Waving…?

….or drowning?

This is the text of a talk given by Herbert Rosengarten in the Emeritus College "Senior Scholar" series on March 12, 2020 at Green College, UBC.

Let me begin by explaining my choice of title. It has a direct connection with my academic career, because it was one of the first things I learned about research at Cambridge. There as a research student preparing for the PhD, I attended an orientation meeting presided over by the Mistress of Girton College, Muriel Bradbrook, someone whom I found later to be charming and accessible, but who at the time seemed rather grim.

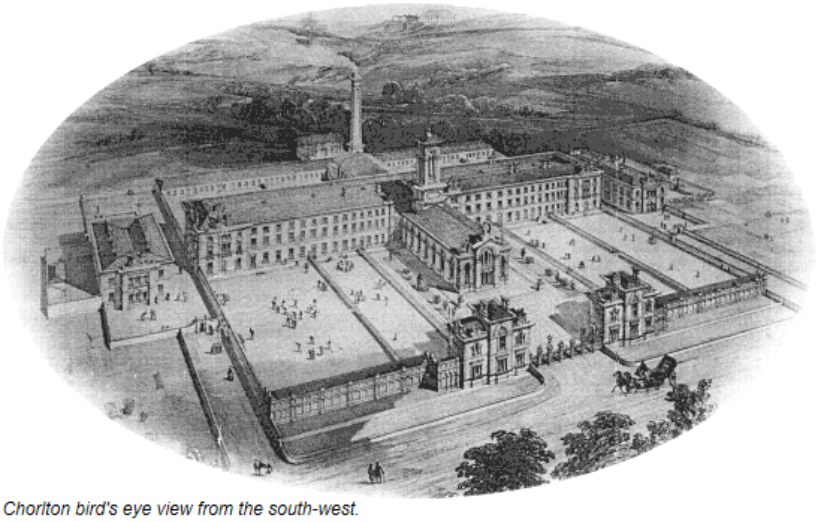
Dr. M. C. Bradbrook (1909-93)

She told the assembled hopefuls that research in English literature was a lonely business; that we were to expect little or no help from faculty members or supervisors; and that the Cambridge PhD did not allow for second chances. In her very words, at Cambridge, research

leading to a thesis was “a matter of sink or swim.” You can imagine how this was received by a roomful of PhD aspirants; and I took it especially hard, as I was (and remain) a poor swimmer.

Some years later, Cambridge PhD in hand, I was Professor Bradbrook’s guest at dinner in her college; just at the time when she herself was faced with what to her was a crisis very like drowning. It was 1976—the year that Girton became a co-educational college; and for Bradbrook that signaled The End of the World as she knew it. In her view, the introduction of men into women’s colleges would reduce the opportunities for Cambridge women to shine in what was an otherwise male-dominated environment. The fact that in 1975 the chemist Rosemary Murray became the first female Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University would suggest that her fears were exaggerated; but it’s notable that in the 45 years since, only one other woman has held that post.

Perhaps I should go back a little further, to give you a better sense of where I come from, as a person and a teacher. I like to tell people that I was born in a work-house; which is strictly true, and which lends weight to a friend’s sarcastic observation once that I was guilty of Victorian thinking. It was in fact Withington Hospital, also known as Nell Lane, a Manchester hospital that had begun life as the Chorlton Poor Law Union workhouse in the 1840s.

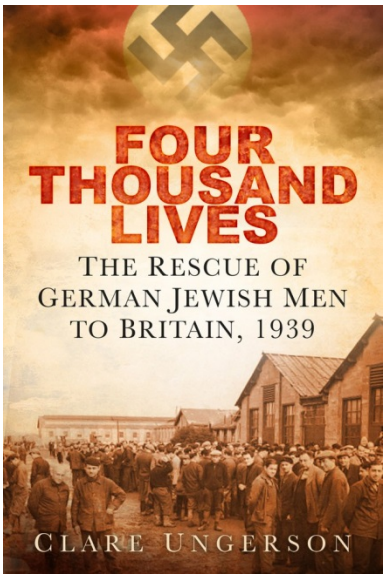


Chorlton bird's eye view from the south-west.

The workhouse buildings were gradually turned over to hospital use. Many of them have now disappeared. And thankfully, by the time I was born there, the children were no longer required to engage in the task of making pins, unlike their Victorian predecessors.

As you might guess from my name, English is my second language. My parents were refugees from Hitler’s Germany. They arrived in England in 1939. Like many other Jews my father had been imprisoned in Dachau after Kristallnacht in November 1938, and was released only on condition that he leave Germany; he was one of the 4000 lucky Jewish men who were

sponsored by the British Council of Jews to travel to Kitchener Camp in Kent, a transitional internment camp in southern England. Eventually most of them, including my father, enlisted in the British Army's Pioneer Corps. Their story is told in *Four Thousand Men,* a book by Clare Ungerson.



