
The Black Prince (1973) – James Tait Memorial Prize
The Sacred and Profane Love Machine (1974) – Whitbread Prize
A Word Child (1975)
Henry and Cato (1976)
The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artist (1977) non fiction
The Sea, the Sea (1978) – Booker Prize
Nuns and Soldiers (1980)
The Philosopher's Pupil (1983)
The Good Apprentice (1985)
The Book and the Brotherhood (1987)
Above the Gods (1987) non fiction
The Message to the Planet (1989)
The Existentialist Political Myth (1989) non fiction
Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals (1992) non fiction
The Green Knight (1993)

[107] Idem, pp. 32-33.

Jackson's Dilemma (1995)
The Fire and the Sun – Why Plato Banished the Artists (1977) – non fiction

LIFE: Iris Murdoch was born in Dublin, in 1919, in an ethnically mixed protestant family. Her English father was a civil servant with a passion for reading and her Irish mother had been trained to become an opera singer, but had given up her musical ambitions when she married. The family moved to England, where Iris studied at the Badmington School in Bristol and then at Somerville College, Oxford. From 1938 to 1942 she worked in the Treasury, and then for the UN Nations' Relief Organization.. She also became a member of the Communist Party, but was soon disillusioned. Nevertheless, years later, she was refused a US visa when she wanted to consume a grant she had obtained there. She lived in London for a while and studied philosophy, as a postgraduate student, under Ludwig Wittgenstein. When she moved to Oxford, to teach philosophy at St. Anne's College, she maintained a London residence in Kensington. Immediately after the war, in Belgium, she met Jean Paul Sartre, whose existentialist writings influeneced her deeply. She was also influenced by the ethics of the French mystic Simone Weil. It seems that Iris Murdoch's great love in her youth was a Czech Jewish poet, Franz Steiner, who died of a heart attack in 1952. She also had a brief affair with novelist Elias Canetti. In 1956, she married Oxford fellow John Bayley. For a while she taught philosophy and wrote – her first novel, *Under the net* (1954) was mistakingly labeled a novel of social protest and she was included by the critics in the Angry Young Men group – but, starting from 1963, she quit teaching and devoted all her energy to writing. She produced almost a novel a year, achieving a total of 27, so some critics (e. g. Lorna Sage) described her as a "Victorian writing machine" of sorts. Murdoch and John Bayley lived together, in their large, unruly Oxford house, until the novelist's death in 1999. Iris Murdoch's final years were darkened by Alzheimer's disease. John Bayley wrote a book about her suffering, entitled *An Elegy for Iris* (1998), followed *by Iris and her Friends: A Memoir of Memory and Desire* (1999). Iris Murdoch received a Cross of the British Empire in 1976 and was created Dame of the British Empire in the 1987 New Year's Honours List.

Most of Iris Murdoch's fiction is focussed on ethical and moral topics, partly due to her philosophical training, though she kept denying that philosophy, or the Catholic faith, had any effect upon her novels. At the same time she was careful to convey her message through a traditional kind of romance, accessible to a great number of readers, so one could contend that her work does not greatly depart from standard popular literature formulas. Her model was the novel practised by the great Victorian novelists, whom she frequentend constantly. "*She wanted*", wrote John Bayley in *Elegy for Iris*, "*through her novels, to reach all possible readers, in different ways and by different means: by the excitement of her story, its pace and comedy, through its ideas and its philosophical implications, through the numinous atmosphere of her own original and created world – the world she must have glimpsed as she considered and planned her first steps in the art of fiction*." So Murdoch's fiction is multy-layered and quite complex and one of the elements that have been sadly ignored is its humour. She based the plots of many of her novels on a re-working of myth and on intertextuality. An interesting observation made by the critics is that whereas her early novels tend to be short and sparsely written, in the

later works she rambles, becomes repetitious and overrethorical, and the novels usually extend to 500 pages or more. Murdoch stuck to conventional narrative formulas in most of her works, with the notable exceptions of *The Sea, the Sea* and *The Black Prince*, considered experimental novels, so she used a traditional chronology, partial omniscience, realistic portrayal of characters and background. Gothic elements and fantasy are also present and, as many of her novels tackle ethical, philosophical or moral topics, they have a tendency to become parabolical, though not to the extent that William Golding's books are allegorical. One of her favourite themes was the presence of religion in everyday life (which is given special development in *The Bell*), whilst she was also preoccupied with the plight of the artist in modern society (*The Sea, the Sea, The Black Prince, Jackson's Dilemma*). The world outlook that informs Murdoch's fiction is neo-Platonism.

