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*Creative Writers on Campus: Dead Spies, Living Lies,  
1593 to the Present*

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It strikes me that we talk, as creative writers on campus, too much in the contemporary. It strikes me that we talk too often as if education in the writing arts is something we recently invented. As if, not only have we invented it but that we children of the twentieth century, perhaps in this generation or the one before ours, have taken on a divine duty to defend it. It strikes me that we often talk naively in contemporary universities and colleges about our attempts to put creative writing on equal footing to that enjoyed in such institutions by hard science research and even harder business practice. That we equally give little real attention to the relationship between the production of original creative writing works on campus and the place of the modern university as the home of original textual criticism. And it strikes me, in all this, that we are missing the point.

History, the great historiographer Fernand Braudel once said, is 'a web of problems...a fleeting spectacle' (Braudel 1980: 10). The history of creative writing in universities is perhaps the first of these, but not the second.

When in circa 1587, Christopher Marlowe - writing while undertaking his MA in Divinity at the University of Cambridge - began *Tamburlaine*, he was not trail-blazing but joining a tradition that stretched considerably into the past, and *today* considerably in front of him. In fact, the history of creative writing on campus, in the modern period, or the period from the Renaissance to the present, can be traced to the development of secular book history at the very opening of modernity - that is, it can be traced some 700 years back.

George Gascoigne, another Cambridge student, says in *The Steele Glas*, published eleven years earlier than Marlowe's writing of *Tamburlaine*:

Pray for the nurses of our noble realme  
I meane the worthy universities

And Cantabridge shall have the dignitie  
Whereof I was an unworthy member once. (quoted in Wood  
1848: 435)

In this, Gascoigne is not merely reliving his student days, but talking of a period of his life which 'nursed' his creative talents, the education which, as it turns out, he truly valued.

Gascoigne, born either in 1530, 1539 or 1542, depending on whose history you follow, later transferred to Grays-Inn where he continued his studies, but now in municipal law. In his dedication of 'The Hermit's Tale' to Elizabeth the First, he emphasises his creative writing education. He writes:

...such Italian as I have learned in London and such Latin  
as I forgot at Cambridge, such French as I borrowed in  
Holland and such English as I stole in Westmoreland, even  
such and no better have I poured before you. (quoted in  
Wood 1848: 435)

We're not to know whether the Queen was thrilled by Gascoigne's admission of tardiness here, but certainly many students since have followed Gascoigne's example in forgetting everything they have ever learnt.

Not surprisingly, Gascoigne didn't complete his Grays-Inn studies but went on to become a soldier and a traveller, being what Anthony Wood described in 1691 as (a man with):

...a rambling and unfixed head...[who] went into France to  
visit the fashions of the royal court there, where he fell in  
love with a Scottish dame. At length being weary of those  
vanities, and his rambles in other countries, he returned into  
England, and retiring to Grays-inn again, was esteemed by  
all ingenious men there, to be a person of breeding,  
eloquent and witty, the most passionate among them to  
bemoan and bewail by his dexterous pen the perplexities of  
love... (Wood 1848: 435)

Among Gascoigne's works are *Weedes*, described by Wood as 'poems, so called, with several things intermix'd in prose' (Wood 1848: 436); a tragic-comedy, *The Glass of Government* (1575); *The Devises*; and *The delectable history of sundry Adventures passed by Dan Barthelmew of Bath*. Gascoigne died in 1577.

Of course, what we might truly ask about Marlowe's or Gascoigne's day-to-day education at Cambridge is: 'But were these sixteenth-century writers actually taught *creative* writing or what we might call 'literary' criticism on campus?'

I think, only in the very narrowness sense of higher education could we say: 'No'.

Marlowe, of course, was a complex individual, the second son of a Kentish shoemaker, a paid-up pensioner as a student at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, who later travelled to the continent, perhaps in the service of the Queen, was deported from Holland for passing off forged gold coins, and died in a brawl while on bail, all of which seems to have had not an insignificant connection to his work as a spy uncovering

Catholic plots against Elizabeth the First, and in the service of Sir Francis Walsingham.

A handsome man with grey eyes and a moustache, Marlowe not only wrote plays but translated the works of classic Greek scholars. He was a man-of-letters whose one published play during his lifetime was written anonymously, in order to avoid almost certain condemnation, and whose translation of Ovid was sent by the Bishop of London to be publicly burned. Like everything Marlowe did, his creative and critical sense was rarely held back by the will of authorities.