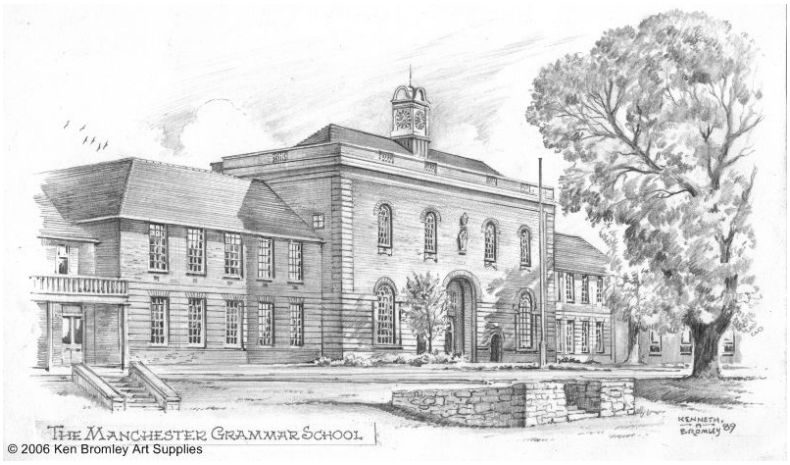
My father's story is also included on a website dedicated to the memory of those who passed through Kitchener Camp: http://www.kitchenercamp.co.uk/memories/leo-rosengarten-memories/

My mother left her home town of Frankfurt am Main and followed her younger sister, my aunt, to Manchester, to become a housemaid in the house of Professor Patrick Blackett; the physicists among you may recognize Blackett as the winner of the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1948 (my uncle was a member of Blackett's team, and would eventually become an eminent scientist in his own right, and vice-president of the Hungarian Academy of Science). My mother's older sister, a PhD graduate in history from Basel University, stayed in Frankfurt with two aunts, was arrested, and subsequently murdered by the Nazis. Her story is in *Wir bleiben hier!* , an account by Angelika Rieber of the thousands of Jews in Frankfort who were rounded up and deported to concentration camps between 1938 and 1942.

When they arrived in England, my parents had little more than the clothes they were wearing, along with some letters, photographs, and family memorabilia. We were poor, though as a child I never knew it—my parents saw to that. We lived in a suburb of Manchester called Didsbury; to get home from central Manchester to Didsbury, the number 42 bus used to pass along Palatine Road, which prompted the cheerful bus conductors of my youth to call out "Next stop, Palestine Road, West Yidsbury." I don't think there was anything particularly malicious in that; it was the kind of mild and thoughtless anti-semitism that we were so used to, we barely noticed it. Indeed, an American scholar who lived in Didsbury with his wife in the early 1960s wrote a brief memoir entitled "Down and Out in Yidsbury" (*The Tablet,* November 2019), in which he explained "It was called Yidsbury because of the sizable Jewish population and the Jewish delicatessen where I bought British bagels, cream cheese, and smoked salmon." Perhaps so; though I think the reality was a little darker than that—certainly when I was a child.

But apart from the occasional school-yard scuffle, my Jewishness was no barrier to my educational progress: though German was the language spoken at home, I learned to read and

write in English by the time I was 8 years old, and a couple of years later I was fortunate enough to pass the entrance examination to get into Manchester Grammar School, an all-boys school which celebrated its five-hundredth birthday a few years ago, and which was my first exposure to the idea of a meritocracy.



The school was led by a Life Peer, Lord James of Fallowfield and Rusholme, who later became the first Vice-Chancellor of York University. Despite his title, Eric James was a Fabian socialist, with a strong conviction in the importance of education as a means of reforming society, and his infectious enthusiasm rubbed off on all who came into contact with him—though I have to say on occasion he and I were on different wavelengths, as when he stopped me in a corridor once to admonish me for the length of my hair—this at a time when sideburns were extremely popular.

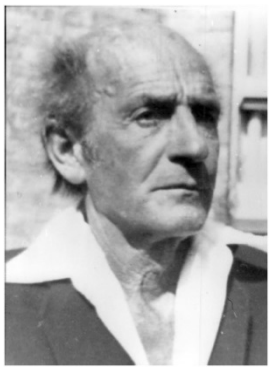
The school was highly academic—at the time, in the 1950s, it registered more Oxbridge entrants than any other school in Britain. This was in some ways a bad thing, since I was surrounded by boys ten times smarter than me who actually understood maths and chemistry, and also how to catch a rugby ball and hit a six at cricket; all of which skills eluded me. It was also a good thing, because I had to work ten times harder just to keep up with my peers, which led to strong work habits and a kind of dogged determination to succeed: qualities that have stood me in good stead over the years, and often helped me to cross the knowledge gaps that I've encountered only too often. And I was lucky enough to be in a system where you were not held back just because you were abysmally poor at science: after taking my GCE O-levels at 14, around Grade 8, I was allowed to concentrate on the subjects that truly interested me, History, English, and French, and then groomed for the race to Oxford or Cambridge.

And it was at this point in my life that I was exposed to some of the people and ideas that would determine the course of my intellectual development and ultimately my choice of career. I had a truly scholarly English teacher, a Victorianist called A. O. J. Cockshut, who was married to the children's author Gillian Avery, and who would move on from Manchester Grammar to All Souls College in Oxford. (He is now an Emeritus Fellow at Hertford College.)

