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# Reconstructing the Past in the Academic Novel:

# The Concept of Nostalgia in Thatcher Britain

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the effects of the British Conservative government led by Margaret Thatcher upon the portrayal of the past and the use of nostalgia in academic novels of the period. After situating the economic status of higher education during the early Thatcher era, and examining the academic novel as a genre, attention shifts to a study of Graham Swift's Waterland, A.S. Byatt's Possession, and David Lodge's Nice Work. It is demonstrated that these authors each reacted to the Thatcher environment by addressing such questions as, "Will I still have a job?" and "Will I still be necessary?" in response to the academic and economic environments of the time. By tracing the use of nostalgia within these works, and comparing it to the official Thatcher-endorsed nostalgia, the thesis explores how the humanities' conception of history and the past are revealed as necessary in order to enable the public to forge a sustaining personal connection between the present and the past. Ultimately, it can be shown that only by uniting the economic sphere and the academic humanities can enriching progress occur in either realm, and this is the solution offered by these authors in response to the Thatcherite use of nostalgia for the nineteenth century as incentive for modern economic success.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Introduction: Margaret Thatcher and the Robbins Report

For a period of eleven years, Margaret Thatcher dominated British politics with her Conservative party line. In a time of economic instability, she brought through reforms that restored England to a more powerful position both in terms of international respect and economic strength. Authoritarian economic reforms which controlled public expenditure and workplace economy, education, training and trade unions were all delivered with the soothing argument that the values they upheld - family, duty, patriotism and tradition - were all bound together to ensure a reawakening of the glorious Victorian golden era. As Lester Friedman says in the introduction to Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism (1983), "her speech writers knew a thing or two about self-promotion. She projected 'British themes' and 'the sinews of authenticity' pummelled out of flabby jingoist nostalgia, or more humbly put, she constructed nationalist myths out of the bric-a-brac of history, xenophobia, and paranoia." (Friedman, 57). Thatcher used the cherished memory of Britain as a puissant economic player and a culturally rich country as a catalyst to her campaigns, aligning the glorious British Empire of the previous century with contemporary England, promising implicitly that what once was, could exist again.

The reaction of the academic world to those "nationalist myths" was influenced by the hostile attitudes the Tory government fostered towards the tertiary educational system. The Robbins Report of 1963 had stimulated lavish governmental funding and relative autonomy of the universities: within twenty years the number of universities had

doubled, thirty-two new polytechnics had been founded, colleges had received upgrades, two new research councils had been formed, and the University Grants Committee had grown to four times its original size (Letwin, 264). In its search for areas to reduce expenditure and concentrate on restoring Britain to a more powerful economic status in the world, the Conservative government seized upon the "ruinously expensive" educational situation they had inherited, and they pruned it mercilessly. In the midst of it all were vocal individuals such as Cambridge historian Corelli Barnett, who claimed that the gradual industrial decline Britain had experienced was the result of the predominance of the liberal arts as the educational focus, creating a class of governors at the expense of tradesmen and labourers (Letwin, 250). On the other side were voices like that of philosophy professor Anthony O'Hear, who lamented that "a person trained in technology alone will lack that richer conception of the world and of human life which comes from a study of the humanities and the natural sciences [...]. If the whole emphasis of the school is on the relevance of school work to industry and commerce, I fear for the chances of that generosity of spirit and culture which a liberal education provides" (Letwin, 249). In scholastic reform, the emphasis upon 'relevant' studies meant that vocational and liberal education became two extremes, the former lauded in its essential role in restoring Britain's economic strength, the latter denigrated for its apparent outdated focus, a luxury no longer beneficial or to be tolerated. The dissatisfaction with the university situation was given concrete expression by the Education Reform Act of 1988, wherein strong financial regulation by the government and an influx of businessmen into the regulation of the universities ensured that "schools should be run like small public businesses" (Letwin, 242). The creation of City Technical Colleges

where there was "considerable emphasis on technical training designed to meet the requirements of British industry, and on the 'relevance of the curriculum to modern needs'" (248) further contrasted the Tory focus on necessary acquisition of skills to survive in the contemporary business-oriented world with the elective cultivation of pure knowledge. Caught between economic marginalization and the hollow honour of being the preservers and archaeologists of that history so lauded by Thatcher, academic authors of the 1980s and early 1990s existed in a curious unbalanced limbo, their work simultaneously important and unimportant. One of the methods of expressing this ambivalence and uncertainty was through creating works of academic fiction.

The university novel is a form in its own right, where the academy is used "as an appropriate stage on which to dramatize some of the key social and political concerns that had animated British society from the 1950s on. With their supposed commitment to excellence, liberalism and academic freedom... universities were a key place for considering questions of standards [and] cultural values" (Bradbury, 275). A.S. Byatt, Graham Swift and David Lodge have each produced academically-oriented works of fiction under the Tory government, works which examine the relationship of the past to the present, thereby undertaking an examination of nostalgia itself while chronicling (inadvertently or intentionally) an academic author's reaction to the Conservative government's attitude towards the humanities as both a superfluous establishment and a cultural guardian. By setting the novels within a scholastic framework, these texts comment on Thatcher's use of the Victorian past by examining academia as culturally relevant, questioning the value of nostalgia, and revealing academic ambivalence about

being marginalized as economically irrelevant while being held up as guardians of a heritage, as keepers of that golden Victorian age.

The inherent contradiction of rejecting advanced education as a liberal extravagance while glorifying an era partially characterized by a value for education and academe's cultural and intellectual benefits is at the heart of Byatt's Possession, Swift's Waterland and Lodge's Nice Work. Byatt examines the personal and cultural relevance of reconstructing the literary past, specifically using the Victorian era as a focus for the academic nostalgia which may or may not be the same nostalgia Thatcher encourages. Swift's narrator teaches the importance not only of history as an academic subject but of social history to young men and women feeling adrift in the modern age. Lodge's novel examines the concept of Thatcher's industry versus intellect in an explicit rewriting of Elizabeth Gaskell's North and South, and a re-examination of the Victorian treatment of the same subjects. The use of nostalgia in each of these texts varies, but each fundamentally addresses the question of whether the past is significant to the present, and how. Finally, each novel implicitly exhibits a curious, conservative academic nostalgia: the academic's desire for a time past when the academy was a nobler thing, for a time when his or her subject was more respected, and a time when economic relevance was not a defining criterion to receive funding.

By using and/or questioning nostalgia in their works, these authors are not necessarily committing themselves to the Tory lauding of an age past; rather, they are using an existing concept of the past as a way to examine contemporary society under

Thatcher. Essentially, the academy portrayed in these texts is a multi-leveled, self-contradictory establishment, on the one hand criticizing Thatcher and the Conservative government for their beliefs concerning education, and on the other reinforcing the historical substance of their nostalgia, partially by virtue of the academy's very existence and mandate, that of reconstructing the past in the present. My aim is to examine these three texts which communicate the tension between the establishment and the humanities, produced by academics or set in the academic world, in the light of the academic reforms Prime Minister Thatcher brought into being and her use of nostalgia as a political tool. I intend to establish that each work, centering on the academic life, be it at the secondary, undergraduate, or post-graduate level, has at its core an examination of the relevance of academic life in contemporary Britain, and is a comment on Conservative views on education and the humanities via the author's use of symbolic nostalgia. Each of these texts, by its very existence, comments on the humanities' concern with nostalgia in its struggle to reconstruct the past in the present, and about the pitfalls therein, often criticizing Thatcher's methods of reconstructing the glory days in modern times. Byatt examines the common mistake of projecting personal nostalgia upon the past; Swift looks beyond the 'jingoist' tendencies of the national history to the deep personal connection an individual has to the past; and Lodge looks at the problem of applying that glorious Victorian work ethic to a modern society.

Beginning with a discussion of the history of the academy and the state of educational institutions just prior to Thatcher's regime and the changes that ensued, I will proceed to situate the academic novel as a form, with mention of the earlier writers of the

genre. Chapter two will examine Graham Swift's Waterland (1983), which comments on the relevance of history to the present day, as well as the shift from what is perceived traditionally as 'liberal' education - pursuit of knowledge unnecessary or superfluous to basic professional skills - to vocational education. Waterland will also serve as a contrast to the other texts in that the author is not an academic, nor is the text a true academic novel, taking place in a secondary level educational institution instead of the traditional university setting. As an author outside the academy, Swift provides an outsider's view of nostalgia and the role of the academy in present-day Britain. Swift's nostalgia is not necessarily only for the Victorian era; it reaches further back and encompasses several genres of history, namely natural and social, as well as personal. Chapter three will center on A.S. Byatt's Possession (1990), which romanticizes the life of an academic as one who reconstructs the past in the present day. Byatt's examination of nostalgia within her text, as well as the implied nostalgia of the form it takes, specifically the simultaneous Victorian and present-day storylines, will be investigated in the light of Thatcherite nostalgia, as well as the unique academic nostalgia previously mentioned. Chapter four will concern itself with David Lodge's Nice Work (1988), which juxtaposes the Thatcher academic world with the Thatcher industrial world, allowing a representative of each world to see how the other half lives, as well as forcing a re-examination of its own position in relation to that other. Lodge's implied nostalgia would appear to entail a satirical questioning of the value of Thatcher's repossession of Victorian values in the modern day, as well as to suggest the academy's re-evaluation of its own relevance in the post-Robbins Report world. I will take up the use of the Victorian past in these texts, an age variously invoked as an essential link (as in Thatcher's argument) or as outdated and

potentially detrimental to culture. As part of this examination of the relevance of the Victorian past to Thatcher's modern Britain and the modern academy, I intend to comment on nostalgia and its use as being a simultaneous critique of the past and the present in these works.

Ultimately, such an examination becomes important within the context of the Tory educational position as a statement concerning the academic mission and how the academic humanities perceive themselves in relation to the contemporary world. If the university novel, self-examining by its very nature, is an attempt to isolate the weaknesses and identify the strengths of the academy, then academic novels created within a time of pressure to rationalize the academy's existence can be very telling. As examples of the struggle to justify the writers' own choice of profession, these three texts stand as explorations of these problems as well as implicit statements concerning the value of the academy within today's world.

## 1. "Cultivated Men and Women":

## The Robbins Report and the Thatcher Response

Under Thatcher's leadership the Conservative government cut universities' budgetary allotment in an attempt to redistribute funding to areas seen as more deserving or needy, namely to the technical colleges which would prepare skilled workers to maintain a workforce that would produce national wealth and stabilise the economy. To create a context for the effect this treatment of education had upon the academic fiction of the era, it is necessary to examine the economics of education leading up to the Thatcher era. The most significant event in this regard, prior to the assumption of power by the Thatcher government, was the Higher Education Report, commonly known as the Robbins Report.

The Robbins Report, commissioned by Conservative Prime Minister Harold MacMillan and presented in complete form in October 1963, became the educational equivalent of the Ten Commandments. Under the guidance of Lord Robbins between 1961-63, the thirteen persons who made up the Committee on Higher Education set out to

> review the pattern of full-time higher education in Great Britain and in the light of national needs and resources to advise Her Majesty's Government on what principles its long-term development should be based. In particular, to advise, in the light of these principles, whether there should be any changes in that pattern, whether any new types of institution are desirable and whether any modifications should be made in the present arrangements for planning and co-ordinating the development of the various types of institution. (Treasury minute dated 8th February 1961; quoted Robbins Report, 1)

The state of tertiary education was duly researched, contrasted with past conditions, and a set of guidelines was drawn up for the future path higher education would (and should)

take. One of the first statements made in the report recognizes the connection between education and economic productivity:

> [T]he growing realisation of this country's economic dependence upon the education of its population has led to much questioning of the adequacy of present arrangements. Unless higher education is speedily reformed, it is argued, there is little hope of this densely populated island maintaining an adequate position in the fiercely competitive world of the future. (Robbins Report, 5)

Between 1938 and 1962, the percentage of children aged seventeen in school had increased from four percent to fifteen percent. The report links this growth to "the steady rise in national prosperity" (12), and predicts that the requirements for tertiary education – be it university, technical college or otherwise – would increase from 216 000 places in 1962/3 to 392 000 places in 1973/4 and then to 558 000 places by 1980/1 (Robbins Report, 160-1). Expecting the number of tertiary education students to more than double in twenty years, the government implemented educational reform accordingly. New colleges and universities were built; the existing ones were expanded; faculty were hired, support staff were brought in, and for a while at least education and the educational industry in Great Britain underwent a swift renaissance following the predictions of the Robbins Report.

Why devote this effort and money to overhauling the higher educational system, apart from better educating men and women to function within a society characterized by increasingly complex sciences and technologies? The second chapter of the report contains an acknowledgment of the question of "what purposes, what general social ends should be served by higher education?" (Robbins Report, 6). The four Aims of Higher Education are set out as follows:

(25) We begin with instruction in skills suitable to play a part in the general division of labour. We put this first, not because we regard it as the most important, but because we think that it is sometimes ignored or undervalued. [...] And it must be recognised that in our own times, progress – and particularly the maintenance of a competitive position – depends to a much greater extent than ever before on skills demanding special training. A good general education, valuable though it may be, is frequently less than we need to solve many of our most pressing problems.

(26) But, secondly, while emphasising that there is no betrayal of values when institutions of higher education teach what will be of some practical use, we must postulate that what is taught should be taught in such a way as to promote the general powers of the mind. The aim should be not to produce specialists but rather cultivated men and women....

(27) Thirdly, we must name the advancement of learning.... [T]he search for truth is an essential function of institutions of higher education and the process of education is itself most vital when it partakes of the nature of discovery.... [T]he world, not higher education alone, will suffer if [institutions of higher learning] ever cease to regard [the advancement of knowledge] as one of their main functions.

(28) Finally there is a function that is more difficult to describe concisely, but that is none the less fundamental: the transmission of a common culture and common standards of citizenship..... [W]e believe that it is a proper function of higher education... to provide in partnership with the family that background of culture and social habit upon which a healthy society depends..... (Robbins Report, 6-7)

These aims and ideals signify a new direction in thought about the academy. A concern for keeping in touch with the needs of the real world is expressed. The report appears to recognise the split between intellectual study and the acquisition of technical skills and proposes the different approaches necessary to develop each of them. By suggesting that labour skills have been undervalued, the report signals the beginning of a slow reversal of the status of each type of education. This recognition, while valid and admirable in its efforts at establishing institutional equality, marks the beginning of what will become the Thatcherist approval of technological colleges and devaluation of liberal studies. The very mention of the fact that "[a] good general education ... is frequently less than we

need to solve many of our most pressing problems" indicates the awareness of a need for focus in an increasingly specialized world of labour, as does the use of the phrase "progress... depends... on skills demanding special training". It is also significant that this requirement comes first on the list, followed by the "search for truth" and "the transmission of a common culture", despite the report's claims that it does not list article 25 first out of importance, but out of concern. This anxiety is what culminates in the position of the academy in the 1980s, and in the views of the Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher.

Having tackled the thorny problem of the purpose of tertiary education, the report later examines the equally difficult problem of the distribution of places by faculty. Throughout the report, the committee connects the need for better training and scientific advancement with a drive to increase economic productivity. While they argue for a significant percentage of the new places in technological and scientific areas to answer needs in the workplace, the report's authors make a point of defending the arts:

> [W]e envisage some further increase beyond 51 per cent. in the proportion of students taking science and technology. As Chapter X has indicated, within this total there is a need for the growth of technology (interpreted in a broad sense) relative to science. ... None of this implies a reduction after 1966/7 in the proportion of students taking arts subject. This we should view with concern, for a growing proportion of students in this category have been taking social studies and we expect this trend to continue; and any decline or weakening in the study of the humanities would impoverish the intellectual and spiritual life of the country. (Robbins Report, 165)

It is evident that the Robbins committee considered the academic pursuit of the arts necessary to the maintenance of a certain level of culture. Unfortunately, that culture is not defined except as one of the important elements transmitted by higher education "upon which a healthy society depends". While culture is mentioned in the same phrase

as "common standards of citizenship" in the list of aims and ideals, it is not made clear what constitutes culture, and this is the area where the diverging paths of intellectual study and technological skill acquisition disagree. In Thatcher's Conservative regime culture appears synonymous with economic stability and a powerful economic presence within the world, the British standard of living, as it were. For the academy, culture involves a knowledge of the humanities and literature, the history of the nation in sociological terms as well as dates and events; a sense of self and nation and the tradition whence they have come. Economic stability has eclipsed culture; the government, seeing the necessity of reestablishing economic power, has chosen to endorse a new cultural focus. The humanities, bereft of support, were left to struggle in their goals to recover wisdom and truth from the past, mining the true culture in an attempt to continue communicating it to those who enroll in higher education for pure intellectual study.

What resulted from the educational horn of plenty the Robbins Report created in the field of tertiary education was not the bright future that the committee had envisioned. As time went on it became evident that certain of the predictions the committee had made did not come to pass. For example, it was assumed that as inflation and the cost of living increased, so would *all* wages and salaries, enabling enrollment to be affordable and professors to maintain pay scales equivalent to other professionals. Huge sums to improve the system were justified by the argument that they were an investment in the future of Great Britain and one that could not help but pay off, in productivity if not in pounds sterling. Ultimately, when the anticipated numbers of students failed to materialize, falling well short of the predicted 558 000 places, the system which had

grown so rapidly began to collapse in upon itself. By the time the Thatcher Conservative Party ordered a stern overhaul of the educational system in 1986-8, it was considered "ruinously expensive" (Letwin, 264) and action was taken accordingly.

