CCUE NEWS

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In this issue

1. Editorial (Chris Ringrose and Ruth Robbins) 2
2. On the Importance of telling Lies (Alan Smith) 4
3. Learning, Teaching; Reading, Writing: Thoughts on a Recent Prospect into a Few ‘Good’ Schools (Ruth Robbins) 9
4. Teaching Theory – A round table with contributions from Merrick Burrow and Tom Herron 12
5. A Message from ESSE (Lachlan Mackenzie) 20
6. Review – *Teaching Children’s Fiction* (Steven Barfield) 23
7. A message from CCUE’s president (Greg Walker) 26

Editorial
Chris Ringrose and Ruth Robbins

I believe there is space for *CCUE News* in the world of University English—a kind of niche market, if you like, for an e-journal that can present brief articles on the nature of the subject, the ways in which it is taught, and changes in the practical demands on university teachers. It can reflect on 'initiatives', on the rise, domestication and revival of theory, and compare English in the UK with the American experience. In the past decade it has included round table discussions, interviews, profiles, reviews, position papers and polemic. It has drawn its contributors from more than thirty different universities and colleges. From now on I shall be a reader rather than an editor, but this issue already shows Ruth Robbins' eye for a story—and for intriguing trends—and suggests that her tenure as Editor will be a lively one. I wish her well in her new role.

Chris Ringrose

After a short hiatus, CCUE News is back. The hiatus is down to me – it has taken longer than expected for me to learn the role of CCUE editor and to get both the materials and the technical expertise to put an issue together. Apologies to all members for that, but it will be a smoother and more regular process in future.

This issue has no single over-arching theme but offers a fairly eclectic mix of thoughts and views from its contributors. Alan Smith's discussion of teaching autobiographical writing proves the Wildean maxim that 'the truth is never pure and rarely simple'. His students (and I sympathize, because mine do this too) tend to think of autobiography as an overwhelmingly confessional mode when they begin to write. His article ranges across the principles of truth-telling as an ethical and moral obligation in social life which he contrasts with the necessity for lying as an aesthetic method and choice via the example of the fiction and autobiography of Alan Sillitoe.

My piece on visiting secondary schools is purely anecdotal, and I don't necessarily set out to produce definitive answers to the question of how best to manage the transition between school or college and university. But I did find visiting local schools very enlightening, and it's something that I would recommend as a way of getting some understanding of *who* we are teaching and what their experience has been.

The two short articles by Tom Herron and Merrick Burrow on their own experiences of teaching literary theory arose out of my interest in the work that they have been doing in a field which is often difficult to manage. Many of us will have had to teach theory at some point or another, and almost all of us embed theory into the other subject areas with which we are involved. Tom and Merrick are both committed, enthusiastic, experimental and successful lecturers in this area. Their different approaches are offered here as examples of how it might be done.

We are quite light on reviews in this issue. The one we have is a very helpful assessment of a book on teaching children's literature. I would very much like to be able to carry more reviews—volunteers are eagerly welcomed.

We include Lachlan Mackenzie's address on behalf of the European Society for the Study of English (ESSE) to the CCUE AGM because the connection between the two associations is very important, and because Lachlan here outlines a significant change to the way that our membership to ESSE will henceforth be managed. (This is a proposal to come into line with other European English associations and offer membership on an individual rather than an institutional basis was proposed at and passed by the AGM.) And we close the issue, as ever, with an address from the President, Greg Walker.

As your new editor, I'm very keen to know what you would like from CCUE News. Suggestions for discussion strands, round tables, themes and topics are very welcome as, indeed, are offers of articles. If the offer is then followed up with an electronic copy, that would also be more than acceptable. (The address for such correspondence is R.Robbins@leedsmet.ac.uk.) In an age when the amount of information that is generated around us is so huge, I would like to be sure that my contribution to the pile is relevant and useful to the community it is supposed to serve. Don't let me impose my own idiosyncrasies upon you. If you've got burning issues, let me know.

That said, there are things I would like to follow up. In his address to CCUE in April, Rick Rylance (Chair of the English sub-panel for RAE 2008) suggested that as a subject community, we're often quite bad at articulating the essential relationship we feel between research and teaching. If anyone has thoughts on that issue, I'd be glad to hear them. I'd also like to continue Chris's good work on different types of teaching —period studies and genres as well as methods for teaching the big issues in identity—class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age, for instance. Any thoughts on any of the above or on anything else will be more than welcome.

And finally: it's often been said that no man is a hero to his successor: Chris Ringrose is a very honourable exception to that rule. He has made CCUE News worth reading, and helped to give a voice to our subject community. Those of us who have worked closely with him will know that he has done all of this with good humour and tireless energy. I make no promise that I will maintain similar levels of either during my tenure, but I will try because, in this as in all other things, it was a very good example.

Ruth Robbins

- The next editions of CCUE News should be published in January and then in June 2008. The address for submissions of articles, reviews, suggestions and ideas is: R.Robbins@leedsmet.ac.uk
- The deadline for submissions is 15 December 2007 for the January edition and 15 May 2008 for the June edition.

On the necessity of telling lies …
Alan Smith

I think that I have good reason for encouraging my students to tell lies. This good reason is that they are, at times, possessed by a spirit of recklessness so that self-harm, humiliation and social rupture seem to be deemed prices worth paying if only the truth might be told. They see this truth-telling not only as a moral imperative but also as a logically necessary part, of biography and auto-biography.

When I wrote the Life Writing Module at The University of Northampton I think that I had only a vague, and innocent, notion in my head that it might be a good idea to offer students the opportunity to write, using material that occurred naturally in their own lives. I was quite unprepared for the tidal wave of indiscretion, unprepared too for the shocked reaction when I suggested that this material might be managed, shaped, improved. After all how can one improve on truth? There was and is a kind of puritan fervour about the truth, a fervour which was all the more puzzling as it came from people who had some knowledge of literary theory.

Nowadays I always begin each term by issuing warnings to the students about looking after their own interests and the feelings of their families. I always warn them about pornography, drugs and crime. This is not a warning about being involved in any of these things—that is none of my business; it is a warning about making disclosures to me, a respectable middle-aged man who feels the need to defend

himself against the sorts of things that might tend to deprave and corrupt him. 'But it's the truth,' they tell me and are more shocked by my lack of regard for the truth than by whatever act of drug-fuelled beastliness they might be aching to report. Not all of them, of course. I think of myself as encouraging them to lie because I am polarised by their extremism. But lying is, of course, as troublesome a notion as truth.

As the academic year goes on the students, who are taking the Life-Writing module, become increasingly concerned about the truth. So they should. There really is an imperative to tell the truth, perhaps even a moral imperative. Truth-telling is a commonplace in any system of ethics and, indeed, how could any society, any set of social relations, persist where truth-telling was not a central, highly-valued notion? I say highly-valued, rather than necessary, because there is sometimes a tendency to speak as though truth-telling were an absolute principle. This kind of claim most typically occurs when we are engaged in conduct that is governed by formal, even ritualised, conventions. So, for example, an MP must not lie to the House of Commons – an absolute principle – and yet there is an endless verbal dance of truth avoidance institutionalised into the daily practice of politics. In a court of law oaths are taken to tell the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth and then expensive barristers are hired to present a case so that one aspect or another of truth is valorised, obfuscated, suppressed. It is as though we are simultaneously devoted to and afraid of truth-telling. There is also an acknowledgement that the truth and truth-telling might not turn out to be the same thing.

