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**CAMPUS NOVELS IN AN AGE OF THE GLOBAL CAMPUS:
ASPECTS OF THE SELF/OTHER DIALOGUE IN THE CAMPUS
NOVELS**

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Abstract:

*The paper emphasizes the same academic world in David Lodge's and Malcolm Bradbury's novels. With good reason critics have noticed similitudes between the two writers' works due to their very good and supportive relationship. David Lodge and Malcolm Bradbury are academics writing about academics and the most prolific writers in the campus genre in Britain. Analysing David Lodge's novels (*Small World*, *Changing Places: A Tale of Two Campuses*, *Nice Work*) and Malcolm Bradbury's novels (*Eating People Is Wrong*, *Stepping Westward*, *The History Man*, *Rates of Exchange*) the paper highlights the idea of the two authors that the world is a global campus. The most interesting aspects of the self/other dialogue in the campus novels may be found where the academic community and the world outside connect, on the border where attitudes converge or clash, and, eventually, where there is a potential for new meanings to arise.*

Key-words: campus novel, academic world, self/other dialogue, society, contemporary history, education, fiction

The popularity of campus fiction proves there is a huge interest in reading about the academy. Campus novels are largely read and appreciated off campus. Between 1954 and 1979, nearly 200 works of campus fiction were published in Britain alone, not to mention an American output of well over 400 titles (Carter 32).

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 (Bergonzi 21).

David Lodge and Malcolm Bradbury are academics writing about academics and the most prolific writers in the campus genre in Britain today. The readers may in fact base their concept of the British academic world partly on views gathered from these two authors' bestsellers.

Lodge has acknowledged a substantial debt to Amis. There is a chapter on Amis in his first critical book, *Language of Fiction*, and in his *Introduction* to the Penguin edition of 1992 he re-examines *Lucky Jim* in a measured but still admiring way.

Academics certainly enjoy reading about themselves and their own world. But in view of the limited number of readers with first-hand experience of university life, for the readers outside the 'Ivory Tower' the reasons must be sought elsewhere. Perhaps part of the fascination lies in a curiosity about the academic world. The image of a narrow and confined world is constantly underlined by the clear-cut social and spatial division featured in this genre, thus reinforcing the tensions between the 'inner' world of academia and society at large.

It is evident that for the image of the university as an Ivory Tower to emerge at all, there must exist the 'other' to relate to. The alternative would be to view the world as a global campus. The most interesting aspects of the self/other dialogue in the campus novels may be found where the academic community and the world outside connect, on the border where attitudes converge or clash, and, eventually, where there is a potential for new meanings to arise.

Regarding this concern, Lodge has confessed in an interview with Lidia Vianu:

I did not operate in the University as a novelist – I did not read my work on campus or discuss it with my students or teach creative writing (at Birmingham – I did elsewhere). I operated as a serious, committed academic. The novels, which often satirized or carnivalised the academic world, belonged to a separate compartment of my life. It was a rather artificial distinction, and I was

quite glad when I was able to take early retirement in 1987 to become a full-time writer. (Vianu, *Desperado Essay – Interviews* 206)

The well known campus novel *Changing Places: The Tale of Two Campuses* (1975) was a great success when it appeared, and one of Lodge's best novels. It is focused on the relationship between the camp of the academy and the other camp, the literary world outside. It highlights Lodge's relation to these two camps, both of which he claims to be part of. He wrote:

I have always regarded myself as having a foot in both camps – the world of academic scholarship and higher education, and the world of literary culture at large, in which books are written, published, discussed and consumed for profit and pleasure in all senses of these words. [*After Bakhtin* 37]

The story takes place in 1969, as two professors, the American Morris Zapp and the Englishman Philip Swallow swap places at each other's universities. Swallow goes to Zapp's Euphoric State University (California, inspired from Berkeley) and Zapp goes to Swallow's University of Rummidge in England's Midlands, (inspired from Birmingham). On the first page the narrator describes it as 'this duplex chronicle'.