The Thatcher attitude towards tertiary education was not viewed as a positive one by the humanities. The actual results of the reforms as compared to the glowing ideals set forth in the Robbins Report's Aims of Higher Education were disappointing at the very least. Even more so than the Robbins committee, the Thatcher government stressed the necessity of training productive individuals to return Britain to its previously prestigious economic position. With an emphasis on training a workforce and teaching its future members "whatever is needed to improve the efficiency of production" (Letwin, 252), the Thatcher government's mandate left no room for the pursuit of knowledge for knowledge's sake. Where once the governments of the Robbins era and immediately afterwards had been seen as benevolent and endorsing the academic's quest for truth in the humanities, now the government was seen as an antagonist, cutting through the lavish educational grants ruthlessly. A fear of the loss of a way of life and cultural standard began to grow in academic halls; or, as the Robbins Report phrased its warning twenty years before, the fear that "the world, not higher education alone, will suffer if [institutions of higher learning] ever cease to regard [the advancement of knowledge] as one of their main functions." A fear for the future of education merged with the anxiety in the academy concerning the relevance of the study of literature and arts in a modern world bent on increasing economic efficiency by increasing productivity. The governmental report Higher Education Meeting the Challenge stated that "[h]igher

education has a crucial role in helping the nation to meet the economic challenges of the final decade of this century and beyond" (Letwin, 266). No mention is made of an equivalent contribution to cultural life. Although the Robbins Report stated as one of its ideals that higher education should not "produce specialists but rather cultivated men and women", by leaving the cultural aspect undefined it eclipsed this concern with technical considerations and thus the warning was forgotten or disregarded. The implicit criticism of the arts inherent in the Thatcher government's investment in technological training was felt keenly, prompting a wave of protest. Professor Sir Geoffrey Elton, writing to the Times on 21 August 1986, lamented that "If the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake were to disappear from the universities they would cease to be universities. Nor do I accept that intellectuals think civilized values incompatible with the creation of material wealth" (quoted in Letwin, 251).

Curiously, the Thatcher approach and that of the Robbins Report appear to agree, at least superficially, regarding the increased need for technological training; both are also concerned with maintaining a certain level of civilized culture via the transmission of values through education. Beyond this superficial resemblance, however, lies a crucial difference in execution of those ideals. The Robbins Report created new schools and new programs to provide both the humanities and the sciences room to expand. The Thatcher government, no longer able to maintain the funding for what was perceived as unproductive, wasted space, cut the humanities' funding to force educational refocusing. This, paired with the Thatcher government's emphasis on economic and industrial

puissance, naturally resulted in a tacit endorsement of the technical colleges rather than the Oxbridge liberal education institutions whose graduates had no guaranteed employment which contributed to the wealth of the nation in any recognizable way. The latter institutions, then, cost the government valuable money to run, with no concrete payback upon their students' completion of the program of study. Again, in a nation where economic viability was the new standard of culture, knowledge for knowledge's sake – a pursuit with no apparent application in the real world – is thus seen as a waste of time, and a waste of money.

In her memoir The Downing Street Years (1993), Margaret Thatcher expresses her concern over the fact that "increases in public spending had not by and large led to higher standards" in education (590). While decentralising certain aspects of the educational system, such as enrolment and local management of schools, the Conservative government was at the same time centralising the most crucial aspect of schooling, erecting a national curriculum, in an attempt to ensure some common level of basic skills in graduating students. They revised the university system significantly. In Thatcher's own words, they did as follows:

> ... By exerting financial pressure we had increased administrative efficiency.... Universities were developing closer links with business and becoming more entrepreneurial. Student loans... had also been introduced: these would make students more discriminating about the courses they chose..... Limits based on the security of tenure enjoyed by university staff also encouraged dons to pay closer attention to satisfy the teaching requirements made of them. All this encountered strong political opposition from within the universities. Some of it was predictable. But undoubtedly other critics were genuinely concerned about the future autonomy and academic integrity of universities.
>
> I had to concede that these critics had a stronger case than I would have liked..... (598-9)

Even the Prime Minister became aware of how ruthless the cuts were growing, and of how threatened the academic way of life was becoming. (It may be worth noting here that Thatcher took a degree in Chemistry at Oxford before moving on to becoming a barrister, and also served as Edward Heath's Education Minister from 1970-74.) Obviously, it was never the government's intention to phase out higher education in the arts and humanities; what Thatcher calls "academic integrity" was not what the cuts were attempting to affect. Budget cuts and financial pressure, however, can go too far, and in retrospect the Prime Minister would see that "increasing administrative efficiency" had affected the quality of education (and the communication of culture?). Education, for the Thatcher government, had been reduced to a business affair. Students are required to make course choices not based on their interests or their skills but based on what they can afford, which in turn leads to the necessity of choosing courses to aid in job training. What emerges from a reading of the Thatcher drive for vocational training is an implicit disregard for the academic pursuit of the arts. In the grand scheme of getting Britain back on the economic track, the arts (and especially the arts in academia) then hold no place of importance. Ultimately, the philosophical conservative values of maintaining a link to the past and upholding traditional establishments are classified as not economically practical in a most un-conservative conclusion.

It may be argued that one of the reasons the Thatcher government became so dismissive of universities and pure learning is because it held that the values necessary for a civilized cultural community were not being transmitted properly in these establishments. Article 28 of the Robbins Report, dealing with the furthering of culture

and healthy civilisation, as well as article 26, concerning the production of "cultivated men and women" via a mode of teaching instilled with those nebulous proper values "difficult to describe" (7), appeared to the Conservatives to have been misinterpreted or even deliberately discarded. The generosity engendered by the Robbins Report produced nowhere near the expected returns economically, and in fact created an academic environment that was unmanageable. With the increasingly liberal attitude of young people during the 1960s and early 1970s, universities became places where, according to David Lodge (a university professor from 1960 through 1987):

> [c]ut off from normal social intercourse with the adult world, relieved of inhibition [...], the students were apt to run wild, indulging in promiscuous behaviour and experimenting with drugs, or else they turned melancholy mad. Robyn's generation, coming up to university in the early 1970s, immediately after the heroic period of student politics, were oppressed by a sense of belatedness. There were no significant rights left to demand, no taboos left to break. (Nice Work, 43)

The Thatcher emphasis on active values (what Shirley Letwin calls "the vigorous virtues" of wholesome morals such as self-sufficiency, energy, adventure, independence, loyalty [33]) ensured that any environment that endorsed a purely intellectual concept, comprehensive programs and other liberal educational pursuits would be met coolly. Understandably, academics began to become more concerned, and this concern is reflected in the academic fiction of the era. Throughout the boom of the Robbins era and the subsequent failure of expectations, academic fiction served as a mirror in which academia studied its fears and as a forum for the examination of such philosophical questions as "who are we?" and "why are we here?". It is significant to note that as the academic situation in Great Britain has grown more and more chaotic, the genre of academic fiction has grown more and more popular.

While fiction set within an academic environment had existed previously, academic fiction as a genre only truly came into its own after World War II, concurrent with and subsequent to the burst of educational growth inspired by the Robbins Report. Prior to this, various novels had their action set in an academic environment, but the setting is not the stimulus for action. With Kingsley Amis' Lucky Jim (1954) this begins to change, and a vague sense of the importance of the specifically academic milieu begins to insinuate itself into the form. Generally recognized as the father of the modern academic novel, Lucky Jim is a comedy of British manners and young love. The academic aspect of this novel is present but minimal: the protagonist Jim Dixon is nearing the end of his appointment, and, knowing that he has little to recommend him for a permanent job (and much to deny it), he attaches himself to the senior professor Welch in hopes of securing a permanent job. There are no references to the actual academic life or teaching other than those made in passing. The characterization of Welch is that of a bumbling man unaware of the life going on around him, happily self-absorbed. Dixon, on the other hand, is sharply aware of the danger he runs of not being offered a permanent staff position, and much of the action revolves around his attempts to ingratiate himself in order to improve his chances of achieving that position. Dixon is the first protagonist of the academic novel to be intensely aware of the economics at work within the academic life. The dichotomy between the older professional, secure in his tenure and cheerfully oblivious, and the younger professional, desperate to actively confirm his job and scholarly status, is a main source of the humour of the novel. Jim agrees to several tasks or entertainments which directly conflict with previous plans or personal interest to stay

in Welch's good graces. Throughout the novel the reader is aware that Jim has no true love for the academic life.

In his introduction to Lucky Jim David Lodge describes the main theme as being a clash of class, the academics being a class unto themselves, the university being "the epitome of a stuffy, provincial bourgeois world into which the hero is promoted by education, and against whose values and codes he rebels, at first inwardly and at last outwardly" (Amis, viii). Lodge points out that Jim is in no way a part of this select breed and only indirectly a commentary upon the academic situation. Jim is firmly of the belief that he does not belong, that he and his students waste each other's time. This "frank antipathy for intellectual matters" (Schellenberger, 45) is accepted with little or no concern in the earlier academic novels which are content to tell stories simply set in an academic environment. An overt commentary on the modern academic situation, how it functions within the nation and the place of individual academics within it has not yet begun to be apparent until Lucky Jim, published in the 1950s when the post-war economic system was beginning to change drastically. A precursor to the Robbins Report, Lucky Jim's protagonist indeed asks, "why am I here?", but the question of the relevance of academia to the rest of society is not addressed. Amis shows established academics of his era to be narrow-minded, petty, out of touch, and duplicitous (Jim's article submitted to a new journal is stolen by the editor and passed off as his own, an action that would devastate most academics). Jim, representing the younger academic attempting to join the tight-knit academic society, makes the right decision when he abandons academia for life in London and takes a job as aide to an established worldly

critic, an employment better suited to his temperament and his low opinion of an elitist academy.

What begins as a mild comic element in Amis's Lucky Jim soon grows to be a significant identifying trait as the academic novel develops as a form. What Lodge describes as "the absent-mindedness, vanity, eccentricity, and practical incompetence that academic institutions seem to tolerate and even to encourage in their senior staff (or at least did before the buzz-word `Management' began to echo through the groves of academe in the 1980s)" (Amis, viii) is further developed as the character of the oblivious professor becomes more withdrawn and out of touch with life. It becomes apparent that this professor character, far from being the admirable figure of knowledgeable authority students expect him to be, is instead a hidebound and limited mind incapable of drawing parallels between his subject and the real world outside the university walls. Angela Hague attributes part of this change to the growing perception that academia's focus is more on scholarship and the quest for knowledge than the actual communication of knowledge to students: "abstractions and theoretical constructs are represented as distorting filters which cause the academic to lose a clear vision of reality and which frequently allow him to avoid making decisions and taking action" (178). This ivory tower syndrome portrayed in academic fiction is also examined by David Bevan, who suggests that over-specialization by academics leads to "stunted personal growth, be it because of innate inadequacy or excessive specialization" (104). The concept of the academic taking refuge in the university environment from the outside world to indulge personal interests to the exclusion of teaching is one that can be seen often in the development of the form. At times, it becomes apparent that professors believe that

"students are interfering with the real business of the university, the scholarly pursuits of the dons" (Hague, 177). This development in the professor character must have some connection to the overgrowth prompted by the Robbins Report: as universities received more and more funding, they became less dependent upon students' tuition fees while not having to host as many students as they had been led to expect from the Robbins forecast, resulting in an excess of faculty. Secure in tenured positions and with time to spare, professors were free to indulge themselves in the 'pure research' aspect of their vocation. With little or no call to interact with students or the world outside, they turned inward, comfortable within their well-funded world. The Thatcher government's concern with the quality of teaching from those comfortably tenured dons is thus paralleled by the situations posed in academic novels where the relevance (both culturally and economically) of the academy is questioned by academics themselves.

It is interesting to note that the development of the academic novel as a genre is almost simultaneous with the expansion of the university as a result of educational reform. Such expansion as a result of the largesse of the Robbins Report took its toll, however, as the post-graduate system grew too quickly and became unable to support itself or to meet the increased financial burdens created by support staff and programs. It is perhaps no surprise that self-examination began to appear in the academic novel. Questioning the success and the purpose of the system became another key theme, partnering the examination of self- and subject-relevance within that system. Clearly, the concern with an academic's relevance to the outside world was being intensified by the increasingly inflated schooling system. The rise of the modern academic novel parallels

the over-quick expansion of the higher education and the increasing dissatisfaction of the academic within the unbalanced educational system.

Although the main characters of academic novels are professors, lecturers and assistants, the actual act of teaching is a marginalized theme in the academic novel; instead, the examination of the place of an academic in the real world is at its heart. Where the relevance of academics and the academy are called into question, the protagonist of the academic novel is often the professor who no longer finds his teaching satisfying. Hague states that "[t]he literature professor, the most frequent figure in the academic novel because it is usually written by a literary critic or literature teacher, is unable to discriminate between life and art. In his desire for life to resemble literature, he imposes aesthetic standards and interpretations onto the chaotic flux of reality in a way which ultimately destroys his ability to perceive objectively or live successfully" (181). In essence, having chosen to specialize in a subject and to enter a university environment, a professor loses the ability to relate to the real world, suffering instead from the superimposition of the analytical systems utilized in academic study upon real life experiences, thereby diminishing or distorting them. Hague points out that in these novels the professor character usually uses his subject (literature) as a simultaneous explication of reality and a shield from it (183), two functions which cannot hope to coexist successfully. While academic protagonists who are shown to be inept social creatures unable to communicate without their analytical systems provide comedy for the reader, they also raise the question that most of the protagonists seem to be struggling with as well: what is the relevance of academia, if it is taken out of context? What is the value of pure research, if it cannot be given back to the world outside the university walls? What

is the point of studying reflections of a past real world if it cannot help interpret the contemporary world? At the heart of these characters lies a very basic fear: what if I am no longer necessary? In a world where relevance is based on economic strength and the production of wealth, the academy seems a poor horse to bet on indeed.

Malcolm Bradbury states that in the modern academic novel the academy is used "as an appropriate stage on which to dramatize some of the key social and political concerns that had animated British society from the 1950s on. With their supposed commitment to excellence, liberalism and academic freedom... universities were a key place for considering questions of standards [and] cultural values" (285). As some of the key authors are professors and academic lecturers themselves (i.e. Bradbury, Lodge, Byatt, Amis) or have spent much time in the university environment pursuing at least one degree in tertiary education (Peter Ackroyd, Swift), the issues are being addressed by those at the heart of the educational crisis. The question to be raised is of course the question of audience. Who are these novels being written for? Who is to hear these cries of dissatisfaction and of doubt? Primarily, fellow academics would be interested in these works, as the issues examined are set in the academic sphere and concern academics' situation. There is another audience: the literary readership in general, to whom some of these concerns can hardly be a surprise, presuming that a significant portion of that readership has also pursued some degree of tertiary education. Perhaps not as familiar with the fears felt within the university sphere proper, these readers are the ones to whom these academics communicate their fears. Fundamentally, it is the professors of literature – specifically English literature – who produce these novels, which raises another interesting question: is it specifically the field of English literature being threatened

within this educational surfeit? As a result of this literary response, that area of study would appear to be the department most aware of the threat, but it is more likely that English is being used as a representative of the humanities in general, being a field well capable of self-reflexive examination. Ultimately, the field of English literature serves as an excellent representative of the humanities at large when it serves as the setting for academic self-examination. In the obliging era of the Robbins Report, the weakening period of over-growth that ensued, and the ruthless cutbacks of the Thatcher reforms, specialists in the field of English literature stand as painfully precise examples of those doubting the relevance of their jobs.

The authors represented in this study each have their own ways of dealing with the struggle to survive within such a harsh environment. David Lodge offers a solution that involves looking beyond those high academic walls and reintegrating scholarship with other pursuits. A.S. Byatt attempts to reconcile "real life" with academia by providing a happy ending for her protagonists. Graham Swift argues that only by knowing the past can we know today, and that only by means of the transmission of that past can humanity move forward. With the Thatcher reforms striking fear into the hearts of tenured dons everywhere, these authors begin to address the academic situation in fictional environments. Can their protagonists survive in the Thatcher-era academy? Robyn Penrose of Nice Work can, thanks to her enlightening relationship with industrial businessman Vic Wilcox (who also, in his turn, learns valuable lessons from Robyn and her academic outlook). Maud Bailey and Roland Michell of Possession can, by virtue of inheritance laws and by understanding the concept of historical value on a personal level. Waterland's Tom Crick, a history teacher being phased out along with the subject he

teaches, survives in his students' lives by virtue of how important he has made history: by revealing how the past is a part of the present. What of the work done by these protagonists? Is it relevant to the outside world? Robyn and Vic enrich each other's lives and chosen fields by sharing workdays and environments. Maud and Roland discover valuable historical documents that are received by people outside their fields with as much interest as by those within. Tom Crick steps outside his curriculum to give his students a sense of place and impresses upon them that history is today, that the Here and Now is in fact also yesterday and tomorrow as well, which as a concept will serve them much better than memorizing the dates of the French Revolution could.