Most of us would recognise that the truth is a rather difficult thing to come by and yet all of us would be appalled if we were accused of living a lie or of not being able to see the truth if it bit us. Being accused of not telling the truth is an accusation, an insult, which is always deeply felt. We get by, however, not with an absolute measure of truth but with a kind of sliding scale, a continuum of acceptable approximations. Truth is one of those words whose cognitive meaning is difficult to quite pin down. We feel on firm ground with the notion of scientific truth. If we were engaged in science we would not have the same sorts of problems with truth which are encountered by those of us who are engaged in the humanities and the arts. Here our notion of what is true might be normative, social, instinctive. The truth about Ohm's Law is not at all the same sort of thing as the truth about a love affair and certainly not the same thing as the truth about how a love affair, or Ohm's Law for that matter, might be represented by an artist. This inability to feel confident about cognitive meaning contrasts with the powerful persuasive power, the emotive meaning, of making a claim that something is true. Claims about truth are used to establish the status, of people, statements and things, often quite independently of what might be the cognitive meaning of the word. Thus the claim that something is a true story is used to establish the value of a story.

'Strange But True,' 'True Romance,' 'True Detective,' 'This Film Is Based On A True Story,' are all claims whose purpose is to draw us into a world of enhanced value which is inherently superior to stuff that is simply made up. Such claims to truth do not involve, in a necessary way, any reference to a system of proofs or any process of verification or measurement. Such claims are made in order to create an

aesthetic environment of trust, wonder, confidence, shock, horror, empathy and so on.

When I invite my students to write about their lives I am often, almost always, taken to be asking that they tell the truth. What I am in fact asking is that they do some telling that has a basis in memory and which is in some way bounded by memory. This qualification is problematic. Saying that we remember something does seem to include the claim that we are telling the truth and yet we habitually and coherently validate our memories without having access to objective sets of references about the events remembered. Coherence, likelihood, the strength of our impressions all conspire to give us confidence in our memories. So does tradition. We have personal, private traditions about the truths of our own lives, versions of events that we habitually tell ourselves. This confidence, this strength of feeling about our rememberings maintains us in our belief in our own good faith. Such a reference to good faith is an ethical move, a tactic that supplies the ethical weight, the emotive meaning, of truth-telling even when the thing that is told is false. It is false but not a falsehood, not a lie.

This leaves us, as writers of auto/biography, with more of a claim, or with perhaps a different kind of a claim on truth than a novelist might have. We might use locutions such as, 'as I remember it,' or, 'but I don't remember it like that,' or 'your memory of events differs from mine,' without being suspected of lying or attempting to mislead anyone. There is no necessary connection between memory and truth-telling. When I have a set of events in my mind I always know whether I am remembering or whether I am imagining and even when I am forced to admit that there is a difference between what I have in memory and the facts, the remembered thing, even though false, is still, in my mental categories, quite distinct from something that I have simply made up. I have arrived at the false memory by an entirely different route from the route which I take when I arrive at an imagining. I assign a different status to each of these routes and to the tellings to which they lead me. In autobiography and in fiction, writers are engaged in creating an aesthetic environment not a scientific one.

None of this is to claim that things don't happen in a definite, limited, factual way in a stable universe of cause and effect, rather it is a claim that we are hardly ever able to witness or report them in the stable way in which they occur. It is a claim that a demand for the truth often goes beyond a demand simply to know what happens to be the case.

Alan Sillitoe is a novelist who often makes overt calls for the truth to be told. He is also a writer of autobiography who is at pains to make clear and unclear the problems of truth-telling. In *Raw Material* Sillitoe goes to some pains to confuse distinctions:

> No matter what I call this book, I know it to be a novel after all, because everything written is fiction, even non-fiction – which may be the most fictional non-fiction of all. (p. 11)

And then:

> To pursue truth one minute while denying there is any such thing the next has the advantage of realism. (p. 11)

So that his reader is, in the opening pages of this autobiography, seduced from scientific notions of truth into a notion of truth where there is 'vacillation,' 'a pattern of wisdom,' and which is susceptible to 'accident or loss of nerve.'

Much of Part One of *Raw Material* is occupied with the telling of the life of Silltoe's grandfather, Burton. This telling is not characterised by any of the hesitancy implied previously. Sillitoe tells the stories of Burton with confidence; they have the certainty which comes from familiarity and repeated telling. In Chapter 17, for example, he tells the story of Burton's eye:

> Burton was working in the blacksmith's shop at the pit one day when a piece of burning steel flew into his eye.

The whole business is recounted in little more than half a page. The telling is chronological and factual with a brief excursion into what it might disclose of Burton's character. This certainty, though, is only a by-product of style and it is a certainty with which Sillitoe feels ill at ease. Chapter Nineteen begins:

> Truth is difficult to get at….Truth comes in flashes, forgotten pictures which it blesses us with. (Sillitoe p. 55)

This sort of nagging is characteristic of Part One where Sillitoe's references are childhood memories, family traditions, re-tellings. Throughout this part of *Raw Material* he speculates about truth and its hold on auto-biographer and novelist. As a novelist writing about this same incident of Burton's blinding such speculations are entirely absent. *A Man Of His Time* is a novel which is based on the life of Burton. The main events and characters are the same as in *Raw Material*; so are the locations, the time scale, the historical setting and yet this is, uncontroversially, a piece of fiction. This absence of controversy is reflected in the absence of any awkwardness about what truth might be, the absence of any authorial musing about our access to truth. The truth of the text is taken for granted simultaneously and necessarily with our recognition that it is a piece of fiction.

In *A Man of His Time* the blinding is told without there being any question of whether or not the detail of the incident is true. It is enough that it is detail which convinces. So, 'A large red handkerchief covered his eye.' and, 'he was tempted to call at Oswald's house at the top of Radford Bridge Road,' and 'Mary Anne cried out when he stood at the mirror to untie the handkerchief' (p. 301) are elements in the story of which it makes no sense to ask, 'are they true?' in the way that it would make sense if Sillitoe had used such devices in *Raw Material*. Writing the incident as fiction employs language which is authoritative and which communicates the assurance that things were so. Reporting the same incident as auto/biography the tone is qualified and even tentative. One mode, fiction makes truth, the other, auto/biography, reports truth. Except, of course, the writer of the latter feels, almost always, that he cannot succeed in doing this. He has an acknowledged burden of responsibility to tell the truth and an awareness of the difficulties which stand in his way. Thus, truth which has a reference in events in the real world is uncertain and qualified. Truth which has a reference only in the text that makes it, is certain and authoritative. What is more, when we are engaged with the fiction ('The red handkerchief,' 'the mirror,' 'Oswald's

house') we take this to be the way that we experience what is true. But it isn't. We experience what is true by making references to the external world and asking whether our internal lives measure up against what we take to be the reality and we are often tentative, uncertain and faced with ambiguity. It is fiction that has the capacity to create certainty.

Memory is intimate whereas facts are public. Claims become facts because of the way in which they are verified. The way in which our society creates facts is by making claims public and submitting them to public scrutiny. Memory attains the status of fact through an intimate process. The more closely, the more intricately we engage with a memory the more we regard it as a true record of things which have actually occurred. Sometimes, more often than we care to admit, our memories are protected from disproof. Fictionalising resembles remembering in this. Fiction is, after all, often intimate, often experienced in an intricate fashion. Perhaps we prefer to remember as fiction rather be convinced in fact.