The whole work is conceived on binary oppositions. Lodge uses the contrast between Zapp and Swallow – who only meet in the final pages of the novel – to exploit the fine comic effect of a whole series of oppositions: English and American academia; the Midlands and the Bay Area; clashing cultures in general.

Philip Swallow and Morris Zapp, Lodge confessed:

...had originally represented two academic cultures, and I thought they could now represent two different positions in the controversy about literary theory. I thought they would be minor characters, but as things worked out, they assumed more important roles. My main problem was to maintain continuity in a very different kind of novel without it becoming bizarre. But also, it's a different kind of novel, much more playful, with more literary allusion in it. (Haffenden 155)

The novel explores the experiences of two professors (and their respective wives), who become reciprocally aware of how much their life style and their set of values, inside and outside the Academe, owe to what they progressively recognize as one's own and the other's national identity and character. Literary criticism, too, is a distinct feature of national identity: Zapp is a champion of specialization, while Swallow despises theory as something un-English. Swallow sees the Americans as being better off, but not having a better life than the English. They are more cynical, and he is uncomfortable with the way they place the pursuit of their own ends above nearly everything. Zapp sees England as gloomy, poor, shabby and boring, linked to welfare solidarity and unaware of the power of free enterprise. He is impressed by family bonds, the warmth of human relationships and the survival of moral scruples. Somewhere in the background students rebel, feminism is beginning, US consumerism is rampaging, and the prominent English welfare state is becoming more and more worn out. In the foreground the comparison between the two worlds of Academe, English and American, becomes a microcosm for the two nations as a whole.

In the next novel, *Small World* (1984), Euphoric State University is only one of a number of invented institutions that provide conference delegates whose elaborate journeyings, meetings and *rencontres* form the basis of the plot. Like Euphoric State University, Rummidge is in this novel a minor locale; and it is only at the very end of the third novel, *Nice Work* (1988), that Euphoric State University plays any part, offering, via Professor Zapp, to the novel's heroine, Robyn Penrose, a book contract and a job (of which she only accepts the former). Rummidge, however, has resumed institutional centre stage in this book. It is set firmly in Mrs. Thatcher's Britain.

The ancillary creations are, as expected, largely confined to the novel *Small World*. There is a university at Darlington, one at Limerick, one in Queensland, one in Ankara. There is also a significant UNESCO chair of literary criticism, paying US \$ 100,000 a year tax-free salary, promising lavish provisions of office staff, unlimited travel, no students to teach, no papers to grade, no committees to chair. This UNESCO professorship represents the apotheosis, the place where Lodge suggests (and perhaps fears) the University is going.

The UNESCO chair, is foreshadowed by Zapp's analysis of the developing university. 'The day of the single, static campus is over', he declares, 'as long as you have access to a telephone, a Xerox machine and a conference grant fund, you're OK, you've plugged into the only campus that really matters – the global campus' (63). Such a campus has no place on it for students or for teaching, although Zapp himself confesses that he seldom goes into his existing university 'except to teach my courses'. By the time the heroes get to the UNESCO

chair, the academic function has vanished. The Chair is the 'pinnacle' of academic achievement 'not merely because of the wealth and privilege the chair would confer on the man who occupied it, but also because of the envy it would arouse in the breasts of those who did not. No one condemns it, all aspire to it' (121).

Philip Swallow's Rummidge University, the one he shares with Robyn Penrose, is at the other end of the scale, although by the third novel we may observe some convergence, for Swallow himself has long embarked on the conference trail, and has unrealistic hopes to get the UNESCO chair. Students at Rummidge are less well taught, not only because of financial stringency, but because their teachers are becoming more involved in research and writing and technology, which divert them from teaching. Robin Dempsey, who has gone to a drab, industry and technology related, new university at Darlington, spends all his time with an analytical computer that not only reduces literary criticism to verbal analysis, but provides him with personal advice: the machine is both his academic and his personality support system. He relies neither upon his intuition and intellect to exercise his profession, nor on the counsel of other human beings for his life (*Small World* 182, 186).