As the years pass, the academic novel becomes more and more concerned with the importance of exploring the present by maintaining a link to the literary past – a conservative action. With the Thatcher emphasis upon technological training, such pursuits are perceoved as "unnecessary" or "liberal", and academics in the humanities begin to feel a fear similar to that felt by James Dixon in Lucky Jim, and yet completely different. It becomes not only a question of *Will I have a job?*, but *Will my job exist?*. This fear is explored on levels much more complex than these deceptively simple philosophical questions: professors examine their own commitment to their subject; lecturers query the relevance of their subject to life in general; and in an effort to "keep up with the times", academics must learn all the latest political moves and businessman tricks. The nostalgic lament for a simpler, easier age is inherent in the academic novel, nostalgia for an easier time within the academic sphere, before things got out of hand with the unbalancing Robbins Report and ruthlessly pruned by the Thatcher government.

Nostalgia is a compound word which comes from the Greek "nostos" (to return home) and "algia" (a painful condition), in effect a homesickness (Davis, 1). Both Fred Davis and David Lowenthal make the point that nostalgia isn't usually for a particularly historically correct period, but rather for "a generalised and often unspecified past" (Lowenthal, 18-9). Nostalgia is a natural reaction to feeling adrift in one's contemporary era, a desire for a "simple and stable past as a refuge from the turbulent and chaotic present" (21). There are two types of nostalgia which function in the Thatcher era academic novel: the nostalgia felt within the academic community for a time where funding was more bountiful and society more open to the idea of intellectual study of knowledge for knowledge's sake; and the nostalgia encouraged by (and perhaps even felt) by the Tory government for a period of economic success and stability. Nostalgia can rarely be acted upon in the manner desired, however. It is impossible, both physically and mentally, to return to an earlier time, or to bring the "easier" time forward and re-engage it within the modern mindset. It is, in fact, a mode of wishful thinking that is perhaps not as productive as it could be. The three texts hereafter examined all exhibit or examine nostalgia and relationships to the past in different ways as they react to the Robbins/Thatcher educational evolution; the question asked must be, are these two visions of the past – that of the government, and that of the humanities – at odds? Do they conflict, or do they support one another indirectly? Does a scholar's work with the past indirectly support the nostalgia encouraged by the government, or does it subvert it? Ultimately, it can be seen that the academy's view of the past is a very different one: one of personal connection, a view which embraces the past as an essential element of the present, instead of a standard to be re-achieved. The nostalgia exhibited by Thatcherite

identification with the nineteenth century is fundamentally shallow, denying any value that the present might hold as an era richer than those past. In Thatcher era academic fiction, the view of the past is anything but nostalgic; the study of history can be productive, but only when paired with a decision to reach out past the ivory walls of the academy to dialogue with the outside world of the present. In effect, the academy does not necessarily yearn for a simpler, less chaotic time; scholars exist as a bridge between history and that chaotic contemporary world.

## 2. "Yet In Every Myth There Is a Grain of Truth": Linking the Past and Present in Graham Swift's Waterland

Although not technically academic fiction, Graham Swift's Waterland shares several characteristics with the genre. Tom Crick is not a university professor but a secondary school teacher; and the action does not take place within a scholarly community. Waterland examines many of the same questions academic fiction does, faced with the beginnings of the Tory system under Thatcher's leadership: will my job still exist? Am I still necessary? Swift responds to these questions and fears by placing his protagonist Tom Crick in a situation where his subject, History, is being cut out of the curriculum, becoming a subset of the general social sciences program, while Crick himself is being forced into an early retirement.

Published in 1983, Waterland predates the actual Educational Reforms fiercely debated up to, and finally implemented in, 1988, and thus is more a reaction to the Tory party's disapproval of what was perceived as educational excess, unnecessary education beyond those basic labour skills. Of all three texts examined, Waterland is the most immediate representation of the disillusionment brought about by the failed Robbins reforms; it is chronologically closest to the report. As Tom Crick reaches back into his own past and the natural history of the region to prove the essential connection between the past and the present day, he is also creating a shield or a personal link for himself that serves as a validation for his life, his career and his present position in both. Crick argues that yes, both he, the history teacher, and the subject itself are still necessary; in fact, every man and woman is necessary, contributing to history overall. Individuals are

valuable, not only for their participation in the production of wealth, but also for their personal achievements left to history (both personal achievements and local achievements, for these are what contribute to the larger national history). In his effort to provide his students with some sort of context to assuage their fears of the future, Crick urges his students by illustration and personal example to question, to be curious, to forge by thought and examination an individual connection to the past: "Children, don't stop asking why. Don't cease your Why Sir? Why Sir? Though it gets more difficult the more you ask it, though it gets more inexplicable, more painful, and the answer never seems to come any nearer, don't try to escape this question Why" (130).

Waterland is also a comment on the state of education. Crick is being retired for two reasons – his wife has committed a crime, and his subject is being phased out of the curriculum. A measure so extreme introduced in a work of fiction suggests a cynical comment on the Thatcher approach to education – Swift sees extreme measures taking place in the future, resulting from the views expressed by the Conservative government on the state of education after two decades of sprawling growth. Already, less than five years into Thatcher's mandate, Swift has seized upon the drive to transform education into a system to produce labourers, not intellectuals, and stressed the importance of the quest for knowledge: question, always question.

While something so drastic as cutting History was never actually undertaken, what did occur in the years leading up to Waterland and the Thatcher regime was a re-evaluation of teaching methods. Rather than teaching what was perceived as rigid theory that allowed for little or no individual expression on the part of the student, teachers began to use a holistic approach. In Britain this became known as the 'progressive'

outlook, modeled on the system of education pioneered by John Dewey in the States. Feelings, reactions, and student input became more important than spelling, dates and equations. Letwin describes the approach as follows:

> Wherever the "progressive" outlook took over, the established attributes of English schools – rules, uniforms, assemblies, rituals, set subjects, timetables, games – were repudiated. In the new open-plan schools, classes were not held in separate rooms and children were not required to remain seated, keep quiet, learn tables or memorize dates. The aim was to replace old-fashioned "passive reception" by "active participation" in doing things "relevant" to contemporary life. Old subjects were crowded out by peace studies; discussions of racism, feminism, community problems, and homosexuality as well as other unconventional sex practices [...]. (Letwin, 230-1)

The aim of this approach is to involve the students to a greater degree than before, to encourage them to question, an excellent trait according to Crick. However, an extreme of any kind creates an imbalance, and what resulted from this particular free-hand approach to learning was the creation of a generation of students who lacked the basic communication skills and mathematics skills necessary for a tertiary education. Swift's fictional secondary school, while still looking to prepare students for the "real world", is in fact crippling them by cutting out History as a subject, in effect severing them from a past while teaching things of "practical relevance to today's world" (Swift, 23). If the earlier levels of the educational system are tampered with, eventually the later levels are also affected, and anyone attempting to acquire a tertiary education – including engineers and scientists, and those who choose a technical college to learn a trade – is, in effect, handicapped. A government would in fact hamper its future by these attempts to save money and streamline the curriculum to produce "training for the real world".

Like a progressive educator, Crick abandons the dates and hard facts, but it is his intent to remove the formal trappings of the curriculum to give his students a clearer, more complete picture of their history. The "regimen of history lessons", the "spooned-down doses of the past" (60), are abandoned; what Crick attempts to convey to his pupils is a complete life experience of where, for example, the French Revolution was coming from, where it was going, its pertinence to the present day. By drawing a connection between local history and cosmic history, Crick proves that today and yesterday are inextricably linked. By his efforts to calm their fears that life has no purpose, Crick offers his students their history as an anchor. For him, the past is deemed valuable not because of some shallow nostalgic desire for a simpler time, or for a return to innocence; but because he respects the past as the path that led to the present day, whether for good or ill.

Waterland comments keenly on the educational movement to phase out the humanities and the arts to make room for more practical skills in vocational training. The headmaster explains it to Crick in financial terms:

> ...I'm not *dropping* History. It's an unavoidable reduction. There'll be no new Head of History. History will merge with General Studies. ... You know the cuts are biting. And you know the kind of pressure I'm under – "practical relevance to today's world" – that's what they're demanding. ...It just so happens, Tom, that I agree with the powers-that-be. Equipping for the real world. It just so happens that I think that's what we're here for. ...Send just one of these kids out into the world with a sense of his or her usefulness, with an ability to apply, with practical knowledge and not a rag-bag of useless information-- (23)

The implication is, of course, that history has no relevance to the contemporary world, that a knowledge of history is unnecessary to men and women who will seek gainful employment in modern society, and in fact is nothing but a tangled scrap-heap of trivia.

Yet Headmaster Lewis Scott's words - "[w]e're cutting back on history" (5) - serve to reveal the impossibility of the task. One can re-interpret the past, perhaps, re-tailor to suit one's needs; "cut back", or actually eliminate events, never. Although events can be excised from a narrative and as such might as well never have happened, an event, once it has occurred, can never be taken back again. Waterland consists of Tom Crick's desperate attempt to communicate the importance of his subject in just such terms to his class of cynical pupils, in an effort to show to them the connection between the Here and Now and the past, and the links between his present self and the past which has shaped it. Crick's need to establish that connection lies in his belief that history is a succession and a progression of not only events, but of historical periods. The past is truth; all that is necessary is knowing how to access it. History is about individuals; national history is the sum of individual histories, thousands of individual stories combining to create a larger pattern, and thus history on the national level, as Crick believes, is no more important – indeed, perhaps less important – than history on the personal level. By stressing the presence of the past and its ongoing ties to the present, Crick validates every individual, giving him/her a context, a source, a direction. In essence, Crick's teachings prove that man as a creature does not change a great deal; people are concerned with the same basics: family, honour, survival, love, pride. Eras may shift and change, but the individual men and women who create those eras are not much different from those of a few eras earlier.

This personal identification with the past is a subtle rejection of the Tory 'glory days' kind of nostalgia generated via the party's efforts to return to the economic success once known in the time of Imperial Britain. While Crick feels pride in his ancestors'

deeds, he identifies more with their personal dedication and self-respect. The nostalgia the Thatcher government creates is a national pride disconnected from the present, focused on the nineteenth century, which inspires the nation to attain a similar productive economy, but Crick's admiration for the past is of a stronger kind. Personal identification gives Crick's stories a unique power that the Conservative government's nostalgia lacks. The irony of Swift's fictional "cutting of History" in a secondary school curriculum may also be contrasted with the Tory use of nostalgia for the Victorian era as a standard to regain or surpass. On the one hand, the government is using nostalgic portrayals of history to inspire citizens; on the other, it implements funding cuts that limit research and study in the arts and humanities. While it is unlikely that the Conservative government cut university budgets to favour technical colleges simply to maintain control over the vision of the past communicated to the general populace, the situation can still be recognised as an opportune one for the Tories. The maintenance of scholars like Crick, who are constantly reevaluating the past and our knowledge of it (and hence our perceptions of it, and our perceptions of the present), is essential to the preservation of historical knowledge. Swift expresses this in the importance Crick attaches to the modern man's concern with finding a place for himself in the chaotic contemporary world, as well as within the larger framework of what we call history. While the Thatcher preference is for active citizens, the actions of the academic, while perceived as passive, are just as dynamic on an intellectual level. The gathering of historical knowledge and interpretation of it are as important as making history in the first place. Cultural continuity is preserved through stories, but there must be someone willing to listen to them in order to receive the transmission.

Crick returns again and again to his personal history, his-story, and the idea of stories and storytelling. Like Scheherazade, Crick (and humanity in general) uses stories as a shield against the unknown, the undesired and the future:

> But when the whole world is about to end there'll be no more reality, only stories. All that will be left to us will be stories. We'll sit down in our shelter, and tell stories, like poor Scheherazade.... (298)

The protagonist in One Thousand and One Arabian Nights Scheherazade tells stories with suspenseful endings to her new husband, the prince, to avoid the death he would otherwise mete out at dawn. For Crick, all of history is a story; stories are what remain when a man has gone, both in official written form, and in unofficial oral form, stories of the nation and stories of the men and women who create a nation at any given time. It is these stories – personal and otherwise – which Crick offers to his students as weapons with which to approach the dreaded future. Telling stories is the oldest method of passing on information, especially historical information; the oral tradition is a strong one, and a tradition that Crick evidently believes in more than he believes in the validity of reciting dates. Like his father telling him stories as a child, Crick tells these children stories to teach them about the real world – not the real world of the headmaster and the Tory government, but the real world in which they will live and love and die.

The obsession with the past Swift constructs for his main character may at a quick glance appear to be an expression of nostalgia. Crick's preoccupation with the past might suggest that he prefers it to the present – not his own personal past, but the noble natural history he retells and the strong men and women who worked the lands, settled the towns and forged communities. His admiration for these accomplishments, coupled with his difficult personal situation in the present, superficially suggests a desire to return to that

past (and perhaps to his own past to make different choices). Nostalgia is the desire to return to what is perceived to be a simpler time, made so by the lack of modern knowledge and awareness of the world and its less than ideal state of affairs. Lowenthal comments that nostalgia

> mainly envisage[s] a time when folk did not feel fragmented, when doubt was either absent or patent, when thought fused with action, when aspiration achieved consummation, when life was whole hearted; in short, a past that was unified and comprehensible, unlike the incoherent, divided present. Significantly, one thing absent from this imagined past is nostalgia – no one *then* looked back in yearning or for succor.
>
> That past is false, not simply because its features are prettified and its virtues exaggerated, but because those who lived in it could never have so viewed their own circumstances. What we are nostalgic for is not the past as it was or even as we wish it were; but for the condition of *having been*, with a concomitant integration and completeness lacking in any present. (Lowenthal, 29)

In fact, Tom Crick is anything but nostalgic in this way. He argues that stories are not only a palliative to soothe restless fears, but more importantly a communication of essential cultural information that provides a base for the modern generation to build upon. Crick revisits the past to tell people about it, to learn from it, not to live in it. For Crick, a sense of what has gone before is what balances out a sense that more will come, with today and the Here and Now being the fulcrum. He strives to allay the feeling of incompleteness, of lack of connection, by providing the knowledge (via personal stories) that the past was not as integrated and simple as it is portrayed by curriculum history. His command to "be curious" (206) is a command always to question the world and the past, issued in the hopes that his students will not accept whatever information is handed to them, that they will think for themselves. Questioning means that a truth is never decided upon, that it is always in flux. Once a truth is accepted, then new growth, new thought, and progress itself ceases.

> Why this seeking for omens? This superstition? Why must the zenith never be fixed? Because to fix the zenith is to contemplate decline. Because if you construct a stage then the show must go on. Because there always must be – don't deny it – a future. [...]
>
> Which way do we go? Forwards to go backwards? Backwards to go forwards? (93-4)

Living only in the future or the past is a mistake – perhaps the mistake that Angela Hague and David Bevan are concerned with, the academic's lack of participation in the present, his eyes set firmly on where he has come from and not on the road ahead, or the present he occupies. The past is as essential to the future as the present is; the links made between them cannot be broken. Today's reality – the Here and Now - becomes the past in a moment, to be interpreted; today's future becomes tomorrow's Here and Now. The process – the evolution – is the important aspect. Studying the past and applying it to the future instead of the present is a futile mistake, however. What Crick teaches is not how to approach the present or the future, but how to arm oneself to deal with them. Learning from history is not the same as attempting to re-create it. In his novel-length lecture to his secondary school students, Crick says of the French Revolution:

> .... [D]id they really have in mind a Society of the Future? Not a bit of it. Their model was an idealized ancient Rome. Laurel wreaths and all. Their prototype the murder of Caesar. Our heroes of the new age – good classicists all – yearned, too, to go back – [...] I draw attention to the backward-sliding element of the Revolution to illustrate that even revolutions with their claims to construct a new order are subject to one of the most ingrained historical beliefs. That history is the record of decline. What we wish upon the future is very often the image of some lost, imagined past. (138, 140-1)

Crick points out the trap of nostalgia: a forward progression becomes in reality a backward step in the grand scheme of things. The error being made repeatedly by indulging in nostalgia is reverencing an earlier time, with the assumption that it is more

desirable. Crick's narrative, while confirming that the present may be uncomfortable, makes the repeated point that although history appears to portray the past in a highly desirable light, it is an idealized time, made so by the transmission of an historical curriculum that is devoid of any sense of personal identification. Crick's narrative (the local natural history cut with his own personal history) serves as a counter to the nebulous curriculum. By conveying history as personal stories, Crick offers his students (and the reader) a truer sense of the past than general study of curriculum history ever could.

In spite of his love for his subject and his defence of it to the headmaster, Crick's opinion of curriculum history is a low one, and this opinion is forced from him when Price tells him outright that "What matters... is the here and now. Not the past. The here and now – and the future. [...] The only important thing about history, I think, sir, is that it's got to the point where it's probably about to end." (6-7) Curriculum history has nowhere near the same urgency and immediacy that "real" history has; and it is this "real" history that Crick attempts to transmit via story to his students in his last hours with them, not as their teacher but as a fellow man, spurred to do so by Price's declaration that history must end and by the headmaster's repeated insistence that there is nothing to learn from history.

