



Behind Closed Doors: The Realm of Campus Novels

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ملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة تطوّر الرواية الجامعية وأبرز ملامحها النقدية، وهي نوع أدبي يعود بجذوره إلى العصور الوسطى، لكنه بلغ ذروة انتشاره في القرن العشرين. فقد نُشر أكثر من 400 عمل في الولايات المتحدة و200 في بريطانيا بين عامي 1945 و1979، ما يجعل من رواية الحرم الجامعي مرآة ثقافية تعكس بوضوح الاختلالات البنيوية والتوترات الأيديولوجية في الأوساط الأكاديمية. يعالج هذا النوع الأدبي قضايا محورية، منها فشل المؤسسات التعليمية البيروقراطية، والعلاقات الجندرية، وتهميش الجماعات العرقية، كما يسخر من النظريات الأدبية المعاصرة والنزعة النخبوية داخل الوسط الأكاديمي. وتعتمد هذه الروايات في الغالب على تصوير جامعات متدهورة وأكاديميين يعانون من الإحباط، حيث تتعرض النزاهة الفكرية للتهديد بفعل الطموحات الفردية والهواجس الطبقية والاختلالات الهيكلية. ورغم الانتقادات التي تطال هذه الأعمال بسبب أنماطها النمطية وقيمتها الأدبية المحدودة، فإن الرواية الجامعية ما تزال قادرة على كشف تعقيدات الحياة الأكاديمية وانعكاساتها الاجتماعية والسياسية. ومن ثم، تُعد رواية الحرم الجامعي ليست مجرد مساحة للنقد، بل أيضاً وثيقة توثق خيبة الأمل التي تسود الحياة الأكاديمية، حيث تنتهي مصائر العديد من الشخصيات إلى الاستقالة، أو الطرد أو السجن أو الهروب الطوعي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: رواية الحرم الجامعي—الأكاديمية—السخرية—الجندر—الإقصاء.

Abstract

This study explores the evolution and critical contours of the university novel, a genre that, while rooted in medieval literary traditions, gained significant prominence in the twentieth century. With over 400 works in the United States and 200 in Britain between 1945 and 1979, the campus novel has become a powerful cultural mirror reflecting the inner workings, dysfunctions, and ideological tensions within academic life. The genre addresses key issues such as the bureaucratic failings of educational institutions, gender dynamics, and the marginalization of ethnic minorities, while also satirizing contemporary literary theory and academic elitism. Central to these narratives is the portrayal of decaying university environments and disillusioned academics, where intellectual integrity is often compromised by ambition, class anxieties, and systemic inequities. Although some critics dismiss these novels for their stereotypical characters and limited literary merit, the genre continues to illuminate the complexities of academic life and its broader sociopolitical implications. Consequently, the campus novel serves not only as a site of critique but also as a record of academic disillusionment, with many characters facing resignation, dismissal, imprisonment, or self-exile as inevitable outcomes.

Keywords: Campus novel—academia—satire—gender—exclusion.

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to explore the English campus novel by summarizing its key characteristics and highlighting the breakdown of the long-standing myth of the academic community's "ivory tower." According to Wiegenstein (1987), the four defining conventions that set college fiction apart as a distinct subgenre are a naive protagonist, an episodic plot, a satirical tone, and a diverse cast of stylized supporting characters (Online). The narratives within this genre can vary widely in purpose and structure. For example, in Joseph O'Neil's *Dog* (2015), the plot extends beyond academic confines to critique real-world issues. Similarly, David Lodge's *Nice Work* delves into the clash between academic ideals and commercial values, examining their broader implications for society. Lastly, Dietrich Schwanitz's *Der Campus* (1996) addresses themes of sexual harassment, portraying the story of a sociology professor and candidate for university chancellor who becomes entangled in a scandal after being accused of inappropriate conduct and rape by a female student, with the dean's involvement. According to Eva Bjork, the depiction of the university is not limited to novels but also appears on television and stage (9). Consequently, the traditional image of the university as an isolated, self-absorbed enclave reserved for a privileged elite has shifted. What was once hidden has been brought to light, revealing academia as a source of empathy, compassion, and understanding¹. The final part of this chapter analyzes and traces the key differences between 19th century campus novels and their modern counterparts. This literary genre—often referred to as the campus novel, university novel, or academic novel—has undergone a fascinating transformation in recent years, embraced and celebrated by some of the most prominent contemporary authors.

Since the Middle Ages, numerous publications have explored the concept of the university. In *The General Prologue* to *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer illustrates life at Oxford University by portraying the scholar as someone isolated from the real world, immersed in academic jargon that the public finds incomprehensible. He is depicted as the oblivious professor who speaks to walls rather than engaging with people. David Lodge's *A Small World* serves as a prime example of this perspective. Such portrayals aim to demean the educated elite and the aristocracy, presenting them as unremarkable and ordinary—no different from common folk.

¹ Egyptian films have given considerable attention to this genre. Notable characters include Dr. Nafeh, the opportunist, in *Professor and Head of Department* (2015); Hassan, a professor of sociology, and his brother Salah, a chemistry professor who ends up working as a pickle vendor, in *Febrayer Al Eswed* (Black February, 2013); Dr. Fouad Alturabi, a philosophy professor in *Saye Bahr* (Sea Thug, 2004); Dr. Hussein Morsi, a law professor in *The Eka Law* (1991); Dr. Noaman in *Hind and Dr. Noaman* (1984); and Dr. Mamoun Radwan in Naguib Mahfouz's *The Mirrors* (1971).

In Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*, Professor Welch is characterized as neither exceptional nor original. Similarly, Terry Eagleton describes intellectuals as rebellious, bohemian, and even treacherous, with their rituals perceived as threats to traditional ways of life and their influence seen as pitiful. Proctor identifies *The Adventures of Oxymel Classic, Esq; Once an Oxford Scholar* (1768) as the earliest known attempt at an academic novel. It chronicles themes of violence, sexuality, and debauchery, portraying academics as obnoxious, foolish, ignorant, and inexperienced—easy prey for cunning students (49).

1.2. Exploring the Literary World of Universities—Definitions

Chris Bald defines campus fiction in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* as typically comic or satirical in nature, set within the enclosed world of a university or similar academic environment, and focused on exposing the absurdities of academic life. Many of these works also convey a sense of nostalgia for university days. The contemporary form of this genre emerged in the 1950s with notable examples including *The Groves of Academe* (1952) by American author Mary McCarthy, *Lucky Jim* (1954) by Amis, *Changing Places* (1975) by Lodge, and *The Rebel Angels* (1982) by Robertson Davies.

Lodge defines the campus novel as a literary work in which the primary events unfold within a college or university setting, placing particular emphasis on the lives of professors and junior faculty members—referred to as dons in America or academic staff in the UK.

In the early eighteenth century, The College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) used the term "campus" to denote a specific location within the town. Over time, the term evolved to describe particular departments at various American universities, and by the 20th century, it had come to encompass the entire university's physical grounds and facilities. The phrase "campus novels" originated in the United States, where the concept was first introduced before being adopted in the United Kingdom around 1950. The *Oxford Dictionary* officially recorded the term in 1958. The term is particularly associated with the University of East Anglia, which was designed similarly to American universities—built as a cohesive, self-contained campus in a rural or park-like environment. While campus fiction emphasizes the spatial unity central to this literary form, some critics argue that the term academic novel is broader and more encompassing.

These narratives satirize the rigid stereotypes of university professors, highlighting their eccentricities and deviations within their fields of expertise. They also portray the inner turmoil of intellectuals and academics whose lives have become consumed—if not entirely lost—within the confines of libraries and lecture halls. Beyond illustrating their personal decline and disillusionment, these stories often engage with broader themes such as the deterioration of academia, modern literary challenges, and evolving educational methods.

In this context, the university is portrayed as a closed society governed by its own set of values, norms, and often riddled with conspiracies and intrigue. Within this literary genre, two central plotlines commonly emerge: one examines the flaws within this insular world and the futility of returning to a classical ideal, while the other explores the possibility of a character breaking free from its seductive pull. According to Elaine Showalter, academic novels of the 1950s depict a community with distinct rules and traditions, cut off from the outside world—a comfortable, womb-like space that can also feel stifling to some. Unlike later works that narrow their focus to specific departments, these earlier novels tend to center on broader institutional bodies such as the college, faculty, or university as a whole. In these stories, the professor's allegiance lies primarily with the larger academic institution (17).

1.3. Key Influences on the Evolution of University Fiction

Great Britain, like the rest of Europe, was deeply affected by the devastating impact of the Second World War. As noted by Bradbury in *The Atlas of Literature* (1996), the post-war novels rooted in social realism tackled the generational divide, reshaped the essence of modern experience that had evolved in earlier decades, and offered some of the most genuine portrayals of everyday life and specific settings. Bradbury argues that this form of literary narrative provides valuable insight into Britain's social history. In his university trilogy, *Lodge* introduces the fictional city of Rummidge, which serves as a representative urban center populated by both businesspeople and industrialists.

The 1950s marked the beginning of a new era and a transformed cultural landscape for the arts and literature, signaled by the publication of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. During this period, three influential novels with distinct stylistic approaches were also released: *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding, *Under the Net* by Iris Murdoch, and *Lucky Jim* by Kingsley Amis, the latter widely recognized as the first English academic novel set on a university campus. Literature of this time reflected the post-war philosophy of life and culture, as well as the tense, often disillusioned atmosphere that permeated London in the 1950s. While political discourse was generally optimistic, literary voices often questioned this optimism, with many writers adopting critical stances that contrasted sharply with those of politicians. In the aftermath of World War II, a new generation of young novelists, poets, and playwrights—including Kingsley Amis, John Wain, John Braine, Iris Murdoch, and William Golding—began to rise in prominence. These writers, often grouped under the label *The Angry Young Men*, used their work to express dissatisfaction with the social and cultural shifts occurring in post-war England. However, given the relative stability and prosperity of the post-war period, some observers likened the era to a modern-

day Elizabethan age, prompting a fair question: in such seemingly favorable times, what are these writers so angry about?

The Education Act of 1944, often referred to as the Butler Act, played a significant role in shaping the university narrative. It guaranteed free education for every child in England and Wales, enabling ordinary people to access higher education and offering them opportunities to overcome poverty and advance in society. Consequently, the aristocratic elite lost their exclusive hold on education and literary influence. Following World War II, British society underwent a profound transformation, with meritocracy² emerging as the primary path to leadership and success. The culture as a whole became more democratic, and the widespread poverty, high unemployment, and social issues that had plagued the 1930s seemed to have diminished.

As universities opened their doors to a broader range of students, the number of graduates increased, leading to various tensions and conflicts. This is evident, for example, in the relationship between Jim Dixon and Professor Welch in *Lucky Jim*. Similarly, Lodge's *Changing Places* highlights the significant gap between the status academics had achieved and the relatively modest salaries they received in both America and Britain. Michelle Dean³ notes that as higher education became accessible to the middle class, university campuses naturally became fertile ground for bourgeois intrigues and conspiracies. Given this context, it is unsurprising that mid-20th century authors were deeply drawn to exploring life on university campuses and the dynamics that unfold within them.

The number of universities has grown across the board, and individuals outside traditional academia now have access to career opportunities within arts colleges. In America, novelists were often drawn to teach in university creative writing programs because these positions, although less lucrative than those of academic staff, allowed them to immerse themselves in the academic environment—a microcosm reflecting the broader society. Many writers valued university teaching for several reasons, most notably the supportive working conditions, flexible schedules, and generous paid leave, all of which enabled them to continue writing, composing, and creating alongside their teaching responsibilities.

According to Showalter, *The Romance of the University Professors* is a college novel that centers mainly on academic staff. The evolution of this literary genre has also seen the emergence of other subgenres, such as Farsty novels—which focus primarily on students rather than the institution—University Detective novels, and Women's University novels, exemplified by works like Rebecca Goldstein's *The Mind-Body Problem* (1983).

² A meritocracy is a system in which an employee's job security or advancement depends on the consistent quality of their work (Al-Ma'ani Dictionary).

³ Campus Novels: Six of the Best Books About University Life. In *The Guardian* [online], 2016 [cited 2017-04-27]. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/aug/29/campus-novels-best-books-university-life>

1.4. Core Characteristics of Campus Novels and Why They Resonate

The university novel gained popularity for several reasons, foremost among them its realistic portrayal of academic life. Although these novels are technically works of fiction, many authors—most notably Lodge—opt for a realistic style that closely mirrors actual university settings and experiences⁴. By using fictional names but grounding their narratives in recognizable academic environments, these writers blur the line between reality and fiction. This authenticity resonates with readers, particularly because the experiences of professors and students depicted in the novels often closely resemble real-life situations. Even when authors include disclaimers distancing their work from real events or people, the overlap is evident, making the distinction between fiction and reality both subtle and easily recognizable. This truthful representation is a key factor in the genre's enduring appeal.

Second, amusement and entertainment play a significant role in the popularity of university novels. Comedy, by nature, is a dramatic form intended to provoke laughter. While some comedies focus purely on humor, others aim to entertain while also satirizing societal flaws and human folly. A specific type of comedy, known as farce, relies on exaggerated scenarios, absurd situations, and flat, stereotypical characters purely for comedic effect. Often set in pastoral or idealized environments, farce prioritizes light-hearted amusement over emotional release or catharsis. In the context of the campus novel, humor often stems from the precarious nature of academic employment. The central theme in early examples of the genre revolves around the challenges professors face in securing stable positions, which have become temporary and limited in duration. Consequently, characters resort to throwing lavish parties for university officials, engaging in deceit or manipulation, and even resorting to various forms of bribery to gain or maintain their posts—all of which contribute to the comic and satirical

⁴ Lodge argues that the novel does not replicate the real world but rather imitates it; it is not a mere slice of life but a statement about life. Novels do not portray life as it truly is but instead present it through an ideological lens [...]. Some critics categorize Lodge's trilogy as *roman-à-clef*—novels where real people or events are depicted under fictional names. Meta-fiction, on the other hand, refers to novels in which the author deliberately highlights the artificial nature of the work or literature itself, often through parody or deviations from traditional narrative conventions and techniques.

Dr. Gamal Al-Gezeery asserts that realism, as both an artistic style and vision, lacks the critical elements needed to challenge the framework of artistic representation itself. Despite the rise of modernist movements since the early twentieth century, few writers have incorporated modernism into their novels and stories. This is because modernism critically examines itself and questions reality, rejecting an uncritical acceptance of the world as it is. It also challenges the writer's ability to perpetuate either the idealized or distorted image they create of themselves and their social category.