A. O. J. Cockshut

He was quirky, learned, and sometimes quite baffling—but to me he was a revelation and an inspiration. He made me read, and think about what I'd read. And it was thanks to him that at around the age of 15 or 16, I read these words: "The great English novelists are Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad."

These are the opening words of a book of literary criticism by the Cambridge don F. R. Leavis called *The Great Tradition*, published in 1948. Leavis was a very polarizing figure in critical circles, and his book received as many brickbats as bouquets; but to me its theme was a clear statement of fact, the assertion of what I took then to be universal truths, that there are objective standards of value; that "greatness" is an attribute that raises some artists above others; and that in literature, greatness consists in "a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life, and a marked moral intensity" (Leavis's words).



F. R. Leavis (1895-1978)

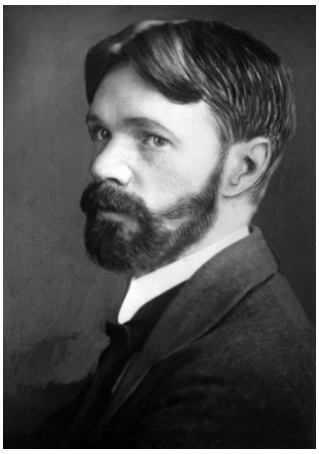
Now, one may quarrel with Leavis's choice of writers to place in his pantheon; but what matters more is the importance he attaches to the role of great literature—to the notion that the study of literature, the study of the best that has been thought and said in the world, is a means of preserving and inculcating moral values. In turn, that gives real significance to the role of the critic and teacher, for it becomes their job to preserve that tradition and those values, and to pass them along. Remember that Leavis's book came out only three years after the end of the Second World War, a time of continuing moral chaos and confusion; so his sense of the moral authority that might be claimed by literature resonated with many who sought an anchor in troubled waters.

Today, of course, Leavis would not get a hearing: today we start with the post-modern assumption that there is no single meaning, that language is unstable, that meaning and value are embodied in our own subjective responses as readers, and shaped by *our* experience as much as the author's. Postmodernism has taught us that moral and spiritual values are all relative—there are no absolutes; so even the idea of a formal tradition comes into question. Whose tradition? we must now ask. Whose values?

Luckily or unluckily for me, post-modernism's tendency to see the notion of "truth" as ideologically or socially constructed was still some years away. Back in those simpler days, I took Leavis at face value, and wrote copious notes about the moral truths conveyed by the authors I was introduced to at school, or found for myself in Manchester's excellent library system and second-hand bookshops.

In the years leading up to university, and in the course of my first years as an undergraduate studying English—what else?—I read everything indiscriminately—the great Victorians, the not-so-great Victorians, Russian novels, French novels, works of pornography disguised as literature (thank you, Henry Miller), English Renaissance drama and poetry (thank you, William Shakespeare), Donne and the Metaphysicals, Pope and the Augustans, the French decadents—I had a glorious time!

Among the most influential of the authors I read at this time was David Herbert Lawrence, author of *Sons and Lovers* (1913) and *Women in Love* (1920). I liked the mixture of roughness and cool control in his novels, the exposure of an inner life seemingly on the brink of an emotional volcano but restrained by the demands of a prosaic and uncomprehending society. Maybe it was the first flowering of my budding literary sensibility; maybe just teenage hormones.



D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930)

Later I would look back at this period of my intellectual growth with some embarrassment; I realized then that I had been reading Lawrence for all the wrong reasons.

That was driven home for me on a November morning in 1960, after I had lined up outside a bookstore in Oxford to buy a copy of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), banned in the UK after publication but newly available in Penguin after a failed attempt to prosecute it as obscene.

I remember taking it back to my rooms in College to devour this compendium of vice and exciting depravity. I think I got as far as the third or fourth chapter, and never finished it. In truth, after the joyful shock of seeing the word "fuck" in print had worn off, I found the story and the characters rather boring. Sex in Lawrence's books seemed to be all big moons and exploding flowers, very colourful but not especially erotic—at least, not to my northern grammar-school yearnings and sensibilities. Only later did I realize that Lawrence was

envisioning sex and love as driving forces in nature, not as a crude physical act, and that his descriptions were deliberately elevated and poetic to imbue them with a mystical quality.

Of course, Lawrence was exploring sexuality at a time long before the notion of sexual liberation took hold, and so his books seemed quite outrageous to a society still struggling to emancipate itself from the values of Victorian England. He was writing in the first quarter of the 20th century; but the sexual revolution really didn't break out until the early sixties, as Philip Larkin pointed out in his poem *Annus Mirabilis:*

> Sexual intercourse began
> In nineteen sixty-three
> (which was rather late for me) –
> Between the end of the Chatterley ban
> And the Beatles' first LP.

(Larkin was 41 in 1963, so the tone of regret there is quite understandable.)

Another writer who had a significant influence on my thinking around this time was a contemporary of Lawrence's, I. A. Richards, author of *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgement* (1929) in which the Cambridge don laid out his theories about how we interpret literature—or rather, how we read and experience literature, then misinterpret it wildly. He stressed the importance of attending to the text itself, and avoiding stock responses—that is, responses governed by prior knowledge about the poet's life or opinions.