Marlowe was, not unexpectedly, said to be hot-tempered and provocative. His motto was: 'That which nourishes me destroys me'.

Education in the writing arts has not changed that much since the birth of the university, certainly not since the time of Marlowe and Gascoigne, and not really since the secularisation of books.

It was, in fact, universities that created the secular book trade. The book trade became a 'licensed appendage of the university, consisting of stationers, scribes, parchment makers, paper makers, bookbinders, and all those associated with making books' (Clement 1985: 317).

By the time Gutenberg began inventing his printing press in 1436 - developing it, I might add, from the wine press in the wine region of the Rhine Valley (and what better writerly connection could there be?) - and using it with a series of blocks and letters from 1440 onwards... by that time *already* the writing arts were well associated with universities.

Of course, then, on 30 September 1452, Gutenberg's Bible was produced and it was the first book to be printed in volume. From then on in, creative writing was no longer destined to be the stuff of individual scribes and slow-but-steady copyists; it was, in effect, destined to be one of the components of the ever-expanding book market.

Even today, the publishing industry, in its traditional paper-based form, the form that can be traced back to Gutenberg, continues to expand, despite the impact of non-paper-based technology.

*That which nourishes me destroys me.* The relationship of writer to critic and, indeed, critic to creative writer has hovered in that dark and sometimes hidden history of our universities, between nourishing and destroying. A system of mentoring, discussing, criticising, responding and, ultimately, publishing work for the recognition or ridicule of peers remains the principal method of educating creative writers world-wide. Likewise, the role of the critic in giving encouragement or in discouraging both individual creative writers and creative writing trends or movements continues to function in a large part in a Marlowesque world - spying on the work of writers and forming ideas which, sometimes more, and sometimes less, find their way into the avenues of our common opinion.

We have to remember, of course, that the formalising of the relationship between creative writer and the academic critic did not come about until relatively recently in the history of the writing arts. As Andrew Delbanco points out in his wonderful article 'The Decline and Fall of Literature': the 'scholar of Scottish and English ballads Francis James Child was appointed to the first chair of English literature at Harvard in 1876; the English honors degrees was not established in Oxford until 1894'

(Delbanco 1999: 8). Colin Evans adds, in *English People: the Experience of teaching and learning English in British Universities*, that:

...the rise of English is part of a modern phenomenon of professionalization and institutionalization... [C]ertain events have disproportionate significance: the founding of Chairs, first in London, 1828, 1835; then in Scotland, 1862, 1865, 1893... (Evans 1993: 12)

It is fair to say that *formal* relationships between literary scholars and creative writers are one thing; *informal* ones are, and have been, quite another.

While the criteria by which academic *information* is provided to potential students - things like 'subject choices' and 'degree programmes' - have been affected holistically by the changing nature of higher education (on which I'll say more shortly), the interaction between individual critics and creative writers on campus, and budding writers in the form of students, has not fundamentally altered.

This interaction continues to involve an examination and a celebration of the 'process' and 'products' of the writing arts through the meeting of like minds. Creative writing on campus is - as Frank Conroy noted in his introduction to *The Eleventh Draft* (1999) - 'a test of character as well as a test of talent' (Conroy 1999: xi). Often, as Marlowe's own history shows, the idea that creative and critical talent are by divine will situated in two separate beasts is quite a false assumption. And the university experience has *always* supported the interaction and development of both talents.

Not everyone, for example, has been like Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who ran away from the University of London after being rejected by a woman and joined a horse regiment where he refused to say very much at all about his background. The surgeon of regiment, pushing Coleridge for information about himself, came to the conclusion that: 'Instead of being an odd fish, I suspect he must be a stray bird from the Oxford or Cambridge aviary' (in Sutherland 1975: 155).

There have been a lot of stray birds from university aviaries worldwide, some of them solely creative writers, some of them not: Dr Samuel Johnson, for example, who studied Greek and Metaphysics at Pembroke College, Cambridge, but left after 14 months and didn't take his degree due to a lack of funds. Another: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who studied law at the University of Leipzig, where he didn't complete his degree due to illness, and at the University of Strasbourg, where his thesis was rejected. This didn't prevent him, as it turned out, from working briefly as a lawyer and calling himself, quite illegally, 'Doctor Goethe'. And then, of course, there is Gustave Flaubert, who was expelled from college at the age of 18, but did manage also to study law in Paris, though he failed to take his finals and didn't qualify after suffering the first of what was to be a lifetime of epileptic fits.