Which leaves me tongue tied when my students ask, 'Does it have to be true?' It makes me a little shamefaced to recall that I say things like, 'Who's to know the difference?' But then it occurs to me that this is the only possible answer, at least it is if they don't think of it as being rhetorical. It is the case though that some of them think that I am encouraging them to tell lies and I have to admit that, although lie is a word that has a harsh ring to it, I sometimes am. In all the Assessment Criteria, in all of the Learning Outcomes that we painstakingly worked out for our new Creative Writing Degree we seem to have omitted all mention of truth. It would be nice to think that this is because we have simply presumed that truth telling is somehow built into Auto/biographical writing but of course we never thought this. We simply never thought that telling the truth was very important. Its importance is not a viable notion in the face of the difficulties that there are in telling it. More significantly, we prefer something that is well told to something that is true.

Works Cited

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Alan Smith senior lecturer in Creative Writing at the University of Northampton. He is also a novelist and occasional columnist. His books include Big Soft Lads.

Learning, Teaching; Reading, Writing: Thoughts on Some Recent Prospects into a Few 'Good' Schools

Ruth Robbins

I am sitting in a class room in a West Yorkshire school. It is, to misuse Evelyn Waugh's designation, a good school—a comprehensive with specialist humanities status in a mixed but largely affluent suburb. This is the first classroom I've sat in today which is quiet; the students are engaged in drafting an essay with help from their teacher for their GSCE coursework. I eavesdrop a bit and the odd student addresses a question at me: one's a really good question about precisely how much of the plot of *Saving Private Ryan* she needs to write down in order to demonstrate that she knows the 'text'. But mostly, while they work, I am reading through some of the work they have produced earlier in their course—an autobiographical piece. I am arrested by one of these essays—a stark, pared down evocation of teenage angst written in spiky monosyllables and simple sentences. It's a great piece and the writing matches brilliantly (and darkly) with the mood it evokes. I read to the end, to the teacher's comment, which points out its shortcomings in relation to the assessment objectives demanded here: it doesn't manipulate complex vocabulary or sentences and it gets a 'C' grade. But it is the best piece I read that day, if by *best* I mean the writing which is most effective, and which I still remember, three months on.

Earlier I have observed an AS Level Language class. The teacher is both an enthusiastic and efficient user of new technologies—a quiz that goes over the previous week's material appears on a data projection screen in a PowerPoint presentation that turns the bells and whistles of the program to good account and puts my own pride in my use of the 'fade-in' function to shame; the students play word games that cement the earlier lesson and then the class turns to a discussion of euphemism and dysphemism using Monty Python's 'Dead Parrot Sketch' as material—and the sketch is played on the screen as well. Lots of activity, lots of participation and lots of sound, mostly productive and engaged. Almost no writing.

Before that, a class of fourteen year olds preparing for Key Stage 3 SATS read a car advert together. The past paper that's being used has a choice on it – the car advert is paired with a passage from *Heart of Darkness*, but there is no discussion of the Conrad; and really, I think, as I reflect on teaching *Heart of Darkness* for what feels like the fifteenth time in as many years, I don't blame anyone for that. There is, though, enthusiastic discussion of the effects of tone, register, address, (what I would call) implied reader, graphology, layout and image. Still no writing of the essay the piece was intended to generate, but a pretty sophisticated discussion all the same, with great vocabulary used with real understanding. Before the class, an A level student dropped in an assignment. The teacher marked it before break. It was a draft of coursework she explained; and the student will redraft and redraft, with comments from the teacher at every stage until it's ready to submit. I'm filled with admiration for the teacher's commitment,

but oh! the horror, the horror of doing that for all the students I teach in my job.

I've been visiting schools recently, not as the anguished parent of an eleven year old about to go to big school—I'm not a parent, not even of any kind; but out of curiosity, both personal and professional. I left school some years ago (more than 20, less than 30) and I haven't really been inside a school since except for the odd concert where nieces and nephews were performing star turns. I'm an interested amateur as well as a professional. I've read lots of stuff about education in general and English education in particular including the material produced by the English subject centre about changes in A level and GCSE provision; I read the education pages of the national press, I've thought about the value of a national curriculum that didn't exist when I was at school and pondered the generation gaps that proliferate when you've got O levels rather than GCSEs.

I've also watched several new intakes of first-year students arrive in five institutions over more than fifteen years, and I've wondered about whether what I'm seeing are real changes in the nature of the student body, or whether, what with nostalgia not being what it used to be, I'm looking at the past with misty-eyed and consequently inaccurate recollection. As a teacher of life-writing, amongst other things, I've talked to a lot of students about their school days, and I've read a lot of material pertaining thereunto in the essays they produce, for after all, if you're 21, school is a pretty big part of your life. (Just the other day, a group of students, middle-aged before their time, discussed the ways in which the schools they attended had deteriorated between their twelfth birthdays and their eighteenths—kids today, they said, with less irony than one might expect, have got no respect. And I wondered, to myself, if it was just that, at twelve, they didn't notice the things they noticed at eighteen or whether something really has changed.)

During the school visit described above (actually an amalgam of several), I was hit by a pretty big wave of second-rate nostalgia. Lots of things might have changed, but schools still smell the same. Young people's voices still sound the same. They're still exuberant and they still seem to be mostly really nice, thoughtful, curious and even generally polite.

The things that have changed have something to do with the feel in classrooms. As University lecturers we're often worried about the transition from school to Higher Education, and the thing we tend to worry about most is how students will respond to seminars: will they be confident enough to talk. Actually, though, most English literature and language school classrooms in my small, anecdotal and entirely unscientific sample tend to replicate the activities of seminars: students participate actively in their learning, they discuss, they argue, they disagree, they share ideas – all the things we hope they will do for us as well. I didn't see a class room set up in the way they were in my school, rows of desks all facing the front, separated from one's neighbour to discourage talking and to focus attention on the teacher and the blackboard (there are no blackboards, only whiteboards and occasional smart boards, and talking to one's neighbour is part of the process). It's formal lectures they're going to struggle with – the sustained (relative) inactivity and concentration over a longer period as opposed to the bite-size chunks that most classes—the pedagogical literature insists on it—operate by. And though lots of people

break lectures up because 50 minutes is a long time by anyone's standards, learning to listen and learning to take appropriate notes is going to be a key skill that students might need help with.

But there's also the whole issue of writing more generally. In some ways the modern student comes to university without enough experience of writing—they don't write enough at school because they don't take notes all the time. They don't need the notes because they don't do so much exam work requiring revision from those notes; writing isn't a normal activity somehow. In other ways, paradoxically, they write way too much: the process of continuous assessment, which has much to recommend it, also leaves students over-reliant on their teachers. They arrive (or is this just me?) expecting to be able to submit draft after draft, and are thoroughly shocked by the discovery that—supportive as one wishes to be—they are on their own. (Less harsh than it sounds; we call it *fostering independence*.) They don't read their own work in terms of proofreading—they expect me to do that. And having just left a culture of Assessment Objectives, where every sentence generates a note the effect that AO 8 has been met, they use writing less as an aid to critical thinking and more as an exercise in ticking the boxes.

A slightly older colleague points out that it's always been like this. As I grow old (hair defiantly not parted at all, trousers unrolled, peach juice on the cuffs), I forget, he tells me, that it was ever thus. And I know that's true. My Granny, educated at local 'board' schools in the teens and twenties, never knew how to use an apostrophe, wrote exactly as she spoke, and regarded re-reading as a sinful waste of time: if she'd ever had a mobile phone, she'd have appreciated text speak nearly as much as she appreciated Matt Munroe. A generation before my Gran, school teachers were commenting on the detrimental effect of the gramophone and the silent movies on young people's capacities for concentration and their appalling lack of diligence and industry. As early as 1881, George Gissing pointed out that young people today have no attention span, and that the recent graduates of the newly established board schools were a very marginally literate market, able only to read trash like *Tittle Tattle* (his dig at George Newnes' *Tit-bits,* and forerunner of our very own *Closer).* Incipient middle age might as well be defined as the age at which one throws up one's hands in horror at the youth of today.