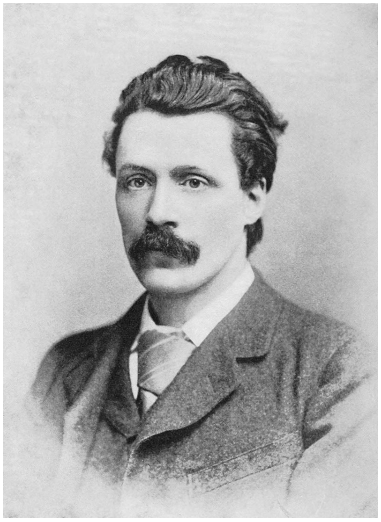
Richards' ideas became very influential in the later movement known as the New Criticism. This was a formalist movement in literary theory that dominated literary criticism in the middle decades of the 20th century. It emphasized close reading, particularly of poetry, to discover how a work of literature functioned as a self-contained, organic, self-referential aesthetic object. The New Critics rebelled against older forms of subjective interpretation, and against the biographical and historical approaches that sought to read literature as the expression of a particular artistic sensibility. Instead, inspired by Richards, they insisted on the autonomy of the text. Anything outside the text was irrelevant—even an author's stated intention was seen as a distraction. A couple of American critics, William K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, wrote what was probably the single most influential argument along these lines in an essay they called "The Intentional Fallacy," published in 1946 in the *Sewanee Review* (54.3, 468-88). They argued that "the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art."

The New Criticism with its rejection of extraneous elements and its emphasis on close reading was very much my stance as a reader and teacher when I arrived at UBC; a position that seemed both self-evident and in accord with my formalist tendencies at the time. It was also

the position of many of my colleagues, and given as received truth to a generation of UBC students. In the years that followed, however, my work as an editor, which necessitated my studying texts as the products of their time, moved me strongly in the direction posited by the new historicism, which connects a work to the social and political history of the period in which it was conceived and produced.

I may come back to this, especially the issue of authorial intention, when I talk a little about my research interests; but let me go back to the sixties, with my head jangling with all the stuff I'd been reading. I had the good fortune to spend my undergraduate life at Brasenose College, Oxford, where my education into English Literature was supervised by a rather dour Scot, Ian Jack, who seemed somewhat forbidding at first, but who eventually became a good friend and mentor. Tutorials with Ian, and later his successor Alastair Fowler, were complemented by lectures and classes from scholars like Helen Gardner, Christopher Tolkien, and Kenneth Clarke. Robert Graves was Professor of Poetry; Lord David Cecil was Professor of Literature. It was a wonderful time to be a student of English, and I can say without exaggeration that I slept through lectures given by some of the most eminent scholars in my chosen discipline.

After completing my BA, I stayed in Oxford to write a thesis for what is now called the MLitt degree. Purely by chance, I read a novel by an English writer called George Gissing, someone I had not read or studied before, despite his having written 22 novels, but whose name I had encountered in the course of reading works by and about late nineteenth-century writers like Thomas Hardy, George Meredith, and H. G. Wells.



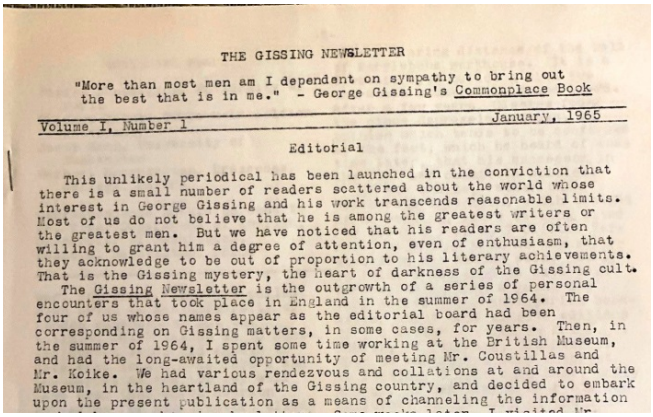
George Gissing (1857-1903)

Gissing's best book, published in three volumes in 1891, is called *New Grub Street*, and deals with the trials and tribulations of an author who wants to write serious literature, but who is

confronted by the reality of the "market"—the demand for publications which satisfy popular taste with cheap sensationalism and sentimental romance.

Gissing himself had strong literary aspirations and in *New Grub Street* he projected his own frustrations through his protagonist's failures, though he did win a degree of respect and critical recognition before his death in 1903. His work and reputation suffered a decline for several decades, but there was a revival of interest in the early sixties, and so it was I found myself drawn into his world and the world of printing and publishing—to such an extent that I chose that world as the topic of my thesis, and read widely in histories of publishing in Britain and the United States.