Nevertheless Lodge points out quite sharply that there is a continuing English university emphasis upon teaching. Zapp, on arriving at Rummidge, is astounded to read Swallow's review of his students, "describing their emotional, psychological and physiological peculiarities ... in intimate detail". 'What kind of man was this that seemed to know more about his students than their own mothers? And to care more, by the sound of it' (*Changing Places* 63).

Lodge describes a picture of the university becoming more and more a corporation for management advancement. In *Nice Work* the juxtaposition of Rummidge University and Pringle's factory affirms the symbiosis. Towards the end of the book, Robyn and Vic Wilcox, who have had sex on a business trip to Frankfurt, and have exchanged roles as visitors to each other's institutions, muse upon the relations between industry and the University. 'It should be a two-way process' says Vic. 'We in industry have a lot to learn too'. 'No way', says Robyn; but she has already observed parallels between Wilcox's management meetings and her tutorials. Later on she accepts the application of commercial principles to collegiate institutions and vice versa, even though she does so unwillingly.

In Lodge's novels the relationship between university and society is dominated by money. Lodge's universities are all state institutions – neither private nor denominational. As such, they are subjected to state control – whether it be over a demonstration, an industry-linked programme, a style of building, or supply of funds. Lodge accepts this, as he must, and

indeed gives no indication that he considers it wholly a bad thing. Even financial adversity brings forth virtues – in curriculum rationalisation, and in enforced relationships with the non-academic world.

The same academic world can be found in Malcolm Bradbury's novels. With good reason critics have noticed similitudes between the two writers' works due to their very good and supportive relationship. In this respect David Lodge confessed in a large interview to John Haffenden, in March 1984:

I think it was essential that we separated when he left Birmingham to go to East Anglia, because we are both rather imitative writers. I sometimes write a line that I realize Malcolm could have written, but I think the ultimate structure and drift of our respective types of fiction are actually very different. (165)

Although Bradbury's four novels are all closely related to the academic scene, too, Morace noticed, he seems to have been taken more seriously as an original voice by the critical establishment:

Eating People Is Wrong (1959) was seen as a more weighty, even if not wholly 'angry', follow-up to Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954); while *The History Man* (1975) with its portentous Goya dust-jacket, hit the headlines at just the right moment, echoing popular disquiet about the permissive society, 'sociology' and the new universities. (Its limited cast and single-campus setting also made it ideal television material). (79)

Unlike David Lodge, all the novels of Malcolm Bradbury were inspired from or had subject-matters in direct connection with the academic world. His first novel, *Eating People Is Wrong*, written while Bradbury was still a student and published when he was twenty-seven years old, was read and reviewed under the sign of Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*. Referring to this, James Gindin wrote: 'In spite of all the critical comparisons and interlocking references, Bradbury's satire is different from Amis's, Bradbury is always more concerned with issues, less implicitly committed to pragmatic success in the world or to mocking contemporary forms of incompetence' (91). In *Eating People Is Wrong*, Bradbury discusses the value of a

liberal education and implicitly emphasizes the idea that many undergraduates in the environment of higher education attend university not out of any love for their subject, but because a degree gets you a better job. Thus, a secondary character, professor Carfax, states that 'a provincial university is just a modern version of the workhouse – we're trainers of the aspiring bourgeoisie' (43).