Harold Bloom, who ranks some of Murdoch's novels alongside D. H. Lawrence's, provides a brief summary of the features of her fiction, in which the fictional, the philosophical and the religious artfully merge:

Was Murdoch too preoccupied with what her moral admirers call "the search for human goodness"? She was certainly a religious fabulist of a very original and unorthodox kind. By "religious' I mean something of that Romantic rationalism she found in Sartre but far more enduring in Plato. I don't mean the Hermetist or Gnostic strain that appears so often throughout Western literature […]. Murdoch is her own revisionist of Plato, and intends to be friendlier to imaginative literature than Plato was, but I surmise that her Platonic severity tended to flatten out her characters. She certainly was aware of this danger, argued against Plato on behalf of art and desired above all to create characters as unlike herself as Shakespeare had done.[108]

In her essay "Against Dryness", Murdoch divides novels into "journalistic" and "crystalline". The latter tend towards the formula of romance. Bloom explains why Murdoch preferred to use this form:

Yet it may be that we and the late Iris Murdoch mistook her form for the novel, when she generally writes prose romance, the cast-off precursor of the novel of Cervantes and all his followers down to Proust, Joyce and Mann. Religious fable, even of a Platonic kind, calls for romance, where sacred places, houses, landscapes, states of being count for more than personality, and romance thrives on incomplete and imperfect knowledge, since full knowledge destroys enchantment. ***The Sea, the Sea, The Good Apprentice*** *and the other strong Murdoch narratives rely upon magic, absurd passions, and gothic intrusions, and this is all in the mode of romance. Unselfing is inevitable in romance, where all identities are fluid.*

Austen, James, and Tolstoy were novelists: memorable characterization was crucial to their art. But great romance writers, like R. L. Stevenson, Kipling, G. K. Chesterton […] do not invest themselves in characters, but in story, imagination, visionary space. Murdoch is curiously mixed: she has the novelist's concern with moral imagination and the romancer's pragmatic disinterest in character. Her moral intensity and her London surfaces give us expectations appropriate to the realistic novel, but her personages belong to the typology of romance. There are her passionate, violent young women, sly and obsessive, who pursue narcissistic older men, who have great charm but

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[108] Harold Bloom, *Genius. A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds*, Warner Books, New York, 2002, p. 648.

little hold on reality, and are wavering skeptics. Then there are her older women, frequently unfulfilled and angry, and who fall in love with terrible suddenness. And there are Murdoch's mages, male Jewish charismatics, her "alien gods", as she once termed them. None of these types allows much individuation in personality, but they fit well into the cosmos of romance.

A very paradoxical Platonist, Murdoch may well have found her genius's appropriate form in her overplotted romance-novels, a very mixed genre, yet perfectly expressive of her highly individual genius."[109]

THE NOVELS:

The Sea, the Sea

The novel narrates the misadventures of Charles Arrowby, a famous and rather self-centred theatre director who retires to an isolated house by the sea in order to write his memoirs undisturbed. His plans are soon thwarted, however, as people from his past converge upon the scene. (There is an eerie feeling that by evoking these people Arrowby brings them back into his life.) Discovering that his first love, Hartley, is living nearby in apparent misery, Arrowby becomes obsessed with the idea of rescuing her. He sets about it with little real concern for her feelings or the intricacies of her marriage to Ben Fitch, a man who is jealous of her past, and who violently objects to Charlie's presence in the neighbourhood.