In the sixties, Gissing studies were still in their infancy; to help you understand what a small number of Gissing enthusiasts there were at that time, I, a recent graduate student still wet behind the ears, was invited to become joint editor of the brand-new *Gissing Newsletter*, a mimeographed publication begun at the University of Washington in Seattle by Professor Jacob Korg, with fellow editors Pierre Coustillas in France and Shigeru Koike in Japan. Jacob Korg was the author of a fine critical biography of Gissing; Pierre Coustillas would become the world's leading scholar on his work, recognized by an MLA prize for his fantastic edition of Gissing's letters in nine volumes.



THE GISSING NEWSLETTER

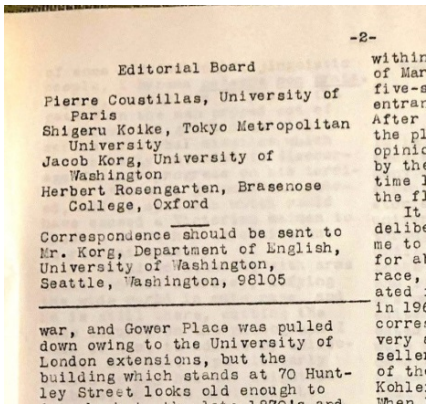
"More than most men am I dependent on sympathy to bring out the best that is in me." - George Gissing's Commonplace Book

Volume I, Number 1 January, 1965

Editorial

This unlikely periodical has been launched in the conviction that there is a small number of readers scattered about the world whose interest in George Gissing and his work transcends reasonable limits. Most of us do not believe that he is among the greatest writers or the greatest men. But we have noticed that his readers are often willing to grant him a degree of attention, even of enthusiasm, that they acknowledge to be out of proportion to his literary achievements. That is the Gissing mystery, the heart of darkness of the Gissing cult.

The Gissing Newsletter is the outgrowth of a series of personal encounters that took place in England in the summer of 1964. The four of us whose names appear as the editorial board had been corresponding on Gissing matters, in some cases, for years. Then, in the summer of 1964, I spent some time working at the British Museum, and had the long-awaited opportunity of meeting Mr. Coustillas and Mr. Koike. We had various rendezvous and collations at and around the Museum, in the heartland of the Gissing country, and decided to embark upon the present publication as a means of channeling the information



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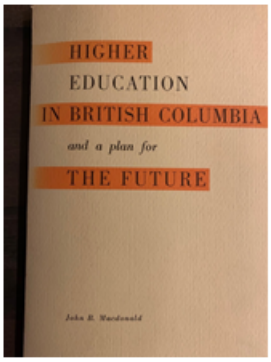
Correspondence should be sent to Mr. Korg, Department of English, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, 98105

war, and Gower Place was pulled down owing to the University of London extensions, but the building which stands at 70 Hunt-ley Street looks old enough to

After several years my own interests would move in different directions; but I remained fascinated by the world of books, printing and publishing, and that would have an enormous effect on my subsequent work as a researcher. (The *Gissing Newsletter*, incidentally, is still going strong, though now as the more serious *Gissing Journal.* Sadly, Jack Korg and Pierre Coustillas are no longer with us.)

Having finished my work on Gissing, it was time to find a job. Why did I stay in academe? I can't answer that question in any clear or decisive way, except to say that I loved reading and writing about books, and the only way I could continue to do so in the working world was through teaching at school or university. And I chose the University because there were lots of post-secondary jobs teaching English in those days, especially in North America.

Jobs were plentiful in Canada because this was the time of rapid expansion of post-secondary education. UBC's president in the mid-sixties was John Barfoot Macdonald, who laid out the problem and proposed the solution in his seminal report *Higher Education in British Columbia and a Plan for the Future*, which he put together and published in December 1962, soon after taking up his position here at UBC.



Macdonald recognized that Canada was falling far behind other countries in adapting to the coming technological age, and he pointed to education as the key:

> Education must be designed to permit individuals to interpret and understand the revolutionary changes which are occurring everywhere. The persons who will make the greatest contribution to society will be those educated to the limits of their capacities and talents, by the best kinds of educational institutions we can finance and staff (6)…. Even though we make allowances for the size of our population, it is clear that Canada falls well behind [the US and Russia], not only in the field of science and technology but in the whole area of education. If Canada is to play the role that she ought to play in international affairs, our educational system must be nourished and expanded at an unprecedented rate (10).

Out of the Macdonald report came the transformation of Victoria College into the University of Victoria, the establishment of Simon Fraser University, and the creation of the system of two-year colleges around the province of BC over the next decade.

So there was great demand. Late in 1964, armed with my BA and MLitt, and with the encouragement of my old tutor, I sent a brief letter of enquiry, along with my extremely brief cv, to the Head of the English Department at the University of BC, in Vancouver, British Columbia, who invited me to send the names of a couple of referees, and shortly afterwards offered me a tenure-track position as an Instructor 2.