Then, perhaps, there is the lesser known story of Samuel Daniel, who is described in Anthony Wood's history of writers and bishops who have had their education at the University of Oxford in the following way:

Samuel Daniel, the most noted poet and historian of all time, was born of a wealthy family in Somersetshire, and at 17 years of age, in 1579, became a commoner of Magdalen Hall, where he continued about three years, and improved

himself much in academical learning by the benefit of an excellent tutor. But his geny being more prone to easier and smoother studies, than in pecking and hewing at logic, he left the university without honour of a degree, and exercised it much in English history and poetry, of which he then gave several ingenious specimens. (Wood 1848: 268).

There is an entire flock of other escaped birds just like Samuel Daniel: Scott Fitzgerald, who went to Princeton, but didn't take a degree; John Milton, expelled from Christ's College, Cambridge and one of the last Cambridge students to be publicly flogged; Edgar Allan Poe, expelled from the University of Virginia in 1826 due to gambling debts; Jonathan Swift, who attended Trinity College, Dublin, but because of his unruly behaviour only received his degree 'by special grace'. And finally - perhaps most famously - Percy Bysshe Shelley who studied at University College, Oxford, but was in trouble after only a year when he and his friend, Thomas Hogg, published a pamphlet entitled 'The Necessity of Atheism'.

It seems almost, from this evidence, that the principal requirement for becoming a great writer, whether creative or critical, is a failure to engage entirely with the university system - to be, in some sense, a rebel against academe. Yet there is as much, if not more evidence, to counter this argument.

Perhaps it's not really a surprise to find in 1638 a poet such as Henry Vaughan, based at Jesus College, Oxford, writing in his poem 'On Sir Thomas Bodley's Library':

Th' hast made us all thine heirs; whatever we  
Hereafter write, 'tis thy posterity.  
This is thy monument! here thou shalt stand  
Till the times fall in their last grain of sand. (Manley 1992: 15)

Vaughan striking a pose here for the longevity of writing itself.

Some years later, the Nobel Prize winner William Golding spent time studying in close proximity indeed to the Bodleian, though not at the same college as Vaughan. But the list of creative writers who have begun or continued their careers as critical scholars at Oxford is in many ways indicative of the writers who have been educated and continue to be educated in their craft at many other universities: T.S. Eliot, Sir Phillip Sydney, W.H. Auden, Charles Dodgson, Thomas Hughes, William Morris, Edward Thomas, Dr Seuss, Alan Bennett, Graham Greene, Aldous Huxley, Neville Shute, Matthew Arnold, Elizabeth Jennings, Iris Murdoch...and so on.

Again we must ask: 'But were any of these students actually *educated*, in a formal sense, in *creative* writing while they were at university?'

And I would say: 'All of them were.'

To continue the Oxford case: Graham Greene, for example, published his collection of 'student poetry' *Babbling April* in 1925 as he finished his term reading modern history. But there are many other writers, from many other universities, who give us similar scenarios: the early work of Ezra Pound, Caryl Churchill, Ian McEwan or Jane Smiley. Also the work of the

wonderful Peruvian writer and sometime politician, Mario Vargas Llosa, who says:

Thus it was with (my novel) *The Time of the Hero*. I tried to write a novel based on that experience when I was in Lima at the university. I could not do it, even though I tried many times. But in 1958 I won a scholarship to Madrid to do my Ph.D dissertation and started to write the novel immediately after arriving in that city. (Vargas Llosa 1991: 44)

From these kinds of personal histories we can expand into a general note on the confident starts that writing careers, begun while in university or college education, have often experienced. In this, we begin to see how much the notion of 'teaching the writing arts' needs to extend to the heart of what that *teaching* has always actually involved: the creation of an environment in which these arts can flourish *because they are valued*. And this recognition of value owes as much to the development of academe in the twentieth century as the site of the *highest* level of formal critical engagement with literature, as it does to the university as the historical site of creative achievement.

Jerome J. McGann picks up on one element of this in his book, *The Textual Condition*, when he talks about authors' intentions. He says:

The point is that author's intentions are always operating along with non-authorial intentions, that each presupposes the other, and that no text came into being, or could come into being, without interactions between the two. The theoretical effort to erase this fundamentally interactive process - to imagine writing and the production of texts as a solitary activity - is not so much mistaken as it is a *highly specialised way* of imagining the nature of texts. (McGann 1991: 66, my italics)

And that, indeed, has been the case. It has taken highly specialised forms of criticism to separate creative writers from their critics. It would be wrong to place the blame for this on any particular critical school. But, I think it is safe to say, at least in some proportion, that the problem has been created by a separation of biographical information, personal histories and private lives, as well as agential social histories, from the textual artefacts that they have produced.