> "One might argue that you've already waived your responsibilities to the curriculum by turning your lessons into these - story-telling sessions."
>
> "The subject's still history."
>
> "I see. Whatever that means. Have some more Scotch. I thought the standard line was that the past actually had something to teach us. By learning from –"
>
> "If that were so, history would be the record of inexorable progress, wouldn't it? The future would be an ever more glowing prospect." (Swift, 153)

However, the future isn't a glowing prospect, and Crick knows it. Humankind makes mistakes over and over again; for Crick, a history teacher is "someone who teaches mistakes. While others say, Here's how to do it, he says, And here's what goes wrong. [...] And here are a few bungles, botches, blunders and fiascos... It doesn't work out; it's human to err [...]" (235). The future is not attractive in a world where the economic and social situation is bleak and where the threat of nuclear war looms every day. By the pupils' own declaration the future does not – or cannot – exist. Only by transmitting history as personal history, and history of place, can these representatives of the next generation be given the desire to "apply [...] practical knowledge", with that "sense of usefulness" the headmaster is intent on giving them. A personal identification with history yields a clearer sense of belonging in the Here and Now, and subsequently a lesser dread of the future. What use is it to prepare students for a hard modern world if they have no hope of a future? Crick tells his students directly that

> Yes, yes, the past gets in the way; it trips us up, it bogs us down; it complicates, it makes difficult. But to ignore this is folly, because, above all, what history teaches us is to avoid illusion and make-believe, to lay aside dreams, moonshine, cure-alls, wonder-workings, pie-in-the-sky – to be realistic. (108)

In short, he counsels to avoid the trap of nostalgia, which defies realism to embrace an imagined past. Such an approach would be self-defeating, for it threatens a weak future if built upon. Thatcherite nostalgia has no place in Waterland; Crick is determined to show all the errors and failures and poor judgment inherent in history. What he values instead is a warts-and-all knowledge of the past because it allows sufficient information to

question the two-dimensional, practical present (and the past) as defined by Thatcher Tories and the headmaster Lew Scott.

Waterland examines the academic view of the future by investigating how the past is perceived and how that perception is transmitted. Price, Crick's pupil opponent and unknowing ally, asks why history is important, and Crick's first answer is that the question "why?" is in essence the answer itself.

> Your demand for explanation provides an explanation. Isn't this seeking of reasons itself inevitably an historical process, since it must always work backwards from what came after to what came before? And so long as we have this itch for explanations, must we not always carry around with us this cumbersome but precious bag of clues called History? (106)

The importance of inquiry, the constant search for truth – this is what a view of the past should embody. What history means to an individual is the key in Waterland; not what it means to a teacher who lectures to you; not what it means to an author of a textbook. Crick's constant inquiry calls for a constant reassessment of history to prevent it from becoming static and stale, a set of dates and events with no life to it. Without questioning life as it happens, there is no progress made. Without what Crick calls "a bag of clues" - what the headmaster calls "a rag-bag of pointless information" – humanity is at a loss to provide a context for the endless questions which result from living. The students, adrift in their own time, at first reject what Crick has been offering them: Price tells him, "[b]ut – I want a future. [...] We all do. And you – you can stuff your past!" (141). It is significant that the student body believe that history is a waste of time until Crick's "story-telling sessions" communicate to them a different kind of history, one that debunks glorious nostalgic myth and appeals instead to the basic desire of understanding history as a weave of individual efforts. It is individuals who combine together to make a nation

and a national identity; by understanding the human level of involvement in history, one can participate in the present confident in the knowledge that every individual makes a difference, even at an imperceptible level. Price embodies the students' concern with not having a future at all (and this view of the future can be read in one of two ways: a successful vocational future, or a biological, global future); it is the literal end of history that Price fears. This is not nostalgia at work; this is not an attempt to improve the present by modeling on the past (regression to achieve progression), but a fear of the cycle itself coming to an end.

Crick quotes Price to the headmaster, saying:

> "The only important thing about history is that history has reached the stage where it might be coming to an end"... and I began quite seriously to think, Lew: what does education do, what does it have to offer, when deprived of its necessary partner, the future, and faced instead with – no future at all? (154)

Being faced with no future at all is a daunting position to be in, for a teacher as well as a student. The argument made in Waterland is that stories, with a life of their own, survive after the figures in them have passed away and become history. History does not become history until it ceases being the present, and moves into the past. The historicizing process, examining the past for clues to the present, functions in all the humanities, and is one of the sources of distress for the professors during the Thatcher regime which methodically cuts funding and shifts importance away from pure research and the value of knowledge into the areas of industry and economic stability. If the contemporary view is that the past is of no use to the present, or to the future, the humanities that concern themselves with the study of past texts or works must find themselves tormented indeed. How to communicate the importance of these predecessors, their academic focus? How

to portray them as valid participants in the modern day, their continued historical value in today's culture, and tomorrow's? And how are they to be portrayed – or to survive – in the Thatcherite era, which values a nostalgic past, and "cuts" or "reduces" History?

Del Ivan Janik comments that "[t]hrough Swift's three novels there runs a concern for the meaning of history, in itself and especially in contrast with the immediate present, the Here and Now; related to this concern is the recurrent theme of the value and danger of knowledge"(74). Janik examines the narrative structure of Waterland and how it pertains to time itself. Whereas industry and business are unconcerned with the past (but for the glowing example of Imperial Britain's economic and cultural success), Swift's narrative structure draws a different conclusion. The past and the present are spliced together as he blends stories, of both a personal and a regional past, creating the illusion that all temporal periods are simultaneous.

> The structure is not chaotic, for each of these three major elements [the history of the fens, the 1940s events and the narrative present-day 1980s ], as it comes to the forefront of the narrative, is treated more or less chronologically; but as a whole the novel conforms to Tom's characterization of history: "It goes in two directions at once. It goes backwards as it goes forwards. It loops. It takes detours" because "there are no compasses for journeying in time". (Janik, 83)

Hence the need for academics to reinterpret and research literary and artistic material: there are no compasses; guides are required. These academic guides are privileged, too; what one discovers in the past may shed light on the present, and new discoveries or the benefit of experience may shed light on certain areas of history previously unfathomable. For an historian or other academic, time can indeed move both ways. Being removed from things facilitates examination and comprehension. The Thatcher regime's devaluing of such academic skills suggests that the government considers work in the academic

humanities a waste of time, that the past is done and gone and has no bearing on current affairs apart from providing statistics to calculate. Yet simultaneously the government is using a nostalgic view of the past to spur its economy on, suggesting that perhaps the government is a victim of seeing the past (in particular the Victorian era) as a preferable era due to its lack of contemporary complications, as well as seeing it as a monumental era to live up to economically.

Waterland emphasizes man's driving need to return again and again to history and to the past in order to validate or explain his present. Why is this? Tom Crick describes it thus:

> [T]here are very few of us who can be, for any length of time, merely realistic. So there's no escaping it; even if we miss the grand repertoire of history, we yet imitate in miniature and endorse, in miniature, its longing for presence, for feature, for purpose, for content. (Swift, 41)

Crick's words suggest that every man has a need to feel that he belongs, to help anchor him in a world that Lowenthal describes as "incoherent, divided" (29). The sweep of history assures us that this, too, shall pass. More than a nostalgic indulgence, this is partially what motivates academics who seek truths in the past. By plumbing the depths of history and examining cultural artefacts, academics gain greater insight into human truths and historical truths, which remain in flux due to constant reinterpretation, and academics' personal interpretations on top of that. Del Ivan Janik believes that

> That other realm, the immediate life-transforming moment, the Here and Now, is history's mirror image: it is a matter of chance or impulse; its logic is the logic of madness or nonsense; it is and creates the most intense kind of *private* reality. (Janik, 85)

If history is a loop that detours and goes forward and backwards simultaneously, then the answer to why man refers constantly to his history would be to make sense of our present, by finding parallels in the past or the source of a problem – or a solution. Often, not knowing the past is the problem, as it is with Dick, Tom's brother, who is ignorant of his incestuous history, and who remedies what his dim mind perceives as a wrongdoing by drowning (intentionally or otherwise) in the very fens that Tom Crick uses as metaphor for the reclamation of history. With the death of Dick, one of those backwards-travelling loops ends, becoming history instead of a troubled Here and Now. The flow forward can resume again. What remains as fact in memory cannot be changed, however; only how we perceive it, deal with it:

> Henry Crick forgets. He says: I remember nothing. But that's just a trick of the brain. That's like saying: I don't want to remember, and I don't want to talk about it. Yet it's perfectly natural that Henry Crick wants to forget, it's a perfectly good sign that he thinks he's forgotten, because that's how we get over things, by forgetting. (222)
>
> [...] Like frightened children, what they want most is to be told stories. And out of this discovery [Helen] evolves a precept: No, don't forget. Don't erase it. You can't erase it. But make it into a story. Just a story. Yes, everything's crazy. What's real? All a story. Only a story... (225)

The reality of Dick cannot be changed. It cannot be "erased", either. It can be dealt with only by turning it into a story, which Crick does, telling it to his students as an example of how mankind carries on.

In reality, there is so much unknown about what transpired in the past that any expression of nostalgia is in reality a combination of the present and a half-imagined ideal of what reality prior to the present must have been. Unlike fiction, where culture is encoded subtly within seemingly unrelated narratives, history is the record of fact (or the

perception of fact), and thus when rewritten loses a certain amount of truth, as well as becoming so subjective that one could challenge any historical 'fact' as part fact, part personal interpretation by the author. In the contemporary world, history rewritten deliberately to obscure unwelcome or uncomfortable facts, media romanticisation and plain ignorance combine to (re)create a sense of a past – a past which did not in fact exist. It is this academics seek to debunk, looking deeper, sifting through historical documents and reconstructing a more truthful view of the past, even if it shatters rose-tinted nostalgia. In Waterland, one of the things that motivates mankind's constant turning to the past is curiosity. "People die when curiosity goes. People have to find out, people have to know. How can there be any true revolution till we know what we're made of?" (206) Tom Crick asks his students. And yet the headmaster, as he blithely phases History out of the curriculum, says, "History breeds pessimism":

> Perhaps this only proves one thing, Tom. Have you ever stopped to think that it's the study of your precious subject that inspires such – gloom? [...] What's more, what we pick up from dwelling on it is a defeatist, jaundiced outlook...(Swift, 154)

Fundamentally, the conflict is between a contemporary focus determined to create a productive society, and an attitude which embraces examining the past for its intrinsic value as well as its potential applications in the world today. Crick says:

> And where history does not undermine and set traps for itself in such an openly perverse way, it creates this insidious longing to revert. It begets this bastard but pampered child, Nostalgia. How we yearn – how you may one day yearn – to return to that time before history claimed us, before things went wrong. [...] How we long for Paradise. For mother's milk. To draw back the curtain of events that has fallen between us and the Golden Age. (136)

According to Crick's own argument as to the failure of revolutions, however, there is no true Golden Age; only in hindsight are such labels given. The Golden Age here represents a glorified past, a signifier for a history that never happened, that has only been created in men's minds. Nostalgia is, for Crick, an "insidious" desire to have it easy, to live in a bucolic paradise: it is a common misperception that our ancestors faced less trying challenges than we do. One of the intentions of Crick's interweaving of fen history, personal family history and national history is to show that our ancestors faced challenges equally daunting in their time, in their own historical context – a view presented as nostalgia by the Thatcher government.

Crick himself reveals admiration (not nostalgia) for his entrepreneurial ancestors's lifestyles, as Pamela Cooper points out. "For Tom," she says, "the constructive principle within history reached its expressive peak in the imperialist heyday of the mid nineteenth century and his Atkinson ancestors' belief in the Victorian `Idea of Progress" (373). Cooper also compares Tom as historian to the machines that work to dredge the marshlands, reclaiming the land:

> He presents historical inquiry as itself a struggle with matter, an effort to "keep scooping, scooping up from the depths this remorseless stuff that time leaves behind" (346). A kind of human dredger, the historian works to salvage the enigmatic "stuff" of fact from the fluid of fiction and its byproduct, the inchoate, erasing mud. (Cooper, 376)

Just as workers dredge the marshes to prevent any further loss of the land, the historian reclaims knowledge from the past to shore up the present upon which to build the future. Material possession of land is paralleled by the mental possession of knowledge, knowledge continually worked upon by historians and other academics. Four years into the Thatcher government's reign, Swift's Waterland has already begun to examine the

necessity of maintaining a group of academics devoted to investigating the past, and examining the potential effects of losing that group. The importance of pursuing history (or any other subject in the arts faculty) is connected to maintaining a sense of being, of belonging, and of pride in oneself as well as pride in where one has come from, both on an individual and a national basis. Tom Crick proves to us that the stories we tell define who we are. By removing the class of academics who seek out those stories to reintroduce or reinterpret them to the present generation, one removes the essential link to that national pride to which the Thatcher government appeals in an effort to reconstruct the country as economically successful. While Tom Crick defies the curriculum by telling stories which connect the national, the local, the natural and the individual historical narratives, he also fights to communicate to his students that history is the blood in their veins and that the past and present are indeed inextricably linked, that they must never be separated as two disconnected and unique entities.

Crick's farewell speech, unrehearsed, unexpected, delivered in response to the Holocaust Club's unexpected vocal demonstration, touches on one of the deepest fears inherent in contemporary civilization: that of the end of civilization itself, of organized, cultural, civilized life. The headmaster begins by mouthing historical platitudes that both Crick and his students know to be empty:

> So let us not dwell on this unhappy departure [...] but – as Mr Crick, as our head of history, would no doubt have us do – look to the past and give due credit to his long and valued service. And let us reflect [...] as Mr Crick would no doubt also have us do, on how time passes [...] these school years of yours, which may seem long enough to you, are soon over, believe me. They're precious. They're vital. So don't waste them, don't spurn them. Build on them. (332-3)

From his nostalgic point of view, these childhood years should be happy ones. The students, having voiced their fears about the lack of a future to Crick, know that looking to the past without looking to the present is pointless. "Fear is here" is their motto, and Crick puts that fear into words for them, then offers them the solution: the pursuit of a goal considered unimportant by the government intent on saving money and focusing education on an industrially productive society, namely, preserving and studying the thing called culture, the academic quest for truth.

> Children, there's this thing called civilization. It's built of hopes and dreams. It's only an idea. It's not real. It's artificial. No one ever said it was real. It's not natural. No one ever said it was natural. It's built by the learning process; by trial and error. It breaks easily. No one said it couldn't fall to bits. And no on ever said it would last for ever. [...]
>
> There's this thing called progress. But it doesn't progress, it doesn't go anywhere. Because as progress progresses the world can slip away. It's progress if you can stop the world from slipping away. My humble model for progress is the reclamation of the land. Which is repeatedly, never-endingly retrieving what is lost. A dull yet valuable business. A hard, inglorious business. But you shouldn't go mistaking the reclamation of land for the building of empires. (Swift, 336)

The trick to civilization is holding on to history and culture while progress occurs, and not letting what you already possess fall away as you reach for more. The work of the academic is to keep hold of that which has been created, in the distant or the recent past, while the world sails forward into the future. The educational cuts the Conservative government begins to implement threaten this academic goal, and by extension threaten that culture. The fears which academics voice in their fiction and criticism are deeper than "will I still have a job?"; "will my job still be needed?" is more to the point in an age which devalues the past and overvalues the present and the possibilities the future holds.

## 3. "A Sense of the History of Things": The Academy in A.S. Byatt's Possession

"Funny way to spend your life, studying another chap's versifying," a character observes in A.S. Byatt's Possession (78). The passivity implicit in studying someone else's great accomplishments, artistic or otherwise, is exactly what is not held up as one of Thatcherism's "vigorous virtues". More to the taste of the pro-active government would be accomplishing great deeds rather than studying them. And yet, "someone has to have a sense of the history of things" (78), and in Possession it is the academic – specifically the literary scholar – who hunts down the historical "truth" inferred from literature. Swift has already argued for the importance of understanding one's background, of giving a sense of place to his students both geographically and historically. In Thatcher's Britain, the academy might be seen as the custodian of the past – it is popularly acknowledged as important, but not important enough to merit increased funding (or even sustained funding) for museums, libraries or education. The Tory mandate to increase economic strength eclipses cultural heritage. In Possession, this heritage is revealed to have great value, academically, personally and nationally. In order for that heritage to have the maximum amount of significance to society, the world of the academic must incorporate the world of the capitalist, and vice versa.