Further interruption is caused by Rosina Vamburgh, a former girl-friend of Charles's, who takes her revenge by 'haunting' him (this explains some, but not all, of the strange occurences in the house). Gilbert Opiau, a homosexual actor, whose attempts to set up house with another of Charles's former girl-friends, Lizzie Scherer, Charles has blocked, arrives, offering to act as a 'house-serf'. Seventeen-year-old Angela Godwin, step-daughter of Rosina's husband, unexpectedly writes to Charles and offers to have his baby. The Fitches's adopted son, Titus, comes to find out whether he really is, as Ben irrationally suspects, Charles's son, and accidentally drowns near the house.

Echoes of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* resonate throughout the novel and familiar Murdochian themes – obsessive love, the power of fate, death by water – abound. These are juxtaposed with Charles's poetic observations of his surroundings (particularly the ever-changing sea) and meticulous accounts of his often bizzare diet. The reader's expectations are frequently undermined, as Murdoch provides explanations for the seemingly irrational – even Charles's vision of a sea-monster, it is suggested, is simply an after-effect of his former addiction to LSD .

The inexplicable is provided, perhaps surprisingly, by James Artrowby, Charles's Buddhist cousin, whom he envied when they were children and who saves Charles's life after Rosina's husband, Peregrine Arbelow, has tried to kill him. Only in retrospect does Charles begin to perceive the extraordinary powers James must have exerted to save him from drowning and to interpret events in a more perspicacious manner. He acknowledges his responsibility – *"I had let loose my own demons, not least the sea-serpent of jealousy"* – and accepts the folly of his obsession with Hartley, *"a secret love which did not exist at all"*.

[109] Idem, p. 649.

Charles Arrowby, an enchanter and an artist, is "in favour of illusion", of "the trickery and magic of art" which fills people with "false hopes and empty dreams". He learns in the course of the novel the dangers of self-delusion, concluding:

'I have been in a state of illusion and caused much fruitless distress […] What a fantasist I have been myself! I was the dreamer … I the magician … reading my own text and not looking at the reality …'

DAVID LODGE
(b. 1935)

WORKS:

Novels:

The Picturegoers (1960)
Ginger, You're Barmy (1962)
The British Museum Is Falling Down (1965)
Out of the Shelter (1970)
Changing Places (1975) Hawthorden Prize, 'Yorkshire Post' Prize for Fiction
How far Can You Go? (1980) Whitbread Book of the Year Award
Small World: An Academic Romance (1984) Shortlisted for Booker Prize
Nice Work (1988) Shortlisted for Booker Prize
Paradise News (1991)
Therapy (1995)
Home Truths (1999)
Thinks … (2001)
Author, Author (2004)

Literary Criticism:

The Language of Fiction (1966)
The Novelist at the Crossroads and Other Essays (1971)
The Modes of Modern Writing (1977)
Working with Structuralism (1981)
Write on: Occasional Essays (1986)
After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism (1990)
The Art of Fiction (1992)
The Practice of Writing (1996)
Consciousness and the Novel: Connected Essays (2002)

LIFE: Born in the South of London, in Dulwitch, David Lodge attended a Catholic school and University College, London. He served in the Royal Army Corps between 1955 / 1957 and was then an employee of the British Council. In 1960 he became a

lecturer in English at the University of Birmingham and began his life-long literary friendship with Malcolm Bradbury. His first novel, ***The Picturegoers***, was published in the same year. He spent two years in the USA on a fellowship and then returned to the States in 1969 as a visiting professor at the University of California, Berkeley (which was to become Euphoric State, in ***Changing Places***). The novel ***Changing Places*** won two important fiction prizes in 1975. Lodge, who had published his first book of criticism, ***The Language of Fiction***, in 1966, became a professor of modern English Literature at Birmingham University in 1987, only to resign this position in 1987, when he was given the title of Honorary Professor. Since this early retirement, he has devoted all his time to writing fiction and criticism, producing thirteen novels, adaptations for TV (of his own books, or of Charles Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewitt*), stage plays (***The Writing Game*** and ***Home Truths***, both performed by the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 1990 and 1998 respectively), and nine books on literary theory and literary criticism.