(Introduction by Prof. Jamal Al-Jaziri to the book *Post-Colonial Theory and the Novel: Selected Studies and Articles*, 2020, p. 13, Bayan House for Translation, Publishing and Distribution).

Lodge, David. (1994). *The Art of Fiction: Illustrated from Classic and Modern Texts*. London: Penguin Books.

tone of the narrative. *Straight Man* (1997) by Richard Russo is widely regarded as one of the funniest novels ever written. Its protagonist, the head of an English department, finds himself in a desperate situation and, in a humorous outburst, threatens to start killing and selling campus geese to raise funds for the department's budget. When he actually follows through and kills a few geese, he becomes the subject of multiple security investigations. From there, a series of comedic events unfolds, driving the narrative with wit and satire until the novel's end.

Third, class conflict has been a prominent theme in campus novels from their early stages—more so than in most other literary genres. These novels often delve into the tensions between the upper, middle, and lower socioeconomic classes within academic settings. The wave of student protests and sit-ins inspired many writers to set their stories on university campuses. However, American campus novels generally steered clear of directly portraying these confrontations, likely due to the prevailing atmosphere of academic freedom. Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* (2000) is a powerful example of a campus novel that tackles racial and social dynamics head-on. The story is narrated by Nathan Zuckerman, a writer who lives near Coleman Silk—the novel's protagonist—in New England. Silk, a former professor and dean at the fictional Athena College in western Massachusetts, becomes embroiled in controversy when he uses the word "spooks" in reference to students, which is interpreted as a racial slur by two African American students. This incident sparks a larger discussion about identity, race, and perception. Moreover, in some academic environments, professors are derogatorily labeled as "peasants," while others are accused of having no legitimate background or origin. These dynamics reflect deeper societal prejudices. Ultimately, *The Human Stain* illustrates how racism and class-based discrimination foster bias and harm all individuals involved.

Fourth, the admission of women into colleges and universities introduced significant new dimensions to the campus novel, transforming both its themes and narrative focus. With the growing presence of women in academic spaces, issues of gender and sexuality became central concerns in academic fiction. These works began to explore not only the challenges women faced within traditionally male-dominated institutions, but also broader questions of identity, autonomy, and social expectation. A recurring theme in many of these novels is the persistent gender-based discrimination experienced by both women and, in some contexts, men. The narratives often examine the struggle for equality and respect within academia, depicting how societal expectations—especially those rooted in conservative or patriarchal cultures—can suppress individual freedom and limit opportunities. These stories frequently portray the journey toward emancipation, highlighting characters who resist or break free from repressive norms surrounding gender roles and sexual behavior. Lodge's campus trilogy (*Changing*

Places, *Small World*, and *Nice Work*) is particularly notable for its engagement with feminist themes. Through sharp satire and well-drawn characters, Lodge explores the rise of feminist thought within the university, the shifting power dynamics between men and women, and the challenges faced by women academics in asserting their voice and authority. His novels reflect not only the growing influence of feminist theory in academic discourse but also the cultural tensions and transformations that accompany these changes. In this way, the campus novel has served as an important literary space for examining gender politics within the evolving landscape of higher education.

Fifth, a defining feature of the campus novel is its engagement with the rise and evolution of literary theory. As literary studies became more theoretical and specialized in the latter half of the 20th century, academic fiction began to reflect—and often critique—these developments. Campus novels frequently incorporate discussions about the relevance and legitimacy of various critical approaches, including feminist criticism, structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, and more. These theoretical debates are not just background elements but often central to the plot and characterization, serving as a source of both intellectual engagement and satire. In many of these works, characters—often professors, graduate students, or critics—debate the value and purpose of self-reflective literary analysis, questioning whether theory enriches or obscures literature. The novels sometimes expose the jargon-filled, esoteric nature of theoretical discourse, poking fun at the academic pretensions and ideological turf wars that can dominate university departments. A particularly sharp example of this is Lodge's *Small World*, which humorously satirizes the international academic circuit, including the often absurd nature of literary conferences, the rise of fashionable critical theories, and the institutionalization of creative writing programs. Lodge uses wit and irony to highlight the gap between theoretical complexity and practical understanding, revealing how literary theory can sometimes drift into the absurd or the performative. Ultimately, the campus novel serves both as a mirror and a critique of the academic world, capturing the intellectual trends and tensions that shape literary scholarship. In doing so, it invites readers to reflect on the value, limitations, and sometimes the vanity of academic pursuits in the realm of literature.

Sixth, a notable characteristic of many campus novels is their serious tone and engagement with complex, often controversial issues. While some entries in the genre are comedic or satirical, a significant number tackles weighty topics that reflect the realities of academic life. This seriousness is largely attributed to the fact that many authors of campus novels are themselves university professors. Drawing on their insider knowledge, they address pressing concerns—either directly or through subtle narrative techniques—to provoke thought, raise

awareness, and encourage readers to reflect on the challenges facing higher education. Works such as Radwa Ashour's *Specters* (1999) and Raouf Abbas's *Footprints: An Autobiography* (*Mashaynaha Khutan: Sirah Zatiyah*, 2004) exemplify this approach⁵. These autobiographical novels explore the deep-rooted problems plaguing universities, including institutional corruption, the deterioration of academic standards, weakened faculty performance, the erosion of collegial relationships, and the commercialization of education. They also highlight the breakdown of fair and transparent systems for evaluation and promotion. Through these narratives, the authors shed light on the systemic issues undermining the integrity and purpose of the academic institution, offering a sobering look at the consequences of such decline. In this way, campus novels serve not only as a form of entertainment or satire but also as a platform for serious critique and reflection on the state of academia and its role in society.

Seventh, academic novels have evolved significantly over time, mirroring the transformations—often for the worse—experienced by universities themselves. This shift is reflected in the increasingly bitter, ironic, disillusioned, or even melancholic tone adopted by the characters and narrators in many of these works. Rather than celebrating the academic world, these novels often express frustration, cynicism, or sorrow over its perceived decline. Michael Frayn's *The Trick of It* (1989) exemplifies this tone, offering a sharp, ironic portrayal of academic life, where the boundaries between intellectual pursuit and personal absurdity blur. The novel's characters embody a sense of disillusionment that has become emblematic of the genre. As universities have been seen to lose their former prestige, purpose, or ethical grounding, campus novels have, in many cases, taken on the role of elegies or epitaphs for the idealized concept of the university. They capture not only the changing structure of academia but also the emotional and intellectual discontent that comes with it. From their inception, campus novels have leaned heavily on satire, and this tradition remains strong. Howard Jacobson's *Coming from Behind* (2003) is a prime example of this

⁵ A professor plagiarized a book written by a deceased colleague and published it under his own name. The victim's family chose to take legal action rather than involve the media. The court ruled in favor of the family, confirming the act of theft. Despite this, the accused professor returned triumphantly, radiating happiness and receiving congratulations after being appointed head of the department where Dr. Yusuf worked (*Specters* 258). Dr. Shagar, visibly upset, rose to leave but paused at the door to address the dean. "I dread to think who will succeed Yusuf. I see the coffin and the pallbearers, and I know it's the university lying in that coffin" (*Specters* 260). At the university, proctors stationed at the doors "keep watch," ostensibly to warn students if a professor is approaching. One girl remarked, "The proctors help students cheat—sometimes they deliver crib sheets from one student to another in different test sections." A boy added, "Human nature is weak. When we see others, who are less capable and less hardworking, achieving higher grades through cheating, we feel compelled to cheat as well because it has become the norm" (*Specters* 146). In another instance, a conversation about Khalil revealed institutional pressures to conform. "I spoke to him about the jilbab, explaining that the university could not consider him for a position if he kept his beard and wore a jilbab and skullcap. After a long discussion—thank Allah—he heeded my advice," she said proudly. "Today, I saw him at the college wearing a shirt and trousers. He kept the beard—that's it" (*Zidan, Specters* 250–251).

enduring satirical impulse. The university it portrays is a pale shadow of what such an institution is meant to be—comically dysfunctional, intellectually barren, and wholly undeserving of its title. Through such works, campus fiction continues to expose the contradictions and failures of academic life, using satire as both critique and lament.

Eighth, modern campus novels place considerable emphasis on sexual relationships, reflecting broader cultural shifts, particularly in Western societies. Since the 1960s, a series of constitutional and societal changes have led to greater sexual freedom, and this liberation is mirrored in the literature of academia. These novels explore a variety of sexual dynamics, often presenting them with both candor and complexity. Common themes include affairs between faculty members, relationships between professors and students, and even entanglements involving faculty spouses and their partners' colleagues. Such narratives often delve into issues of power, consent, desire, and the ethical boundaries within academic settings. One notable example is Tom Wolfe's *I Am Charlotte Simmons* (2004), which offers a sharp critique of campus culture from a student's point of view. The novel follows Charlotte, a brilliant and morally upright young woman from a working-class background, who receives a full scholarship to the prestigious and hedonistic DuPont University. Upon arrival, she is overwhelmed by a culture steeped in casual sex, social status, and materialism. The novel vividly portrays her sense of alienation and disillusionment as she navigates a world starkly different from the one she grew up in. What sets the novel apart is its refusal to conform to a cynical or tragic outcome. Despite the pressure to conform and the emotional toll of her experiences, Charlotte's integrity and inner strength remain intact. Wolfe uses her journey to critique the superficiality and excess of modern campus life while affirming the possibility of resilience and moral clarity amid chaos. In this way, contemporary university novels use sexuality not just as a provocative theme, but as a lens through which to examine identity, power, and the human condition within the academic environment.

Ninth, one of the key reasons for the enduring popularity of campus novels is the deep curiosity readers have about the inner workings of university life—especially the aspects that are typically hidden from public view. Universities often present a polished, intellectual façade to the outside world, but readers are drawn to what happens behind closed doors: the personal rivalries, departmental politics, moral dilemmas, and interpersonal dramas that unfold away from the lecture halls and graduation ceremonies. For many, campus novels offer a form of literary voyeurism, providing access to a world they may once have been part of—or wish they had been. Some readers are especially interested in fictionalized portrayals of institutions they themselves attended, eager to compare the fiction with their own lived experiences. These novels satisfy a desire to demystify the

academic environment, revealing the very human complexities behind its scholarly surface. Lodge's *Small World* illustrates this duality particularly well. Through a global cast of academics traveling from one literary conference to another, Lodge presents the university as both an inspiring space of intellectual exchange and a competitive, sometimes hostile environment driven by ego, ambition, and ideological clashes. For some characters, academia offers opportunity, creativity, and belonging; for others, it becomes a place of alienation, frustration, or even existential threat. This contrast reflects the broader appeal of the campus novel: it captures the contradictions of university life—its promise and its pitfalls—while giving readers an insider's glimpse into a world that is often as flawed and fascinating as any other corner of society.

Tenth, a recurring, and often problematic, feature in some campus novels is the exaggerated and sometimes stereotypical portrayal of Jewish characters. These depictions occasionally suggest that Jewish academics wield disproportionate influence over literary awards and the publishing world, reflecting a controversial narrative that has appeared not only in campus fiction but in broader cultural discourse. In certain novels, Jewish academic figures are portrayed with negative traits, yet paradoxically, they often emerge as the few who succeed decisively by the story's end, underscoring a complex and sometimes contradictory representation.

The academic novel traditionally centers on English departments, with other disciplines like history and sociology appearing only sporadically in passing. This focus reflects the genre's origins and the prominence of literary studies within universities. Lodge's *Small World* and Bradbury's *Stepping Westward* exemplify this tendency, with their narratives largely unfolding within the world of English literature departments, where issues of literary theory, criticism, and academic politics take center stage.

Women's representation in campus fiction has also evolved significantly over time. Early campus novels often portrayed women in limited and stereotypical roles—either as stay-at-home mothers or occupying low-status, low-paying jobs within the university community. Such depictions reinforced traditional gender norms and overlooked the complexities of women's experiences in academia. However, from works like *The History Man* onwards, and increasingly in contemporary campus fiction, female characters are depicted with greater nuance and objectivity. Modern narratives explore women's ambitions, challenges, and contributions in academic settings, offering a more balanced and realistic portrayal that reflects changing social attitudes toward gender and professional life. Overall, while certain stereotypes and narrow focuses have persisted within the genre, campus novels continue to evolve, broadening their scope and deepening their exploration of identity, power, and diversity within the academic world.

Eleventh, in many campus novels, events such as conferences, public lectures, and social gatherings play a crucial role in uncovering the hidden dynamics of academic life. Characters—like the author hired to teach creative writing or deliver public lectures, as seen with Walker in *Stepping Westward*—navigate these formal and informal settings, which reveal underlying tensions and unspoken truths about the university world. The significance of public lectures is particularly evident in Amis's *Lucky Jim*, where such events serve to expose the flaws and hypocrisies of English academic culture, painting a rather unflattering picture of the nation itself. Meanwhile, parties and social functions become spaces where academics' true personalities come to light, far beyond their professional facades. These gatherings embody Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of the carnivalesque—moments when conventional rules and hierarchies are temporarily suspended, allowing for a release of inhibitions and a subversion of established norms. Conferences and festivals provide academics with an authorized, fleeting freedom to break from the rigid customs and formalities that usually govern their behavior. In these carnivalesque moments, hidden rivalries, desires, and power struggles play out openly, offering readers a vivid and often humorous glimpse into the complexities of academic life.

Twelfth, a persistent theme in campus novels is the critique of how the true purpose of academia—advancing knowledge and scientific inquiry—has been undermined by an endless scramble for status, personal gain, and material rewards. Rather than prioritizing intellectual rigor or groundbreaking research, many academics become consumed by the pursuit of coveted positions, social prestige, financial benefits, and even romantic conquests. This shift often paints academic life as absurd and farcical, where the quest for genuine scholarship takes a backseat to politics, ambition, and distractions. The novels suggest that this decline in academic brilliance is exacerbated by poor working conditions, especially low salaries, which fail to recognize or reward the intellectual labor of scholars. Without adequate compensation, talented academics may become demotivated or drawn away from their true calling—the pursuit of knowledge—toward more superficial goals. Some voices within the literary and academic world, such as Professor Shawqi Daif, advocate for radical reform to reverse this trend. They argue that by eliminating unnecessary administrative roles and ensuring that academics receive dignified, respectable salaries, scholars could be freed from bureaucratic burdens and financial anxieties. This would allow them to return to the “silos” of science and knowledge—spaces dedicated purely to research, teaching, and intellectual exploration. Ultimately, campus novels use this theme to lament the loss of idealism in higher education, calling for a renewed focus on scholarship, integrity, and the true mission of the university as a center for discovery and enlightenment.