In other words, what McGann talks about as criticism which has separated *some-time author* from *some-time editor*, I see as a *separation of real people* from their *artefacts*. Andrew Delbanco talks about this in terms of academic critics getting 'terribly solemn' (Delbanco 1999: 9) about language play and of 'losing faith in their subject and in themselves' (Delbanco 1999: 8).

There is no doubt that it is taking some considerable 'effort' to bring the discourses - that concerned with the human being and that concerned with the text - back together. The growth of formal creative writing courses on campus, and their vast expansion during the late twentieth century, has been fundamental to that re-attachment. But it's not yet complete. On many campuses, the bridge between creative practice and contemporary styles of criticism still remains to be built.

It's often been a point of amusement for a lot of us, I think, that when certain critics first began to deal with the theoretical work of Jacques

Derrida, some thirty years ago now, they were amazed to find in his work aspects they believed simply had to be located *outside* of critical writing - aspects, that is, that belonged to some other, creative sphere. Stuart Sim does this in his summary of Derrida's work. He says:

At once an extremely subtle and dauntingly obscure thinker, Derrida is famed for the difficulty and sheer eccentricity of his style...in which word play, those staples of the deconstructive critical repertoire, are important elements in a strategy to locate gaps...in our discourse. The deconstructionist self-consciously plays with texts rather than subjecting them to analysis, with the objective being to provide a supplement to, rather than a reading of, a text... The end result is a style of philosophy which is much more reminiscent of game playing or creative writing than of traditional philosophic discourse, but...this has to be considered part of the plan. (Sim 1995: 104)

We might wonder what Sim would do with the life and work of Charles Dodgson who, as a fellow at Christ Church College, Oxford, took great pride in his scholarly works on logic and mathematics while also writing children's books. Children's books, that is, as well known as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*.

Between 1845 and 1898, the academic Charles Dodgson, or the creative writer Lewis Carroll (one and the same) applied his mathematical ideals to the writing of some 255 books. In addition to his children's works he produced works on subjects as diverse as tennis, letter-writing and medicine. He was also an accomplished photographer.

In a similar way, if ever we want to find the textual evidence for the general and widespread influence of academe on the writing arts, we need look no further than the origins of characters that appear in pieces of creative writing. In E.M. Forster's *The Longest Journey*, for example, the character of Stephen Wonham is based on Hugh Owen Meredith. Meredith, who was one of Forster's lovers, also provided some of the profile for the character of Ansell, who appears in the same book. First as a lecturer at Manchester University, and later as Professor of Economics at Queen's University, Belfast, Meredith is just one instance of academic fact informing Forster's fiction. The character of Martin Whitby in Forster's story, 'Arctic Summer', is in part based on Roger Fry, Slade Professor of Fine Art at Cambridge. So it goes. And Forster is not an exception in using the academic world for this kind of inspiration. Sir Joshua Matteson in D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* is [based on] philosopher and academic Bertrand Russell. Dr Fossile in John Gay's *Three Hours After Marriage*, published in 1717, is [based on] Dr John Woodward, physician, geologist and Professor of Physics at Gresham College, London. Edward Cavan in May Sarton's *Faithful are the Wounds* (1955) is [based on] Harvard tutor in literature, Professor F.O. Matthiessen, whose literary studies include those of T.S. Eliot and Henry James and whose suicide in the throes of depression Sarton indirectly immortalises. And, finally, in James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the character of Davin is [based on] George Clancy, a student with Joyce at University College, Dublin and later Mayor of Limerick.

Yet the *historical conditions* affecting the academic 'environment', in which this kind of exchange occurs, have not always favoured good relations between creating and criticising in the writing arts. At some

points the role of the university in the wider cultural and economic ambitions of nations and regions has worked against such exchanges. *All* educational theorists now note that the creation of a learning environment which encourages *independent* learning is the highest achievement possible for any teacher...but perhaps, at this point, we need to consider whether this kind of encouragement has always been overt.