Perhaps David Lodge's fiction should be discussed in the light of the theoretical precepts he establishes in his books of criticism. The most consistent of these is *The Modes of Modern Writing*, in which he starts from Roman Jakobson's distinction between 'metaphor' and 'metonimy', which is central to contemporary critical discourse. Although he seems skeptical at the beginning, Lodge is trying to put together a 'poetics of fiction': "What is needed is a single way of talking about novels, a critical methodology, a poetics or esthetics of fiction, which can embrace descriptively all the varieties of this way of writing .." *The Modes of Modern Writing* explores 20th century literature in terms of metaphor and synonymy: traditionally, realistic writing tends to be metonymic and modernist writing tends to be metaphoric. (In *Nice Work*, Robyn explains it to Vic in terms of cigarette brands: Silk Cut is metaphoric, Marlboro is metonymic). But literary texts are inevitably a mixed affair, so one can only speak of a metaphoric or metonymic 'dominant'. The major value of the book lies in Lodge's discussion of specific works and authors, where "the metaphor/metonimy distinction is at best an approximate guide." The essay on Joyce in this book is a masterpiece.

An influential piece of criticism by Lodge is the essay "The Novelist at the Crossroads", which looks at the state of the British and American novel in the late 1960s. The novelist is pictured as standing at a crossroads and hesitating as to which road to take: the broad, generous road of realism; the road of myth, fantasy and fabulation; the road of the non-fiction novel; the road of the metafictional novel. His idea was that the main road of realism would continue to be the most significant, but greatly enriched by the other possibilities. Commenting on his essay later, in 1992, Lodge remarks that the kind of pluralism he had been defending seemed to have become a genrally accepted fact of literary life in postmodernism.

In *Working with Structuralism* he defines European structuralism, as opposed to classical criticism. He argues that there are two kinds of post-structuralism, one formalist, which aspires to the status of science, and one ideological, which combines structuralism with ideas from Marxism, psychoanalysis and philosophy to analyze cultural phenomena and institutions as mediations of ideology. Jakobson, Levi-Strauss and Todorov would be representatives of the former, Foucault, Lacan and Derrida of the latter. Lodge's

allegiance in this book is clearly to the former, classical mode, though the latter rapidly rose to academic predominance.[110]

The Novels

The protagonist of ***The British Museum is Falling Down*** is Adam Appleby, a Catholic graduate student who spends most of his time in the Reading Room of the British Museum, working on a thesis about style in the modern novel. Adam is married and has three children – a fourth may be on the way and the family is rather hard up. The book was published at a time when there was much talk amongst Catholics about the ban on contraception being lifted. The treatment of sex in the literature Adam reads contrasts sharply with his personal experience: "literature", he observes, "is mostly about sex and not much about having children. Life is the other way around." The action of the novel, like that of *Ulysses*, is concentrated in one day, spent by Adam in and around the British Museum (the idea of the world as a library). There are lots of events which, though unrelated, follow one another in rapid succession. The novel draws on intertextuality, parodying such authors as Henry James, Franz Kafka, Virginia Woolf, Graham Greene. Adam reflects that so much human experience has been used up by the writers of the past that it is impossible both to distinguish fact from fiction, and to be original in the field of literature. At times, Adam finds himself responding to the the successive events and traumas of the day in the manner of a twentieth century novelist. Lodge weaves into the fabric of his novel the problem of 'the anxiety of influence' (Harold Bloom): "the sense every young writer must have of the daunting weight of the literary tradition he has inherited, the necessity and yet seeming impossibility of doing something in writing that has not been done before." One could argue that *The British Museum Is Falling Down* is essentially a parody of narrative modes, moods and styles. Like the 'Oxen of the Sun' chapter in *Ulysses*. The book actually ends with an interior monologue of Adam's wife, Barbara, which resembles that of Molly Bloom at the end of Joyce's novel, with the difference that whilst Molly says a definite 'yes' to life, Barbara, more cautious, utters a tentative 'perhaps', which, according to the author, is more in keeping with the mingled notes of optimism and resignation with which he wanted to end the novel.