Thirteenth, intertextuality—a concept highlighting the interconnectedness of texts and revealing the shared mental frameworks of their authors—is a vital element of campus novels. This notion reflects the idea that no text exists in isolation; instead, all writing is influenced by and responds to other cultural and literary works. This feature has gained increasing prominence in postmodern literature as a whole, and campus novels are no exception. Given that the English department is the most common setting for these novels, British campus fiction in particular often weaves in references and echoes of classic literature, alongside frequent allusions to literary theory—a field that has become central to English studies since the 1970s. Beyond simply engaging with other texts, campus novels also often explore the creative process itself, reflecting on writing as both an art and a craft. This focus on writing is closely linked to the rise of creative writing courses within English departments in Anglo-American universities. As a result, many campus novels—both British and American—feature visiting writers as characters, and incorporate excerpts or stylistic nods to other literary works. These intertextual references enrich the narrative by adding layers of meaning and connotation, inviting readers to engage in a deeper dialogue with the texts and the ideas they represent. In essence, intertextuality in campus novels not only situates these stories within a broader literary and cultural tradition but also highlights the dynamic, ongoing conversation between writers, texts, and academic discourse.

Fourteenth, a troubling theme that recurs in campus novels is the abuse and exploitation of students by certain academics who use them as pawns to advance personal agendas. Some faculty members pressure students into participating in protests, sit-ins, or demonstrations—not necessarily out of genuine concern for the students’ interests, but as a strategic tool to challenge or unseat department heads, administrators, or rivals within the university hierarchy. Others may engage in spreading rumors or orchestrating behind-the-scenes political maneuvers, manipulating student activism and loyalties to serve their own ambitions. This dynamic exposes a darker side of academic life, revealing how power struggles within universities can exploit the idealism and energy of students for selfish ends. Such exploitation can cause disillusionment among students, who often enter university with hopes of intellectual growth and social justice, only to find themselves caught in the petty or ruthless politics of their professors. Bradbury’s and Lodge’s trilogies provide vivid examples of this phenomenon. Characters like Froelich, Kirk, and Louis Bates exemplify faculty members who manipulate students to influence departmental politics or personal rivalries, illustrating how academic environments can sometimes become battlegrounds where students are unwittingly used as instruments in larger conflicts. By highlighting these abuses, campus novels not only critique the ethical lapses within academia but also raise broader questions about the

responsibilities of educators and the vulnerabilities of students within institutional power structures.

Fifteenth, in many campus novels, secular, liberal, and leftist characters frequently face setbacks, defeats, and personal crises. For example, the president of Jocelyn College resigns in *Groves of Academia*, Kirk is dismissed in *Stepping Westward*, and the protagonist of Treece's *Eating People Is Wrong* ends up in a mental institution. These narratives suggest that material indulgence—such as pornography and luxury—or even involvement in revolutionary movements does little to protect individuals from existential despair, depression, or the harsh realities of life. Instead, these novels often imply that secular ideologies alone cannot shield the human spirit from suffering and disillusionment. The recurring message is that, despite their flaws, religious faith and spirituality offer a more enduring refuge for the soul, providing comfort and strength amid life's numerous struggles and uncertainties. Through these portrayals, campus novels explore the limitations of secular worldviews within the academic context and suggest a complex relationship between ideology, personal wellbeing, and the search for meaning.

Finally, campus novels often depict universities as self-contained, almost insular environments—closed worlds with their own peculiar rhythms and social dynamics. Within these settings, academics are frequently defined by intense intellectual rivalries, political maneuvering, and complicated sexual relationships. This distinctive atmosphere gives the institution an unusual, almost otherworldly allure, making it feel separate from everyday life. The university becomes a cozy yet charged microcosm where the pressures and passions of its inhabitants are heightened, creating a strange but compelling backdrop for the unfolding drama.

1.5. The University of Oxford's Dominance in Campus Novel Settings and Its Lack During the Victorian Era

Over a century and a half ago, the university novel genre first emerged in England. Since the latter half of the nineteenth century, it has gained increasing recognition and versatility. The plots of university novels serve varied purposes. For example, in Joseph O'Neill's *The Dog* (2013), the narrative critiques life beyond the university. Alternatively, they may depict a clash between academic ideals and society's commercial and financial norms, as seen in Lodge's *Nice Work* (1989). Dietrich Schwanitz's *Der Campus* (1995) uses the genre to address issues like sexual harassment.

However, the specific term "university novel" became prominent only after discussions around post-1945 literature. Before this period, most narratives focused exclusively on life within Oxford and Cambridge universities, with 85% centered on the former and 15% on the latter. Despite the establishment of

universities in cities like Cardiff, Durham, London, and Manchester between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, these institutions did not engage in significant academic inquiry at the time. Notably, Edward Bradley, a University of Durham graduate, set the events of his novel, *The Adventures of Mr. Verdant Green* (1853–57), at the University of Oxford. Writing under the pseudonym Cuthbert Bede, Bradley's work is considered one of the finest university novels of the 19th century.

According to Bigork (1993), *The Adventures of Mr. Verdant Green*, along with *Sinister Street* and *Lucky Jim*, meets three key criteria. First, it garnered widespread attention upon its publication. Second, it contributed new elements to the university novel tradition, particularly in the latter two works, where optimism and belief in academic principles give way to a more negative and antagonistic perspective, reflecting the upheavals in English society. Finally, it offers a profound exploration of the dialogic relationship between self and other in diverse contexts.

According to Patricia Shaw⁶, Oxford University's long-standing emphasis on teaching classical literature has contributed to its producing more novelists than Cambridge University, which, in contrast, has demonstrated a stronger focus on science and mathematics. Efforts to bridge the divide between these "two cultures"—scientists and writers—were notably undertaken by Charles Percy Snow⁷, a prominent Cambridge alumnus.

Older Oxford graduates, compared to their Cambridge counterparts, often express a more pronounced and vocal nostalgia for their undergraduate years. One of the most significant features of university novels published after 1945 is their freedom from being exclusively set at Oxford or Cambridge. This shift reflects the fact that not all university novelists were alumni of these two institutions. However, those who were alumni often offered accurate depictions of the events, activities, and genres familiar to them in the nineteenth century. Consequently, some critics have questioned why Victorian novelists did not develop this genre during their time.

⁶ The researcher relied extensively on this paper as a foundational source for the theoretical framework of campus fiction, recognizing it as a groundbreaking reference.

⁷ Snow began his academic journey not as a novelist but as a scientist, securing a scholarship to pursue a Ph.D. in physics. Initially, he worked as a researcher and later as a government official overseeing the recruitment of scientists for the British government. However, writing remained his true passion. Snow authored novels, plays, articles, and lectures, drawing from his expertise in science, politics, and literature to enrich his literary works. His deep knowledge of both the humanities and sciences provided the foundation for his most renowned and debated work, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (1959). In this work, Snow argued that scholars and intellectuals were disconnected, often regarding one another's fields with skepticism. He warned that this divide could fragment culture and have dire consequences for society. To address this, he proposed education reforms: increasing the focus on mathematics and science in early education while integrating more humanities into advanced levels. Snow also expressed concern over the technological gap between developed and developing nations, advocating for industrialized countries to assist less industrialized regions.

Only five Victorian authors—Thackeray, Charles Reade, Sir Walter Scott, R.L. Stevenson, and Lewis Carroll—held college degrees. The term "Oxbridge" was first introduced in Thackeray's novel *Pendennis* (1848–1855), which remains the only work among these authors to explore academic themes. Female writers of the era, such as the Brontë sisters, Elizabeth Gaskell, Jane Austen, and Mary Ann Evans (better known as George Eliot), did not attend universities. Similarly, male authors like Dickens, Trollope, Meredith, Gissing, Hardy, and Moore were unable to access higher education due to financial constraints. Nevertheless, some of these writers made brief references to Oxbridge in their works.

In *Barchester Towers* (1857), Anthony Trollope portrays Mr. Araban as a symbol of academic excellence. Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895) critiques the University of Oxford, highlighting its atmosphere of melancholy and immorality. Benjamin Disraeli, who did not attend university, ironically argues in *Contarini Fleming* (1832) that a university education is futile, criticizing not only the poor quality of textbooks but also the wretched and unappealing nature of the work itself. Later, some university-educated authors, holding bachelor's or master's degrees, published over 80 books, including titles like *The Oxford and Cambridge Games* and *The Oxford Days* and *How Ross Got His Undergraduate Degree*.

A third reason Victorian novels avoid addressing scholarly topics is that the traditional content of these works is fundamentally at odds with the prevailing beliefs of the era.

The university narratives of the 20th century exclusively upheld and preserved customs and regulations that had endured for over 150 years. One notable example of earlier references to university life is Dr. Johnson's *The Rambler* (1749), which offers observations on life at Oxbridge. The novel highlights archetypal figures within these universities, such as pedantic professors who disregarded professional etiquette and social traditions, and indulgent students who spent more time in pubs and with waitresses than in lecture halls or tutorials. Similar depictions of university life and its associated fields can also be found in Renaissance and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literature.

Until recently, works like Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*⁸ (1945) continued to explore the dichotomy of deviance versus discipline within this

⁸ The story revolves around an Oxford graduate who becomes entangled with a wealthy but tragic English Catholic family. The family's grand estate, called Brideshead, serves as a central setting. The novel was adapted into a highly successful TV series in 1980, which captivated the English public with its depiction of upper-class life in the past—their attire, conversations, and manners. This adaptation notably influenced both fashion trends and other television productions. The narrative is told from the perspective of the students, Ryder and his friend Sebastian, whose lives spiral into ruin through drunkenness and despair. Women in the story are marginalized, portrayed as silent and secondary, often appearing as outsiders. Ryder ignores his cousin's advice and becomes deeply involved in the troubled lives of Sebastian and his family, leading to reckless acts and scandalous adventures. Unlike typical campus novels, the protagonist shows little interest in philosophical discourse, instead gaining more from his relationships with Sebastian and his family than from academic pursuits. Ultimately, the

genre. The dark and tumultuous lives of young men inspired the earliest English university novels. In Henry Fielding's morally charged novel *Tom Jones* (1749), the narrator recounts being seduced by a wealthy madman, drawn into theft, and ultimately forced to leave Oxford. Thwackum and Square, Fielding's caricature of Tom's instructors, are not meant as a satire of Oxbridge graduates. This literary tradition, which delves into the vulnerability of young men to malevolent influences during their college years, persisted into the 20th century, notably re-emerging in Philip Larkin's *Jill* (1945).

1.6. Types of Campus Narratives in the 19th Century

Nineteenth-century academic novels can be classified into various genres, one of which is 'rowdyism'⁹. This genre depicts the student as a reckless and wasteful clown, antagonistic toward university authorities and diligent peers. The four chapters of Thackeray's *Pendennis* that detail daily life at Oxbridge universities serve as an excellent example of this tradition. Elements of 'hooliganism' later found their way into 20th century university fiction, portraying themes such as dishonest and underprivileged college students, freshman initiation ceremonies, camaraderie among male students, and the notion that immature or unruly behavior is typical of boys or young adults and should not be surprising (for example, in matters of fashion¹⁰). These works often advocated for tolerance of a turbulent lifestyle, while simultaneously demeaning women.

Between 1825 and 1875, the university system underwent significant changes in areas such as curricula, examinations, faculty hiring practices, and student admissions. As the university novel aims to reflect reality, authors began incorporating these developments, portraying academic activities like exams, literary awards, debates, and other events with greater realism. During this period, most students came from upper-class backgrounds, with abundant career opportunities, so early novels rarely focused on exams or job hunting, as these students had little immediate need for exam results. However, a new class of serious students emerged as protagonists in these novels, gaining admission through revised processes. These students often despised their rowdy counterparts, who had the potential to corrupt even the most accomplished peers. Despite these challenges, they ultimately achieved their ambitions and made significant scientific and practical contributions. Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1861) follows the character Tom Brown to St. Ambrose College, a

hero's redemption is tied to his years at Oxford, especially during his embrace of Catholicism. The novel suggests that salvation lies in faith, adherence to religion, and following divine guidance.

⁹ In the film of *Al Nazer* (*The Headmaster*, 2000), a rebellious student disrupts his peers' ability to study but is ultimately reformed by the school principal, who helps him recognize his true role. In the end, the student aids his classmates in winning the ministry's competition against the girls' school, albeit through unethical means. Additionally, the influence of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *School for Scandal* (1777) on the Egyptian play *Madraset El-Moshaghbeen* (*The School of Rowdies*) cannot be overlooked.

¹⁰ Boys will be boys' idealization.

fictional institution in Oxford, providing a vivid portrayal of mid-19th century university life.

Beginning in 1870, universities became the focus of debates among academics and intellectuals regarding their purpose. Key questions emerged: What are the benefits and feasibility of university education? What should its goals be? And which approach is superior—liberal or scientific education? Empirical philosophers and scientists, led by Thomas Huxley and Herbert Spencer, advocated for a scientific and practical education. In contrast, proponents of the humanities, such as Cardinal Newman and Matthew Arnold, championed liberal education, emphasizing its role in nurturing the soul. They shifted the focus of higher education from imparting practical knowledge to fostering mental purification and refinement. In *The Idea of a University Defined* (1873), Newman argues for the importance of liberal education, portraying the ideal society as one embodied by a noble individual rather than defined by religious affiliation, such as being Christian or Catholic. He emphasizes that universities should cultivate qualities like refined taste, rational and impartial thought, and noble and compassionate behavior—qualities he equates with the very essence of knowledge.

For humanities scholars, the university must provide an environment conducive to intelligent, honest, and truth-seeking inquiry across all fields of knowledge. Newman argued that only within the university community can such an environment truly flourish, as the interaction among a group of eager, kind, empathetic, and attentive young men fosters intellectual growth far more effectively than mere hard study or attending lectures. Before 1945, Waugh defended this view of the societal value of university life, while Larkin offered criticism—both perspectives featured prominently in Oxbridge novels of the period. This ideal is captured in the "Oxford Doctrine," a romantic trend common in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century college novels, which celebrates intellectual rigor in the sincere pursuit of knowledge. Despite this focus, the protagonist often achieves literary recognition and secures early academic positions, privileges typically accompanied by the refined social prestige that characterized the fast set¹¹ depicted in early university novels—an elite that was sharply satirized by Max Beerbohm.