The simultaneous unfolding of two storylines set in different historical eras subtly reinforces Byatt's comment about the function of the academic community in the modern day. Past and present unfold concurrently, suggesting that the academic dialogue between the two eras is a natural and desirable one. Louise Yelin calls this "an instance of

cultural cartography, a simultaneous mapping of Victorian culture and contemporary Victorian studies" (Yelin, 38). The way Maud and Roland re-live the original relationship between Christabel LaMotte and Randolph Ash suggests that through academic research, one can in effect reconstruct the past to such an extent that reality in the contemporary world begins to reflect the scholar's findings, paralleling past events. Such a reflection can be useful: if part of the argument against arts and humanities is directed at their lack of relevance in the modern world, then the effect upon how one's view of the contemporary world is assisted and refined by dialogue with the past can be argued as being a valuable application of scholarship. The interest in the past depicted in Possession is not the superficial nostalgia often popularly expressed for the Victorian era in heritage sites and Merchant-Ivory films, where pain-staking and loving recreation of period detail abounds. Such examples of popular nostalgia testify to the belief that life in the past must have been pastoral and idyllic, and, if only that state of uncomplicated simplicity could be reached again, the world in general (and individual lives in specific) could be greatly improved. The desire most often expressed by Byatt's main characters is the desire (in the case of several characters, the need) to know what really happened in the past – not to conduct a superficial nostalgic interpretation of the past, but to search for truth. The knowledge is not used to deliberately repeat history, but instead to fully understand it, to comprehend motivation, or uncover truths as they existed in another era. There is no active desire to reestablish the glory of a bygone era; rather, there is the desire to piece together the events, to reconstruct the reality of the past as opposed to operating further under the imagined idyllic or superficial popular perceptions of the Victorian era.

Here the role of the academic protagonists is to discover the truth about a small set of individuals, challenging the accepted interpretation of the history of Ash and LaMotte for the sake of authenticity itself (if there ever can be such a thing), and ultimately for the improvement of the nation. Byatt portrays the academic as a crusader for truth, illumination and Britain's cultural legacy. Authenticity, for the academics in Possession, becomes not only a matter of integrity, but also a personal quest. As illustrated by Maud's discovery that she is in fact the descendant of Ash and LaMotte, researching the past in Possession is a method of re-establishing the present, of redefining it and oneself. Unlike the nostalgic past encouraged by the Thatcher government, the past in Possession is revealed to have been one of era-challenging individuals, visionaries who ultimately could not move completely beyond the constrains of their society, and whose story has been suppressed. The suppression of the story creates a more socially acceptable picture of Randolph Henry Ash's past, but not an accurate one – a description reminiscent of the nostalgia endorsed by the government.

The research that Roland and Maud undertake is crucial not only to Maud, but also to the nation – they discover precious historical documents and protect them from foreign ownership. The fact that this story is set in the academic community emphasizes the importance of scholarly research on several levels: the discovery is personally important to the researchers, to their subjects on a professional level, and to Britain on a national level. History is thus given more weight, making it something of great import to individuals as well as to nations, creating a parallel between the academy and the outside world. Yelin states that "Possession represents Victorian England as Victorian culture, and especially literature" (38), and it is clear that Byatt's novel argues that the cultural

heritage of the Victorian era is equally as important as the economic heritage Thatcher evokes as inspiration for a modern economic advancement. Byatt's stress on the importance of cultural history is a response to the Thatcher government's emphasis on economic growth and the production of wealth: money is not the only wealth that exists, as Byatt's characters discover. Some things – like culture and heritage, that are defined as the knowledge the academy holds, and the traditions and material it investigates in Possession - are beyond price.

Invoked in simile and metaphor and portrayed as the constant companion of the characters from both eras, time is very important in Possession, and functions almost as a personality in its own right. As time is an essential element of the concept of history, this is no surprise, especially in a novel so concerned with the past; however, the unique idea of time co-existing with, replacing an aspect of, or even substituting for the character, is returned to again and again. Ash perceives LaMotte as "an hour-glass, containing time. [...] She had his time, she contained his past and his future" (287). Christabel LaMotte invokes the Greek goddess of memory, Mnemosyne, in her epic poem, The Fairy Melusine: "Help me, O Mnemosyne, thou Titaness / [...] O Memory, who holds the thread that links / My modern mind to that of ancient days" (293). Mortimer Cropper's lectures involve his looking at his literary hero Ash's watch which he carries with him, and those lectures used to include "a little joke about continuity, Ash's time and Cropper's" with a point of "publicly claiming the watch" (387). When speaking of Ash, Blackadder claims that: "He wrote about history – he understood history – he saw what the new ideas about development had done to the human idea of time" (400). Roland sits in the library, thinking on "the tiresome and bewitching endlessness of the quest for

knowledge. Here he sat, recuperating a dead man's reading, timing his exploration by the library clock and the faint constriction of his belly" (4). History, the past, the passage of time, the mystery created by the desire to know the truth about the past – all these issues lie at the heart of the action of Possession. The presentation of time as a unifying concept implies that history is all about continuity, not rifts, an implication strengthened by the concurrent plots in two eras. The simultaneous past-present storylines sometimes belie the passage of time: the reader experiences both stories concurrently, privy to the immediacy of each, while the modern characters must seek through the mists of time to banish the darkness surrounding the facts of the Ash-LaMotte relationship (and by extension many of the poets' literary accomplishments). By re-establishing the past, the scholars can redefine their views of the present, but only by re-evaluating their methods of viewing the contemporary world at the same time. Time provides certain obstacles to the collection of knowledge about history and concerning the past, but the fact that it is also continuous proves that history is not the past alone; it is how the present interacts with the past.

As an aspect of the novel's major theme of time, history as an abstract is at the heart of much of Byatt's text. Her characters are all very aware of it – LaMotte and Ash exist in an era where archeological data challenges religion with proof of natural history, and Maud and Roland exist within their chosen profession of literary archaeology, referring to it often. In the case of the poets, history is in crisis, which creates an odd ironic tension between the past (Ash and LaMotte exhibiting contradictory nostalgia for man's memory since the dawn of time and nostalgia for a time before history became so threatening) and the present, where Roland and Maud seek to uncover the real events

which constitute their cultural history. The irony lies in the assumption that unearthing information in the modern era, however complete, can convey the true experience on a personal level. For all their success in discovering the relationship between Ash and LaMotte, and the involvement of Blanche Glover and Ellen Ash, Roland and Maud cannot truly understand what actually occurred. They can reconstruct; they can theorize; they can empathize; but they can never truly *know*. Frederick M. Holmes points out that "documents disrupt the initial illusion established by the novel that it is supplying direct access to an independent reality. In other words, we are reminded that textual mediation of any kind distances us from such a reality" (321). Ann Hulbert sees the solution to that distance felt by Roland and Maud as an "act of sympathy required to bridge what they see as a huge gap separating them from Ash and LaMotte" (59). This sympathy is hardly part of the academic stereotype, and shows the protagonists of Possession as emerging from their ivory tower and rejecting the use of analytical systems as shields from real life. Holmes, however, argues that any complete understanding of the past is impossible:

> But how can the interpreters adequately free themselves from the limitations of their own historical situation in order to make their interpretations accurate? Byatt's answer is that they cannot do so, but that they must try anyway in full knowledge that the result will be a fictive approximation, not the objective truth. (331)

The irony of the narrative in Possession is that the reader knows the "objective truth" about the past, encountering the Ash-LaMotte story as it unfolds in their present, while Roland and Maud, separated from their historical subjects by a century, cannot know it. They can only formulate a rough sketch of what happened: a "fictive approximation" within a work of fiction. Yelin sees Byatt as a novelist unable or unwilling to allow her characters to fully access the past: "If, on the one hand, Byatt is... urging us to be modest

about our endeavours and to humble ourselves before history, on the other hand she represents the Victorian period as an essence unavailable to the grasping moderns and postmoderns – us – who only want to possess it" (40). Ultimately Byatt represents the past as important to embrace, but impossible to know completely. Cultural history is not composed of statistics and soulless dates of great events; it is the lives, the loves, the literature and other cultural artefacts of people past. The wonder of it is that one must experience literature and the arts directly in order to benefit from the worth therein. By directly accessing cultural artefacts, one can garner greater truths about the past, formulating individual interpretations and reactions to create a personal link between the present and the past to replace the glossed nostalgia offered by the government.

Creating a personal link by accessing cultural artefacts is partially the purpose of using academics as protagonists. The environment of the academic novel casts a different light upon the pursuit of truth in the modern world. By using this academic setting, Byatt immediately presents a cast of characters who have certain obsessions and drives: namely, to explore literaria in an attempt to discover new insight into truths buried in the past, to conduct the quintessential search for wisdom. When Roland comes across letters previously unseen and unknown which challenge the established version of truth surrounding Ash - a truth carefully reconstructed and guarded for decades - he creates a situation where his professional obligations become secondary to the all-consuming desire to "play detective" on a much more personal level. While presented as a personal obsession in the novel, the action of keeping such knowledge to oneself and acting on it in relative secrecy is in keeping with the academic's fear of losing the edge he has on his colleagues. In the ever desperate search for tenure, these academics (some

subconsciously and some consciously) guard their research jealously, then publish in triumphant originality. This tendency is at direct odds with the academic purpose of uncovering the past and illuminating truths to improve people's understanding of where they have come from, and where they are now. The power involved in keeping silent about a subject – especially a hitherto misunderstood past – can be dizzying. Roland says to Maud,

> I mean of course everything connects and connects – all the time – and I suppose one studies – I study – literature because all these connections seem both endlessly exciting, and then in some sense dangerously powerful – as though we held a clue to the true nature of things? (Byatt, 253)

Who holds the truth about the past holds power over others as a result. By presenting the past in certain lights, by playing up certain aspects or leaving out others, history can be seen or understood as something different from what it was. The danger lies in focusing too closely on one aspect, as the Thatcher government does with the inspiring economic nostalgia for the Victorian era, specifically the boom created by the Industrial Revolution. By ignoring the rich literary and artistic legacy from the same era, Britain is being crippled, deprived of a significant part of its heritage as funding is directed towards technological colleges and industry improvement and withheld from the very academic institutions which work to preserve cultural heritage. Reinterpretation or misrepresentation of history is inevitable in any era; historical parallax, if you will. Byatt's novel suggests that examining literature is the method by which one can fix a certain point in time and come as close as possible to understanding it. Examining a cultural artifact offers a tantalizing glimpse into the mindset of the historical figure that created it. Subjectivity is unavoidable; however, Possession argues that it is literature and its study that reconstructs the past in a clearer, more beneficial way than the simple

observance of dates, actions and statistics. By looking beyond these simple aspects of the past, the academic can recreate a more comprehensive picture of how men and women reacted in their own day to social and intellectual questions and stresses, how they worked out problems of their own, and how they too viewed the past. All in all, a more complete view can be obtained, and by examining such outlooks, certain solutions or approaches applicable to today's problems may be found. The benefit of researching the cultural past is a better understanding of the present.

The proprietary view of the academic "possessing" facts he or she unearths personally provides further evidence to Angela Hague's insular ivory tower theory. A distrust of the outer world, of the 'other', the unknown quantity (often of fellow academics, rivals or even colleagues) is characteristic of many academics in these academic novels. Suspiciously guarding notes and information gleaned until the time has come to reveal them to the world, a scholar uses fact and research into the past (and ultimately the approval or rejection of his colleagues) as the measure of his own worth. Roland Mitchell doesn't quite fit the stereotypical mold. For him and Maud, the research of the Ash-LaMotte correspondence (and their ensuing mysterious relationship) becomes the kind of mad obsession of which they speak; the professional academic aspect vanishes almost completely, leaving behind only the personal interest in historical fact. The function of the academic protagonists in Possession is that of the academic ideal: they are custodians of the past, literary archaeologists who unearth truths unknown and unsuspected, truths that enrich both their fields and the nation's history. Personal interest would seem to be at odds with this; however, Byatt's emphasis on the importance of cultural heritage, and the embodiment of the past within the character of Maud Bailey,

prevails. Even the work of academics who become insular and lock themselves within personal towers within the larger academic ivory tower is important – so long as they finally publish it. Ultimately, the most significant aspect of Roland and Maud's choice to pursue the Ash-LaMotte mystery in secrecy is that at one point they choose to share it with the rest of the academic community. Personal interest can advance the field and the cultural wealth of the nation as well as academic research, so long as one's findings are made public. Personal passions can indeed benefit the community, as Swift has illustrated, since national history is made up of individuals' achievements.

The all-consuming desire to know is one of the central motivations of protagonists in the academic novel. The antagonists or less admirable characters of the genre can usually be identified by their motivation by greed or something equally negative. In Possession the antagonists are Hildebrand Ash, the aristocratic Ash heir, and Mortimer Cropper, the American Ash specialist: both are unwelcome in the Thatcher Conservative view of things, being foreign and traditionally privileged, respectively. In Byatt's view they are unwelcome because of their personal greed and their desire to completely personally possess information or cultural artefacts, depriving the nation and the academy of their value. However, the protagonists are by no means solely virtuous. Angela Hague's theory that academics use the study of subjects to insulate themselves from the real world is applicable here. By throwing themselves into the study of people and works from another era, Byatt's characters find that it is all too easy to ignore the contemporary world. The Ash Factory is a prime example of such: it is a basement operation "hutched in the bowels of the building" (26), windowless and dim, beneath the British Museum, which significantly contains relics from the past, a housing for history. Roland and Maud

leave together to retrace events through Brittany without telling anyone where they have gone, and Roland says,

> I think I've just lost everything I've ever had or cared about. My bit of job in the Ash Factory. Val. Which means my home because it's her home, she pays the rent. I should feel frightful. I probably shall. But at the moment I feel all – clear in the head – and *single*, if you know what I mean. (332)

The single-mindedness serves as a buffer against the pain that the consequences of ignoring real life have brought. Maud tells Roland prior to this confession:

> "Of course we are mad. [...] All scholars are a bit mad. All obsessions are dangerous. This one's got a bit out of hand. [...] Oddly," said Maud, "if we were obsessed with each other, no one would think we were mad." (332)

This "madness", the driving desire of the academic to seek out and know to the exclusion of all else, is not shared or understood by the non-academics of the novel. Roland's girlfriend Val thinks an obsession with Maud would be healthier than his obsession with Ash (332). Sir George Bailey confronts Maud in the market, accusing her of keeping the value of Christabel LaMotte's letters to herself to profit monetarily from them (322-3). The love of research, of seeking knowledge for knowledge's sake is unknown to the non-academics, who function in the realm of everyday life and who are motivated by such things as money, love, or desire. A significant danger lies in the quest for wisdom and truth becoming obsession, however, just as the obsession with materialistic possessions or wealth for the sake of wealth is unhealthy. Obsession with the quest for wisdom results in the close-minded academic immured in the ivory tower, unable to relate to the world outside, alone and apart. Only by uniting these two realms, by opening themselves up to the realm previously ignored or misunderstood, and creating a balance between the two, can the protagonists move on.

What one does with one's information once one's research is complete is a problem, however. Facts are a resource available to anyone who cares to discover them, and to cling proprietarily to a fact or a set of research simply because it is the fruit of one's own labour is the selfish desire that Maud and Roland must fight. From the beginning of the novel Roland is said to enjoy "possessing his knowledge on his own" (5) and is "reluctant to tell Blackadder" his findings concerning Proserpina in the London Library. This reluctance carries through to the Ash-LaMotte correspondence. Again at the end of the novel, when he produces the original letters, he says,

> I took them. I don't know why. I never meant to – to *keep* them forever. I don't know what possessed me to do it – it seemed so easy, and they seemed to be my find – I mean, as no one else had touched them, since he put them away in Vico, as bookmarks or whatever. I'll have to give them back. Whose are they? (482)

When he hands them to Blackadder, Blackadder seems "unable to resist reading them then and there, to turn the paper lovingly, possessively, recognizing the writing" (482). The distance from their subject makes these academics enamoured of touching and/or owning these objects originally possessed or used by whoever their object of study is. Byatt's academics desperately crave concrete proof of their subject's existence, possibly because the contemporary world has shifted from a purely intellectual bent to a more material one. The Thatcherism of the contemporary world and its preference for an economically sound productive system has affected even these scholars of Byatt's academic sphere. Is this is a taint or a boon? There appears to be a fundamental contradiction in Byatt's world. The two spheres of scholarship and capitalism must be conjoined and brought into balance, but at the same time there is a nostalgia functioning here: there is a faint regret that such importance has been placed on material objects. And

yet, it is often these objects – possessions, textual documents – which prove or disprove theory, or provide new insight into a subject long idle. Pure knowledge for knowledge's sake must learn to survive within a materialist world.

Ultimately, it isn't the one who jealously guards the facts and reveals them triumphantly in a publishing coup who wins in Byatt's academic community; the united protagonists obtain the satisfaction of uncovering truths and denying the American possession of the historical documents which will remain in Britain, at least "until their status as national heritage treasures has been ascertained" (497). Again Byatt stresses the cultural heritage aspect of these findings, suggesting that academic research is important to the nation as well as to the individual. At the level of the individual, Maud Bailey has a part of her personal history restored to her, which just happens to be connected to her focal area of study. There is a certain nostalgia here in the familial connection; that sense of personal history, nostalgia for one's own past, however distant; a yearning for a basis or a rootedness in a greater scheme of things, absent in this fragmented, chaotic modern world, as well as an academic and personal respect for an ancestor. As an academic, Maud is a custodian of an academically revered past reached through poetry and correspondence; as a direct descendant of Ash and LaMotte she is living proof of their existence, a sort of human touchstone and custodian of their personal relationship as well as their literary history. This is significant in Byatt's argument that cultural heritage must be valued: Maud brings the past into the present by her very existence: her chosen profession is in academia, and involves the continual search for, and the communication of, historical truth. Waterland's Tom Crick has argued that situating his students within a

cultural and natural history gives them hope for the future. A living link in this cultural history chain, who better than Maud to teach others about the past?