Lodge was brought up by a Catholic mother, but he says the atmosphere at home was not very devout; morover, he did not have a large family or Catholic friends to reinforce the Catholic cultural code. But "the sense of being in the Church and at the same time something of an outsider can be traced in Lodge's novels, which combine detailed knowledge of the institution with cool observation."[111] His reading of Joyce (*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* was his favourite novel) taught him how to be critical of the excesses of the faith, whilst Graham Greene (an author he greatly admires) and Francois Mauriac offered examples of how the Catholic world view could cast a certain moral light on the doings of man, particularly in representing the average human being as sinner. Lodge's early novels all contain Catholic characters and catholic themes – the fate of the Catholic in a predominantly Anglican social milieu is, nevertheless, treated in a comic, rather than a serious manner. Of the so-called 'Catholic' novels,

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[110] Idem, pp. 51-53.

[111] Bernard Bergonzi, *David Lodge* (Writers and Their Work), Northcote House (in association with the British Council), Plymouth, 1995, p. 30.

mention should be made especially of *How Far Can You Go?*, a book that focuses on a group of young Catholic students in South London, on their spiritual growth and their love relationships. The central story is that of the couple formed by Michael and Miriam (a convert to Catholicism), and also that of Angela and Dennis. The transformation of the young priest, Father Austin Brierley, who gradually moves away from the Church, gaining a critical attitude towards the dogma and becoming, in the end, a sociologist, is another interesting narrative thread. The novel cuts rapidly from one individual couple to another and unashamedly uses authorial omniscience. "One of the most important characters is the narrator, whose voice is frequently heard. In time it becomes evident that he is a version of Lodge himself; he cross-refers to his other novels, and at the end of the book, when there is a round-up of what all the characters are doing, he says: ' I teach English literature at a redbrick university and write novels in my spare time, slowly, and hustled by history.'[…] The active role of the narrator in *How Far Can You Go?* means that the book contains a good deal of direct discussion of the transformations of Catholicism as well as showing them in the attitudes and behaviour of the characters. […] It asks how far can Catholics, or the Church, change and still retain anything identifiable as Catholic identity."[112]

The problem of how long one can cling to the Catholic faith in a secular, technological age is given further treatment in the novel *Paradise News*. Bernard Walsh, the protagonist of this novel, has abandoned both priesthood and the Catholic faith itself. His faith has never been too robust and Lodge carefully traces the intellectual and psychological process of the decline. The final break is prompted by sex, when Bernard, a 40 year old celibate and virgin, is led into an affair with a woman whom he is supposedly instructing in Catholicism. It ends disastrously for both of them. After he has left the priesthood, Bernard scrapes a modest living as an unbelieveing part-time lecturer in theology at a college in Rummidge. [..] He is a lonely and depressed figure, with few friends and more or less alienated from his family, who have found it difficult to forgive his abandonment of the priesthood."[113] These are the premises of the plot. Bernard has an estranged aunt who lives in Hawaii; she sends him a letter, asking him to persuade his father, a grumbling, reluctant Irishman, to pay her a visit, as she is incurably ill and wants to be reunited with what is left of her family. The two men (an odd pair!) leave Rummidge for Hawaii, where most of the convolutions of the plot take place. Bernard's hope is rekindled by this trip. And, indeed, in Hawaii he has a love affair with a woman, Yolande, who is about to divorce her academic husband who lives in continental USA. The novel presents an image of Hawaii as a kitch paradise – the title is borrowed from a tourist prospect – which, however, is associated with many human figurations of Pradise, including Shakespeare's magic island in *The Tempest*. If Bernard's adventures in Hawaii did not restore his faith, they have given him hope. As Bernard Bergonzi observes, the "tentatively happy ending of *Paradise News* emphasizes its afinities with the romance mode, rather than with the despairing realism of much modern fiction."[114]