Another feature of romantic university novels is the portrayal of distinguished academics. While these stories are primarily told from the students' perspective, the characters of the teachers are depicted with respect and empathy when necessary. A key difference between modern university narratives and their predecessors is that earlier works rarely addressed the concerns or objectives of teachers. This is because they were written from the viewpoint of students—

¹¹ Fast Set (later called "outrageous" in J. I. M. Stewart's novels).

graduates reflecting on their youthful experiences—who did not have the opportunity to teach. After 1945, however, the narrative perspective shifted from students to teachers, as many novelists themselves were lecturers and professors. At the beginning of the 20th century, academic novels gave due attention to male university life at Oxford and Cambridge. While elements of romanticism appear in these works, they are occasional—such as when the protagonist is on holiday or when a colleague’s sister arrives to compete in a regatta or boat race¹². These novels are written from the students’ perspective and focus on celebrating the social ideals of their male peers, as well as highlighting the university’s role in shaping and developing their personalities.

1.7. British Campus Novel

Over sixty novels centered on university-related themes were published in England during the twentieth century. Among the most significant authors in this genre are E.M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, Compton Mackenzie, Evelyn Waugh, Angus Wilson, C.P. Snow, William Cooper, Kingsley Amis, Malcolm Bradbury, David Lodge, and others.

1.7.1. E. M. Forster's *The Longest Journey*

In 1907, for example, Forster published his second novel, *The Longest Journey*, ten years after attending Cambridge. The novel reflects the Cambridge ethos and is divided into three parts. Dedicated to his college friends, the first section—titled "Cambridge"—focuses on university life, portraying a conflict between the protagonist, Ricky Elliot, a Cambridge graduate who embodies the university's inspiring ideals, and the opposing views of his wife, Agnes, her brother Herbert Pembroke, and ultimately his philosophical friend, Stuart Ansell.

The novel opens with a scene set in university life—likely at Oxford or Cambridge—around the turn of the 20th century. A group of young men are engaged in a philosophical discussion, contemplating questions such as the nature of existence. This intellectual and intimate atmosphere is suddenly disrupted when Agnes bursts into Ricky's room. Feeling alienated and unwelcome in the male-dominated circle, she reacts with hostility. Her presence causes a commotion; the group scrambles in confusion, shouting “Ladies!” as Ricky’s friends flee at the sound of her approaching footsteps, like mice from a cat. To Stuart Ansell, Agnes represents a threat—he views all women in this light. In his view, women, bound by biological imperatives, starkly contrast with the young men’s ideals of thoughtfulness, morality, and civility. Educated by books—which, to him, are infallible—Ansell believes men and women have inherently

¹² Known as *Eights Week* or *Summer Eights*, this four-day regatta serves as a significant annual festival for the University of Oxford. The event features rowing teams, each consisting of eight men or women, representing various university departments.

different desires. Men, he thinks, pursue sex and promiscuity, while women desire a single man and see their role as complete once they have secured him. To him, women are messengers of nature, responding instinctively to its call. Men, however, especially those more civilized, are preoccupied with a broader range of concerns—seeking not only a wife and children but also friendship and spiritual freedom¹³.

One of the central academic themes explored in the novel is the pursuit of truth through knowledge, a concept reflected in Ansell's frequent references to books in his letters. He believes that scholarships should exist for their own sake, as a pure pursuit of learning. Forster highlights Ansell's idealism, particularly his reverence for the reading room at the British Museum, which he considers his sanctuary—a place where his existence feels meaningful and peaceful. Even when truth seems unattainable, Ansell insists that the effort to seek it remains essential. He accepts the likelihood of failure, but not of disillusionment. Humanity, he suggests, is simply reiterating the same fundamental concerns and questions it has pondered since the beginning of time. What makes reading or writing—even books that few people ever read—worthwhile is that they require no validation; “no one shows a check” (6). Throughout the novel, Ansell serves as the voice of integrity and insight, ultimately helping to liberate Ricky from the mediocrity and stagnation of his married life.

At the end of the "Cambridge" chapter, Ricky's loyalty to the values of the university is put to the test when he faces a moral dilemma: whether to speak the truth about his adopted half-brother or remain silent. Influenced by the small-minded and vain Agnes, he fails the test, choosing silence while offering only a weak defense of his obligation to truth. From this moment, Forster suggests, Ricky begins to decline—though he remains outwardly polite and punctual, his spiritual and moral depth begins to fade (7). Ultimately, it is Ansell—the character who embodies the ideals of Cambridge—who helps to redeem Ricky's spiritual decline. Ricky dies while saving his drunken half-brother from being struck by a train, an act that restores his moral integrity. Critics, however, do not view his death as a tragedy, since in this final act he fulfills a sense of duty to others—an ideal deeply rooted in the values instilled by the university¹⁴.

1.7.2. *An Oxford Love Story* (1911)

¹³ The introduction to Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman* makes this situation clear.

¹⁴ He is the illegitimate brother, not Stephen, and he grew to love his brother deeply because they shared a connection through his mother, whom he cherished more than his father—the man who had abandoned them and failed to care for them. By the novel's end, Ricky sacrifices his life, being tragically struck and killed by a train while saving his half-brother. After Ricky's death, his half-brother ensures that his book is published, earning him posthumous acclaim and great fame.

Sir Henry Maximilian (1872–1956) was an essayist, cartoonist, and parodist/satirist, often likened to the Egyptian writer Jalal Amer, who humorously remarked that if antiquities smuggling in Egypt continues at its current rate, only the actress Athar al-Hakim will remain. Gaining fame in the 1890s under the pen name "Max," he became known for his sophisticated wit and pessimistic tone. His only novel, *Zuleika Dobson: An Oxford Love Story*, remains one of his most celebrated works. Many of his caricatures—typically drawn in ink or pencil and finished with soft watercolor washes—are held in public collections. His novel also inspired a parody by Sidney Castle Roberts, titled *Zuleika in Cambridge* (1940). In English, "Zuleika" is pronounced "Zuleeka."

In his 1911 satirical novel *Zuleika Dobson; or, An Oxford Love Story*, Max Beerbohm—an Oxford graduate—mocked the overly romanticized portrayals of Oxford University. The story recounts the disastrous impact of Zuleika Dobson, an enchanting and adventurous young woman and the granddaughter of the Warden of Judas College, on the male students of Oxford. Her presence causes mass hysteria, particularly affecting the Duke of Dorset. After witnessing their college boat defeat Magdalene College, the infatuated undergraduates, led by the Duke, dramatically drown themselves in the River Isis as a demonstration of their love for her. Although such adoration was extreme, Zuleika was no stranger to admiration. She had received marriage proposals from Russian aristocrats and German princes. Before she left Madrid, a bullfight was held in her honor, during which fifteen bulls were knocked out. The celebrated matador Alvarez died in the arena while attempting to kill the final bull—his gaze fixed on the divine figure of Zuleika (8).

Zuleika Dobson, also known as *Fantasy*, is one of Max Beerbohm's most famous caricatures—a satirical parody of all things revered in Oxford culture. Central to the novel is the aristocratic Duke of Dorset, the quintessential Oxford student and winner of every major literary prize. He bears a striking resemblance to the character Morgan in the film *Morgan Ahmed Morgan* (2007). The Duke is portrayed as a paragon of excellence: a master of the humanities and athletics, a world-class pianist and painter, fluent in all modern languages, impeccably dressed, and an advocate of Arnoldian ideals of physical fitness. Beerbohm paints a vivid and whimsical picture of his time at Oxford, capturing both the Duke's lofty aspirations and inevitable disillusionments.

Much of the humor in *Zuleika Dobson* is directed at the American Rhodes scholar, highlighting contrasting perceptions of knowledge between the United States and Britain. These cultural differences serve as a lens through which intellectual identity is explored. In the latter half of the 20th century, university novelists helped popularize and bring critical attention to this genre. However, by 1911, the impact of institutional biases on female graduates was already evident. According to Beerbohm, Oxford's standard of beauty lies primarily in its

architecture; the university, once a male-only domain, now includes the virgins of Somerville and Lady Margaret Hall—but the union of beauty and intellectual passion has yet to be realized (9). Much like Agnes in Forster's novel, Zuleika¹⁵ is physically attractive but also portrayed as cruel, deceitful, vulgar, and intolerable. Despite lacking real musical talent, she is confident in what she wants. Yet, beneath the satire and comic exaggeration, the novel offers something distinctive: a poignant emotional nostalgia for Oxford. This sentiment is most powerfully conveyed in Chapter Twelve, where the author is swept up by a longing to relive the past, delivering a dramatic tribute to the university.

Beerbohm expresses a profound emotional attachment to the spirit and character of Oxford, declaring that no other place in England compares to it—and that even the mere mention of the university fills him with an irresistible fascination (10). The novel features multiple narrative voices. It begins with events seen from Zuleika's point of view, then shifts to the Duke's perspective. Midway through, the narrator introduces a fantastical element, claiming that his insight comes from the Greek gods—particularly Clio—who, with Zeus's help, provide him with rich narrative material. This divine connection, combined with the narrator's ability to perceive the ghosts of Oxford's historic figures—present though invisible to others—lends the novel a supernatural quality, transforming it into something far more than simple satire.

1.7.3. Compton Mackenzie's *Sinister Street*, 1913-4

One of Mackenzie's most famous works, *Sinister Street*, was published in two volumes. This novel is a Bildungsroman, tracing the moral and psychological development of the protagonist from childhood to adulthood, highlighting the significance of personal transformation. The story focuses on Michael Fine and his sister Stella, two children born out of wedlock during a period when such circumstances were socially stigmatized. In the United States, the book was released under the titles *The Battle of Youth* (1913) and *Famous Street* (1914). Beyond fiction, Mackenzie also wrote autobiographies, histories, memoirs, and cultural critiques.

¹⁵ The tragic end of Lebanese author Mai Ziada is a poignant reminder of the struggles faced by even the most celebrated intellectuals. Revered across the Arab world, Ziada was a prolific writer, poet, and essayist who played a pivotal role in the Arabic literary renaissance of the early 20th century. Her exceptional intellect, eloquence, and deep understanding of literature earned her admiration from countless Arab authors, including Taha Hussein, known as the "Dean of Arabic Literature." Hussein, a towering figure in Arab literary history, held Ziada in high regard, captivated not only by her literary talents but also by the charm and magic of her voice. Through her correspondence with prominent intellectuals of her time, Ziada became a central figure in fostering cultural and intellectual dialogue. Despite her accomplishments, Ziada's later years were marked by personal tragedy and mental health struggles. Following the loss of her parents and unrequited love for Khalil Gibran, her life took a turn for the worse, culminating in her unjust institutionalization in a mental hospital. This heartbreaking chapter underscores the profound vulnerability behind her brilliance and serves as a testament to the enduring challenges faced by creative minds. Her story resonates deeply, not only as a tale of personal loss but also as a reflection on the complexities of fame, love, and resilience in the face of adversity.

Michael Fine, the protagonist, bears similarities to Ricky from Forster's novel. Much of Michael's formative development takes place at Oxford, where his daily interactions with a diverse group of friends—each with different backgrounds, temperaments, and talents—create an environment of critical thinking. Together, they engage in discussions on politics, morals, and literature within their rooms, inspiring one another intellectually. This theme recurs frequently in Oxbridge novels, which often highlight the characters' partners' appearances, wealth, and differing ambitions. Examples include Stewart's quintet *A Staircase in Surrey*¹⁶ and C.P. Snow's *Strangers and Brothers*¹⁷ series, whose extended length allows both authors and readers to track the characters' growth and experiences well beyond their college years.

Fane views the vitality of Oxford as a powerful influence shaping his character and spirit, preparing him to serve others—much like Ricky's experience at Cambridge. He believes that the best at Oxford represents the best in Britain, and the best in England represents the best in the world. Fane aspires to the ideals upheld by Oxford graduates and holds a deep faith that the transcendence of the Spirit, which elevates them, will ultimately resolve all of life's challenges (11). Similar to *The Longest Journey*, Fane once again observes the spiritual shortcomings of many women and their disconnect from the ideas and values instilled during their Oxbridge youth. This awareness drives him to help others, particularly to reform and redeem a woman from his past with whom he had a relationship. Although he is often troubled by illusion and disappointment, he endures these hardships with a strength drawn from his Oxford experience.

The scenes depicting Rickie Eliot, Michael Fane, and their friends engaging in philosophical debates may be seen as a nod to the early days of the Bloomsbury Group. In G.E. Moore's *Chamber* in Cambridge, figures such as Lytton Strachey, Forster, Leonard Woolf, Clive Bell, and others gather to freely and respectfully discuss topics like the subjective versus objective existence of things and ethical principles, all in a spirit of genuine pursuit of truth.

The Bloomsbury Group was a collective of English writers, thinkers, philosophers, and artists who thrived during the first half of the 20th century. They lived, worked, and studied in the Bloomsbury area of London and were connected to the University of Cambridge for men and King's College London for women. Although the members rejected the idea of being an official group, Ian Osby notes

¹⁶ A series of five novels by the Scottish novelist and academic G. I. M. Stewart (1906–1994), published in London by Victor Gollancz (1974–1978). The term "Surrey" in the title of the quintet refers to a fictional Oxford college residence, consisting of dormitory-style apartments linked by a ground-floor entrance leading into a quadrangle.

¹⁷ This novel was published as a series between 1940 and 1970. It explores themes such as political and personal integrity, as well as the exercise of power. Narrated by the protagonist Lewis Eliot, the series traces his journey from humble origins in an English provincial town to his rise as a successful lawyer in London, then to a professorship at Cambridge, followed by his service at Whitehall during World War II, and ultimately to his retirement.

that they were united by a shared belief in the importance of the arts. Their works and ideas had a profound impact on literature, aesthetics, criticism, economics, as well as modern views on feminism, pacifism, and sexuality. As one of Dorothy Parker's most famous quotes puts it, they "lived in squares, painted in circles, and fell in love in triangles."

1.7.4. *Jacob's Room*

Virginia Woolf, who taught at King Finn College London's Girls' Department, was a pioneer in employing stream-of-consciousness as a narrative technique. Despite her literary acclaim, she faced accusations of anti-Semitism and elitism and struggled with bipolar disorder. Tragically, she ended her life at the age of 59 by drowning in the Aous River.

Woolf's third novel, *Jacob's Room*, was published on October 26, 1922. The story, which unfolds in pre-war England, presents the life of its protagonist, Jacob Flanders, through the impressions and memories of other characters. Rather than following a traditional plot or providing a detailed background, the novel constructs its narrative around the absence and void left by Jacob, creating an elegiac tone. The depiction of Jacob emerges as a composite of the perspectives of various characters and the narrator, focusing on sensations and memories rather than concrete events. The narrative traces Jacob from his childhood to his years at Cambridge University and into adulthood, primarily through the viewpoints of women in his life, such as Clara Durant, an upper-middle-class woman, and Florinda, a young art student with whom he has an affair. While Jacob's travels to Italy and Greece are briefly mentioned, much of the story revolves around his time in London. *Jacob's Room* stands in stark contrast to Woolf's earlier, more conventionally structured novels, *The Voyage Out* (1915) and *Night and Day* (1919). The work is considered a seminal modernist text, showcasing the experimental style Woolf began exploring in her 1919 collection of short stories, *Monday or Tuesday*.