In his second novel, *Stepping Westward*, also focused on the academic world, the new protagonist James Walker (compared at one point to 'a stout predatory pigeon') is a 'slightly thyroidic, very shambling person in his early thirties, victimized by the need for twelve hours' sleep a day' (12). He is, like his creator, an English liberal and (like the author conjured by reviewers of *Eating People Is Wrong*) a not-so-angry-young-novelist who traveled to the United States. When Walker receives an invitation to become writer-in-residence for a year at an American university, he interprets this invitation as a validation of his existence as a writer. As his name suggests, Walker is on the move, but slowly and uncertainly, beset by many of the same liberal doubts that at once ennoble and paralyse Treece. To go to the United States, for instance, means leaving his wife and a young daughter behind; his liberation from England and all it represents, including Walker's awareness of his own limitations. His English past hides below the surface of his American present, and as a result he is unable to adapt to life in America. Bernard Froelich is another manifestation of the *idea* of education in America, and his name suggests an ambivalence. The Germanic resonance of his name means literally: gay, cheerful. His cheerfulness is as ambiguous as his reasons for bringing Walker to Party: to further his book, part of which concerns Walker's fiction; to explode the complacency of his departmental colleagues, especially his chairman, Harrison Bourbon, who would reduce art 'to simple order'.

We need to remind ourselves that the author of *Stepping Westward* was also the author of a doctoral dissertation entitled *American Literary Expatriates in Europe: 1815 to 1950*, as well as a teacher who 'throughout the fifties ... shuttled the Atlantic', who was offered faculty appointments on both sides, fascinated by an America that seemed (as he pointed out in his *Introduction to American Studies*) at once a utopia and a dystopia. For Bradbury, America and England are not merely different geographical locations; they represent contrasting metaphors and alternative ways of perceiving life. Just as a 19th century American writer such as Henry James was drawn to Europe by the richness of its history, the British writer was drawn to America by its boundless energy.

If *Stepping Westward* is an ambivalent portrait of America and of American academic education, the next novel – *The History Man* – published ten years later, deals with the

problem that this ambivalence implies. Professor Howard Kirk is the essential character, the centre towards which all the others gravitate and around which they revolve. He is an ambiguous character in a double sense. On the one hand he is the novel's most fully realized, rounded figure, and on the other hand he is a walking abstraction, a dehumanised history man, a man of his time. Howard possesses a 'passion to make things happen', to order the chaos, to make reality (a reality full of theories and action but devoid of people and values). As several commentators have noticed, it is a novel in which there is a kind of crisis in the relation between fiction and reality, a tension between paradigmatic form and contingent reality. This crisis is dramatised, in *The History Man*, in the conflict between Kirk, 'the high priest of paradigmatic and entirely abstract History' (Kermode 74) and Annie Callendar, who (as her name suggests) represents the escape from the plot of History (as Kirk defines it) to the freedom of individual days.

One of the researchers of Bradbury's work properly explained the character of Kirk: 'His quasi-Marxist quest constantly to preside over history's cutting-edge denies earlier models of humanity (and fiction) any chance of validity' (Valentine Cunningham 528).

Bradbury's third novel appears in his fourth as well; the absence of any copies of *The History Man* from the bookstalls at Heathrow airport ensures its presence in *Rates of Exchange*. One of Howard Kirk's colleagues from the earlier book makes his way into the later novel in a similar fashion. He is the Dr. Petworth, with whom the Dr. Petworth of *Rates of Exchange* is twice mistaken for. Bradbury considers narratively what the rate of exchange metaphor both denotes and connotes. There is the literal exchange of currencies, as well as the figurative exchanges of various kinds – economic, cultural, diplomatic, linguistic etc.

Rates of Exchange gives comic shape to the possible tragedy of contemporary history. As Julian Rees wrote, the novel is 'humorous in his confusion, but tragic in his hopelessness. Bradbury shows him groping for identity in a world that defies comprehension' (Literary Review, May, 1983).

But Bradbury explained that it was not his authorial intention. He mentioned that he was interested 'in the idea of writing a book which doesn't have a central character'. Howard Kirk is central to *The History Man*. He is a kind of anti-character. In *Rates of Exchange*, the central character, professor Petworth invited by the British Council to deliver a series of conferences in an Eastern European country, is described by someone else in the book as *not a character in the historical sense*. Bradbury himself states that this 'is rather against British habit'. Since on the whole the tradition of the British novel is to assume that 'there is a significant relationship between a substantial ego and a working society' (Haffenden 39).

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