The '***Campus Trilogy***'."The so-called 'campus novel' emerged in America in the nineteen-forties. America has many colleges and universities and novelists have found a

[112] Idem, pp. 36-37.
[113] Idem, p. 40.
[114] Idem, p. 43

niche in them as teachers of creative writing. It is tempting to see, as many of them have done, the university as a microcosm of the large society, though often physically isolated from it, where academics, brought together in oppressive proximity, may be struggling with each other for power and promotion, or having affairs with their students and colleagues. Power and sex, the traditional themes of fiction, are brought into high relief in the American campus fiction. In England there were proportionally fewer universities and they did not offer the same opportunities for writers. But an English version of the campus novel made a lively impact when Kingsley Amis published his first novel, *Lucky Jim*, in 1954. It was a wonderfully comic work, but it had its serious implications, and it brought into public consciousness a new setting – a minor English provincial university – and a new kind of hero, the iconoclastic young man with good academic qualifications, but a marked lack of sympathy for the traditional claims and attitudes of high culture. Lodge has acknowledged a substantial debt to Amis. There is a chapter on Amis in his first critical book, *The Language o f Fiction*."[115]

Lodge's own campus fiction consists primarily of three novels: *Changing Places*, *Small World* and *Nice Work*. Even though there is a continuity of setting and the characters migrate from one book to another, the novels were not concieved as a trilogz and each of them reamins thematically and formaly distinct.

Changing Places, subtitled 'A Tale of Two Campuses', chronicles, in parallel, the changes in the lives of two English Literature professors brought about by their half-year visiting appointments at each other's university, as part of an exchange agreement. The Englishman, Philip Swallow, a mild, unconfident, unsophisticated teacher, goes to Euphoric State University, in Esseph, Euphoria, USA, while his American colleague, the overconfident, energetic Morris Zapp, takes his place at the University of Rummidge, in England. (The universities are, of course, patterned on Berkeley, Cal., and the University of Birmingham.) Lodge uses the contrasts between Swallow and Zapp to exploit to fine comic effect a whole series of oppositions: English and American academia, the Midlands and the Bay Area, clashing cultures in general. *Changing Places* alternates rapidly between the respective adventures of Zapp in Rummidge and Swallow in Plotinus. They are both almost overcome with culture shock at the beginning, but eventually accomodate and begin to feel at home in their host countries, to the degree that they almost resent having to return home. The intricacies and frustrations of English university life are hilariously presented as the background of Zapp's unlikely adventures, while Swallow gradually finds out thet the American way of life suits him to a T, but also that the West Coast in the late sixties is much more dangerous than the idyllic America he had known several years before. "The novel's most obvious features are the wit and economy of language, and the rapidity and inventiveness with which the story proceeds. Lodge plays with modes of narrative described by Bakhtin, a crirtic whom he later discovered and admired. Authorial description at the beginning of the novel gives place to the correspondence between Zapp and Swallow and their respective wives. […] Then follows a section composed of newspaper reports and official university statements from Rummidge and Euphoric State, as Zapp and Swallow get caught up in student unrest on either campus. At the end of the novel, when Zapp and Swallow have not only exchanged

[115] Idem, p. 14.

jobs, but had had affairs with each other's wive, ythe four parties meet in New York to try and unravel the situation. This final episode is written as a film script …"[116]

"*Changing Places* is dominated by a pattern of binary oppositions, often of an ingenious and unexpected kind: yet within this pattern, so indicative of the author's will and interst (particularly in Anglo-American culture clashes), the characters are lifelike and free, in the central tradition of realist fiction. It is at the same time a work of great formal ingenuity and allusiveness and a story of recognizable people in recognizable places, dealing with familiar human dilemmas."

Changing Places is essentially a comedy based on coincidence and gentle caricature. It also succeeds in interesting the reader in its characters' emotional development, and offers some temperate reflections on the virtues and limitations of the 1960s "liberation".