Woolf's *Jacob's Room* (1922) unsurprisingly captures echoes and reflections of life and lofty ideals at Cambridge. After the devastating and untimely death of her brother Thoby, Woolf made several efforts to gather details about his intellectual experiences at Cambridge by reaching out to his classmates, as noted by Quentin Bell, Woolf's nephew and biographer. The novel's third chapter is dedicated to the experience of attending college in 1906, offering an impressionistic¹⁸ portrayal that marks Woolf's first venture into experimental novelistic techniques.

¹⁸ Impressionism is founded on the belief that the artist first experiences or is affected by something, then conveys this impression through expression, without concern for traditional literary standards. According to this view, the value of any literary work lies in the quality of the impressions it leaves on each individual reader. Writers, therefore, must remember that impression is the sole proof of a literary work's living presence. Impressionism asserts, "I feel, therefore I exist," contrasting with rationalism's famous dictum from Descartes, "I think, therefore

Quentin Bell aptly describes the tone of this chapter as possessing "a delicious and bitter curiosity," given its ironic undertones compared to the rest of the book. For example, Woolf details Jacob's opinions on the wives of professors during his time at a university that harbored hostility toward women. He views these women as "ugly as sin," observing their absent-mindedness during religious services at King's College Chapel. Jacob even likens their presence to that of dogs, suggesting they should be barred from the chapel. Furthermore, he criticizes their social interactions and relationships with their husbands' students or colleagues, describing them as "bloody savage."

The humorous, impressionistic depictions of daily life at Cambridge highlight both the faculty and the students. Woolf's satirical portrayals of unmarried professors, whom Jacob observes crossing the building after dinner, best illustrate her conflicted admiration for Cambridge's moral ideals. These men, when viewed from an external perspective, appear deeply flawed, treating others as their prey. For example, old Huxtable is disheveled and intoxicated, Sopwith is awkward and overly talkative, and Kowan is self-satisfied. Yet, despite these imperfections, Woolf portrays them as embodying pure knowledge and specialization (13).

Despite her irritation, she reluctantly acknowledged that old Huxtable's mind held more thoughts than all the others combined in an underground railroad carriage. Moreover, those who attended Sopwith's lectures during their college years would find themselves recalling, reflecting on, and cherishing them anew, particularly when he recited Latin. To them, the language seemed like wine on his lips—so captivating that even Virgil himself, were he to return, would hear nothing comparable. The emphasis on "nowhere else" underscores Cambridge's unique and enduring quality.

Woolf recounts the story of a provincial scholarship student who, despite attempting in later years to dismiss Huxtable's seemingly trivial evening routines, would still save every penny to send his own son to Cambridge, illustrating the

I am." Impressionists argue that knowledge without a preceding sensory experience is useless. For them, the content—the writer's self-impression—is more important than artistic form in conveying personal experience. They see the external world not as an objective reality existing independently, but as private experience and individual feelings. A key criticism of Impressionism is that it moves beyond merely recording impressions literally and neglects the aesthetic value that artistic form brings to literature. The focus on confession and personal expression often reduces literature to a mere reflection of the writer's inner life—essentially, autobiography or personal biography. As a result, literary criticism and artistic appreciation become little more than expressions of the critic's own subjective feelings and emotions evoked by the work. Impressionism emerged from the modern world's emphasis on individualism and subjective experience, which isolated people and narrowed their focus to themselves. The individual's world became a series of sensory influences, impressions, and psychological states, with little concern for reforming or improving society. Consequently, Impressionism does not aim to address social or moral issues or inspire change. This moral and social detachment profoundly affects readers who are unaware of the doctrine's underlying ideas. The impressionist artist is committed solely to portraying sensory experiences and what is imprinted on their senses, regardless of whether others perceive the same or whether these impressions contradict higher values or cause harm.

institution's profound and persistent allure (15). Woolf suggests that the charm of the Oxbridge professors contributes to the enduring myth of the university, even among those who feel uneasy within its culture. Her ambivalence toward Cambridge stems from her sense of oppression and the dominance of men, a sentiment explored with nuance in *Jacob's Room* and sharply critiqued in *A Room of One's Own*. Yet, for the intellectual achievements Cambridge represents, Woolf conveys both admiration and respect.

Jacob's Room is an evocative novel. By the late 1920s, Oxford novels began to reflect a growing sense of nostalgia, shaped by the significant changes that had transformed Oxford in the post-war era. These changes included: (1) the arrival of older students who had served in the military, (2) a surge in scholarship recipients, (3) an increase in the student population that made it impossible for everyone to reside in dormitories, and (4) the collapse of the traditional values upheld by the Oxford educational community.

Two novels published in 1921—Gerald Hopkins's *A City in the Foreground*¹⁹ and Beverly Nichols's *Patchwork*²⁰—capture the disillusionment of their protagonists with an Oxford that now starkly contrasts with the idyllic vision presented in *Sinister Street*. The emphasis shifted from reflections, dialogues, and philosophical debates on existence and the philosophy of life to attending lectures. This shift was driven by the students'—particularly scholarship holders'—pragmatic focus on obtaining degrees, which they perceived as essential for securing employment.

1.7.5. Detective Novel

The detective novel, often categorized as a crime novel, shares the fundamental element of a crime at its core. However, while detective novels follow a logical progression in unraveling the crime, the secret detective novel takes a different approach, beginning at the end and retracing the details of the murder. A detective novel is a subgenre of crime and mystery fiction, centering on a detective—professional, amateur, or retired—investigating a crime, typically a murder.

¹⁹ Gerard Manley Hopkins (28 July 1844 – 8 June 1889) was an English poet and Jesuit priest who gained posthumous fame as one of the great Victorian poets. He is renowned for his innovation in prosody, especially his development of sprung rhythm—an irregular rhythmic system based on the number of stressed syllables per line, allowing for a flexible number of unstressed syllables. In this rhythm, a foot can consist of one to four syllables. Hopkins was also notable for his vivid imagery and his distinctive style of self-praise through nature. After his death, Robert Bridges published some of Hopkins' mature poems in an anthology, aiming to introduce his unique style to a broader audience. By 1930, Hopkins' work was celebrated as one of the most original literary achievements of the century and significantly influenced prominent 20th-century poets such as T. S. Eliot.

²⁰ John Beverly Nichols (September 9, 1898 – September 15, 1983) was a versatile writer, playwright, composer, and public speaker. He authored over 60 books and plays, including novels, articles, theatrical works, and children's literature. His nonfiction writings covered a wide range of topics such as travel, politics, religion, cats, parapsychology—the study of mental phenomena unexplained by conventional scientific psychology—and autobiography. Throughout his life, he contributed to numerous magazines and newspapers. His education was interrupted by military service in the intelligence branch of the War Office. Nichols was openly gay and is believed to have had a brief relationship with the renowned war poet Siegfried Sassoon.

This genre emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, alongside science fiction and other literary subgenres, and has remained immensely popular, particularly in novel form. Iconic protagonists like C. Auguste Dupin, Sherlock Holmes, and Hercule Poirot are synonymous with the detective genre. Key features of detective fiction include maintaining suspense, a balance of plausibility and chance, and the role of technology in solving crimes.

The genre also adheres to several essential "commandments," including:

1. A crime, usually a murder, occurs early in the story.
2. A range of suspects is presented, each with distinct motives.
3. A central figure, acting formally or informally, gathers and analyzes information.
4. The investigator collects evidence related to the crime and its victim.
5. Suspects and witnesses are interrogated.
6. The investigator solves the mystery and identifies the true culprit.
7. The criminal is typically arrested or otherwise punished by the end.

In the 1930s, a new literary subgenre emerged, set within the Oxbridge universities and exploring themes specific to these institutions. Unlike traditional detective novels, the events in this subgenre are narrated by professors rather than students, as the authors themselves are often academics from Cambridge or Oxford. The academic setting is particularly well-suited to the detective genre, as it naturally provides the groups of suspects such stories require. Within this environment, the author finds a cast of intelligent, often eccentric individuals, each with the potential to commit crimes, typically murder. The collective life in these venerable universities, while intellectually stimulating, can also feel stifling, offering rich material for the author's creative exploration.

For writers of detective stories, academic training proves to be a valuable asset, as there are notable parallels between literary or historical research and police interrogation. Much like scholarly articles that focus on interpreting facts or documents and uncovering their significance, detective fiction operates in a similar fashion. The resolution of the mystery hinges on how effectively the information (evidence) is analyzed and utilized to solve the crime.

Between 1933 and 1965, over thirty novels set in English universities were published, with thirteen set in Oxford, seven in Cambridge, and the remaining eight distributed across Dublin, Edinburgh, and London. In these stories, the investigator is often a university professor, while the accused is typically another professor or a university staff member, such as a janitor. Some notable titles in this subgenre include *Don Among the Dead Men*, *Murder at Cambridge*, and *Murder by Mathematics*. John Cecil Masterman's *An Oxford Tragedy*²¹ follows

²¹ Sir John Cecil Masterman (12 January 1891 – 6 June 1977) was a distinguished academic, mathematician, and author. Among his most notable roles was serving as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford. He was also renowned as the Chairman of the "Committee of Twenty," which managed the Double-Cross system during World

a similar formula: a murder occurs, often involving a sharp-tongued and unpopular teacher, and the crime is solved by a visiting professor. This theme later inspired works by authors like Snow and Stewart, who frequently expressed a deep affection and formal nostalgia for the traditions, charm, and architecture of Oxford University.

Two years later, Dorothy Sayers added a new layer of depth to the college detective novel with the publication of her ninth novel, *Gaudy Night*²², set at a women's college in Oxford. Instead of focusing on murder, the book delves into acts of vandalism and threats during the Oxford Alumni Festival. With the assistance of her aristocratic fiancé, Lord Peter Wimsey—a true embodiment of the romantic Oxfordian archetype, akin to the Duke of Dorset—Harriet Vane uncovers the culprits. Lord Peter, a lover of red wine and books, is portrayed as intelligent, brave, youthful, and physically active. Sayers uses the novel as an opportunity to offer keen observations on academic life, as Harriet Vane returns to her college after a long absence.

Most of the characters in the novel are academics, and it contains numerous references to typical faculty and student traditions at Oxford, such as climbing Magdalene Tower before dawn on Labor Day and enjoying wine and cookies in the Warden's Room. The book conveys a profound respect for scholarship and intellectual endeavor. Each chapter is introduced by a quotation that serves as its subtitle, highlighting the grandeur of knowledge, while the final quote—from John Donne—celebrates universities as paradises where rivers of knowledge flow, giving rise to the arts and sciences. Despite its flaws or strengths, the novel offers a more vivid and detailed portrayal of women's colleges than Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.

Death at the President's Lodging, also known in the United States as *Seven Suspects*, was published by G. I. M. Stewart in 1935. It is the first academic detective novel by an author who made significant contributions to the academic community through numerous works, both academic and otherwise. Stewart studied at Oxford and later taught there from 1948 until his retirement. His writings about Oxford reflect a deep passion and admiration for the university's academic culture and its natural surroundings.

War II, overseeing double agents in Britain. In 1933, Masterman published a novel titled *An Oxford Tragedy*, set at the fictional Oxford College of St. Thomas. The story is narrated by Francis Wheatley Wynne, a resident and teacher at St. Thomas. The plot centers on Brendel, an amateur investigator from Vienna with a European reputation, who was delivering lectures at the law school and was known as a detective whose secrets were well kept. When an unpopular teacher is found shot dead in the dean's rooms, Brendel takes on the task of solving the murder. Ultimately, he uncovers the killer, who commits suicide. The novel was unusual for its time in depicting how the murder disrupted the tranquil life of Oxford students. Though it followed the classic theme of sinister acts in a quiet setting, it helped establish a tradition of Oxford-based crime novels, influencing later authors like Michael Innes and Edmund Crispin.

²² At Oxford University, it is a tradition to hold a festival called Gaudy Weekend, dedicated to the alumni of the last three graduating classes from each college.

The story begins when the university president is shot dead in his home, prompting the arrival of Inspector Appelby. As the investigation unfolds, scandals and rumors emerge, especially when it becomes clear that the seven colleagues living nearby are the main suspects. Since the lodgings are isolated compounds with restricted access—only the residents hold keys—they too fall under suspicion. Employing false clues and various investigative techniques, the detective works to unravel the complex mystery. The novel is smoothly written, with a subtle and light touch in its end.

1.7.6. Philip Larkin's *Jill*

This is Larkin's debut novel, written shortly after his graduation from Oxford. He became associated with a group of writers whom journalists labeled "the Movement," which included figures like Donald Davie, Kingsley Amis, and John Wain. The Movement emphasized clarity and precision over emotionalism, rejected romantic excess, and resisted the ambiguity and experimental techniques of modernism. *Jill* exemplifies many of these principles through its traditional structure, subtle complexity, and its persistent critique of romantic illusions.

The protagonist's journey reflects this ethos. After failing to emulate the privileged lifestyles of his upper-class peers, he yearns for a more expansive and inclusive identity—one aligned more with middle-class Christopher Warner than with his own parents or friend Bleaney. Returning to Oxford from a part of the country ravaged by war, he feels, for the first time, a sense of belonging—yet this transformation remains incomplete. Larkin channels his anger and sharp satire into the narrative. For example, Kemp burns the false narratives surrounding his imagined character Jill, yet paradoxically adopts the role of a romantic hero when he tries to "rescue" her from Warner's influence. He distances himself from his parents and childhood, but when he falls ill, they visit him at Oxford, complicating his rejection of his roots. Ultimately, the protagonist emerges as a distorted reflection of time, class, and age.

When Philip Larkin published his Oxford-based novel *Jill*, he defied the conventions typically associated with Oxford fiction. Among post-war literary works, one critic singled it out as particularly distinctive. The novel follows a working-class protagonist who feels displaced, reflecting Larkin's own experience of the austere and restrained atmosphere of Oxford during the Second World War. As noted in his introduction, many of the traditional student activities were suspended—there was little frivolity or indulgence, but this lack of warmth was matched by an absence of foolishness. During his time at Oxford, Larkin met and formed a close friendship with Kingsley Amis. In the introduction to *Jill*, Amis is portrayed as possessing a clownish, imitative charm—a description that foreshadows the comedic flair of Dixon, the central character in *Lucky Jim*.