So shall I wring my hands and sigh in despair: 'what is to be done?' Probably: it's part of what I do, and possibly should come with the job description. But visiting local schools does give an insight into where the students are coming from (metaphorically as well as literally). It's something I'd recommend to anyone: find out what they do before you get them, and then you've got a rough (probably very rough, and again, unscientific and again, anecdotal) idea of where they're at when they arrive. It's made me think about building blocks in teaching—what we did last week, and how it feeds this week's discussion, and how this week leads to next week, which I've always done, but not always explicitly enough perhaps. A Whig view of teaching, perhaps, but it kind of works. It's also made me think about lectures a bit differently: perhaps they need to be more active (once I'd have said 'gimmicky') especially at the beginning of the course. But most of all, it's making me think about ways to get students to write so that they are doing it

often, and not always for my eyes—learning journals, textual interventions, reports on lectures they have heard for use in seminars. I want them to be used to it, and to be self-aware about it, and to know what's an appropriate 'voice' for different contexts. And I want them to re-read their own work so that when I do actually come to read it for assessment processes, it's not a sinful, not to say painful, waste of time and/or pencil points.

Ruth Robbins is principal lecturer in the School of Cultural Studies at Leeds Metropolitan University. She has just become the editor of CCUE News.

Teaching Theory: A round table with contributions from Merrick Burrow and Tom Herron

Introduction

I asked Merrick and Tom to contribute to this round table because in both cases I know their work in the tricky arena of teaching literary theory at close quarters. The teaching of theory in stand-alone modules or units is difficult because on so many levels it takes students out of their comfort zone. 'I didn't come here to read about Marxism, psychoanalysis, sociology, philosophy, politics, feminism' and variant comments have been made to me and most of my colleagues who teach theory at some point or another. Student resistance to the whole issue comes in part from the fact that, as Tom puts it, engaging with theory can go against the grain of commonsense reading habits. Additionally, much theory is also 'hard'—intellectually difficult to map for the inexperienced reader. And, frankly, they probably weren't expecting it, despite its clear appearance on lists of modules in the publicity materials and programme specifications for all relevant degrees.

At the same time, we all know that we can't really do without it even in non-theory modules. If a student is reading, say, *Dracula*, in a module that is really a historical survey of late-nineteenth-century writing, she or he will almost certainly have to write an academic essay on the book. In writing that essay, s/he will have to engage in some secondary reading—it's part of the nature of the game. In the last thirty years, one way or another, the vast majority of important essays and articles on *Dracula* have been strongly influenced by one theoretical model or another (notably psychoanalysis in this particular case). A student with no insight into what Freud actually said will

struggle to make sense of some of those articles. Actually, even if the student does know what Freud actually said, there may be still be a comprehension gap, though that's another story.

For undergraduate students, for some of us theory is a *sine qua non* of our discipline; and for those who are themselves more resistant, there is a wide recognition that it is necessary. In the following two articles, Merrick and Tom describe what they do and give some sense of why they do it. The institutional contexts for these two pieces are different. The University of Huddersfield runs year-long modules whereas Leeds Metropolitan has a semesterized academic year. This does put constraints on what one can do, and there are advantages and disadvantages in both systems.

In Merrick's case, he is able to take full advantage of the luxury of a longer period for teaching students to 'do theory'; the emphasis in his article is on giving students a sense of ownership of the theories they discuss by enabling them, through an innovative assessment schedule, to demonstrate their understanding on their own terms. For Tom, working with a tighter time frame, the focus is on the practicalities of the teaching, including the nuts and bolts of choosing an anthology and of managing the seminars. In both cases, the writers are keen for students to find ways of *applying* theory, not just as a kind of intellectual sticking plaster, but as a real act of intellectual engagement.

RR

The Use of a Journal-Portfolio to Enhance the Teaching of Theory

Merrick Burrow

When I first took up my current post I inherited a module entitled 'Introduction to Contemporary Literary Theory'. I could see from the supporting documents I was given that the teaching and learning materials had been prepared with thoroughness and rigour, and that effort had been made to ensure that theoretical exposition was balanced by textual application. But there was something about the course that seemed not quite right, a feeling that was confirmed by Ruth Robbins who, as External Examiner for the module, encouraged us to think about a thorough revision of it.

There was nothing wrong with the material as such. Weeks one and two were devoted to Structuralism, which was followed—logically enough—by Post-structuralism and from thence we visited a selection of theoretical approaches familiar, with slight variations of emphasis, to most people who have taught 'Theory'. Structuralism was a tough opening gambit, I thought, but I had taught courses like this at other institutions

and, indeed, had taken something quite similar when I was an undergraduate in the late 1980s.

That uniformity was, in the end, what I had found unsatisfactory about the teaching of Theory in general. Theory had become a canon in its own right, one whose values students often found it difficult to identify with or understand. Reading Theory was not a liberating experience for most of the students I talked to in seminars, and was often a frustrating and demoralising encounter. This, I hasten to add, was not simply because they struggled with the 'difficulty' of the concepts. More importantly, the frustration seemed to result from the students' lack of experience and confidence in working with theoretical discourse.

For one thing, students taking the original module had few opportunities to talk constructively about their experience of these difficulties and it was certainly not something they could explore in module assignments, where they might hope to receive detailed feedback. The assessment consisted of a formal essay and a seen exam paper, both of which reinforced the impression that students should engage with Theory in a reverential, yet superficial, fashion by producing a faithful simulation of critical engagement—to write a Marxist-style critique of a set text, for example, after having sketched an outline of Marxist theory. The prohibition against repeating material in different pieces of assessment meant, in addition, that students were required to perform this role-play for two distinct critical 'approaches'—all of which may have led students to conclude, not unreasonably, that Theory was not only obscure but, worse, it was mechanical and relativistic.

In putting together a new Theory module we tried to take account of these problems, attempting to resolve them through changes to the style of engagement with Theory, the structure of the module and the mode of assessment. The guiding principles for the design of the new module were as follows:

1. To encourage students to explore theoretical concepts with reference to ideas, contexts, discourses and practices that they find meaningful.

2. To prioritise confident theoretical exploration over and above completeness of understanding.

3. To develop students' capacity to refine their own understanding of abstract concepts through heuristic and reflective approaches to learning.

4. To encourage students to perceive the connections between ideas, as well as understanding the differences between theoretical positions.

5. To inculcate a creative and enthusiastic approach to Theory.

These guiding principles had a number of consequences for the design of the module. The first was the broadening of its scope to include material associated with Cultural Studies. In part this reflects the changing nature of English Studies over recent years, but from a pedagogical perspective it also has the

great advantage of allowing visual material and popular culture to be treated as objects for analysis—objects which, as it turned out, students were both well-equipped for, and genuinely interested in, interrogating.

The second important feature was the shift away from teaching a range of '-isms' towards a more iterative curriculum design, which introduced students to related concepts from a variety of perspectives. The module does cover canonical theorists but their place within the curriculum is based upon this iterative pattern rather than the history of ideas. By the time students read Derrida or Lacan, for example, they will have already encountered their ideas at least once in a more recent and slightly more accessible manifestation, and they will be reminded of them again later in the module.