The action of *Small World* is placed in Rummidge ten years after the events narrated in *Changing Places*. Philip Swallow has become a full professor, as he has managed to publish a book and the man who was holding the chair has died. He has lost part of his innocence and has developped a liking for young female students (flappers, Scott Fitzgerald would have called them). Morris Zapp has divorced Desiree, has become a poststructuralist and a member of the jet-set, travelling constantly to international conferences. If in the earlier novel Swallow and Zapp represented two different modes of academic culture, " … now they stand for opposed views of literary study – traditional humanism versus radical theory".[117]

Intertextuality is used here much more extensively than in the previous novel, and so are the metafictional elements. The book begins with a comparison between modern academic scholars rushing to conferences and Chaucer's Cantebury pilgrims. (The motto is from the 'General Prologue' to *The Canterbury Tales*.) The subtitle, 'An Academic Romance', alludes to Hawthorne and his thoughts on the romance form of narrative. And, though the novel starts in a conventional narrative fashion, a romance, indeed, it becomes. Morris Zapp flies in from America and gives a shocking lecture on 'Textuality and Striptease' – actually, a dazzling exposition of poststructuralist poetics. At Rummidge, he meets and befriends a young Irish scolar and poet, Persse McGarrigle, who becomes the notional protagonist of *Small World*. He falls deeply in love with a mysterious young woman, Angelica, who is as well-read as he is, has a good knowledge of contemporary critical theory and works on a dissertation on Romance. Intertextuality becomes a little too heavy-handed, as Angelica is patterned on the princess of that name who is a leading character in Ariosto's 16th century epic *Orlando Furioso*, and 'Persse' is derived from Percival, one of the outstinding knights of the Round Table and a symbol of male purity. After the opening in Rummidge, the story becomes global. Many more characters appear, mostly university people rushing off to literature conferences in various parts of the world and having brief love romances. The story moves forward with the rapid movement and quick alternations of scene that characterize Lodge's comic fiction. Lodge said: "As I worked at *Small World*, I became more and more interested in the romance idea, weaving in as many romance motifs as I could, and I very deliberately exploited the narrative codes of mystery and suspense. I wanted to have a lot of enigmas and points of uncertainty, and if you have a good many characters, you can naturally

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[116] Idem, p. 17.
[117] Ibidem.

create suspense by leavingone character and moving to another."[118] "*Small World* enacts ideas about the nature of narrative that Lodge was interested in as a critic; despite the prevailing air of fantasy and mystery, it also contains a substantial amount of travelogue fiction."[119]

Lodge's version of the Holy Grail that all the academics are in pursuit of in this novel is the UNESCO Chair of Literary Criticism, a highly-paid and prestigious appointment, with no particular duties. It is eventually gained by Kingfisher, and the novel ends in a modd of general reconcilliation. Persse's quest, however, continues> he has lost Angelica, who is engaged to a harvard academic, and is off again in pursuit of another elusive female. Lodge remarks of Persse's continuing quest: "I also remembered Northrop Frye's observation that in its most primitive form romance doesn't end: a character has one adventure after another until the author dies of exhaustion." Umberto Eco, in his preface to the French translation, calls *Small World* an 'academic picaresque'.[120]

Like the romance world, *Small World* is eminently episodic, rambling and circular, so that the hero ends up where he started from: with the prospect of another quest ahead of him.

The academic world that Lodge describes is quite dispiriting. Books published and ignored, ideas stolen, careers made or marred by mere hazard, aborted love affairs, marriages broken or kept up for the sake of convenienece, student – professor love affairs. Lodge gossips at ease and invents with gusto.