Does the relatively modern formation of named courses and degrees in both criticism and in creative writing alter, in essence, a long established learning environment's intention? Or does it simply declare a previous circumstance which, for various reasons, has sometimes been pushed underground in the holistic, societal sense, but which has largely remained in an individual, personal sense - sometimes even in opposition to the prevailing cultural and economic imperatives imposed upon it?

For example, Ian Hamilton writing in his biography of Robert Lowell, relates this intriguing episode in Lowell's college life:

Lowell had published a dozen poems in the college magazine during his two and half years at Kenyon, but the first one of these did not appear until December 1938. In his first year he continued to solicit the good opinion of Richard Eberhart, although his regard for Eberhart's homely pieties was beginning to crumble in the shadow of the New Criticism's care for detail. In November 1937 Eberhart sent Lowell a group of his own poems and was shocked to find his ex-pupil had become confident enough to issue a few lessons of his own: "Your generalities are commonplace (Lowell said). If you want to write poems that will outlast your age you must condense." (Hamilton 1983: 58)

In this case, of course, you might think there is more than enough *independent* learning going on.

Eberhart goes on to say, in response to Lowell's criticism, that as a poet Lowell will probably 'peter out by 25 - but that need not worry anyone: "You'll always be able to relapse into the soft arms of your Harvard background"' (Hamilton 1983: 58) - a comment that is not so much echoed as set in a poetic context by Hamilton's note that Lowell's college poems were 'as artificial and pretentious as most other people's college poems' (Hamilton 1983: 59).

But, in the case of the teaching of creative writing, that's not the point. Lowell's sometimes difficult relationship with his college education, and with such critical opinion, was part of his ongoing process of learning and development as a writer. The quality of his college poems reflects the writer finding form and style - and the sometimes fraught use of the learning environment that college education provided, continued well beyond Lowell's formal 'taught' years.

Like Robert Lowell, many creative writers who have long-term contact with a campus as teachers, or as relatively regular 'writers-in-residence' or members of the part-time staff, form a considerable body of evidence in support of the history of the university in creative writing learning, well before creative writing 'courses' were ever established as part of university life...indeed, before the study of literature was itself a formalised university subject. They also support the wider notion that universities



have always been invested with the ethos of operating between individual, independent learning, and the formation of societal group knowledge.

I'd like to quote briefly from a book with a title as follows: *The Method of Teaching and Studying Belles Lettres, or an Introduction to Languages, Poetry, Rhetoric, History, Physics etc with Reflections on Taste and instructions with regard to the eloquence of the pulpit, the bar and the stage. The whole illustrated with Passages from the most famous Poets and Orators, Ancient and Modern, with critical remarks on them. Designed more particularly for students in the university.*

This book is by Professor M. Rollin, Late Principal of the University of Paris, Professor of Eloquence in the Royal College (though not Professor of Brevity, apparently), and member of the Royal Academy of Inscriptions and Belles Lettres. The book was published in 1810. Professor Rollin is talking in this passage about the education of scholars in Ancient Greece:

At last they met [he writes]...in Athens. We know that the city was in a manner the theatre and centre of polite learning and erudition... There was an odd custom in Athens, relating to such scholars as were newcomers, that were sent hither from different provinces. They began by introducing them into a numerous assembly of youth like themselves, and there they exposed them to all imaginary raillery and insolence, after which they led them across the city in procession, conducted and preceded by all the boys, who marched two by two before them. When they came to the place appointed (the place of learning) the whole company stopt, set up a loud cry, and made as if they would break open the gates, and they were refused to be open to them. When the novice was admitted there, he was then restored to his liberty. (Rollin 1796: 454)

Rollin's reference to tradition and ritual go hand in hand with the coming together of what we might call 'the ownership of the academic tradition' and 'the cultural significance' of institutions of higher learning. When Nathaniel Hawthorne visited New College, Oxford in 1856 he caught some of this in his notebooks.

"The gardens of New College are indescribably beautiful," he noted, "not gardens in an American sense, but lawns of the richest green and softest velvet grass, shadowed over by *ancient* trees, that have lived a quiet life here for centuries, and have been nursed and tended with such care, and so sheltered from rude winds, that certainly they must have been the happiest of all trees. Such a sweet, quiet, *sacred*, stately seclusion so long as this has been, and, I hope, will continue to be, cannot exist anywhere else." (Manley 1992: 17)

Given this kind of enthusiasm, we might wonder what Hawthorne would make of Ben Siegel's comment in his book *The American Writer and the University*, published in 1989. His comment is that the creative writer is:

...appointed to add a cultural veneer to the literature department and perhaps attract students. What the writer

inevitably attracts is his academic colleagues' envy and hostility. (Siegel 1988: 9)

Siegel goes on to suggest that many academics find the writer on campus an anomalous figure, particularly when he or she is a writer-in-residence 'without the customary academic degrees' (Siegel 1988: 9).