Byatt's academic life is truly a fairy-tale. There are no explicit mentions of budgetary cuts, of the struggle for tenure, of the uncertainty that Swift expresses. Students do not exist except as faceless and nameless research assistants who ghost about the libraries. As in Swift, however, there is a constant examination of the value of history, its pertinence to both a personal and a collective past, and of the place of the academic in relation to history. Figures on the fringe of academic life like Roland, however, are like James Dixon of Lucky Jim: doing drudge-like research work for an established professor to ensure that a small amount of pay continues to trickle in. Unlike Jim Dixon, however, Roland does it for the love of his subject. Randolph Henry Ash consumes Roland and has throughout his postgraduate career. His doctoral paper is entitled "History, Historians and Poetry? A Study of the Presentation of Historical 'Evidence' in the Poems of Randolph Henry Ash", a title that offers significant proof of his involvement in the pursuit of history and literature. Byatt pairs these two topics for Roland deliberately, and has her hero remain a minor academic until he breaks out of the staid, purely intellectual mode, and seeks truth on a personal level, going out into the world away from the ivory tower to actively challenge the accepted record of the past and discover, on a personal level, the truth. This personal identification forges a stronger link between the past and present and ensures that the past cannot (and will not) be discarded.

Roland is more than ready to leave the tower when the opportunity arises. Upon discovering the mysterious drafts of Ash's letters to an unknown woman in the author's copy of Vico, something completely new, presumably hitherto unknown except for the

parties involved, he takes that opportunity, drawn by the freshness and opportunity, to contribute to his field. As in other academic novels, those not involved in the academy do not understand the academic's quest for knowledge and truth. For example, Val cannot comprehend Roland's obsession at all:

> "It might change the face of scholarship. It *could*. [...] I'm sorry, Val, I'm sorry to bore you. It does look exciting."
> "That depends on what turns you on.[...]"
> "I can write it up. An article. A solid discovery. Make me a better job prospect."
> "There aren't any jobs." [...]
> "If you really think what I do is so unimportant..."
> "You do what turns you on," said Val. "Everyone does, if they're lucky, if there is anything that turns them on. You have this thing about this dead man. Who had a thing about dead people. That's OK, but not everyone is bothered about all that. [...]"(19)

Bitter at being the breadwinner in a relationship that she feels includes Ash as well, Val belittles Roland's passions. At the beginning of the text, the materialist and capitalist modern outlook cannot coexist with the academic quest for wisdom. Val implies that Roland is living in the past; she has "banished" Roland's three copies of Ash portraits (including his death mask) to the dim hallway: "She said she did not want him staring at her, she wanted a bit of her life to herself, without having to share it with Randolph Henry Ash" (16). Val lives very much in the present, and has no practical use for history in her life, let alone literature. Her lackluster academic career has not benefited her in any respect; she holds temp jobs, does typing on the side, participates in "menial" work to sustain them both. Ultimately, it does not feed her soul, and hence she is not as wealthy as Roland is, who is occupied by something that he loves, even though that love is not rewarded financially. As Vic Wilcox will say in David Lodge's Nice Work, "Who pays?" There is always someone who pays, be it financially or by some other sacrifice, and in this instance it is Val. In the end, it is only by accepting Val and Euan's help that Roland

and Maud can succeed: when the academics join forces with the members of the capitalist workforce, when Roland's world incorporates Val instead of using her, then the spheres balance and there is gain on both the personal and national levels.

We might assume that the contemporary characters who research the literature from another era would revere history, but the language Byatt uses often contradicts this assumption, destabilizing the thrust of their research. The novel begins in the London Library, which is "shabby but civilised, alive with history but inhabited also by living poets and thinkers" (92); but the copy of Vico in which Roland finds the correspondence is covered with "a black, thick, tenacious Victorian dust" possibly dating back from when "it had been laid to rest" (2). Roland himself inhabits "the basement of a decaying Victorian house" (8). From the start Byatt constructs a modern Tory world which has moved past and abandoned the Victorian age, an era which is presented as dead and decaying, although academics can still recognize its presence, infusing the environment, their modes of thinking and their expectations. The academics of the novel understand this co-existence of several eras of cultural history – in some cases, they willingly live with a foot in each era, so to speak – but this view is at odds with the Thatcher view, the belief that history is not a sociological exploration of people and culture, but a collection of dates and important events, benchmarks, accomplishments. Significantly, however, it is not the academics and scholars who triumph by their love for and interest in literature and literary history alone. It is the modern world of Tory Britain which ensures the "happy ending" of the novel. Louise Yelin points out that Euan MacIntyre, as a wealthy lawyer, is the one to "bring all the protagonists together" to ensure "that Ash's remains remain in England. Euan, culturally literate even though he is rolling in dough, is a

sanitized figure for the England and especially the Tory Victorian revivals of Margaret Thatcher" (40). By the end of the novel Roland and Maud each have new careers – Roland has his choice of three academic positions (out of Britain, interestingly enough; the education cuts do have an effect on the academic situation after all), and Maud has the letters to edit, promising academic notoriety and financial gain as well. The fairy-tale continues: wealth and prestige, enabled by the work done uncovering the past, are offered to the protagonists, reward enough for the work they have done in their guardianship of the past, their work in literary archaeology, and their dedication to serving the truth behind the mythologised past, to discovering the reality behind the oversimplified nostalgic portrayal of history encouraged by the government. Such a portrayal denies the public the truth of its own past and disallows citizens an aspect of their own present that could enrich their sense of national tradition.

Byatt paints a view of the past that is something more than history recorded by dates and Ellen Ash's carefully preserved books. By doing so, she emphasizes that there is a gestalt to any era that is difficult to invoke in historical research, and nearly impossible to recreate in any later era. There is no overt Tory propagandistic nostalgia for a successful bygone era in Possession, nor is there any attempt to consciously recreate that past in today's present, or to inspire the contemporary world by holding up the virtues of a bygone era. Rather, Byatt looks to the past as an essential stepping-stone, to be comprehended by careful examination, by which we may illumine our present path. Intellectually, this pursuit is far from the efforts of the Conservative government under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher to restore Great Britain to an economic status it enjoyed in the Victorian expansionist days where the sun never set upon the Empire.

Byatt urges Britain to look to its cultural artefacts to see their worth as an inspiration to better things. Possession speaks not of academics being creatively barren guardians of a glorious past; instead, it links the modern world to that which has gone before in a tradition which continues, Ash and LaMotte being carried forward by Roland and Maud, not as nostalgic talismans but as elements of a new path founded upon the old.

Ann Hulbert suggests that Byatt "becomes a nineteenth century ventriloquist, and she ingeniously juxtaposes the previous century with the hothouse world of the contemporary academe", arguing that by doing so the author is able to "[s]crutinize the postmodern, post-Freudian, `knowing' attitude" by "compar[ing] it with the doubting, inhibited Victorian spirit" (56). It is perhaps telling that this juxtaposition does not confidently reveal that the modern era is an improvement, as Byatt's language suggests. Hulbert points out that "lives in the age of sexual ultrasophistication turn out to be frigid, and passion thrives in the age of repression" (56). The contemporary protagonists cannot engage in a straightforward romantic relationship until they have uncovered and understood the passion often discounted in the stereotypically frigid era. This pursuit is done reluctantly; as academics, Roland and Maud are unwilling to step away from the isolated works to go poking about in the poets' private lives. However it is not until they allow themselves to delve into those private lives that they can fully understand the poetry, or their own relationship. Hulbert comments that "[t]he key to the young scholars' sympathetic comprehension of the poets is the opposite of sophistication. `Something primitive,' they acknowledge, seizes them in their reading[...]. Roland and Maud are inspired by the act of sympathy required to bridge what they see as a huge gap separating them from Ash and LaMotte" (58-9). Ultimately it is not the academic aspect of these

characters which triumphs; instead it is the personal aspect. This does not suggest that Byatt's opinion of the relevance of the academic in the contemporary world is a low one; rather, in Possession she creates a lesson to all academics that while the text is important in learning about the past, it is not the sole source of information, and in fact can be a very two-dimensional indicator unless one takes into account the human lives involved. In this respect Byatt appears to be firmly rejecting a New Critical approach. Her characters require more than a separation of text from author: they require a separation from analysis itself.

> Narcissism, the unstable self, the fractured ego, Maud thought, who am I? A matrix for a susurration of texts and codes? It was both a pleasant and unpleasant idea, this requirement that she think of herself as intermittent and partial. [...]
>
> Semiotics nearly spoiled their first day[...]. (Byatt, 251)
>
> "... We are so knowing. And all we've found out, is primitive sympathetic magic. Infantile polymorphous perversity. Everything relates to *us* and we're so imprisoned in ourselves – we can't see *things*. And we paint everything with this metaphor –" (253-4)

Frederick M. Holmes agrees, stating that "[t]he analytical structures, Roland feels, are metaphors that screen out more direct encounters with reality and inhibit people from following the dictates of their own natures" (324). Here again is Angela Hague's theory that "abstractions and theoretical constructs are represented as distorting filters which cause the academic to lose a clear vision of reality and which frequently allow him to avoid making decisions and taking action" (178). Byatt's protagonists move beyond this limitation by setting aside the poetry as primary focus and choosing to examine instead the lives and love of the poets themselves. In this manner, Byatt shows that history is not

only texts, artifacts and dates; it is a complex entity of all these bound by the glue of human experience and personal involvement.

In his examination of "The Academic Novel as Metaphor" David Bevan observes that history begins to play an essential role in the academic novel in recent decades:

> ... [T]he university, variously citadel of knowledge, quaint retreat and web of intrigue, is becoming in the most recent fiction a microcosm... of the human predicament itself in the spectral year 1984.
>
> The shift is heralded in the mid- to late seventies by three novels in which there is an increasing speculation on history and the situation of the professor, however unwilling or unable, as both observer and participant. The only salvation, it would seem, for the lost soul he has become is re-immersion in, or recognition of, the historical process – a re-discovery of that umbilical cord, however fragile, which joins him to the rest of mankind. (106)

Roland and Maud achieve this salvation. It is the re-immersion in the historical past to completely realize the continuity of a literary and humanistic tradition that provides rescue from their flat two-dimensional existence. It is not, as some of Byatt's academics believe, the actual physical possession of the fragments of the past which accomplishes an integral link to history. Holmes addresses the problem of the very concept of possessing the past, asking:

> Is such an act possible, or is the past irretrievably separate and other? By what means can we know the past? Can we represent it objectively through empirical methods, or, as the New Historicism teaches, do the particular limitations of our own historical embeddedness necessarily cause us to filter previously-existing representations of the past through the ideological distortions of the present? [...] Are we always prisoners of our own historical moment, or are there universals in the human condition that permit us to make connections with people of all times and cultures? (319)

Roland and Maud succeed because they do not attempt to "possess" the past; instead, they choose to become integrated, or re-integrated, with it. In a sense, the past (and what

will soon become the past) possesses them. They are freed by their realization that history can never be objective, and only by becoming completely subjective can they fully merge with it, to realize those "universals in the human condition that permit us to make connections" (Holmes, 319) with people of another era. In Possession, which intentionally identifies itself as "A Romance", that human universal is love. It is this "sympathetic magic" which enables them to identify with the poets, which allows them to pass beyond the limiting, shield-like world of analytical academe into the real world of experience and humanity. In this respect, Roland and Maud transcend the limiting aspects of the world of academe and triumph via a blend of criticism, detective work, and emotion. This is ultimately the balance that Byatt strives for: a dialogue between analysis and emotion

Is this re-integration with the past motivated by nostalgic view of history? Has the work of the academic become that of a shrine-keeper, reluctant to remain in the modern world and cope with it? Holmes believes that Byatt's protagonists are indeed motivated by nostalgia:

> Nevertheless, a belief that the Victorian era contained possibilities for fulfillment absent in the present is what motivates the consuming interest of the modern characters in the lives of the two poets. Separated from the Victorians by the chasm dug by Freud, Roland and Maud long nostalgically for the great age of humanism before the splintering of the unitary self. [...] The conflict for this allegedly confident and benign individualism is a society that seemed reassuringly stable in its institutions and values in contrast to the disorder and confusion of the twentieth century. (324-5)

However, Holmes's claim of romantic nostalgia is unfounded. The aim of reconstructing the events of the past is not to live vicariously in a society free of the fragmented "unitary self". Instead, the scholars seek to remove the limits placed upon them by analysis and

critical methods, not in an attempt to return to a "great age of humanism" but to move beyond them and interact with their contemporary world (and their academic subjects) in a broader fashion. They seek to be secure in their world, and do so by ensuring the security of history. Holmes is closer to the truth when he states that:

> The quest of Roland and Maud to uncover the complete story of Ash and LaMotte's relationship is at bottom a quest not only to recover love but also to discover in the process the fundamental significance of life. Just as the identities of the Victorian pair seem to their modern counterparts more substantial and real than their own, so Ash and LaMotte also seem to them to be closer to some basic truth about life's origins and purpose. (325)

Much of this revolves around the basic difference between the two pairs: Ash and LaMotte are poets, while Roland and Maud are academics studying the poetry they produced. Ash and LaMotte appear to be closer to this "basic truth" because they are; the scholars are removed from "life's origins and purpose" by virtue of their profession - the age-old difference between creator and critic. The analytic structures cocoon and protect them, and it is only by leaving the safe academic community and travelling across the countryside to experience first-hand what the poets did that Roland and Maud can connect with that "basic truth", enabling them to grow as creative and expressive people, as well as to finally understand what happened in the poets' relationship a century ago.

In effect, the nostalgia that exists in Byatt's Possession is for an existence free of the insulating academic structures by which a scholar examines the past and his present surroundings. These structures are not unnecessary; in fact, abolishing them would create an intellectual chaos. It is the ability to discard the limitations of these structures when necessary that Byatt argues is valuable. Thatcherite nostalgia devalues the humanities by favouring a past bereft of study and personal connection; in this respect the nostalgia is a very conservative one, rather than the progressive view of the past academia holds. For

the humanities, possession of a true heritage means full possession of the present and of self-potential. Questioning the past brings new views and applications to the contemporary world. A nostalgic past is not necessarily a truthful one; it is truth which Byatt's academics fight for, a history free of the nostalgic gloss that deflects closer analysis, further questioning, and the establishment of a personal connection to the past. With the freedom gained by temporarily discarding their protective analytical structures, the scholar-protagonists can forge the all-important personal connection to the past, while still using those structures to apply their newfound knowledge of the past to the contemporary world around them.

## 4. "What Has the Faculty of Arts To Do With Industry Year?": Academia Meets Capitalism in David Lodge's Nice Work

David Lodge taught in British universities from 1960 through 1987, through the Robbins Report era and the Open University years to the early years of the Thatcher government. Nice Work appeared in 1988, the action within taking place in early 1986. Of all the texts examined in this thesis, Nice Work is the one that most obviously takes materialistic Thatcher Britain and its views and places them firmly in contrast to the academy and its more purely intellectual pursuits. It also shows how commercial academe has become in response to loss of funding, how it is reduced to raising money to survive, how the quality of education has declined as teachers must divide their attention between the goals of education, making money for themselves to survive, and making money for the university. This juxtaposition of Thatcherite industry and academia is represented by two characters: Vic Wilcox, managing director for J Pringle & Sons Casting and General Engineering; and Robyn Penrose, lecturer in Women's Studies at Lodge's fictitious Rummidge University. Each sees his or her sphere of focus as the only hope for the future of the nation, while considering the other to be a misuse of work hours. Brought together by the whim of a committee which sees a mutually beneficial public relations boost by having the two spheres meet, Robyn and Vic disagree about everything from the start, victims of prejudice and preconceived notions about the use and validity of the other's sphere. Each stands as a representative of what is wrong with Britain in the other character's eyes.

The novel begins with Vic Wilcox, who states his prejudiced views towards education in reference to his children. His eldest son has dropped out of university; his

wife is taking his daughter out of school to shop after an early doctor's appointment; his younger son has no school at all due to a teacher's strike. Vic is scornful of the need for a strike in the educational world:

> "Industrial action, or whatever they call it. He brought a note home on Friday."
>
> "Industrial *in*action, you mean. You don't see teachers out on the picket line, in the cold and the rain, have you noticed? They're just sitting around in their warm staff-rooms, chewing the fat, while the kids are sent home to get into mischief. That's not action. It's not an industry, either, come to that. It's a profession, and it's about time they started to act like professionals." (20-1)

From the very beginning his stereotyping distrust of and distaste for the academic system is plain. It's not a real profession; it's an easy job; it exists to keep children out of mischief. Teaching should reassess its purpose; "it's about time they started to act like professionals", he says. In Vic's eyes, a professional is someone who produces a service or a product in response to a societal demand. Teachers who pass on labour skills are productive; students who pursue intellectual knowledge for knowledge's sake are not gaining a productive skill, in Vic's worldview.