The third and final feature of the new module is a partial shift of emphasis in the assessment strategy away from the simulation of established theoretical positions. Students are still required to write one formal essay of the theoretical-exposition-plus-textual-application variety. But, in addition, they are encouraged to reflect upon what they are gaining from the experience of reading a variety of theoretical texts, to take seriously the practical difficulties and emotional responses involved when engaging with material outside of their comfort zone, and to begin to develop for themselves the habits of thinking theoretically.

Students keep a weekly learning journal, in which they record comments about the set reading, seminar, lecture or anything else that seems relevant, including reference back to previous journal entries. This journal forms part of the final summative assessment for the module. Students are encouraged to treat the journal as a personal as well as an academic diary and are free to record honestly their feelings as well as their thoughts about the set texts. At the end of the module the students re-read their journal entries and write a reflective commentary on the learning process that it documents. The iterative design of the module structure helps to facilitate this process. Concepts that students find difficult at first are often viewed differently when encountered in a different context, so that a sense of frustration noted when reading Lacan may be replaced by a euphoric sense of recognition when the Mirror Stage crops up in Laura Mulvey's film theory several weeks later.

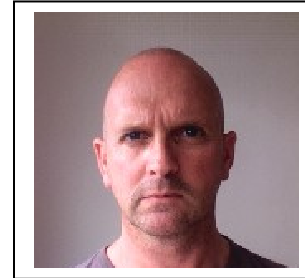
In addition to the learning journal and reflective commentary, the third part of the final summative assessment comprises a portfolio of images drawn from contemporary culture and a theoretically-informed commentary upon them. Most students choose to place these images and commentaries alongside their journal entries, using a scrapbook to cut and paste together the various components into a composite journal-portfolio.

There have been very few of these journal-portfolios which have been of a poor standard, especially when compared with the typical distribution of marks for the 2500 word essay amongst the same cohort of students. Many of them have been very impressive indeed. The relatively unfamiliar nature of the exercise, as well as the distribution of effort across two terms, means that it is less likely to suffer from the problems associated with work left to the last minute. But, beyond these factors, the success students have with these journal-portfolios derives from the fact that they have taken

possession of the subject matter and, in doing so, have learned something about themselves. The majority of the journal-portfolios convey a degree of personal investment which I only rarely come across when reading an undergraduate essay, for example. In some cases students display a strong visual flair, producing striking graphic objects with clusters of images and multi-layered sections linking analytical commentary to image to journal entry. The creative, tactile qualities of the journal-portfolio as an object, as well as its visual element, lends itself to different styles of learning and allows for variety in the skills and abilities that students can demonstrate in the assessment they undertake as part of an English degree course.

The journals also provide a source of detailed feedback on students' experience of the module which is easy to gather and which is incorporated within the ordinary workload associated with marking assignments. There are improvements that can always be made, but in general the experiment with this module has been a success and we intend to continue delivering it in its current form.

Merrick Burrow is the subject head of English at the University of Huddersfield. His teaching and research are focused on Victorian writing, literary theories and particularly the work of Walter Benjamin.



Tom Herron
Theory into Practice: Seminars and Presentations

Overview of the module

Theory into Practice is a second year module on the BA (Hons) English Literature degree at Leeds Metropolitan University. It is taught over a period of eleven weeks by means of one weekly lecture and a follow-up seminar. It is assessed by two pieces of work: a critical analysis of two theoretical essays, and a presentation in which theory covered on the module is discused in relation to texts taught on a concurrent module on Literary Modernism.

The module has three fundamental aims. The first, to introduce students to some of the major trends and schools of thought within twentieth-century literary theory. The second, to bring the theory to bear on some of the texts they are studying on the Literary Modernisms module. The third, to encourage the students to think as self-reflexively as possible about (a) their own reading and interpretative practices, and (b) how they

might usefully extend some of the insights they gain on this module into their reading on other modules.

It is intended to be a challenging module, and indeed, most students admit to a fair degree of uncertainty (anxiety, even) during the course of the eleven weeks. This is one of the real challenges of teaching a module such as this: the material is unfamiliar and strange to students, especially as much so-called literary theory is not immediately or easily applicable to their reading of 'literary' texts in that it has its origins not in the field of literature but in linguistics, philosophy, psychoanalysis, structuralism, Marxism, etc. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that almost all the material is in the form of translation (from French, Russian, and German) and, more substantially, by the fact that many of the ideas articulated by these theorists are undeniably challenging to (a) the habits of reading that students have acquired and (b) commonsense notions of what reading and interpretation are about. But this sense of negotiating with what many students perceive as 'difficult' ideas can prove, with careful management of their anxiety and with an approach that encourages a sceptical questioning of the utility and, indeed, the value of the theory under discussion, prove to be one of the most satisfying aspects of the module. If there is any underlying agenda on the module (and there is!) it is that theory is not some canon of sacred, infallible prouncements, but is, rather, an assemblage of ideas, assertions and hypotheses that can be, by turns, useful and risible, intellectually illuminating and barely decipherable (let alone 'applicable').

In some ways it is quite a traditional module. The theoretical approaches we cover (more or less at the rate of one per week) are some of the more obvious ones: structural linguistics (focusing on Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*); Russian formalism (Shklovsky on poetry and Bakhtin on the novel); Marxism / materialism (Walter Benjamin on the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction and Max Horkheimer & Theodor W. Adorno on the culture industry); and psychoanalysis (Freud on the interpretation of dreams). After the first few weeks we narrow the focus quite considerably by concentrating on a strand of theoretical thought that might be termed (with a nod to Richard Harland) post-Saussurean superstucturalism (structural anthropology and literary analysis in Claude Lévi-Strauss's work on myth); Roland Barthes on the Death of the Author; Jacques Derrida on structure, sign, play and différance; and Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva's feminist-inflected poststructuralism. We close the module with Edward Said's *Orientalism*—that links in very effectively with two texts on the Literary Modernisms module (*Heart of Darkness* and *A Passage to India*) —and with a final week on postmodern theory in extracts from Jean-François Lyotard, Ihab Hassan, Jean Baudrillard, and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.

While the emphasis on the module is on students engaging with theory in the raw (i.e. they are asked to read primary material in extracted form) there is an attempt each week to discuss a literary text in the light of their engagement with the theory. So, for example, when we discuss Lévi-Strauss on myth we look at several versions of the Oedipus story. When we consider Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language*, we look at how Sylvia Plath's poem

'Daddy' might be seen to articulate or enact Kristeva's ideas. When we consider Freud's work on dreams we focus on a rich passage from the opening pages of Janet Frame's *Faces in the Water*. Incidentally, one of the most useful exercises is when I ask students to interpret one of their own dreams following the procedures set out by Freud. Derrida's essays are discussed in tandem with George Herbert's 1633 poem 'Prayer' and Mark Doty's poem 'Difference'. So, each piece of theory is keyed into a literary text that shows how theory might be applied, but also how problematic certain 'applications' of theory might be. As well as these 'test' texts, I constantly cross-reference to the texts students are studying on Literary Modernisms, and indeed the second piece of assessment on Theory into Practice is a theoretical discussion of a piece of modernist fiction or poetry.