That was indeed how I obtained my position at UBC; things were very different in those days…. Compare my experience and credentials then to what is expected of candidates for an Assistant Professorship in English at UBC today, as reflected in a job advertisement in *University Affairs* for December 2019:

> Applicants must have a PhD or provide solid indication of imminent completion. Applicants should have publications and experience teaching at the postsecondary level; they are expected to provide strong evidence of active and excellent research, and demonstrate a record of, or potential for, high quality teaching at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Applicants are asked to include, as part of their application materials, a separate statement describing past experience that promotes diversity and inclusion, broadly understood and/or plans to make future contributions to more inclusive representation of racialized minorities in the applicant's core discipline(s), in the academy more broadly, and/or affiliate institution(s)…. To ensure full consideration, applicants should submit their applications online … and be prepared to upload the following in the order listed: a letter of application, curriculum vitae, a description of current and future research interests, statement of teaching philosophy, the one-page diversity statement referred to above, a sample of ongoing research preferably in the form of published material, and evidence of teaching effectiveness. Applicants should also arrange to have confidential letters from three referees sent to: english.recruitment@ubc.ca by the same deadline.

I doubt I would even get past the initial screening today…. But thanks to the pressures of the sixties expansion, I was offered and accepted a job; and on a warm evening in June 1965 my wife, baby daughter, and I arrived in Vancouver with a trunkful of clothes and books, thirty-three pounds in cash—then about $112—and the address of the Sylvia Hotel, where the department had booked us a room for which we paid $12 a night.

The money for our passage to Canada had been advanced by the Canadian government, which made the loan without interest—a generous gesture, but I was still left with the problem of paying back about $1400 over the next several years; a debt that thrust me into the endless cycle of overload teaching, in evenings and in summer, that would characterize my working life well into the 1980's. Indeed, on my second day in Canada I found myself in the Bank of Montreal, at its UBC branch by the Old Auditorium, pleading my case for a loan of $150 to see us through for the next few weeks. The bank manager, George Pearson, looked me in the eye and said "Are you serious? You're going to need at least $500"; whereupon I began my lifelong vassalage to the Bank of Montreal, a state of grateful servitude that continues to this day.

The Department I had joined was on the cusp of great change. The Head was Roy Daniells, who had taken over from the legendary Garnett Sedgewick in 1948, and held his position for seventeen years.

Professor Roy Daniells (1902-79)

I first met Roy during his last week as Head, before he became UBC's first University Professor. He was a charming man, a fine critic, and a master of what we used to call occasional verse—short poems for particular occasions that made gentle fun of friends and colleagues. He had built a strong, if somewhat conservative department, not yet the publishing machine it would become, but with a reputation for excellence in teaching, built upon an extensive service contribution to the rest of the University. Some of you may remember that at one time all UBC students had to take a full year of English 100, so everyone was pressed into teaching first-year composition, full professor or not. At one point, in the seventies I think, we had over 130 sections catering to about 4,000 students in that course alone.

My first office was in the Buchanan Building, block C, third floor, next to the washrooms. I shared it with Andrzej Busza, who had also arrived from the UK, and who was equally ignorant about the workings of a North American university.

Buchanan Building C

Professor Andrejz Busza

Andrzej, a specialist in the writings of Joseph Conrad, was to become a famous Polish émigré poet, honoured by the Polish government and the subject of critical studies in his native land; but at this stage of his career he, like me, struggled with endless preparation and marking, and the need to decipher mysterious pronouncements from above concerning such arcana as "units of credit"—what were they? we wondered; proper use of the DNW designation—what was that?—or teaching assignments on Saturday mornings—were they serious?? (Yes, unfortunately, they were.)

I'm not going to bore you with a history of my teaching and administrative experiences; they were not out of the ordinary in any way, but they were immensely important in my continuing education—for one thing, I had read no American or Canadian literature at all before arriving at UBC, and since the leading lights in English 100 at that time were Hemingway, Faulkner, and Fitzgerald, and since our poetry and composition texts all originated in the States, I had a lot of catching up to do. Canadian literature didn't begin to appear on the first-year reading list until the late sixties, with the publication of new anthologies of Canadian writing and the belated recognition, fostered particularly by Don Stephens, Bill New, and George Woodcock, that Canadian fiction and poetry were in fact worth studying; but that's another story.

It was a huge department, by the late seventies hosting over 120 full-time faculty and sessional lecturers—needed because of the huge service commitments in first and second year; not just English 100 and 200, but courses in report-writing and dystopian literature for Engineers, courses in composition and literary history for the Faculty of Education, and numerous credit and non-credit courses in Continuing Education.

It was an excellent teaching department, as reflected in its success when the University instituted its first teaching prizes in 1969: the second and third winners of that university-wide

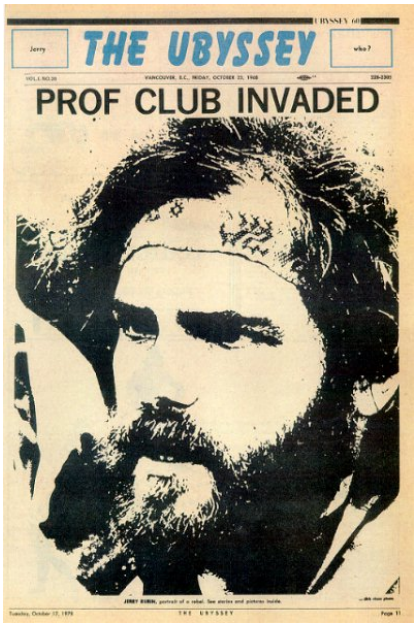
prize were Geoffrey Durrant, former Head, and John Hulcoop, seen here in a photo that says a lot about John and why students loved his classes.