Coupled with his scorn for academe is his staunch patriotism, which is displayed by his buying power:

> "Why don't we get a microwave? I could cook you a bit of bacon in seconds with a microwave."
>
> "Did you know," says Vic, "that ninety-six percent of the world's microwaves are made in Japan, Taiwan or Korea?"
>
> "Everybody we know has one," says Marjorie.
>
> "Exactly," says Vic. (23)

The economic state is contingent on supporting your own economy, something Vic knows well from working in the manufacturing business. When he reads in the paper that

"Britain is back in the Super-League of top industrial nations" (24) he is cynical; his experience tells him that "economic growth, price stability and strong balance of payments" (24) is not translating into success all the way down the production supply chain. His car, a Jaguar, also reflects his deep-seated belief that economic success or ruin depends on strengthening one's own economy by constant re-investment of one's returns. Vic is a firm believer in the Thatcherite philosophy that worth is measured by strengthening the nation economically. In this novel, he personifies the Thatcher drive for British economic strength through production of wealth.

Vic works in what Lodge terms the Dark Country, "so called because of the pall of smoke that hung over it, and the film of coal dust and soot that covered it, in the heyday of the Industrial Revolution" (31). (Interestingly, Robyn considers Pringle's as "the cultural heart of darkness" [141], associating the physical characteristics of the location with literary subreferencing, as well as implying that where industry is, culture is not.) Modernity has reformed it from the mining and smelting centre it once was into an engineering and industrial centre housing "kings of manufacturing known generally as `metal-bashing'" (32). Vic knows the history of the area not through his line of work, but because he had "done a prize-winning project on it at school" (31), an ironic truth in the case of a man for whom tertiary education exists to acquire labour skills only. We are not told what level of education this project was accomplished in, but the names of Thomas Carlyle and Charles Dickens are evoked in Vic's mind as writerly witnesses to the Dark Country, presumably only introduced as such and explored no further. Vic, born and raised in Rummidge, ultimately graduated as a Mechanical Engineer from the Rummidge College of Advanced Technology. Education, for Vic, is a means to an end. It is

significant that his sense of the history of the area he grew up in, and now lives and works in, derives from his education, tailored to the economic sphere he has trained to enter.

As he travels to work, before he reaches the Dark Country, he passes through the university area of Rummidge. It is an area that is beautiful and attractive, and yet far away from where he considers real work to be done by professionals – namely, the Dark Country – and from where he was educated. In his eyes, it is, "[w]ith its massive architecture and landscaped grounds[,]... rather like a small city-state, an academic Vatican" (29). This is the first of several comparisons between academia and religion in Nice Work. Vic is "both intimidated by and disapproving of its air of privileged detachment from the vulgar, bustling industrial city in which it is embedded" (29). Vic perceives academia as setting itself apart from the everyday crowd – even his first glimpse of the university is of its "tall, redbrick clock-tower... visible above trees and rooftops" (28), an isolated spire rising above man and nature, much as cathedrals do. The comparison suggests that academe is a quasi-religious retreat from a wordly society, and equates intellectual pursuit with a religious calling.

Vic's own educational experience is sharply at odds with this idyllic sight. The utilitarian description of his old school is contrasted with the calm, lovely university, and the language used to describe it is industrial in tone and term.

> His own *alma mater*, situated a few miles away, was a very different kind of institution, a dingy tower block, crammed with machinery and lab benches, overlooking a railway marshalling yard and a roundabout on the inner ring road. In his day a College of Advanced Technology, it has since grown in size and been raised to the status of a university, but without putting on any airs and graces. And quite right too. If you make college too comfortable nobody will ever want to leave it to do proper work. (29)

To Vic, working in a university is anything but a real job – a real job must be taxing in some respect, and require some sort of sacrifice: a sacrifice of locale, of beauty, of comfort. For Robyn Penrose, the university is a life's work, and the only kind she can dream of, let alone understand.

We are introduced to Robyn as she prepares for the first day of term, reviewing her lectures and beliefs concerning the nineteenth century industrial novel. For Robyn both the novel and capitalism "are expressions of a secularized Protestant work ethic, both dependent on the idea of an autonomous individual self who is responsible for and in control of his/her own destiny, selling happiness and fortune in competition with other autonomous selves. This is true of the novel considered both as a commodity and as a mode of representation" (39). Not that Robyn has anything against the novel as a literary form; the novel is a necessary evil for one in her line of work. Professor of Women's' Studies and a feminist, she is, as Vic Wilcox notes in disgust, a left-winger, and continually argues for equal opportunity for all. Seeing the evils of capitalism everywhere, she is a firm believer in even the novelist as capitalist:

> The novelist is a capitalist of the imagination. He or she invents a product which consumers didn't know they wanted until it is made available, manufactures it with the assistance of purveyors of risk capital known as publishers, and sells it in competition with makers of marginally differentiated products of the same kind.[...] The novel was the first mass-produced cultural artefact. (39-40)

Robyn's spin on the novel is a very interesting one in the capitalist versus academe context of Nice Work. The novelist is the subject of Robyn's analysis here, but what of the academy itself? To continually keep up its enrollment, the university must do much the same as Vic's company does: create a syllabus attractive enough to draw potential

students to enrol in a program, or as Vic Wilcox puts it, "make something people want, make it well, and make it in one size" (350), a statement which echoes Robyn's own words about the publishing of novels. The university has become capitalist in order to survive.

Robyn considers academia essential "to pursue excellence and self-fulfilment, each according to her own rhythm and inclination" (346), an option which should be accessible to all who wish to participate; but the economic state of the nation and an unsympathetic Tory government frustrate this dream. Robyn enthusiastically endorses the university strike and when a fellow professor reminds her of her precarious future in the department, she retorts that "[i]t's a matter of principle!" (61). In fact, Robyn's position is similar to that of James Dixon in Lucky Jim: her time is almost up and when her review arrives she fears that she won't be kept on. The lack of a future in the only line of work she is interested in is "a constant background worry as the days and the weeks of her appointment ticked away like a taxi meter" (54). Her brother Basil states flatly that "Maggie's absolutely right – the future for our economy is in the service industries, and perhaps some high-tech engineering" (185). It is no wonder that academics are feeling cornered and long for an easier time. And yet, while `Maggie's' economic preferences are certainly part of the problem, the corner that the academy has backed itself into by overexpansion (both intellectually and financially) in the sixties and seventies is also to blame. 'Maggie' herself is not the threat to Robyn's career; the true threat is the isolation of an intellectual education in the humanities.

Robyn's education took place in the enthusiastic years of bounty provided by the Robbins Report, a time, for her, of joining "progressive causes" (45) and studying

"structuralism and poststructuralism, semiotics and deconstruction, new mutations and graftings of psychoanalysis and Marxism, linguistics and literary criticism" which "more conservative dons viewed [...] with alarm, seeing in them a threat to the traditional values and methods of literary scholarship" (46). Lodge describes this era as "civil war [...] the sixties all over again, in a new, more austerely intellectual key" (46). The sudden influx of European thought paired with the funding of the Robbins Report caused what might be termed an academic revolution, creating outdated criticisms almost instantly and drawing battle lines between conservative dons and liberal students.

Unlike Jim Dixon, however, Robyn is not seeking to ingratiate herself with the director of the department or influential professors. She defends her courses and her curriculum hotly; she boldly pickets the university gates "in the cold and the rain" (20), proving Vic Wilcox wrong in his judgement of how teachers handle strike action. Only when she perceives the Shadow Scheme as a potentially disastrous move does she reluctantly agree to participate in it, admitting to a colleague that a letter of reference from Head of the English Department Philip Swallow might be necessary one day. The lack of jobs in the education field is due, we are told, to the fact that "the Conservative Government of Mrs. Thatcher, elected in 1979 with a mandate to cut public spending, had set about decimating the national system of higher education. [...] Required to reduce their academic staff by anything up to twenty per cent, [universities] responded by persuading as many people as possible to take early retirement and freezing all vacancies" (50-1). Robyn's father comments that "[t]his government is capable of anything... [t]hey are systematically destroying the finest university system in the world" (307). Vic Wilcox demonstrates to Robyn through the course of the novel that in

industry, men are made redundant by the streamlining of the manufacturing process as a result of upgrading machinery or by cutting back on the variety of products made. In the arts and humanities, however, a loss of manpower is not an increase in efficiency or quality; in fact it is a loss of resource, especially as the field broadens. It is this loss of resource that must be recognised and dealt with immediately:

> "It's no use hankering after the good old days, which were actually the boring old days," said Bob Busby impatiently. "The subject has expanded vastly since you started in it, Rupert. Now we have linguistics, media studies, American Literature, Commonwealth Literature, literary theory, women's studies, not to mention about a hundred new British writers worth taking seriously. We can't cover it all in three years. We have to have a system of options." (351)

Any sort of nostalgia at this point is seen as sentimental and indulgent, serving no purpose whatsoever. In fact the nostalgia portrayed in Nice Work is not dwelt upon; most of the characters understand that reality is what must be dealt with now, in a time of crisis. In explaining to Vic what happened to the arts and humanities in the last two decades, Philip Swallow reveals the implicit nostalgia for an easier time:

> "It's partly a matter of history [...]. Once upon a time... there was a single syllabus, essentially a survey course on Eng. Lit. from Beowulf to Virginia Woolf, [...] and life was very simple and comfortable, if a little dull. And then in the sixties and the seventies we began to add all kinds of exciting new ingredients like the ones Bob mentioned – but without subtracting anything from the original syllabus. [...] Well, that was just about workable, if a little frantic, as long as there was plenty of cash to recruit more teachers, but now... [I]t's like a three-masted ship with too many sails aloft and a diminishing crew. We're exhausting ourselves scrambling up and down the rigging, just trying to keep the damn thing from capsizing, never mind getting anywhere, or enjoying the voyage." (352)

Philip Swallow puts his finger on the key problem created by the Robbins Report in a time of exciting intellectual growth: the syllabus has become unwieldy and must be

refocused in this time of economic thrift. Perhaps this is the solution to dealing with cuts: by streamlining the syllabus the university can drop unnecessary courses or combine them with others to still cover the subjects while enabling classes to be filled completely.

Ultimately Lodge does not present a solution for the problems of academics and the academy, but what he does offer is a new approach to the problem. The Shadow Scheme, the "University's contribution to IY [Industry Year]", calls for "a member of staff to `shadow' some person employed at the senior management level in local manufacturing industry" (85). The memorandum from the Vice-Chancellor's office makes direct reference to the ivory tower syndrome:

> There is a widespread feeling in the country that universities are `ivory tower' institutions, whose staff are ignorant of the realities of the modern commercial world. Whatever the justice of this prejudice, it is important in the present economic climate that we should do our utmost to dispel it. The SS [Shadow Scheme] will advertise our willingness to inform ourselves about the needs of industry. (85)

It is significant that the University itself devised the Shadow Scheme for Industry Year: the academy is aware of the mistrust and scorn directed towards it by the country for its apparent lack of connection the "present economic climate", and it has taken steps to demonstrate that it is in fact open to the real world, and not hiding behind smooth ivory walls. This Shadow Scheme brings together representatives of the manufacturing industry and the academy and allows the two to glimpse each other's world, enabling them to shake off their prejudice and apply new strategies or views to their own problems. By interacting with the "enemy" created by the Thatcher government, Robyn and Vic learn that there is always somebody who pays, be it financially (which Vic ultimately does, losing his job in an industrial takeover),or intellectually by sacrificing one's ideals and

principles (which Robyn does, redefining her view of industry and the humanities). An understanding of the entire system allows them to reassess their own perceptions of the economic and intellectual systems. The answer may indeed lie in applying principles from the other sphere to one's own situation. The sole character who understands this and unites the economic and educational spheres is Robyn's on-again off-again boyfriend Charles, a fellow academic who defects to the commercial world of banking. He tells Robyn that business is "abstract. It has its own rather seductive jargon [...]. It's like literary theory" (219). He "see[s] no fundamental inconsistency" between his academic career and his new place on a bank's strategic planning team: "I regard myself as simply exchanging one semiotic system for another [...] a game with high philosophical stakes for a game with high monetary stakes. [...] Anyway, I have no intention of giving up reading. I don't see why deconstruction can't be my hobby as other men have model railroads or tropical fish..." (313). Charles recognizes that without the Real World, isolated analytical systems are hollow. Uniting his academic training with a Real World application, Charles serves as an example of the academic emerging from his Ivory Tower. As a secondary character, Charles and his actions are not presented directly to the reader; instead, we learn about his progress through his letters to Robyn, where he serves as a mirror for her to see her own beliefs reflected, although she resists them at first: "There were things in this letter which struck a nerve of reluctant assent, mixed up with things she found false and obnoxious. T'was all a muddle" (314-5). At the same time, Charles is the character who actively voices the latent belief that education implies culture: in his last letter to Robyn he tells her that he has left Debbie (who we first meet as Basil's girlfriend), who

> was such a novel person to me that I was rather taken in at first. I mistook quickwittedness for intelligence. Frankly, my dear, she's rather stupid. Most foreign exchange dealers are, in my experience – they have to be to play that electronic roulette all day. And they think of nothing else. When you come home from a hard day's work at the bank, you need some civilised conversation, not more talk about positions and percentages. (375)

While implying that people who participate in the economic sphere are good at what they do but unintelligent, Charles exhibits a superiority felt by most of the novel's academics, a superiority borne out by that quest for truth and wisdom, and also by the visual connotations of the ivory tower concept: like the University's spire in Rummidge, the tower rises above the rest of the world, associating height with culture. Lodge's comments in his introduction to Amis's Lucky Jim regarding class structure and where academe fits in are called to mind again: Jim is "promoted" into the world of education, suggesting that the university is something prestigious that one aspires to. The term "higher education" implies the same thing.

Academics are not the only ones who perpetuate this Ivory Tower perception. Vic Vic recognizes his place within the economic system, but he excludes the intellectual out of ignorance and scorn:

> "Boy?" Wilcox curled a lip. "Nancy boys?"
> "Perfectly normal, decent, intelligent young men," said Robyn, struggling to control her temper.
> "Why aren't they studying something useful, then?"
> "Like mechanical engineering?"
> "You said it."
> Robyn sighed. "Do I really have to tell you?"
> "Not if you don't want to."
> "Because they're more interested in ideas, in feelings, than in the way machines work."
> "Won't pay the rent, though, will they – ideas, feelings?" (114-5)

Society as a whole reinforces the academic's Ivory Tower inclination with its ignorance of what lies behind the stereotype. The intersection of the Real World with academia is rare, which partially accounts for the lack of direction once the universities are faced with becoming capitalist entities as well as the misconceptions concerning what scholars are capable of, and what they actually do. When Robyn is selected for the Shadow Scheme it is partially because of her junior position in the department, and partially because of her area of expertise:

> "Well, I *am* supposed to be an expert on the industrial novel. Swallow made a great point of that."
>
> "But not in a *realist* sort of way. I mean, you're not suggesting that there's any possible *relevance* -"
>
> "No, no, of course not," said Robyn, anxious to disown the taint of realism. (95)

Robyn is quick to deny any connection between her area of expertise and real life, not out of a sense of justice to industry (or academia) but in an effort to be emphasize her distinctness from reality, and her promptness in doing implies a distaste for the latter. Vic is equally disbelieving that familiarity with any sort of intellectual theory can have meaning in the Real World. To him, going to school in one of the technical colleges to secure an economically viable education, to produce tangible results in the working world, is what education should be about. What Robyn is fighting for is the freedom for everyone to benefit from creative studies. She daydreams about transporting the foundry workers into the university setting, uniting the two spheres, setting in motion a mutually beneficial learning experience resulting in two well-rounded sets of individuals whose outlooks are now less limited – in effect giving them the eye-opening experience that she and Vic Wilcox undergo, moving past their misconceptions of economic industry and intellectual study respectively.

Robyn's area of specialization is the nineteenth-century industrial novel, which is ironic, for David Lodge has constructed Nice Work as a rewriting of Elizabeth Gaskell's North and South. While the independent, liberated, left-wing Robyn is hardly a Margaret Hale, the plotline is so similar as to be almost identical. There is an ironic nostalgia functioning in Nice Work, which is a modern version of the Condition of England novels, set in a contemporary economic crisis. The irony is even more sharp in light of the Thatcher push to return to a period of economic superiority like that of the Victorian era. In Robyn's lecture on the industrial novel, she points out that "writers of the industrial novels were never able to resolve in fictional terms the ideological contradictions inherent in their own situation in society" (82), and the same appears to be true of Lodge himself. Instead of providing a pat answer to a thick tangle of socio-economic and intellectual problems, he uses the form of the Condition of England novel, which proposes no clear solution to a problem other than empathy and humanitarian action in the realm of industry, as an ironic parody of the Thatcherite endorsement of the nineteenth century and of the Thatcherite world of industry and marginalized academe. Lodge's ambiguous answer is to suggest indirectly a dialogue between the two estranged spheres of idealist academe and practical economy as a potentially rewarding path.