The notorious issue of which anthology of theory to use was solved, I initially thought, by the publication in 2001 of Vincent Leitch's *Norton Anthology of Theory and Literature*. For a variety of reasons I had grown dissatisfied with other anthologies, and the *Norton* seemed to promise a truly compendious offering of extracts. Now, I am not so sure. Although students make use of this massive tome throughout the module and, indeed, into their third year, I am always on the look out for a more manageable set-text. In considering revisions to the module, Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle's excellent *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* is a strong contender, not least for the ways in which it cleverly weaves theory into the types of contexts, themes and questions that we tend to return to in literary studies, but I remain wedded to the basic idea of having students engage with the theory as primary text rather than mediated through a critical filter.

The seminars and the presentations

It is the application and simultaneous testing of theory that are the chief functions of the seminars. The seminar is the place where students are expected to demonstrate their understanding (or, indeed, voice their difficulties of comprehension) of the theory, and then to consider ways in which that theory might inflect their reading and interpretation. This is not something I cover in the weekly lectures, which are concerned solely with setting out the basic premises of each piece of theory and how it fits in with the narrative of twentieth-century theory. It is in the seminars where things become literary. The informal nature of the seminars allows (when all goes well) a wide-ranging discussion in which the key ideas of that week's theoretical text are reiterated, discussed, and extended into students' engagement with the reading they are undertaking on other modules and beyond: i.e. in their reading for enjoyment.

So, one of the first things that I say to students about their attendance at, and active participation in, the seminars is that both are a crucial aspect of the module. In the first lecture I explain in very straightforward terms that it is absolutely in their interests to attend seminars (a) in order to make sure they have understood the theory itself, and (b) that they gain an idea of how that theory relates to their reading practice. From the opening moments of the weekly seminar the expectation is that students will contribute to any part of the discussion, be it clarification of particular

ideas, or in the discussion of the relevance of theory to literary text. The seminars are not information-heavy (that's the function of the lectures) and my role is almost exclusively one of facilitator of discussion. I spend very little time talking in seminars: the emphasis is strongly on checking understanding, suggesting ways of applying and, perhaps most importantly, raising questions about the utility of each theoretical approach we cover.

The seminars on this module work successfully because they are a genuinely necessary supplement to the lectures. Having understood something that can initially seem daunting, it is with equal amounts of relief, pleasure, and achievement that most students leave the seminar-room. I try to make seminars entertaining and fast-moving (90% perspiration, as the saying goes!) Probably the most enjoyable and productive moments are when real debate or argument occurs, and when the students realize that reading and interpretation are contestable and, indeed, arguable; and when they (and I) realize that their debate itself is informed by theory that perhaps only days before they had found impenetrable.

The emphasis on the seminar work is important because it is within the seminar that the second piece of assessment for the module is carried out. The first assignment (a critical analysis of the conjunctions and disjunctions between two pieces of theory) is a standard 2,500 word essay. The second is an individual or paired presentation (without notes) addressing the following task: 'Taking one essay from the Theory into Practice module and one novel, poem, passage, or statement from the Literary Modernisms module, you should discuss the possible application of theory to text.' The key-phrase here is, of course, 'possible application'. The guidelines to the presentation make it clear to students that it is not so much a mechanical application of theory that is called for, but an open-minded and critical questioning of how a particular theory may, or may not, assist with interpretation of a modernist text. Less ambitious students more often than not opt to bring together, in a slightly predictable albeit more-often-than-not perfectly decent manner, quite obvious texts: Orientalism and Conrad or Forster, being the most frequent. But the more ambitious students often do something very different, and this is where the presentation as a piece of assessment has a genuinely pedagogic function. This past year, for example, saw students discussing *Orlando* through the frame of Deleuze and Guattari's work on the rhizome; *The Good Soldier* with the aid of Derrida's différance; and W. B Yeats's 'The Stolen Child' by reference to Freud's 'The Interpretation of Dreams'. Delivered sometimes falteringly and at other times with admirable gusto and confidence, these presentations demonstrate to the students the creative possibilities of bringing texts and theories together in an adventurous and critical spirit.

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Lachlan Mackenzie
A message on behalf of ESSE

At the April Annual General Meeting of CCUE in Oxford, Lachlan Mackenzie addressed the assembly. We reproduce an edited version of his script here because the executive feels strongly that the relationship between CCUE and ESSE is important and needs to be emphasized, reinforced and strengthened. Lachlan's address contained the proposal for an important modification to the manner of CCUE's relationship with ESSE, for individual rather than departmental membership. The feeling of the AGM was that CCUE would continue to support ESSE and all its activities and we offer the information here as part of that support of this major European society.

Thank you to CCUE for inviting me to this splendid college. I am today substituting for the new President of ESSE, Fernando Galván of the University of Alcalá de Henares, just as in 2005 and 2006 I had the privilege and pleasure of standing in for the former President, Ado Haberer. Through me, Professor Galván sends his very best wishes to you, and apologizes for his absence: he is particularly sorry that as the new incumbent he cannot himself be here. As I speak, he has just returned from representing ESSE in Ankara and is now in Évora, representing ESSE at the annual meeting of the Portuguese Association. He has asked me to underscore how important CCUE and the study of English in the United Kingdom are for ESSE: the idea of a European Society was born on these shores, and it was in London that its latest major activity, the Eighth ESSE Conference, took place last year. ESSE's bursary system is strongly oriented to enabling continental scholars to come to work in the excellent departments and libraries available in this country, and the submissions to our biennial book award reflect the dominance of British publishers (but of course not their exclusivity) in our field: two of last year's three awards went to books published in the UK.

At the present moment, ESSE is a federation of 33 national associations of different sizes, ranging from tiny Estonia (with only four members) to massive France (with some two thousand). The latest addition is Malta, and there are few blanks left on the map of Europe; our most easterly member is the lively Armenian association. With two exceptions, all of the associations have individual membership, that is, the members of the association are individuals teaching and researching in English studies. Mostly, the members themselves pay the annual fee to the association, which includes a sum for the association's membership of ESSE; in a few countries, the fee is paid by the Ministry of Education, sometimes on a competitive basis. Because of increasing costs, the ESSE Board last year took the decision to increase the membership fee from €7 (the level at which it had been pinned since 1999) to €9 per head, or about £6. The exceptions to individual membership are the rump Scandinavian association, which after the creation of independent Finnish and Swedish associations now covers only Denmark and Norway … and CCUE. In these two cases, the associations have departmental membership, so that the fee payable to

ESSE by CCUE is calculated on the basis of the total number of copies of ESSE's newsletter, the *European English Messenger*, sent to departments.

Some departments submit the names of those individuals in their departments to whom the *Messenger* should be sent to CCUE, and these are then passed to me as Treasurer of ESSE for incorporation in my database and the mailing list generated from it. Other departments simply order a particular number of copies, often indicating the name of the person responsible for the distribution thereof. We have tried various ways of dispatching the *Messenger* so that it arrives reliably on the desks of the academics interested in its contents, and to date, the current compromise seems to be working well. The accuracy of the dispatch is entirely down to the intermediaries between the departments and me, i.e. the officials of CCUE. In recent months, indeed years, the flow of information from CCUE has sadly been less than optimal, so that my database has fallen behind developments on the ground. However, on the basis of discussions I have been having here in Oxford, I am confident that service to the departments will be radically improved. We need not go as far as the hyper-efficient Spanish association, which sends me monthly updates of their membership list, but a regular flow of information between our two organizations cannot but be in everyone's interest and a better reflection of the intimate bond between them.

The idea has been mooted that CCUE could develop towards the system of individual membership that pertains in 31 of the 33 ESSE-affiliated associations. It is not my place to involve myself in the CCUE-internal debate about this matter, but suffice it to say that individual membership has proved on the continent and in Ireland to give scholars at their desks and in their classrooms a greater sense of being more involved in English Studies as a global enterprise. Many indeed regard themselves as "ESSE members", a term which is technically incorrect since ESSE is a federation of associations but it is a term which speaks of the supranational identity they feel.