Nice Work is a slightly different novel, much narrower in scope and less continuously funny. It is set in Rummidge and rooted in contemporary history. The action happens ten years after the events in *Small World* and "shows the effects of the Thatcherite culture of market forces and competition and general anti-intellectualism, primarily on the city and university of Rummidge, but, by implication, on society at large."[121] For this tale, Lodge creates a pair of brand new characters: Robyn Penrose and Vic Wilcox, representing the academe and the humanities, and the industrial world respectively. Robyn is a highly professional temporary lecturer in the department headed by professor Philip Swallow. She has little hope of securing a permanent job in the financially stricken university. She is a dedicated follower of the intellectual fashions of the day: Marxism, feminism, pschoanalysis, poststructuralism. She is naïve and narcissistic and remarkably ignorant of the ways in which society really works. She specializes in the 'industrial novel' of the early Victorian period, but knows next to nothing about industry. Her boss, Swallow, arranges for her to spend one day a week in the company of an industrial executive, whose 'shadow' she must become, in order to learn things about industry and trade. The "Industry Year Shadow Scheme" is a Government initiative meant to help academics to understand the practical aspects of life. Vic Wilcox, the man chosen for this purpose, is a hard-working engineer, the managing director of a Rummidge engineering plant. He is tough and energetic, a skilled professional who enjoys the material rewards of his work, but is also trapped in a joyless marriage and conscious of his cultural limitations. *Nice Work* tells the story of Robyn and

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[118] Quoted in Idem, pp. 20-21.
[119] Idem, p. 21.
[120] Quoted by Bergonzi in Idem, p. 22.
[121] Idem, p. 23.

Vic's enforced relationship over several weeks, during which each educates the other. The initial hostility changes into mutual respect and understanding, then into liking. Each of the two protagonists learn how to respect and appreciate the values represented by the other. Robyn contrasts her bookish image about life in England's industrial towns with the realities of economic life highlighted by Vic. Wilcox, in his turn, mellows out, becomes more considerate and more understanding, as he begins to value the insights into the human heart and psyche that literature and the arts make possible. Through Robyn, Lodge manages to develop a whole range of intellectual preoccupations, from industrialism to feminism, from economic theory to literary history and literary criticim. The author's favourite distinction between metaphor and metonymy is used in the famous "Silk Cut" advertisment scene, in which Robyn's permanent inclination to interpretation is contrasted with Vic's common sense. Robyn has sex with Vic during a brief business visit they take together to Germany, making the man think he has fallen in love with her. But as she does not believe in romantic love, she quickly determines Vic to give up his budding plans of divorcing his wife and marrying her. They remain fond of each other and good friends.

"For all its considerable human interest, *Nice Work* is also a novel of ideas. The arguments between Vic and Robin reflect their personalities, but they do more than that: they tap into a sustained debate in English culture about the effects of industrialism. Robyn is the heir to distinguished intellectual tradition of hostility to industrial civilization, which extends from Carlyle to Leavis. Vic presents the opposing position, that without national wealth, won in a harsh competitive world, none of the academic values and quality of life that Robyn takes for granted could be sustained. […] Similar debates were enacted in the Victorian industrial novels which were sometimes known, in Carlyle's expressive phrase, as 'Condition of England' novels; *Nice Work* is a latter-day addition to the genre. References to those books abound in Lodge's novel, in accounts of Robyn's teaching and scholarship, and in quotations from them which provide epigraphs to the separate sections. Several of the novels contain binary divisions akin to those in *Nice Work*: there is the opposition in Disraeli's *Sybil* between the 'two nations' of the rich and the poor; and in Dickens's *Hard Times* between the school and the circus, or more generally between head and heart; and, most fundamentally, the division indicated in the title of Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*. Lodge brings the argument up to date, in the contrast between factory and university, industrialist and intellectual, practice and theory. Robyn and Vic embody these oppositions, whilst retaining their human uniqueness."[122]

Therapy. The main character is a successful television scriptwriter, Tubby Passmore, who is very pleased that his thirty-year long marriage has been happy when all the other marriages around him have been crumbling. He is flabbergasted when his wife announces that she is leaving him, not for another man, but because she cannot stand him any more. Passmore, who is pushing sixty, tries desperately to reconstruct his love-life. He falls in love again with Maureen, his first love, who has had a fate similar to his. But she tells him that, as a Catholic, she will not divorce her husband. Lodge provides a surrogate happy ending by intimating that Tubby, Maureen and her husband have become good friends. The 'therapy' of the title refers both to the curative virtues of writing, of creation in general, and to the panacea of love.

[122] Idem, p. 25.