If this is true then we can add to our list of anomalous characters, with or without such 'academic qualifications', not only Lewis Carroll but Gabriel Rossetti; Rabindranath Tagore; Simone de Beauvoir; Robertson Davies; A.D. Hope; Vladimir Nabokov; Saul Bellow; Christine Brooke-Rose; Nikki Giovanni; Henry Wadsworth Longfellow; John Gardner; Robert Penn Warren; Raymond Carver; Paul Valery; e.e. cummings; Amiri Baraka; Margaret Atwood; Seamus Heaney and Joyce Carol Oates...to name a mere three or four handfuls.

Somehow, therefore, I don't believe Ben Siegel is correct - at least not in the large part. And it is also worth noting that Hawthorne was visiting Oxford before indeed the subject of English Literature itself was a recognised honors degree at that university. The writing arts on campus have *never* depended on formal recognition.

Longfellow, perhaps to re-paint for some of you that short and well-known history, taught Modern Languages at Bowdoin College, Maine, from 1829 to 1835. After that, he was offered the position of Smith Professor of Modern Languages at Harvard, with an instruction that he might first take a year in Europe before assuming his duties, which he did.

It's said that the first suggestion for Longfellow's 'The Song of Hiawatha' came from some Amer-Indian tales recited to him by a Harvard student. Bowdoin, of course, was the same college from which Nathaniel Hawthorne graduated in 1825, publishing his first novel in 1828, a novel set in a college similar to Bowdoin. Harvard's graduates - and many of you will know these as well as I do - include Henry James (graduated in 1863), who contributed to magazines while a student there; T.S. Eliot (1910), who published his first poems in the *Harvard Advocate*, which he later edited; Norman Mailer (1943), who was a member of the *Advocate's* literary board; John Updike (1954), who was prolific while at Harvard, writing most of each issue of the *Harvard Lampoon*, a significant text in the history of humour magazines; and Michael Crichton (1964), whose many medical and science thrillers bear the marks of his MD degree earned at Harvard Medical School.

And so I repeat that salient point. Despite these notable names: the first chair of English Literature was not appointed at Harvard until 1876, certainly after Henry James' time, and only 78 years earlier than the graduation of John Updike. Historically, creative writing on campus has stimulated the careers of critics as much as critics have affected the careers of creative writers.

We come to a point at which the question must be asked: 'Why now do we find the situation in which creative writing in the company of academe is portrayed as something relatively new, something which many writers on campus feel we must somehow further define?'

Malcolm Bradbury, novelist, Professor of American Studies, and founder (alongside Angus Wilson) of the MA in Creative Writing program at the University of East Anglia, was often heard to say how the subject of creative writing in the UK represented something decidedly new and

suspiciously American ('like the hoola-hoop' he'd say). In many ways, in its naming and its bold declaration of a wider 'creative practice' ethos, this carried some truth in the British higher education system of the late 1970s, when Bradbury's program was launched. But in other ways, this was merely a matter of presentation - perhaps something borne out of Bradbury's own genuine curiosity with the differences between American and British cultures.

In order to find the origins of what we might call the 'paradox of presentation' of the writing arts within academe we need to track back through the history of tertiary education in the twentieth century.

It's in the 1890s, in the midst of Modernism, that we can find the origins of our current situation - that is, simplistically put, with the great emphasis found in the tenets of Modernism on a style of education applicable to Western progress and to the progress, in particular, of a certain Westernised version of a global culture. So we see, to take the UK example, the 1895 Bryce Commission report on British education, which announced the further involvement of the State in the work of universities and, by inference, in the creative life within and around them. We find, alongside this, works such as John Churton Collins' *The Study of English Literature: a plea for its recognition and organisation at the universities* published by Macmillan, London, in 1891. In this book Collins makes a strong case for literary study, albeit it within an atmosphere of having to make that case in the first place. We can find, likewise, T.H. Huxley's poignant comment to the Cowper Commission of 1892 that 'the primary business of universities is with *pure* knowledge and *pure* art - independent of all application to practice; with progress in *culture*, not with wealth' (Halsey 1957/1958: 148).