What, then, can ESSE offer its "members" in this non-technical sense? First and foremost, we must mention the biennial conferences, of course. Last year's conference in London was among the best-attended and, for many people who were there, simply the best of the conferences so far. The magnificent opening in the Great Court of the British Museum, the presence of Dame Antonia Byatt in debate with the Dutch writer Cees Nooteboom, the poetry reading – both moving and amusing – were all very memorable, but an even more lasting impression was left by the academic programme itself, which was generally judged to have been very well prepared by Warwick Gould and his team at the Institute of English Studies at the University of London. Literary scholars of all types, linguists of all types, and students of culture of all types: the entire ESSE constituency was more than adequately represented and satisfied. Our thanks go to CCUE as the instigators and sponsors of this event and to Professor Gould for the energy and elegance with which he ensured that all went smoothly. He has just informed me that the books have been closed, and that income (from registration fees but also from a raft of sponsors) has proved to be more than sufficient to cover the ambitious programme of expenditure. The next conference will take place in 2008 in Aarhus, Denmark. This

location is easily accessible from the UK, with a ferry from Harwich to Esbjerg and flights from Stansted, and ESSE confidently expects that attendance by CCUE members will, as with all previous conferences, again be substantial. There still is more than enough time to propose seminar topics. Full information will be available in the *Messenger* hitting your desk in the coming weeks; if you can't wait, please go to ESSE's website at www.essenglish.org. By the way, the 2010 conference is taking place in Turin; various cities are currently tussling for the task of preparing the 2012 conference. It's not too late to join that tussle.

I mentioned our website. In partnership with the *Messenger*, the site is becoming an ever more frequently used way for ESSE and its "members" to communicate with each other, and I hope you have it as a bookmark. Almost any conceivable doubt you may have about the Society is answered by the site's FAQ section, but more specifically the site contains information about our Bursary scheme and also the rules and regulations of the ESSE Book Award. In London, at the closing session of the conference, three awards were made: to Derek Attridge, for his book *The Singularity of Literature*; to John Holm, for *Languages in Contact*; and to Stavros Stavrou Karayanni, for *Dancing, Fear and Desire*. As members of departments affiliated to CCUE, you are all entitled to submit your books for this award (worth €1500, about £1,000). Any book published in 2006 or 2007 is eligible; see the detailed rules on the website for further particulars.

London saw the relaunch of the *European Journal of English Studies* (EJES). With a new publisher, Routledge (Taylor & Francis), a new team of editors, a new policy, and a new board, *EJES* is poised to soar, presenting an interesting and challenging range of themes covering many aspects of our multifarious discipline. Do please consider *EJES* as a destination for your thematic publications and continue to encourage your libraries to subscribe to the paper and electronic versions. And finally, do remember the unique potential of the *Messenger*, with its targeted circulation of almost 8,000 copies across Europe, to reach more relevant colleagues than any journal ever could. At a time when English studies is coming together across Europe under the flag of the Bologna Process, with joint curricula, Erasmus Mundus joint Masters', and interdisciplinary projects mushrooming (such as the Acume project interfacing science, literature and the humanities), the *Messenger* offers a superb platform for research networking in English studies.

The hope of the entire ESSE Executive is that our Society will play its due part in your lives as scholars of English Studies and that CCUE and ESSE will continue to co-evolve in a spirit of openness, communication and cooperation.

Review

Charles Butler (ed.), *Teaching Children's Fiction*, Basingstoke, UK, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. ISBN (HB) 978-1-4039-4494-8, (PB) 978-1-4039-4495-5.

Steven Barfield

This new book by Charles Butler will be welcomed by academics who teach children's literature in English departments, although as we shall see, it is indebted to many disciplines outside of English studies itself. The book's title refers to *Children's Fiction*, presumably because novels are most often taught and while picture books are discussed, there is little said about either children's poetry or drama. However, the debates invoked and methodologies applied are not dissimilar between these different genres, and so I have tended to use the more familiar term, Children's Literature, throughout this review, as Butler does himself. While the teaching and learning of children's literature within the English curriculum is increasingly popular with students, there is no doubt that is still problematic and somewhat contentious. Your colleagues in English may have a lingering suspicion that teaching texts like *The Wind In The Willows*, rather than 'difficult' works like Milton or Joyce represents for both lecturer and students concerned a mutual and highly agreeable wallowing in shared nostalgia for lost childhood pleasures. If many children's books traditionally narrate the loss of childhood innocence in favour of adult experience, they nonetheless often become classics because they proffer readers an imaginative return to such a pre-lapsarian childhood state. Teaching children's literature may often seem epitomised by J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*, the story of a child who refused to grow up. It is such pedagogic anxieties that ensure the value of a book like *Teaching Children's Fiction* that explores teaching and learning in the subject in depth.

Butler's concise and effective introduction considers the question of the location of the subject and its current critical context. He points out that the 'past decade has seen an unprecedented growth in the attention given to children's literature', that has been matched by the enhanced 'status of children's literature as an academic field' (1). He argues that the 'differing aims and origins of the programmes' in which the study of children's literature occurs (English departments and centres for the study of childhood, as well as more traditional locations such as Education, Library and Information Studies), necessitates an approach that engages productively with all the disciplines involved, rather than preferring one over another. This makes the learning and teaching of children's literature, a somewhat chaotic, fluid field; a situation that is enhanced by an absence of a fixed canon of texts and the subject's own complex, multi-disciplinary heritage. Butler suggests what has evolved is a 'diversity of critical practices' and an approach to the study of the subject that is both 'flexible and pragmatic' (2-3). This diversity itself a source of confusion for teachers and learners coming from different disciplines and approaching children's literature, and one of *Teaching Children's Fiction's* object is to help dispel such confusion. Butler's three principal aims are clear, but are also quite diverse: 'to explain the

intellectual and educational traditions within which children's literature has been studied and taught' and to offer 'some historical context for the state of the discipline'; 'to discuss and disseminate ideas for developing teaching practice'; and 'to provide a convenient point of access to resources and information' (3).

The last of these aims is probably the easiest to achieve and the lists of resources for studying and teaching children's literature that the book provides is thorough and probably worth the book's purchase price alone. However, as it is a print based list, it will not be able to be updated as quickly as a web based resource would. The book's structure is intended to help deliver 'discussion and dissemination' of appropriate pedagogy, as it is organised into a series of sections that follow several of the most common and germane approaches to the subject. It is not organised around a classification by type or genre of children's literature, as is more normal in histories or companions to the subject of children's literature. This is useful from a pedagogic point of view, although it does mean that the reader needs a considerable knowledge of children's literature to begin with. The intended audience is within the HE teaching community, rather than either school teachers or undergraduate students. Each chapter is written by a leading figure in the field from one of the particular disciplines associated with the study of children's literature and each one uses their focus on a particular approach to introduce associated critical strategies, key debates and pertinent case studies. In a practical fashion each chapter explores to greater or lesser degrees specific classroom applications. There are no detailed lesson plans, but in HE this is not expected.