The use of a Condition of England novel, specifically Elizabeth Gaskell's North and South, appears nostalgic until one realises that Lodge is using the nostalgia for the nineteenth century implicit in such a rewrite as a mirror for contemporary England. Robyn lectures that "[i]n short, all the Victorian novelist could offer as a solution to the problems of industrial capitalism were: a legacy, a marriage, emigration or death" (83). Three of these four options offer themselves to Robyn: like Margaret Hale, she is the sole

beneficiary of a relative's legacy; Charles proposes to her, not romantically but practically; and Morris Zapp offers her a tenure-track position in the United States and secures a publisher for her unpublished text. Even in the modern era, in Nice Work as in Byatt's Possession, it is the redistribution of capital that enables the heroine to take the next step. Financially secure, Robyn can now invest in Vic's entrepreneurial enterprise, stay and teach in Great Britain, and accept Charles's proposal if she so desires. Money is the ultimate enabler, and it is this enabler which the universities of Great Britain are lacking, forced to restructure in order to make the most of what funding they have.

The scorn of the industrial characters for the people of leisure the academics appear to be is evident in Nice Work, but even more so in North and South; as Mrs Thornton says: "I have no doubt that classics are very desirable for people who have leisure. But, I confess, it was against my judgement that my son renewed his study of them. The time and place in which he lives, seem to me to require all his energy and attention. Classics may do very well for men who loiter away their lives in the country or in colleges; but Milton men ought to have their thoughts and powers absorbed in the work of to-day" (Gaskell, 159). The assumption that intellectual work is less important than physical labour or work that produces tangible wealth repeatedly appears in both Gaskell and Lodge, usually presented in a bitterly resentful fashion and expressing contempt for the apparently passive academic life in a time of material focus. To an industrialist or a capitalist, a quixotic quest for wisdom benefits no one in the Real World. Of the Milton intellectual who eventually leaves Margaret his estate, Mrs Thornton says, "Mr Bell! What can he know of John? He, living a lazy life in a drowsy college" (161). John Thornton and the ex-Miltoner Mr Bell discuss the difference

between the industrial man and the academic at length with Mr Hale and Margaret, arriving at the topic by way of mention of Margaret's belief that it would do both Oxford men and the men of industrial Milton much "good to see a little more of the other" (412). This is the solution both for Margaret and Robyn, daughters of academics, and Thornton and Vic Wilcox, factory managers.

In conversation Thornton reveals that he is not in the industrial business for the money; when asked what his objective is instead, he does not answer directly, but his motivations are revealed as his inborn work ethic:

> "... I belong to the Teutonic blood; it is little mingled in this part of England to what it is in others; [...] we do not look upon life as a time for enjoyment, but as a time for action and exertion. Our glory and our beauty arise out of our inward strength, which makes us victorious over material resistance, and over greater difficulties still...." (414)

While Thornton attributes the industrial work ethic to inborn and regional factors, he does acknowledge that intellectual study has a place; however, he draws a very clear picture of what the true problem is, and this problem is also the one that Lodge's industrialists have:

> "If we do not reverence the past as you do on Oxford, it is because we want something which can apply to the present more directly. It is fine when the study of the past leads to a prophecy of the future. But to men groping in new circumstances, it would be finer if the words of experience could direct us how to act in what concerns us most intimately and immediately; which is full of difficulties that must be encountered; and upon the mode in which they are to be met and conquered – not merely pushed aside for the time – depends our future." (414)

LikeVic, Thornton seeks answers to immediate problems, and literature is of necessity a study of a text produced in the past. What neither Vic nor Thornton understand is that by studying one learns techniques of analysis that allow one to examine a situation differently, and by such an examination an answer may be found that might otherwise

have been overlooked. When Vic sits in on one of her seminars, he asks Robyn why she didn't give the students the answer to a question raised in discussion:

> "I don't tell them what to think," said Robyn.
> "Then how are they supposed to learn the right answers?"
> "There are no right answers to questions like that. There are only interpretations."
> "What's the point of it then?" he said. "What's the point of sitting around discussing books all day, if you're no wiser by the end of it?"
> "Oh, you're *wiser*," said Robyn. "What you learn is that language is an infinitely more devious and slippery medium than you had supposed."
> "That's good for you?"
> "Very good for you" she said [...]. (340)

As for Tom Crick in Waterland, it is not the subject of one's analytical study which is the focus, but the application of that analysis which is the reward. In Philip Swallow's terms, it is the voyage, not the destination, which yields the true value. This is the lesson both Robyn and Vic learn: to look beyond the results of their applications to the process of application itself. A correct answer is not necessarily what one learns from; the true worth lies in how one figures out an answer.

Characters outside the academy tend to consider academics people of leisure entertaining themselves; to individuals outside the academy, intellectual pursuits are perceived as nothing but entertainment in an era of economic focus and capitalist pursuit. What the outside world does not know (and consequently does not value) is that academia is not an entertainment so much as a quest for wisdom, for a deeper understanding of how men communicate, of how they learn, of how "cultural artefacts" endure and are reinterpreted over and over in new ways. In this pursuit, a certain amount of academic nostalgia is displayed: Sutcliffe yearns for an easier time before the Robbins Report blew the boundaries of analysis wide open; Professor Penrose yearns for the days

of the Robbins Report when education was available for anyone and everyone. In effect, what these academics are sensing and resisting is the immediate necessity of joining the Real World in order to survive, as their privileged position is finally taken away from them. The reality of the situation is decreased teaching positions and a drastic shift towards a materialistic society during the last century. From Jim Dixon, who requires a job to live then gives it up, to Robyn Penrose, who wants desperately to work in academia and is enabled by a *deus ex* industrial novel ending to do so, academics are becoming bleakly aware that as industry and economy trudge on, there is less and less room for their kind of knowledge. For the Conservative government under Thatcher's rule, the slow inexorable march of progress requires different support. In their effort to weed out what they perceive as unnecessary expenditure the government asks, what does tertiary education in the humanities give back to the economy? The ivory tower which academia has built can no longer protect the humanities. The economy is tearing it down, and to survive, academics perforce must integrate with the real world. For Robyn, this means investing in a new industry, aiding it in its development. But as Robyn herself has said in reference to the industrial novel, this is an unsatisfactory and negative ending, a personal solution to a personal problem. The answer, then, Lodge appears to suggest, lies in the Shadow Scheme, acquainting each world with the other, bringing awareness of how that other functions, and revealing what its underlying truths really are. The academy must learn from the industrial model in order to survive within the Thatcherist economy. In doing so the academy has the opportunity to communicate the wisdom gathered from its quest and to reintegrate itself into society, becoming a popular and essential part of cultural guardianship. The ivory tower must be breached, both for the

sake of the capitalists outside in need of intellectual thought, and for the academics inside who are severed from the essential input of the Real World; yet it must not be demolished, lest the academy lose that which makes it unique: the intellectual pursuit of truth, which balances the practical pursuit of skill.

## Conclusion: Scholarship's Place in Thatcher's England

The Thatcher government slowly decentralised much of the existing governmental programs in an effort to withdraw what it saw as unnecessary state support for such social programs as education, transport and health; it privatized state-owned businesses; it created a market where free enterprise and accumulation of wealth became the most important objectives. In a society such as this, art, culture and the humanities are set adrift with no obvious place. Leonard Quart argues that "Thatcher promoted an individualist ethos and an entrepreneurial culture where the acquisition of wealth and the consumption of goods became the prime values, while the ethic of social responsibility and mutual aid began to unravel" (20). Likewise, Peter Wollen remarks on the "vulgarity of her regime, her exaltation of the profit motive, her determination that art and scholarship should only be supported if they served an economic function" (48). In a society where money and consumerism have thus replaced cultural and intellectual wealth, scholarship in the humanities must struggle to survive.

In a governing career that spanned over a decade, Margaret Thatcher, with her Conservative mandates regarding tertiary education, affected universities and academics deeply. The academic fiction of the 1980s expresses the familiar concern with preserving job opportunities, but the concern is magnified as a result of the cuts the Tories implemented in the area of education. Once "Will I still have a job?", the question evolves into "Will my job still exist?", or even worse, "Will my subject still exist?". This is the question raised by Swift in Waterland, where he projects a future in which the Tory pruning of an unwieldy system of education will go so far as to cut out History as a

subject - and, by inference, History as a concept in the Thatcher economic world, a move which, in Swift's eyes, cripples the present generation).

Essentially, the Thatcherist reforms and favouring of industrial economic approaches began to affect the academic humanities, causing them to exhibit behaviour more suited to capitalist employment. Byatt's and Lodge's implicit suggestion that only by uniting the spheres of the academic humanities and the capitalist economy can the academy survive and the stagnant economy benefit is symptomatic of such behaviour. No longer are the academics in Thatcher-era academic fiction happy bumbling comic figures, professors cut off from the real world, isolated in an ivory tower. This new breed of academics are thinking, progressive researchers aware that a breakdown between the academic system and the eternal search for truth has occurred, that the relationship between past and present has become subverted. It is vital that these new academics reunite the two spheres of capitalism and academia; progress cannot occur without this reintegration, the intellectual enriching the industrial, the economic helping to organize the academic. Waterland's Tom Crick, forced to retire, conveys the importance of maintaining a dialogue with the past to provide a link between the past and the present, an essential background for the generations in secondary and tertiary education today. Robyn Penrose of Nice Work and Roland and Maud of Possession symbolically unite capitalist and academic outlooks to assure progress in both areas.

What of this newly united capitalist/academic approach? It seems rather idealistic to imagine making the sphere of industrial capitalism aware of the humanities in academia and vice versa, assuming an immediate exchange will spring up to facilitate the creation of a multi-faceted economic culture. In truth, it is idealistic, and not an end that

is easily attained. Years of ingrained distrust of the other sphere and of established behaviour must be overcome. The new generation of academic portrayed in Lodge and Byatt's novels is far from present and ready for action. The ivory tower is still very much a barrier between the valuable academic dialogue between past and present and the world outside the walls, although mistakenly perceived as protection, and that barrier that is impossible for outsiders to cross. If the walls stay up and the doors shut, valuable information on how to function in the modern world could be lost. By the same token, if the tower comes down completely, the academy lies open to any and all attack, running the risk of losing everything scholars have struggled to maintain.

In her memoirs, Margaret Thatcher says that "[u]niversities were developing closer links with business and becoming more entrepreneurial" (598) as a result of financial pressure from the government. If the government begins to treat universities like businesses, it seems logical that universities would begin to develop a more sympathetic understanding of capitalist system and better understand their position within it, and be able to contribute to it, another benefit of the two spheres interacting. There is another way the humanities are used by the government, however, and it is directly related to the use of nostalgia on the government's behalf. David Lowenthal suggests that the national heritage trust is one of the ways in which the government controls the populace:

> Nostalgia is linked to an elitist, escapist perspective designed by the wealthy and powerful to justify their control of the present, to palliate its iniquities, and to persuade the public that traditional privileges deserve self-denying support. Robert Hewison sees the self-appointed custodians of English heritage purveying a cosy, sentimentalised past to enshrine 'order' and 'stability' as hierarchically ordained; Patrick Wright feels that the National Trust's heritage leadership promotes an 'ancenstralised ethic'; Neal Ascherson claims that the Tory historical message simply tells the public that 'your heritage is the story of how we came to rule you'. The 'insecurity' and 'ill-feeling' aroused by sweeping changes under Tory rule

> make 'invocation of the past – the [renewal] of an immemorial and accepted English national order - ... infinitely important to Mrs Thatcher's governments. 'Heritage' is a soothing physic against loneliness and fear.' (Lowenthal, 25)

In a time of extreme fragmentation as Thatcher asserted her pro-economic, pro-individual mandate, the populace was served nostalgia as a calming drug. Further evocation of the Victorian values and economic successes connected with industrial advancement allowed the government to implicitly suggest that these standards could be attained again. The Thatcherite commercialization of nostalgia, however, is criticized here. Lowenthal further quotes Ascherson, saying that "a fictional past of theme parks and costume dramas governs the present"(25), bringing to mind a lush, picture-perfect, historically detailed Merchant-Ivory version of history and the numerous heritage sites throughout the country. If, as Lowenthal suggests, nostalgia is being used by the government to create a fondness for days gone by and to create a sympathetic link to the Victorian era, then nostalgia itself has become a capitalist creation used for economic gain. As Lowenthal says, "[a]t bottom, the marketing of nostalgia is felt to debase sacred values by turning them into commodities" (23). What of the academic's position in all of this? Is the ivory tower thus a construct to protect the past from the real world, as much as it is to protect the academic?

The academics in these novels do not revere the past simply because it is the past; theirs is not a blind worship stemming from the belief that what is old is by definition more valuable. Their concern with the past is an essential part of the search for truth and wisdom, truths still valid in the contemporary world, potentially more so in this world where the Conservative mandate is above all to strengthen the economy. Those within the ivory tower, as devoted as they are to preserving the past and sifting through it to

discover new truths or to recast old ones in a new light, suffer from their own kind of nostalgia, however: they yearn for the simpler, more straightforward past, where a clear canon existed for study, before all the new intellectual analytical systems exploded onto the academic scene in the 1960s, for a period prior to the Robbins Report, with its legacy of unwieldy curriculums, and financial grants ripe for Thatcher's repossession.

Thatcher's intent of forcing universities to act like businesses - to make them turn a recognisable profit - challenges the very basic tenets of what a university is. Naturally there is a fundamental resistance on the part of academics:

> "No!" said Robyn hotly. "That's not the answer. If you try to make universities like commercial institutions, you destroy everything that makes them valuable.[...]" (Lodge, 345)

What makes universities valuable is their providing people with the opportunity to study, the chance to indulge one's desires to know more about the past; as Robyn believes, "to pursue excellence and self-fulfilment, each according to her own rhythm and inclination" (346). This does not exclude tertiary education in such economically viable areas as business management or engineering, of course. The threat that the humanities and the arts faculties have felt since the introduction of the Robbins reforms, from the sudden increase in technological colleges and the subsequent Thatcher endorsement of those colleges, has culminated in scholars' ambivalence about being marginalized as economically irrelevant, even though the humanities' focus – the past and its significant connection to the present – appears to be a governmental tool, marketed as nostalgia.

What of the nostalgia within academic halls? Is it an impediment to progress, or does it serve a similar function as the Thatcherite balm for a chaotic age? The danger of academic nostalgia lies in their reluctance to embrace the new schools of thought and

new academic analytical systems; in other words, academics who refuse to use new methods or consider new approaches, and thus do not use all the tools at their disposal to continue in the search for wisdom. In this respect, academic nostalgia for a simpler time is as detrimental to the growth and advancement of that quest for truth as funding cuts and staff reductions. However, as Lowenthal argues, no one who is nostalgic actually wishes to return to an earlier time to participate in another historical period. Instead, what they desire is to be reassured that the era they belong to is fragmented and incoherent, to be comforted in the knowledge that, although they feel adrift and disconnected, in time this era too will be easily understood, once it has passed into the realm of history and can be examined with detachment. Academics in their ivory towers are no different. The academic protagonists of these novels – Tom Crick, Roland and Maud, and Robyn – understand that their world is a precarious one, both in terms of job security and job availability. For each of them, the solution is to communicate the importance of their craft to people outside their academic community - or, in the case of Tom Crick, to his students, who are not yet voluntarily part of the academic community. Scholars within the ivory tower who are aware of the misuse of nostalgia amongst their colleagues and in the outside world know that their role is to make the past as clear as possible, to mine as many truths from it as they can, and to guard that past both by protecting the cultural artefacts (keeping the Ash – LaMotte papers within England, for example, rather than letting them escape in the hands of an American who sees them as monetarily valuable rather than culturally valuable), and by protecting their knowledge. In the end, although the government's emphasis on heritage, to convince the nation that traditional values are still alive today, implicitly approves cultural scholarship of the past, academics must

appoint *themselves* cultural guardians of the true heritage rather than allow the nostalgic past to remain the sole version of history. The academic quest for truth and knowledge continually reexamines the past, providing a new insight, as opposed to governmental nostalgia which assumes a simplified, ideal past. Constant dialogue between past and present ensures that the "official" history – namely, the Thatcherite nostalgic past – is not the only history, and that those truths buried in texts and events of bygone eras do not remain lost and unknown.

The Tory government encourages identification with the Victorian era, its strong British economy and its sturdy morals and values to create a link between an unstable contemporary society and a past time seen as successful. The very use of the past (even in a nostalgic fashion) emphasizes the concept of heritage and the importance of maintaining traditional values, evoking comforting stability in a time of change and economic unrest. By possessing and controlling a past seen nostalgically, a past portrayed by nationally-funded heritage sites and period films as calm and beautiful, the Conservative government associates these qualities with its own era and social order. It is a sound strategy, at least on the surface. However, for academics in the humanities, who by virtue of their work can see through this ruse, the problem lies in reconciling the search for truth in history and historical documents with an economic environment which not only does not support their work but which encourages a different view of the past. If, as the protagonists of these three academic novels produced within the Thatcher era discover, the answer lies in communicating with outsiders, breaching the ivory tower to allow free passage in and out, then scholarship in the humanities can create its own future, working against the hollow nostalgia promoted by the Thatcher government. The

authors of the 1980s, in reaction against the economic focus of the Conservative party under Thatcher's leadership, define their own views of history, its connection to the present, and its importance to society as a whole. The question has now evolved to, "How can I portray my job as important?", and the quest for truth and wisdom has developed a secondary goal: to bring those truths to a culture that perhaps does not recognise that they are missing. By opening the gates of the ivory tower, the academic can invite new views, new approaches and new systems in, even while enabling the truths held inside to disseminate in the outside world.

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