Unlike *Brideshead Revisited*, *Jill* cannot be classified as a nostalgic memoir novel. Instead, it captures the realism of the 1940s by integrating fresh and

unconventional elements into the traditional university narrative. The protagonist, John Kemp, a scholarship student from Lancashire in northern England, comes from a working-class background—setting him apart from the elite protagonists typical of early 20th century fiction and aligning him more closely with the struggling students found in 19th century reform literature. At the heart of the novel is a critique of the traditional Newman-inspired idea of the university as a cohesive moral and intellectual community. Kemp's experience illustrates how this ideal has eroded. He is placed in the company of Christopher Warner, a privileged and reckless public school student who drinks heavily, entertains women in his dormitory, and avoids studying altogether. Kemp, ill-suited to this environment, becomes increasingly isolated and emotionally wounded. Under Warner's influence, Kemp squanders time and engages in behavior uncharacteristic of his background, including excessive drinking. His infatuation with Warner's girlfriend leads him to project his feelings onto the fictional character "Jill," whom he ultimately rejects in bitterness and confusion. The novel reaches its low point when, goaded by his peers, Kemp attempts to follow and kiss "Jill" in a lake, only to fall ill and end up in the college clinic with pneumonia. The moral of the story is stark: Kemp's first year at Oxford is marked by disillusionment and failure, portraying his university experience as a complete personal and academic disaster.

Warner is a quintessential Oxford character, marked by his energy, physicality, and a kind of primitivism. A middle-class product of a private English boarding school, he belongs to the typical age range of 13 to 18 and is accustomed to residential campus life. He is portrayed as an opportunist—borrowing money from friends and plagiarizing Kemp's notes and essays. For Warner, Oxford is less an intellectual pursuit and more a social experience. In contrast to Kemp, who strives to fully assimilate into his new environment, Warner's choice to leave Oxford and move to London with his girlfriend by the novel's end reflects a certain openness and willingness to break away from traditional expectations.

In the story, Kemp receives valuable guidance and support from a diligent scholarship student from Yorkshire, whose friendship proves increasingly beneficial. However, Larkin skillfully portrays the character of Whitehead (often mistakenly overshadowed by the charismatic presence of Christopher Warner, who exerts a strong influence over Kemp). This contrast brings us back to the tradition of the reformist novel, which often highlights the tension between wayward youth and industrious counterparts. Whitehead's personality is vividly captured in the following description: he wore thick, star-shaped glasses and had a pale, stubby head that resembled a dormouse (22). His dull Yorkshire accent led Kemp to mistakenly perceive him as amusing. Kemp also noticed Whitehead's modest clothing, which revealed his lack of wealth, and was

reminded of a line from one of his mother's letters. She had expressed hope that he had made friends "of his own class"—a comment that, in a sudden surge of anger, Kemp realized referred to boys like Whitehead.

The novel introduces a compelling modern theme through a twenty-page flashback that Larkin dedicates to the events leading up to Kemp's admission to Oxford. An English literature teacher takes a special interest in Kemp, recognizing his academic potential. She lends him books and plays a pivotal role in persuading both his teacher and his parents to support his pursuit of higher education at Oxford.

The entire journey is thoroughly documented, highlighting the immense effort Kemp invested during his first year at Oxford to uphold the belief that an Oxford degree was a valuable goal. However, this is sharply contrasted by the relatively little effort expected of him once he arrived. As previously noted, Kemp is depicted as a working-class, displaced hero. By the end of the novel, the reader is left with the impression that Kemp might have been far happier—and certainly less isolated and out of place—had he attended a provincial university, with his own room and access to mixed, regularly scheduled lectures.

The romantic portrayal of Oxford student life in *Sinister Street* and *Brideshead Revisited* is, to a certain extent, called into question by Jill.

1.7.7. Charles Percy Snow's *The Masters*

The fifth novel in C.P. Snow's *Strangers and Brothers* series centers on the election of a new president at an unnamed Cambridge college, closely modeled on Christ's College, where Snow once served. This installment serves as a tribute to Cambridge mathematician G.H. Hardy and was the first in the series to be published in the United States. Set in 1937, against the looming threat of Nazi Germany, the story follows the political and personal drama surrounding the search for a successor to Vernon Royce, the outgoing president diagnosed with cancer.

Two candidates emerge. The first is Crawford, a physics professor and outspoken political radical determined to steer the college toward a public stance against appeasement of Hitler. However, Lewis Eliot—the narrator and a young academic from a modest background who has risen to social prominence—doubts Crawford's ability to relate effectively to others. Eliot and several influential businessmen instead support Paul Jago, the rival candidate. Though Eliot is confident in Jago's chances and envisions him as the next dean, Jago and his socially well-connected wife, Alice, face growing criticism and hostility.

What makes the novel especially compelling is its exploration of the underlying motives and political maneuvering of those championing each candidate. The key figures in the narrative are portrayed as inhabiting private intellectual and emotional worlds—each engaged in his own academic field, personal life, and individual ambitions, often unknown to or misunderstood by colleagues. Yet,

despite these differences, they remain tied to one another through their shared college life, building friendships, loyalties, and alliances either out of necessity or mutual respect.

The novel employs two distinct modes of narration: direct depictions of events and reflective, observational commentary, offering both immediacy and introspective depth to the unfolding political drama.

Snow's first novel set at the University of Cambridge was published in 1947, marking a significant point in his literary career. It belongs to his *Strangers and Brothers* series, which, despite being unified by the recurring narrator Lewis Eliot, often lacks narrative cohesion. Only a few of the novels—particularly *The Masters*, *The New Men*, and *The Affair*—focus directly on academic life. Written from the perspective of a professor, these works (excluding the academic detective novel) are considered among the earliest examples of the campus novel genre.

These novels draw heavily on traditional and familiar elements of Oxbridge life, reflecting Snow's own two-decade tenure as a professor at Christ's College, Cambridge. What distinguishes them, however, is Snow's persistent focus on the inner workings of academia. His fiction delves into themes such as scholarly pursuits, university governance, institutional rivalries, promotion disputes, power dynamics, and the tension between justice and injustice.

Although the narratives are confined to the Cambridge setting, their themes resonate far beyond. Through detailed portrayals of ambition, political maneuvering, and the pursuit of status and influence, Snow's work offers a universal exploration of human motives—topics that are examined in even greater depth in the analytical chapters that follow.

Among C.P. Snow's college novels, *The Masters* stands out as the most compelling. It powerfully captures both the advantages and drawbacks of selecting a new college president, highlighting the stark contrast between the two candidates. One is astute and dependable but emotionally distant; the other is compassionate but irresponsible and inefficient.

While *The Masters* has faced criticism for being narrow in scope, Snow skillfully and dramatically portrays the deep divisions in age, personality, and ambition within the college community. He also presents the inevitable tensions between the factions backing each candidate, crafting a narrative so engaging that readers are drawn in until the final page. The novel concludes with a moment of grace: despite his defeat, Jago toasts his rival's success at the inauguration, symbolizing the triumph of the university's enduring spirit over personal disappointment. Despite its strengths, some critics argue that the novel doesn't fully qualify as a traditional campus novel. They note that, as part of a longer series centered on the recurring character Lewis Eliot, it lacks a standalone identity. Furthermore,

The Masters offers little insight into the academic profession itself, gives minimal attention to student life, and—unlike *Lucky Jim*—has not served as a creative model for future campus novelists.

The victory in *The Affair*—where a somewhat unpopular young scientist is accused of falsifying an experiment, dismissed, and then ultimately reinstated—reflects the university's core values of loyalty and an impartial quest for truth. Unlike Jago's opponent in *The Masters*, this character does not easily elicit sympathy. However, the key takeaway is the university's commitment to prioritizing truth over personal agendas or self-interest.

In *The Affair*, Donald Howard, an unpopular academic, is dismissed on charges of scientific fraud. His controversial research and far-left political views alienate his colleagues, many of whom are indifferent or even pleased by his removal. However, when new evidence emerges that challenges the accusations against him, the faculty becomes divided: some hesitate to reopen the case, while others bypass the department board to address it directly. Ultimately, Eliot chooses to champion justice and takes action to defend Howard. This reflects a broader context where academics in countries like Turkey and America have also faced dismissal due to their political affiliations.

The New Men is the sixth installment in the series. Set as World War II draws to a close, it follows Lewis Eliot as he engages with the scientific community about efforts to develop and deploy nuclear weapons in Britain. At Cambridge, Walter Locke and his brother Martin, a scientist, are conducting research on atomic fission aimed at creating a new military bomb. Surrounding them are government officials competing for influence, aging politicians striving to maintain their relevance, and military leaders pressing for decisive action. Throughout, the characters wrestle with the tension between scientific progress and the hope that the devastating weapon they are helping to build will never be used. The novel is told in a clear, polished style, enriched with moments of suspense that distinguish Snow from his peers.

1.7.8. William Cooper's *The Struggles of Albert Woods*

William Cooper (1910–2002), a World War II Royal Air Force veteran, published 17 novels over his career. Between 1934 and 1946, he wrote four books under the pseudonym Harry Summerfield Hoff. Cooper maintained a close friendship with C.P. Snow, who is featured as a character in Cooper's novel *Scenes from a Simple Life*. This book tells the story of a chemical scientist who rises from humble beginnings to become a member of the Royal Society, yet never attains the honor of a knighthood.

The rise of openly satirical university novels actually began in the 1950s—not with Amis's *Lucky Jim* as is often claimed, but with William Cooper's *The Struggles of Albert Woods* in 1952. Unlike Snow's novels, which are marked by a serious tone and profound respect for the university as an institution, Cooper's

book has received little attention and remains relatively unread and underreviewed. In this novel, the university world is observed through the eyes of a hostile, clown-like figure similar to Jim Dixon, while the protagonist, Albert Woods—a lower-middle-class “Little Napoleon”—ambitiously strives to assimilate into the university and climb its institutional ranks. Often called a “novel of success,” the story follows Albert, a chemistry expert from 1923 to 1945, as he achieves his ambitions of becoming a professor, earning a knighthood, and potentially winning a Nobel Prize. The narration frequently employs satire to expose familiar strategies behind academic and professional success.

Although the novel is set in Oxford, the iconic dreamlike towers are never mentioned or alluded to. Instead, the narrative concentrates entirely on the protagonist’s life after graduation, following his progression from teaching assistant to lecturer, and ultimately to professor of experimental chemistry.

One of the novel’s innovative themes introduced by Cooper is the dynamic between research students and their supervisors, as well as the relationships among the students themselves. The author also critiques the harshness often present in interactions shaped by academic hierarchy and highlights how ambition and the outward pursuit of knowledge can sometimes breed selfishness. Cooper further exposes Oxford’s exclusivity with sharp irony: despite being the sole candidate, the protagonist struggles to secure a fellowship because, despite his refined accent and Edwardian-style Oxford dress, he is not an Oxford alumnus.

Cooper also introduces new themes, such as the protagonist’s engagement with the challenges of scientific research and how, even after achieving success, the individual maintains their appeal and sense of accomplishment. The main character is a scientist specializing in the natural sciences rather than the humanities, reminiscent of Snow’s exploration of atomic fission in *The New Men*. The novel acknowledges the potential for scientific discoveries to be harmful or even destructive. For instance, although the lethal nerve gas Albert developed in 1939 was never used during World War II, its devastating impact in wartime would have been immeasurable.

1.7.9. Kingsley Amis’s *Lucky Jim*

Kingsley Amis, born in South London in 1922, studied at St. John’s College, Oxford, and later served as a professor there from 1948 to 1966. A passionate jazz enthusiast and avid reader of science fiction, Amis authored numerous novels, including *Take A Girl Like You* (1960) and *One Fat Englishman* (1963), many of which were published by Penguin. He was honored with a CBE in 1981

and knighted in 1990. Although his breakthrough novel *Lucky Jim* wasn't published until after 1959, and the subsequent film adaptation directed by John Boulting didn't achieve major box office success, Amis remains a prolific literary figure. Over his career, he wrote more than twenty novels, three poetry collections, as well as short stories, radio plays, and television scripts. His work, blending wit and social observation, is often compared to that of Ray Bradbury, Joseph Connolly, and Michael Frayn.

Amis joined the British Communist Party in 1946 but was disillusioned when it disbanded in 1956, particularly in light of the Soviet Union's decline. This shift prompted him to embrace conservatism as his core political stance. Though he began his literary career as a poet, Amis quickly found greater success in fiction. In contrast, his close friend Philip Larkin started out as a novelist, publishing two novels before gaining recognition primarily as a poet. While some critics argue that Amis's work lacks empathy, intellectual depth, or nostalgia, his storytelling is widely noted for its precision and clarity.

Lodge first explored Amis's work in his 1966 book *The Language of Fiction*, where he analyzed Amis's sharp critique of English academic life and, more broadly, English society. This fiction is often regarded as a foundational piece that helped reshape post-World War II literature, especially in its use of satire. It played a crucial role in transforming the novel's tone and style during that era. A close reading reveals a precise portrayal of academics, who were seen at the time as a kind of modern aristocracy. The novel captures the mood of 1950s England and stands out as a refined example of comic literature. Yet, despite its humor, certain passages carry a somber tone and reflect deeper truths about the protagonist's emotional struggles, offering moments that evoke reflection more than laughter.

While comedy often arises from both action and style working in harmony, the reverse isn't always true—style alone can provoke laughter, even without comedic action. Both elements, however, rely heavily on the author's skillful manipulation of time. Kingsley Amis demonstrates this mastery in his ability to structure events that balance both surprise and logic—key components of effective comedy. In *Lucky Jim*, the protagonist Jim Dixon finds himself in numerous classic comic scenarios. These include an awkward moment while still in his pajamas at the home of Mr. Welch, his department head; accidentally setting fire to his teacher's mattress in a clumsy attempt to conceal a mishap at a party caused by his cigarette; adopting an absurdly different voice while speaking to Mrs. Welch on the phone; stealing a taxi from a rival, Bardy, after a university event; and delivering a lecture while drunk. Each of these moments reflects Amis's deft use of timing and tone to create situations that are both hilarious and revealing.

These elements function as subtle forms of social critique, echoing the comedic traditions of Charles Dickens, Henry Fielding, and later writers like P.G. Wodehouse and Evelyn Waugh, as well as the comic spirit of the Elizabethan and Revival periods. Drawing from these literary roots, Amis infused English fiction with a fresh and distinctive tone. His prose is marked by precision and a scholarly quality, yet it remains detached from any specific social class. Despite employing a rich vocabulary, Amis avoids the typical conventions of sarcastic literary prose. His style is partly influenced by the philosophy of ordinary language, which held considerable sway at Oxford during his student years. This approach is distinguished by unexpected shifts in direction, a deliberate erosion of formulaic expressions and conventional responses, and a sparkling, critical engagement with the nuances of everyday life.