Pat Pinsent considers 'Historical Studies' as an approach to children's literature and she even includes sample course materials. Her account shows the value of contextualising writing for children in its historical context and is one of the most straightforward 'approaches', pedagogically speaking. David Rudd, whose previous work is known for engaging with how adults read books written for children, in the chapter 'Cultural Studies', situates developments in the subject alongside a fruitful encounter with the theorising of children's literature as cultural objects through cultural studies methodologies. Although he gives some useful examples, the very breadth of cultural studies inevitably means that some possible interactions can only be hinted at. Jean Webb in 'Genre and Convention', used these familiar literary signposts as a way of discussing both canon formation within the subject and how it may help to engage with what the study of children's literature purports to do. Despite its title this approach was not as much about direct application as Pinsent and Rudd's chapters, but more a reflection on the historical construction and consequent limits of the subject.

The presence of Roderick McGillis from the University of Calgary, usefully reminds the reader that children's literature and its study is not just a British concern but an international one. In 'Pedagogy, Theory and Children's Literature', McGillis presents an account of how the adoption of theoretical concerns from 'mainstream' literary theory leads to a problematisation of assumption such as what 'reading' or 'child' means when studying the subject. However, it was not clear how this understanding of theory, insofar as it makes learners and teachers more critically reflective, differs (if at all), from

Pinsent and Rudd's methodological approaches. What are the respective values, implications and pros and cons of different kinds of theoretical approaches to children's literature? In contrast, Maria Nickolajeva considers in a very practical fashion, by means of a single case study, how we might deal methodologically with the relationship between words and pictures in illustrated books for young children and do justice to the complementary interaction between the two sign systems. Judith Elkin explores what it means for children to be readers, drawing her information from diverse sources, including educational and government policy documents (though little from the field of developmental or social psychology), and then asks what this might say about teaching and learning children's literature at University. The book then provides two useful surveys. Pat Pinsent and Kimberley Reynolds analyse postgraduate provision in children's literature in the U.K., while Richard Flynn does the same for the U.S.A. The book concludes with several helpful appendices relevant to the subject: undergraduate syllabi in the UK; resources; key critical texts and a bibliography about teaching children's literature in HE.

Teaching Children's Fiction is probably of more use to the experienced university teacher of children's literature, than to someone starting out to teach the subject: the resource lists are useful, but only some of the chapters detail in a systematic enough fashion what practical examples of using a particular approach actually look like at the level of the lesson. While the book does 'discuss and disseminate ideas for developing teaching practice', from the classroom practitioner's point of view, this did not always occur in a way coherent enough to be accessible or to allow meaningful and structured comparisons between approaches to be made. A stricter adherence to format at the level of each chapter would have helped. In some ways, this is a consequence of Butler and his contributors being true to the spirit of what Butler perceives is a 'diversity of critical practices' from different disciplines. However, it also makes for a problem of coherency within the project. I did not feel the book fully articulated 'the intellectual and educational traditions within which children's literature has been studied and taught', nor provided an adequate, 'historical context for the state of the discipline', so much as it left the reader to draw their own conclusions from the perspectives provided. Why are some theoretical approaches chosen and others (for example, psychoanalytic, cultural materialist or postcolonial ones) strangely absent?

There is relatively little sense of what the relevant debates are between the different approaches that feature in the book and what it means to use one approach or methodology rather than another, or how individual disciplines interact with one another when the come to the study of children's literature. I did not feel as if the possible sources of confusion between approaches derived from different disciplines were dispelled because I lacked a clear idea of what was at stake in terms of the effective disciplinary differences. It would have been beneficial to the reader if there had been a concluding, summative chapter that tried to draw together these somewhat disparate, albeit always stimulating perspectives and to elaborate the key issues. However, as Butler notes, children's literature is transforming rapidly as it emerges as a complex subject in its own right, and he deserves to be commended for

providing the first attempt to seriously reflect on what this means for the current development of its learning and pedagogy.

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A message from the CCUE President

This year has proved an unusually busy one in terms of the number of consultative documents and exercises that CCUE has been invited to contribute to on behalf of the English subject community. As the activities for the first half of the academic year have been described in detail in the Chair's report to the OGM, which is available for consultation on the CCUE website (www.CCUE.ac.uk), I shall restrict myself here largely to those events that have taken place since that report.

Since the OGM in December the CCUE Executive has met formally for one meeting, and maintained a virtual conversation on matters of importance, liasing via e-mail on a number of matters. We were asked, for example, by the AHRC to comment on their proposals to move to the so-called Block Grant Partnerships in Postgraduate Funding. We asked for comments from heads of Department and CCUE reps, and collated the responses into as coherent a document as was possible, given that departments tended to take rather different lines on the attractiveness of the proposals, in part at least based on whether they saw gains or losses for their own institutions in the move. The text of our response has been posted on the CCUE website—as ever maintained and managed by Paul Vetch (to whom I am deeply grateful for his technical acumen and all round decency when faced with inane inquiries), and can be consulted in the 'Documents' section.

In these and other matters, a notable feature of the past year has been the close co-operation between CCUE and the English Association in responding to national initiatives and

consultations of all kinds. This has been possible thanks to the good offices of Professor Peter Kitson, formally Chair and now President of the EA. I am grateful to Peter and his colleagues on the EA Higher Education Committee for their willingness to discuss matters of mutual interest, and hope to continue our close and fruitful relationship in the coming years. It can only strengthen the voice of the English subject community nationally if our two associations speak together, if not with one voice, at least in dialogue. Another key aspect of the discipline's national profile is, of course, provided by the English Subject Centre, and it would be remiss of me not to mention the excellent 'Renewals' conference hosted by the ESC at Royal Holloway over the summer, which many of us attended to our considerable benefit, and which offered an opportunity for more sustained and considered reflection on the state of the discipline and its possible future directions.

CCUE also offered a number of nominations and suggestions for the new round of invitations to the AHRC Peer Review College and Research Panel. I attended a meeting with Tony McEnery and Emma Wakelin in Bristol about the postgraduate funding proposals and took the opportunity to raise the subject of research funding too, arguing for the continuation of responsive mode funding and the focus on time for research as well as the more modish strategic-mode funding and the drive towards funding large-scale projects. This was a theme of a further, more formal consultation in which members of the Executive and the EA met with Philip Essler, Tony McEnery and Alicia Greated in Bristol in the early summer. We used this meeting to lobby for a greater emphasis on specifically literary and linguistic topics in future rounds of research funding.

Finally, we were also asked to contribute to Professor Sir Ivor Crewe's review of the Institute of Advanced Studies in London, in particular relation to the work of The Institute of English Studies. There was, as usual, a very short deadline, so after consultation with colleagues on the Executive, with members of the EA and with Rick Rylance, Chair of the English sub-panel for RAE 2008, I sent a strongly supportive response, which also encouraged the IES to continue to roll out its programmes beyond London and across a wider swathe of these islands.

In closing, I should notice two further significant developments. The Revised English Subject Benchmarking document is now finally in the public domain. Thanks to the labours of the original drafting team and the subtlety and care with which they drafted the original text, there was only a little work required to bring the document in line with the current state of the discipline. What we hope that the new team has done is found a more explicit place for new developments in the discipline, most notably Creative Writing in the document. Secondly, there have been two significant changes in personnel since the 2006 OGM. Linden Peach has stepped down as Treasurer and been replaced by Sue Zlosnik, and Chris Ringrose has stepped down as Editor of CCUE News and been replaced by Ruth Robbins. I should like to thank both Chris and Linden on behalf of the Executive Committee for their sterling work on our behalf over the years, and thank Ruth and Sue for gamely stepping into their shoes.

Finally, a note for your diaries: **the CCUE OGM 2007 will be held at The IES in Senate House on Saturday 1 December 2007**

Greg Walker, Chair, CCUE