The recording of these kinds of defences of university life against the desire to further the hopes of Western prosperity, connected fundamentally to industrial and technological progress, are not incidental. Nor that such progress meant the 'scientising' of higher education - both its subjects and its educational practices. Everything reduced to quantitative logic or behaviourist psychology. And this is where I disagree with Andrew Delbanco when he talks about the field of English literature as a 'self-consuming artefact'. In reality, it's both the formal and the informal relationships between creator and critic on campus that allows it not to be self-consuming at all - even during the low points of some of the most anti-humanist kind of intellectual positions.

It's no ultimate concern then that we find the young Robert Lowell drawing on the connected Modernist 'finesse' of New Criticism to criticise his college mentor, Eberhardt, because Lowell does so as a young creator looking for his critical repertoire. Nor that he writes in 1946:

That awful summer! Every poet in America came to stay with us. It was the first summer after the war, when people once again had gasoline and could go where they liked, and all those poets came to our house in Maine and stayed for weeks at a stretch, bringing wives or mistresses with whom they quarrelled, and complaining so vividly about the wives and mistresses they'd left, or had been left by, that the discards were real presences, swelling the ranks, swelling the house, *my* house (my very own, my first and my very own), to its seams. (Hamilton 1983: 115)

Even the pace of the writing here seems to reflect the rush to recovery, fuelled by gasoline and fuelled by growth and expansion as supposedly 'natural modes' of progress and, indeed, modes of protection. But writing itself for Lowell remained sacrosanct.

Things were, of course, changing - the West's global focus, for one. Given the relative decline beyond the two World Wars of British industrial fortunes and the rise of North American hegemony, the history of the relationship between creator and critic on campuses in these two countries remains connected, but becomes different.

When Vladimir Nabokov arrived at Wellesley College in the fall term of 1941 he described the conditions there as 'ecstatic quietude' (Field 1987: 220). Nabokov was hired not to teach a course in 'creative writing' but to lecture on Russian writers. However, he also gave talks in the Departments of French and English and, most importantly, as was the tradition at Wellesley, his lectures were made compulsory for students in many departments, including those who were majoring in English composition - a course which involved producing a novel in the senior year (Field 1987: 223).

As Andrew Field points out in his biography of Nabokov, these seniors were not only expected at one point to engage formally in Nabokov's critical work but also to entertain him (Field 1987: 224) and, by inference, discuss their creative writing with him. At the time, not only was Nabokov writing his longer works, but he was regularly contributing poetry and stories to some of the country's top magazines (Field 1987: 229).

By the time Nabokov had left Wellesley and arrived at Cornell in 1948 he was already regarded by his students as a wonderful teacher, though he personally denied that he did anything special. But the fact was, Professor Nabokov was a naturally skilled and passionate performer, much as he was in his writing. His students, as has become common history, included the science-fiction writer, Joanna Russ, and the novelist Thomas Pynchon. By 1951 Nabokov had five major writing projects in various stages of development, one of which was the beginnings of a book called *The Kingdom by the Sea*, which grew little by little into a novel some of you might perhaps have come across, entitled *Lolita*.

Nabokov certainly met with young writers on campus at Cornell, but even when he was teaching 'critical literature courses' (so-called) he was just as much teaching creative writing.

"Great writers invent their own world," [he would tell his students], "[but] minor writers merely ornament the commonplace... The artist is a sublime liar... Art is not 'about' something but it is the thing itself... Art is not a simple arithmetic but a delicate calculus... In art, the roundabout hits the centre... Life is the least realistic of fictions." (quoted in Wetzsteon 2002: 242)

Tracing the history of meetings of critics and creative writers on campus often unearths the decidedly unrealistic way in which this relationship has been denied its history, partly through the impact of a Modernist educational ethos which filtered away the layers of personal and fortuitous pedagogy in search of a holistic 'systemic' education, and partly through a naïve willingness to downgrade the nature of artistic knowledge against

those institutionalised and even positivist ideals which have found their way into some poverty-stricken theory / observation distinctions.

Nevertheless, the story, the long and exciting history of this relationship between creator and critic on campus, is real and significant. I'm pleased to say that, in writing that story, something of the actual practice of university teaching and university learning emerges.

I think, from the evidence, it's a story which not only tells us a lot about the nature of knowledge and the nature of creativity, but also a great deal about the actual *human* value we place in the writing arts themselves.

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