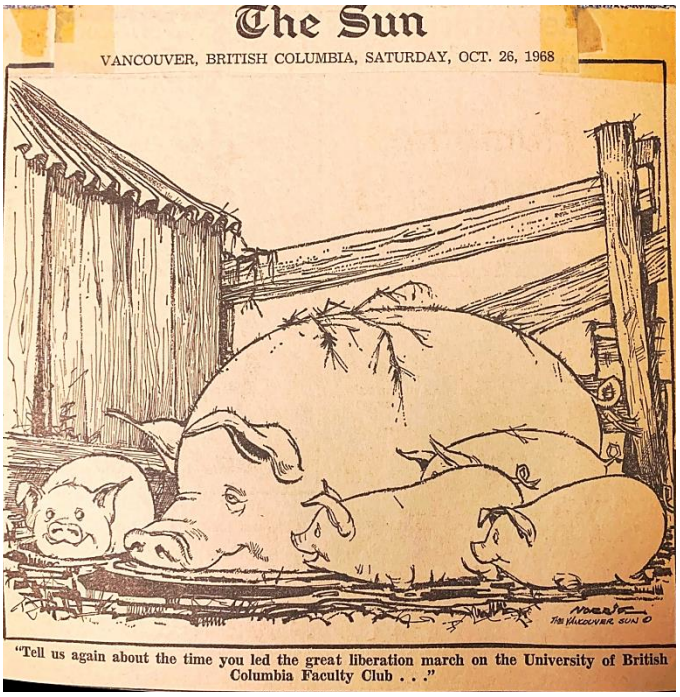
Professor Geoffrey Durrant (1913-2015)

Professor John Hulcoop

But the emphasis on teaching was not matched by an emphasis on publication, and the scholarly record of the professoriate in English did not impress senior administration. So in 1969 John Young, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, appointed a new Head, Robert Jordan, a noted medievalist, who joined a Department that was beginning to be rocked by all the commotion affecting universities everywhere at this time.

This was the era of sit-ins and protests, the Kent State shootings, the TA protests at SFU, the rise of the Yippies under Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin. It was the time of the legendary UBC Faculty Club occupation by students, brought there by Jerry Rubin leading a pig.





This was in October 1968. I was in the Club at the time, engaged in the serious business of playing pool with a sessional colleague, Paul Burkhardt; and my sole contribution to the event was to find the manager and get him to lock the downstairs bar to protect the Club's new pool table. Despite the occupation, which lasted perhaps 24 hours; despite the singing of anti-war songs and the ceremonial burning of a US draft card, the event failed to achieve anything concrete, and set the AMS back $2000 to help pay for the damage to the Club premises.

What students everywhere were demanding at this period, besides an end to the Vietnam war, was a greater say in the administration of their universities. Last month Paul Marantz from Political Science spoke about the events at Cornell in 1969, which were truly frightening; and Canada had its own version of student rebellion at Sir George Williams in February of that year. The occupation of the UBC Faculty Club was much less threatening than either of those events. Some of the demands by students were not unreasonable, such as more transparency in decision-making and greater representation on department and Faculty committees.

Interestingly, the faculty themselves were beginning to make similar kinds of demands; they wanted a more democratic and transparent system in such matters as appointments, tenure, and promotion. And this was certainly true of the faculty in the UBC English Department, which engaged in a great deal of navel-gazing from about 1968 till 1982—the period corresponding roughly to the time that Robert Jordan was Head. During that time the Department gained the

reputation of being rowdy and ungovernable; a reputation that was, I think, in some ways well deserved.

Dr. Robert Jordan (1925-2012)

Was that the fault of Robert Jordan? Certainly, that's how it was often presented: an unsympathetic and obdurate Head versus a reasonable, democratic, and fair-minded faculty. Looking back, however, I can see fault on both sides; to be sure, Bob Jordan was stubborn and not inclined to listen to arguments counter to his own; and his opponents sometimes lacked common sense, not to say good manners. Jordan was particularly strongly attacked because of several tenure decisions in 1969 and 1970, which saw tenure denied to several young and popular instructors, decisions which led to mass demonstrations by students and denunciation of the Head by such august organs as the *Ubyssey*. But what many people inside and outside the Department didn't understand, or chose to ignore, was that Jordan had been brought in by the Administration and explicitly directed to raise the standard of scholarship in the Department, especially in the area of publication. He felt it was his duty to cut the dead wood, and bring in new young faculty who could do what the Dean and senior administration wanted.

Robert Jordan addressing students outside Buchanan

I will spare you the details of that seemingly endless battle between the white hats, black hats, and grey hats; the tedious teach-ins; the wrangling at department meetings; the heavy-handed anonymous satires that circulated freely throughout the Department, appearing in one's mailbox or under one's office door; the letters, declarations, and petitions to the Dean or the President. The degree to which this largely internal matter became a subject of lengthy public scrutiny is reflected in the massive amounts of ink and paper that were expended on analysis and opinion pieces in the *Ubyssey* and the local press.