Lucky Jim is notable as the first English novel to feature a protagonist working as a lecturer at a local university, using the academic setting as rich ground for its comic narrative. According to Amis, much of the credit for the novel's conception belongs to his close friend Larkin, who was then a librarian at the University of Leicester. Larkin's astonishment at the peculiarities of academic life inspired Amis to explore and critique that world. He described the university environment as strange, unsettling, and so complex that it can only be truly understood through direct experience. Although the novel is set at a university resembling Leicester, Amis himself taught at Swansea University in Wales from 1948 to 1961. His influence is evident in the works of later writers such as David Lodge, Malcolm Bradbury, Andrew Davies, and Howard Jacobson, all of whom acknowledged his foundational role in shaping the modern university novel.

The central theme of the novel revolves around the protagonist's frustration and anger over his uncertain career prospects, intensified by Thatcher-era budget cuts and his dependence on a younger colleague he deeply dislikes. Through the main character, the novel paints a vivid portrait of vanity, absent-mindedness, eccentricity, and a lack of scientific competence—traits that the university environment fosters in its teaching assistants and which eventually become ingrained. These ideas are further explored in the researcher's article *Academics and the Novel: A Study of Social Criticism*, published in *Al Quds Al Araby* in 2008.

The novel broadly explores academic life, delving into institutional regulations, intellectual rivalries, behind-the-scenes scheming, and illicit relationships involving students, faculty, or both. It also engages with wider social and educational concerns, offering a critique of the bourgeois world—particularly the environments in which the protagonist was raised, educated, and ultimately rebelled against, both emotionally and ideologically. To orchestrate interactions among characters, the author employs a classic narrative device borrowed from

18th-century novels: gatherings such as parties and meetings. This technique subtly mirrors the structures and dynamics found in hierarchical institutions like banks and the broader financial and business sectors.

The Welch family's lifestyle echoes that of the pre-World War II upper class. They live in a house complete with servants and a music room, while their two sons, Bertrand and Michael, embody a kind of outdated bohemianism. Bertrand is a pacifist painter with a beard, and Michael is a writer with an effeminate appearance. Notably, Bertrand's pacifism conflicts with the doctrines of the revolutionary party he supports—something he explains in political discussions with the protagonist, Jim Dixon. Bertrand criticizes Dixon's socialism as lacking ideological depth. In the novel, leftist views are portrayed as being driven more by emotion, class identity, and moral instinct than by a coherent political philosophy—more akin to devotion to a new secular religion than to traditional politics.

The Second World War, the Labour Party's 1945 victory, and the foundation of the welfare state marked significant progress in the 1940s, helping to democratize English society and reduce class divisions and inequality. However, many young people who benefited from the 1944 Education Act noticed that the old pre-war upper classes remained influential, particularly in cultural and social spheres. Despite societal shifts, these elites continued to hold sway. Regional universities, often affiliated with or modeled after Oxford and Cambridge, were typically administered by their alumni—much like how Cairo and Ain Shams Universities reflect similar dynamics in the Egyptian context.

The protagonist finds himself in trouble because he refuses to conform to the university's social and cultural expectations. He prefers spending time in pubs rather than art galleries, enjoys pop music over Mozart, and chooses the company of non-academics instead of his scholarly peers. As a result, he is dismissed from his position. Feeling both misled and betrayed in his role as a teacher—frustrated that his students waste his time while he wastes theirs—he begins to question why he ever accepted the job. After breaking free from his emotional dependence on Margaret and leaving the university, Dixon rebels against bourgeois values and other societal institutions. His physical and mental resilience ultimately rewards him with the job he desires and the wife he has always envisioned. Throughout the story, two key developments help him escape his cycle of misery. First, Gore Erkett offers him a position as a private secretary, a role Dixon eagerly accepts since it allows him to move to London—a city he's long dreamed of raising his wife in. Second, through Catchpole, he discovers that Margaret's alleged suicide attempt was staged, which had been the main source of his emotional attachment to her, driven by guilt and compassion.

Despite being set in a university, the role of students in Amis's novel is relatively minor, especially at the beginning. The author makes it clear that his focus is not

on mocking students' foolishness, but rather on satirizing certain traditions and behaviors of faculty members, particularly in regional universities. The older generation is embodied by Professor Welch, a cultured, well-educated man who enjoys classical music and lives somewhat detached in an academic ivory tower. After the establishment of several universities outside London following World War II, Welch was compelled to move to one of these new institutions to teach and supervise students. However, the facilities and the student body he encounters are vastly different from what he was accustomed to, coming from social, cultural, and educational backgrounds entirely unfamiliar to him. This clash creates tensions and misunderstandings both between teachers and students and among the faculty themselves, providing rich material for irony and comedy within these emerging educational settings.

The novel addresses several key themes, including the idea that a person's value is largely determined by their appearance, and the role of class in English society, with the Welch family symbolizing the aristocracy. It explores art and culture, highlighting how the middle classes, lacking interest in music or fine arts, turn to novels rather than poetry in an attempt to emulate the upper classes. Education is another important topic, examining how new laws and funding have allowed many lower-class students to attend university, pursue doctorates, and become professors—developments that the novel suggests have a negative impact on both society and education itself. Other themes include injustice, the prioritization of respect and reputation over the reality of life, drug and alcohol use, sexual freedom, and views on women and femininity. The author's portrayal of women is marked by disdain; he metaphorically "mutilates" them, reflecting his belief that women lacking conventional beauty have no place in society. To him, women are seen as either wantons or princesses waiting for a knight to rescue them on a white horse.

One of the academic themes woven throughout the novel is the concept of the Special Courses, which Jim is assigned to teach but feels intimidated by one particularly assertive student. Beyond his reluctance to take on the course, he is also anxious that an overwhelming number of students might enroll—much to the displeasure of Professor Welch—putting Jim under significant pressure. The novel also touches on specific contemporary issues, similar to those in *Jell*, such as a colleague's critique of the university's admissions procedures and the policy of passing intermediate students automatically due to a shortage of teaching staff. The protagonist's character is clearly established from the very beginning of the novel; he stands apart from those around him, and this difference ultimately shapes his inevitable fate. Dixon is in search of a permanent position within a social and cultural environment he deeply detests. Early on, he reveals both his disdain for academic life and a lack of self-respect. For example, despite holding

a respected role at the university, Mr. Welch, the head of the history department, is unable to properly evaluate an essay Dixon has written for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. This raises an important question about whether Welch is truly a suitable role model for academics. Interestingly, an academic serving as head of the history department in Argentina later published this essay under his own name after translating it into Italian. Dixon is far from a traditional hero; he displays very ordinary traits and behaviors, and his achievements and skills are unremarkable. Yet his defining quality lies in his comedic talent, expressed through his sharp contempt for those around him. He also excels at twisting and subverting the coarse language of others, as seen in his pointed remarks about his teacher Welch's words.

The narration's rapid shifts between episodes evoke the omniscient narrator style popular in the eighteenth century. The story also recalls the picaresque novel, with the protagonist simply moving from one scene to another without undergoing significant development—Dixon's character remains largely unchanged by the novel's end. His struggles are heavily shaped by the influence of Welch and Margaret; he lacks the courage to openly express his contempt for academic work in front of his department head, fearing dismissal, and he also hesitates to confront Margaret, worried about hurting her feelings.

The third chapter makes a clear nod to the Second World War when Michie, a student in Dixon's class, appears on the scene. Unlike his teacher—who has no personal memories of the war—Michie served as a commander during the conflict. These subtle details continue to underscore the flawed hierarchy present in the story: despite Michie having held a higher rank than Dixon during the war, it is Dixon who is now Michie's professor at the university. Michie is the only student prominently featured in the novel; he is diligent and believes that academic standards should form the foundation of both teaching and education. In contrast, Dixon had hoped to have three attractive female students in his class, but instead, fate gave him Michie—and the three women apologized for not studying with him. It's a situation where a simple disappointment feels like a major disaster.

The novel sheds light on middle-class characters and explores the struggle for intellectual and political power in contemporary society. It critically examines the academic world, with the author earning a reputation as a revolutionary writer due to his bold critique of various issues. Thanks to Amis's direct approach in portraying his themes and characters, along with dialogue characterized by precise and clear language, the book functions both as a novel and a work of critical analysis.

1.7.10. Angus Wilson's *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*

Sir Angus Frank Johnston Wilson (11 August 1913 – 31 May 1991), one of the first openly gay writers in England, was a celebrated English novelist and short

story author. He was awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize in 1958 and was later knighted for his contributions to literature. Among his most acclaimed works is *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*, a satirical novel published in 1956 that many critics consider his finest. The story centers around two interconnected events that take place on the same day.

The first incident involves the discovery of a statue in the tomb of an Anglo-Saxon bishop by a team of archaeologists. Gerald, a 60-year-old retired history professor who has been asked to edit a book on the subject, sees himself as a failure for never having the courage to confront the issue. The statue reveals that the bishop was actually a pagan, but Gerald decides against revealing the truth, fearing it would mislead an entire generation.

The second incident revolves around Gerald's love for Dolly, the fiancée of his friend Gilbert, who was the one to discover the statue. When Gilbert enlisted to fight in World War I, Gerald began a romantic relationship with Dolly. However, after Gilbert was killed in action, Dolly refused to marry Gerald. He later married Inge, a Scandinavian woman, but continued to harbor feelings for Dolly, who struggled with alcoholism. Eventually, Gerald and Inge separated.

The novel is rich with coincidences and subplots, featuring a cast of eccentric characters, many of whom are members of Gerald's own family. His eldest son, Robin, is a womanizer torn between his wife and his mistress. His daughter Kay is trapped in an unhappy marriage and harbors deep resentment toward Gerald, blaming him for all her misfortunes—including a withered hand, which was actually caused by her mother. Gerald's unfaithful wife, Inge, refuses to acknowledge either their daughter's disability or their youngest son John's homosexuality. Gerald is burdened by guilt over the suffering of both Dolly and his children. At the start of the novel, he is determined to confront the personal failures that have haunted his life. He sets out to reexamine the Melfam case, reconcile with Dolly, and repair his damaged relationships with his children. The story ultimately concludes with Gerald's psychological reconciliation—with himself and those around him.

Although the novel is not set in an academic environment, many of its characters are retired or active scholars. The narrative explores themes of intellectual integrity and the search for truth, drawing parallels to Snow's *The Affair*.

1.7.11. J. I. M. Stewart's Novels

Since 1950, Stewart's academic novels have primarily explored the culture and ideology of Oxford, often referred to as the Oxford cult or doctrine. In works such as *The Guardians* and several others, academic themes are touched upon only briefly and superficially. However, in *Vanderlyne's Kingdom* (1967), the focus

shifts to a wealthy American visitor who arrives at Oxford University intending to donate funds and offer grants and gifts. The novel presents a captivating and poignant portrayal of Oxford's magnificent architecture. During his stay, the American millionaire, Vanderlyne, encounters a young man on a moonlit night within the university residences, and their ensuing relationship becomes the emotional and thematic centerpiece of the story.

The Guardians (1955) evokes comparisons to *The Aspern Papers*²³ and attempts to mirror the literary style of James Joyce. It explores the university's acquisition of numerous literary manuscripts intended for future research. The novel also offers an intriguing insight into how these documents are ultimately archived at Oxford, while highlighting the contrasting academic temperaments of England and America.

In *Mungo's Dream* (1973), Stewart revitalizes the novelistic form, portraying the enduring significance of Oxford society through the eyes of its graduates. The novel also incorporates contemporary elements, such as references to student protests and sit-ins, reflecting the social changes of the time. Given Stewart's deep affection for Oxford—the city and university he called home for over three decades—it is fitting that he would create a literary tribute to Oxford akin to what C.P. Snow achieved for Cambridge history.

In 1974, Stewart published *The Gaudy*, the first installment in his *A Staircase in Surrey* series. The novel opens with the annual Veterans Dinner at Surrey College, which sets the stage for the narrative. The story unfolds primarily through the reflections of the narrator, Duncan Pattullo, who uses flashbacks to recount his own life during and after his university years, as well as the lives of his friends and contemporaries who entered Oxford in the same cohort.

The true protagonist of the story is the institution itself, which imparts a set of values and ideals that continue to shape its students' professional lives long after graduation. They are consistently drawn back to the guiding spirit of the university. As the narrator moves into a teaching role, he observes his former students returning for conferences and festivals, or navigating the challenges faced by their own children who have recently graduated.

²³ Henry James first published his novella *The Aspern Papers* in *The Atlantic Monthly*. Widely regarded as a distinguished achievement in the art of fiction, it is often compared to James' more renowned masterpiece *The Turn of the Screw* due to its gothic and mysterious atmosphere. The story draws inspiration from the real-life letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley to Claire Clairmont, Mary Shelley's stepsister, who preserved them until her death. These influences contribute to the novella's strong connection to the gothic tradition of horror—a genre James explored more extensively in his ghost stories. The plot centers on the narrator's obsessive pursuit of a long-lost manuscript and is set in a once-grand, now decaying Venetian mansion—an ideal backdrop for a tale tinged with suspense and eerie tension. The narrator remains unnamed throughout the story, a choice that enhances his unreliability and deepens the mystery that lies at the heart of the narrative. His anonymity also reinforces many of the novella's central themes and showcases James' literary prowess among his contemporaries in the realm of psychological and mystery fiction. In this way, the faceless narrator becomes a powerful metaphor, prompting readers to focus on the art itself rather than the identity of the artist.

Young Pattullo (1975), the second volume in the series, is a nostalgic reflection filled with classic elements of the Oxford experience—philosophical conversations over tea, rafting on the Thames, and similar traditions. Alongside these, the novel delves into the dynamics between professors and students, exploring psychological insights into the fleeting nature of adolescent love and sexual attraction. In contrast, *Memorial Service* (1976) shifts perspective to that of the professor. As the narrator, Pattullo, becomes a faculty member at Surrey, the novel introduces a range of new themes. Through his eyes, readers gain insight into the college's internal challenges, including its financial struggles and administrative complexities.

In fact, a central plot thread in the novel revolves around the Provost's determination to secure a donation or some form of support from a wealthy Surrey alumnus. This ambition is complicated by the scandal surrounding the millionaire's disgraced grandson, who was expelled from the university for inappropriate behavior. The novel offers a vivid portrayal of various aspects of university life. Pattullo is portrayed as a more contented and balanced version of John Kemp from Larkin's work. He is a well-educated and respected student from the provinces who refuses to be overwhelmed by the mystique of Oxford. Unlike Kemp—who is depicted as overly reserved, ultimately failing all his exams, succumbing to alcoholism, and falling victim to manipulative students—Pattullo maintains resilience and clarity, navigating academic life with greater confidence and stability.

