

## From the Editors

The academic novel (or university, college, or campus novel) is of course a subgenre. It may be statistically unimposing if compared to, say, the mystery or science fiction or romance varieties (though all these are represented in academic fiction). There may be critics who dismiss its interest or complain of its narrow appeal, critics who are themselves usually university-based academics. And yet the academic novel not only continues: it flourishes. Novelists write them and readers, most of whom are not professors, read them. Moreover, it is a subgenre that has appealed to many major literary novelists, including such authors as Vladimir Nabokov, Javier Marias, Zadie Smith, Philip Roth, A. S. Byatt, Bernard Malamud, and Nobel laureates Saul Bellow and J. M. Coetzee. A majority of the best-known academic novels have been from the Anglo-American world but this is changing as new examples spring up outside the Anglosphere.

Explanations for the attractions of the form are many and range from the usefulness of the academic milieu and the prescribed academic term as closed systems to the supposed fun of seeing intellectuals made to look petty or venal, cowardly or lustful. That a university is a setting for thinking and the attainment of wisdom, among other activities, invites writers and readers who want a cerebral quality in their fiction. And the university seems to lend itself to comedy and satire.

In November of 2019, one in a series of seminars on the academic novel organized on the Continent (earlier seminars or dedicated portions of seminars on academic fiction had been held in Ghent, Bucharest, Vienna, Gdansk, Kyiv, and Lublin) took place at Jagiellonian University in Kraków. Alongside scholars from several Polish universities there were representatives from the United States, Britain, Romania, Spain, and even India for two days of presentations. The series we present here brings together a selection of articles most of which are based on the presentations in Kraków.

In "Research Scholars and Rebel Angels" Rowland Cotterill discusses three novelistic portrayals of the university, C.S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength* (1945), Simon Raven's *Places Where They Sing* (1970) and Robertson Davies's *The Rebel Angels* (1981) as academic "theodramas" revolving around a battle between forces of good and evil. Acknowledging the supernatural framework of the selected novels and consistently referring to the myth of Faust (especially in Goethe's and Marlowe's works), the author treats the novels by Lewis, Raven

and Davies as twentieth-century manifestations of some of the conflicts and dilemmas attendant on human ambition and the desire for knowledge.

Zbigniew Glowala discusses the representation of the private and professional lives of Oxford dons in J.I.M. Stewart's *The Aylwins* (1966). The novel is treated as an illustration of the genre of "collegiate story", as the narrator himself describes it. Starting with the premise that *The Aylwins* is based on a number of stereotypes about academic life, the author refers to *The Academic Tribes* (1976) by Hazard Adams in order to demonstrate that most of the observations Adams makes in his book are confirmed in Stewart's fictional story.

Another satirical take on the life of scholars may be found in Michael Frayn's *The Trick of It* (1973). Through its academic protagonist's failures and frustrations, the novel mocks the secondary, derivative nature of scholarship as opposed to creative work. In her analysis of Frayn's story, Isabel Berzal Ayuso employs Simon Critchley's typology of humour (2002). It is argued that irrespective of its multi-layered comic aspect, *The Trick of It* conveys a positive image of academia.

Izabela Curyłło-Klag analyses Evelyn Conlon's short story "Two Gallants" from *Dubliners 100*, a volume of contemporary re-writes of Joyce's stories, issued to mark the centenary of the original publication. Conlon both openly alludes to Joyce's story of the same title, and targets the critical industry that Joyce's work has amassed over the past century. The motif of two men swindling a servant girl is reworked into a story of belated feminist scholarly revenge. The female protagonist, who turns out to be descended from the woman who supposedly served as a model for the Joycean character, offers a new version of the real-life story as well as exposes unfair and predatory academic practices of her male colleagues.

David Lodge's *Thinks...* (2001) dramatises the well-known opposition between "the two cultures" as a professional and private relationship between a writer and scientist, in a campus setting. Informed by Bakhtin's views on novelistic dialogism, Lodge's novel sets up several binaries without resolving them conclusively. The chief dualism addressed in the novel stems from different approaches to human consciousness. Bożena Kucała's article provides a detailed analysis of how this and related kinds of dualism are represented in the novel.

Ewa Kowal analyses James Lusdun's representation of academia in his 2002 novel *The Horned Man*. The book tells the story of a British scholar working at an American college and, in the course of his work, confronting issues of gender relations and sexual harassment in what may be identified, in hindsight, as a pre-#MeToo movement era. Despite the fact that Lusdun's novel

gradually departs from the realist mode, the article highlights its topicality and perceptive engagement with some of the most controversial and thorny problems in contemporary academic life. Carefully tracing the trajectories of the increasingly confusing and unreliable narration, Ewa Kowal also offers a detailed interpretation of the novel's numerous intertextual allusions and cultural references.

Corina Selejan's article addresses a spectrum of fictional representations of academe in contemporary Romanian novels. The author outlines the cultural and political context of Romanian academic fiction, pointing out that this is a relatively new phenomenon since this genre was almost non-existent in Romania before the fall of Communism. In her article, Selejan references numerous Romanian academic novels and suggests a periodisation of Romanian academic fiction into the realist phase, the metafictional phase, and, the most recent phase, the turn towards magic realism. The author also poses questions concerning the viability of applying postcolonial theory to the study of literature after Communism.

Michał Palmowski examines attitudes to teaching as well as images of teachers in a wide range of academic novels, by Kingsley Amis, Malcolm Bradbury, Jonathan Franzen, J.M. Coetzee, Philip Roth and Michel Houellebecq. Drawing on pedagogic literature, he distinguishes fear-driven, anger-driven and passion-driven approaches to teaching in the selected novels. The main focus of his article is on the teacher-protagonist and his relations with his students. The author's special interest is in the teaching of literature, its proper purposes and relevance to students' needs.

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