In the third volume, the university introduces subtle changes by encouraging the narrator to take a special interest in the child of his sibling, who has been admitted to Oxford. In the fourth book, *The Madonna of the Astrolabe* (1977), the narrator reflects on his relationship with a colleague, deals with financial matters, and becomes involved with an Italian portrait discovered at the college. Throughout the 1970s, the story continues to closely observe student activities and campus life.

The final book in the series, *Full Term* (1978), addresses a contemporary issue while also resolving lingering questions about the narrator's romantic life and uncovering aspects of his family history. A faculty member at Surrey, who secretly works as a Russian spy and is also a nuclear physicist, becomes a key figure in the novel's mystery, which is ultimately resolved. The author skillfully satirizes the university's traditions throughout the story.

The series as a whole explores a wide range of themes, including college administration, the lives and work of professors and their spouses, relationships among faculty members, interactions between men and women, student life, university admissions processes, and the broader dynamics of the academic community.

1.7.12. Malcolm Bradbury's Academic Trilogy

Bradbury is one of the modern authors most engaged with the development of the university novel. He began writing his first academic novel, *Eating People is Wrong* (1959), around the same time Amis published *Lucky Jim*. Bradbury, a Professor of English and American Studies at the University of East Anglia and a Redbrick University alumnus, sought to portray 1950s England realistically through the lens of a liberal, introspective English literature professor named Stuart Treece. Unlike Amis, who introduces humor gradually and adopts the perspective of a skeptical student critical of his pompous professor, Bradbury writes from the professor's point of view. Though written by a student, Bradbury's novel marks the first instance of the university novel genre, offering an insider's view of academic life at a small university.

Eating People Is Wrong offers an engaging and original take on familiar themes found in both earlier and more contemporary academic novels. While it contains humorous moments, it stands out as the first novel to seriously attempt a realistic portrayal of life at a regional university. Told from the perspective of a professor, the story explores various aspects of academic life, including the complex relationships between students and faculty as well as among the faculty themselves. Notably, Bradbury breaks new ground in his depiction of women. Whether they are academics or students, female characters are presented as intellectually equal to their male counterparts—an approach with few, if any, precedents at the time. In his work, women are consistently portrayed as intelligent, driven, independent, and successful, both professionally and socially. The co-ed nature of academic work naturally gives rise to romantic entanglements, adding another layer to campus dynamics. Bradbury also offers vivid and often unflattering depictions of the mundane yet revealing rituals of academic life: awkward meetings with visiting scholars, meandering intellectual chatter at tea parties, students' embarrassment in front of their professors, and professors' often clumsy efforts to behave normally. Particularly uncomfortable are the interactions with international students, where well-meaning politeness frequently gives way to moments of tension, awkwardness, and cultural misunderstanding.

The university's value is ultimately affirmed by the triumph of its core spirit over human flaws and missteps, as seen in Amis' work and echoed in Bradbury's novel. At the heart of the narrative is Stewart, whose liberal ideals, honesty, and commitment to fairness drive his actions—even when they conflict with his personal feelings. Despite his aversion to the combative student Louis Bate, Stewart forces himself to rise above his irritation. In a deeply ironic and self-punishing gesture, he even encourages a romantic connection between Bate and Emma Fielding, a graduate student he himself cares for. Much like Snow, Bradbury draws on the academic environment he knows intimately, using it as a

backdrop to explore a liberal protagonist striving to uphold E.M. Forster's humanist values in the face of emotional and ethical challenges.

Bradbury revisits similar themes in a more grounded and realistic manner in his second novel, *Stepping Westward*, while also introducing a fresh element: a subtle comparison between British and American universities. The story follows James Walker, a British writer invited to teach a creative writing course in the Department of English Language at Middle Western University in the United States. The novel delves into academic power dynamics and institutional politics, echoing themes found in C.P. Snow's *The Masters*. Upon his arrival, the overweight and uninspired Walker quickly becomes a passive figure—more a pawn than a player—manipulated by Bernard Froehlich, a lively and self-absorbed American professor who exerts significant influence over events. The tension escalates when Froehlich pressures Walker to sign a loyalty oath to the U.S. government—an act Walker refuses. This refusal brings national and political anxieties into the university setting, complicating matters both within the academic institution and beyond. As the power struggle unfolds, Froehlich ultimately takes over as the new head of the department, solidifying his control. As in *The Masters*, the central theme of *Stepping Westward* is ambition. However, while Snow leaves readers with a sense that the struggle and sacrifice were ultimately justified, Bradbury takes a more satirical approach. Much like in *Eating People Is Wrong*, he presents his core concerns humorously, weaving them into a range of observations about American university life as seen through the eyes of an Englishman. With a sharp sense of irony, Bradbury depicts both academic and social activities, and he explores the professor–student dynamic in a witty and artistically comic manner.

The History Man focuses on the life and career of Professor Howard Kirk, a sociologist at a newly established university that falls short of international academic standards. Kirk is portrayed as an energetic, insightful, and multi-talented young academic who frequently writes across disciplines and regularly appears on television. His lectures often center on revolutionary themes, reflecting the influential role sociology plays in the university's progressive ambitions. Kirk embodies the aggressive, self-serving modern intellectual: ambitious, morally flexible, and sexually promiscuous. He is ruthless toward his superiors and domineering toward those beneath him. His wife, who initially appears to share his fashionable, radical persona, ultimately becomes a casualty of his selfishness, taking her own life by the novel's end. In stark contrast to Stuart Treece's altruistic and self-sacrificing nature—evident in his support for the difficult student Louis Bates—Kirk harbors a deep and unfair resentment toward his student Carmody, simply because he finds him unappealing. Carmody, mistreated and dismissed, attempts to retaliate, but Kirk, calculating and

manipulative, ultimately triumphs. Adding to his web of control, the savvy lecturer who once defended Kirk ends up becoming his lover.

The central theme of *The History Man* is the corruption introduced by Kirk, both within the university and in society at large. What makes this portrayal especially disturbing is that society not only fails to condemn Kirk's behavior—it actively enables and encourages it. The university serves as the primary stage for his actions, not because of any unique moral failing in academia, but simply because Kirk chooses it as his arena. His character could just as easily exist in the world of business or industry, where his manipulative and self-serving traits would likely thrive as well. This depiction marks a stark departure from the idealized academic worlds imagined in earlier novels like *Sinister Street* or *The Longest Journey*, where universities were seen as places of growth, reflection, and moral aspiration. Instead, *The History Man* presents a bleak and cynical vision, where ambition and ideology mask deeper ethical decay.

1.7.13. David Lodge's *Changing Places*, or, *A Tale of Two Campuses*
Changing Places, a satirical novel by academic writer and critic Lodge, was published in the same year as *The History Man*. Like Bradbury's *Stepping Westward*, it explores the contrast between British and American academic cultures, but does so in a far more playful and ironic tone. The novel follows two English literature professors—Philip Swallow from the UK and Morris Zapp from the US—who participate in a six-month academic exchange program, trading not only their teaching positions and classrooms but eventually, in a twist of biting satire, their personal lives as well, including their wives.

While *Stepping Westward* offers an Englishman's critical view of American university life, *Changing Places* presents a more balanced, two-way cultural exchange. Through this dual perspective, Lodge humorously yet insightfully examines the differing values, norms, and pressures within British and American academia. Swallow, the reserved and conventional British professor, finds unexpected freedom and vitality in the American setting, while Zapp, the brash and ambitious American, becomes increasingly introspective amid the constraints of British academic life.

What makes *Changing Places* particularly compelling is its artistic depth and the larger truth it reveals: human behavior is profoundly shaped by environment and social context. Lodge suggests that personality is not fixed, but fluid—malleable in response to new surroundings, cultural expectations, and the people one encounters. In this way, the novel transcends satire to offer a thoughtful commentary on identity, adaptation, and the academic world's influence on personal transformation.

1.8. American Campus Fiction

Numerous American novels have explored university life as a central theme, including *The Groves of Academe* by Mary McCarthy, *Pictures from an Institution* by Randall Jarrell, *A New Life* by Bernard Malamud, *Stoner* by John Williams, *The Sterile Cuckoo* by John Nichols, and *The Professors of Desire* by Philip Roth, among others.

McCarthy's *The Groves of Academe* is composed of thirteen chapters, each bearing its own distinct title. Beneath this surface structure, however, the novel is more broadly divided into two main sections. The first focuses on the protagonist, Mulcahy, and his deceitful efforts to retain his teaching position after being dismissed from the university. To do so, he fabricates a story about a mysterious communist past in an attempt to manipulate sympathy and support. The second section shifts attention to a disastrous poetry conference held at the college, exposing the layers of deception surrounding both the poets and their benefactors.

Showalter stands out among critics by naming *The Groves of Academe* the finest American novel of the 1950s. She notes that McCarthy drew on her own college teaching experience, having taught at Bard and Sarah Lawrence Colleges. In 1945, at Sarah Lawrence, there were about eighty students, and McCarthy supervised seven of them while teaching courses on the Russian novel and modern literature, beginning with Jane Austen. McCarthy also brought along her seven-year-old son, Revell, which likely explains the presence of families, children, and babysitters living on the campus depicted in her novel (33).

1.9. Egyptian University Fiction

He struck her with strong love (2018), *Cheating Report* (2019), *Anonymous Complaint* (2020), *Taiwan Beard* (2020), *Blazing Sun* (2021), *Umm Saeed* [*Mom of Saeed*] (2022), and other books by Helmy Muhammad Al-Qaoud—Professor in the Department of Arabic Language, Faculty of Arts, Tanta University—can be included in the list of university novels.

Umm Saeed delves deeply into the complex and often troubling dynamics within academic institutions, highlighting a wide array of issues that reveal both institutional decay and personal misconduct. Among the central themes she explores are the fierce power struggles that take place within universities, where both legal and illegal tactics are employed to suppress and combat the influence of Islamic currents perceived as threats. This political maneuvering creates a charged atmosphere that deeply affects the academic community.

Moreover, *Umm Saeed* sheds light on the intricate web of relationships between academics and their families, showing how these personal ties often intersect with professional roles in ways that undermine academic freedom. The novel phenomenon of faculty members engaging in sexual relationships with each other, which has led to the dismissal of four professors involved in such acts,

serves as a stark example of how personal misconduct intertwines with institutional governance, revealing lapses in ethical standards and administrative oversight.

The roots of corruption, as outlined by *Umm Saeed*, are embedded in systemic problems such as the promotion system and the management of faculty salaries, which often favor favoritism and nepotism over merit and fairness. This corruption erodes the very foundations of scholarly integrity and academic excellence.

A particularly egregious case illustrating both institutional and familial corruption is that of Dr. Saeed Mahmoud Hegazy. His actions exemplify the darker side of university politics, where power is wielded not to advance knowledge or protect academic values but to entrench personal influence and suppress dissent. Through Dr. Hegazy's example, *Umm Saeed* offers a powerful critique of how corruption at both the personal and institutional levels can devastate the academic environment and stifle the pursuit of truth and justice within universities.

1.10. Conclusion

The university novel is not a recent literary phenomenon, having its origins in the Middle Ages. However, it gained widespread recognition in the twentieth century as prominent writers embraced this genre. The addition of creative writing courses to university curricula attracted numerous writers, even those not employed within academic institutions, exposing them to the challenges of university life and the experiences of students. In the United States, over 400 university novels have been published, while Britain saw the release of around 200 such works between 1945 and 1979. These figures underscore the cultural significance of the campus novel. Notable classics of the American university novel include *Groves of Academe* by McCarthy (1952), *Scenes from an Institution* by Jarrell (1954), and *Lucky Jim* by Amis, regarded as the true precursor to the modern British campus novel. British academic novels often critique the nation's higher education system, highlighting issues such as insufficient research funding, financial limitations, and the shortcomings of strict government educational policies.

Nineteenth-century academic fiction unmistakably mirrors the dominance of Oxford University. However, such fiction was largely absent during the Victorian era, as only a small number of Victorian authors—fewer than five—had attended college. These included Thackeray, Charles Reed, Sir Walter Scott, R. L. Stevenson, and Lewis Carroll. Additionally, the traditional themes of these works often clashed with the era's dominant beliefs.

The central theme of the genre examines the dysfunction inherent in this insular society and the futility of returning to the ideals of classicism. While Cooper's *The Struggle of Albert Woods*—not Amis's *Lucky Jim*, as is often mistakenly believed—initiated a new wave of satirical portrayals of university life in the

early 1950s, Snow's novels continue to reflect a profound seriousness and a deep respect for the academic institution.

To blur the line between fact and fiction and discourage readers from interpreting their stories as having realistic implications, some academic novelists deliberately deny any link between the events in their works and real life.

As Sartre primarily concentrated on post-structuralism and its prominent theorists, the academic novel often satirizes contemporary literary theories. This is particularly evident in the university novels of Bradbury and Lodge. *Groves of Academe*, for instance, highlights the conflict between tradition and modernity.

For the first time, women—both academics and students—took central roles in novels such as Lodge's *Nice Work*, Bradbury's *Stepping Westward*, and McCarthy's *Groves of Academe*. These women are portrayed as ideologically equal to, and sometimes even surpassing, their male counterparts. While women were marginalized in nineteenth-century novels, many of the champions in this genre have now become women.

Academic life in Britain seems more secure and less competitive, as academics, once appointed, cannot be dismissed. While competition does exist, it is typically brief. This lack of sustained rivalry within the British system has led to a decline in scholarly distinction, exemplified by Maurice Zapp's inability to recognize any of the staff members at Rummidge University.

The novels examined in the study underscore the desolation of university settings, deemed unsuitable for teaching. This marks a key distinction between nineteenth-century and twentieth-century literature, where the setting played a vital role in shaping the characters of both professors and students. In the twentieth century, universities, with their unfinished buildings and areas completely cut off from life, have come to resemble mental institutions or train stations, significantly undermining the quality of university life.

The quality of university education was also influenced by the caliber of both students and professors. Students were primarily focused on obtaining a degree to secure employment and ensure financial stability. Meanwhile, professors, often from lower or middle-class backgrounds, engaged in schemes and intrigues to safeguard their positions.

Campus novels often highlight racism and ethnic exclusion within academic circles. This is evident in *Eating People is Wrong*, where African students and other international individuals are marginalized.

These books have faced significant criticism for lacking literary value and portraying stereotypical characters who engage in various inappropriate or unethical academic behaviors, as well as highlighting certain contradictions within the academic community and among students.

Given all that has been discussed so far, it is unsurprising that many individuals have been expelled from universities, resigned, returned to their home countries, faced imprisonment, or sought alternative employment.

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