VANCOUVER Express

Saturday, March 14, 1970 VOLUME 1 No. 10 15¢

UBC faces crisis on firing issue

The University of B.C.—which, unlike Simon Fraser University, seldom shows cracks in its monolithic academic structure—has a

ceived a polite hearing, though students continued to sign petitions asking for a reversal of the Mayne and Powell decision as

"publish or perish philoso told the students that English department is

The Department was made the subject of at least three internal reviews and reports between 1970 and 1979. One of the review committees observed:

> Missing in the department is a sense of a common ground of feeling and judgement. Consequently, the continuing and necessary debate about the functions of an English Department, about standards of scholarship and teaching, has degenerated into an intemperate dispute in which accusations of the capricious exercise of power on the one hand are countered with accusations of irresponsible and unethical reactions on the other.
>
> *Report of the University-Wide Review Committee of the English Department, chaired by B. A. Dunell (Chemistry), May 1972.*

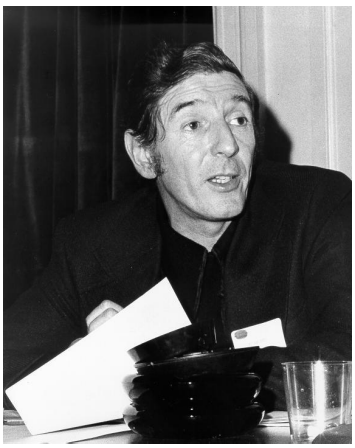
Another review wryly commented on the strong opinions held by many members of the Department:

> …the Department as a whole is stiff and formal. The atmosphere is not relaxed. All administrative questions are addressed with overly critical attention to detail. It is reminiscent of the bush fever that makes a trapper murder his partner for putting the

big frying pan on the hook meant for the small one, and probably has much the same kind of explanation.

> *A Report on a Study of Policy and Decision-Making Processes in the Department of English, by P. A. Larkin, Dean of Graduate Studies, April 1979.*

Much of this tension and antagonism had disappeared by the time I took on the Headship in 1987, and for that we have the canny Scot Ian Ross to thank. Ian was Head from 1982 to 1987, and his appointment was made in part to placate the avid democrats in the Department—of whom Ian was one. He was an expert on the writings of Adam Smith, the Scottish economist and philosopher, and I have no doubt acted on Smith's declaration, "To feel much for others and little for ourselves; to restrain our selfishness and exercise our benevolent affections, constitute the perfection of human nature" (*The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ch. V).



Professor Ian Ross (1930-2015)

Ian exercised his benevolent affections by creating new committees that gave a greater say in department decision-making to a greater number of people; besides which, he was better at managing opposition than Bob Jordan, who was a bit stiff-necked at times. But looking back over the last fifty years, and seeing what kind of a department English became, I'd have to say that over the long term Jordan accomplished what he had been asked to do: to push his colleagues to a higher standard of academic production, especially in scholarly publication. Today the Department is recognized as one of the best in the country, with a truly extensive publication list. The old axiom of "publish or perish" still has some force, but thankfully the University has recognized the value of good teaching, and created a rank of Professor of Teaching that helps us keep our best classroom instructors; had it been available in Jordan's time, the Department's history might have been very different.

About the time I became Head in 1987, the nature of my subject—the study of English language and literature—began to change. Concepts that had been floating on the margins of literary study pushed their way to the centre—deconstruction, postmodernism, postcolonialism, new historicism, and the most influential –ism of them all, feminism. Names like Derrida, Foucault, Kristeva, and Lacan began to dominate discussion, and works of literature became documents in the study of social breakdown, gender oppression, and subjectivity. For many older members of the Department, this wave of change was incomprehensible and threatening; for younger members, especially our graduate students, it was exciting and exhilarating. Literature and the humanities took on new significance as a commentary on the faults and failings of a flawed society. For administrators like me, it was a mixed blessing; on the one hand, it reflected a new vigour, a sense of awakening in our field and renewal in the professoriate; on the other, it drove a wedge between the younger and the older members of the department, and the members of the latter group—mostly male, it needs to be said—felt a growing alienation from what they had always felt was their territory. By the time I left the department, power had swung to the younger group, and the seeds were sown for growth in entirely new directions.

As a department head, I discovered that, like some before me, I too could be stiff-necked and unreasonable when the opportunities arose—and arise they did. I faced a number of challenges, not always successfully. This was a time of change across the University—a growing shift from the Humanities to the STEM subjects, with corresponding changes in curriculum decisions and funding priorities; an increase in student activism, motivated by general dissatisfaction with the post-secondary system; and the rise of feminism, both inside and outside the academy, which challenged the old-boys-club tendencies of the university. We were faced with strikes by our TAs, who had unionized, and we had to deal with the uncomfortable experience of crossing picket-lines manned by our own students—who, for the most part, were very polite, though a little unclear about union rules: on one occasion, one of the picketers came into the office to collect his mail, and I had to remind him that he wasn't supposed to cross his own picket line.

Before the strike, TAs had control of their own sections of English 100, and served on the course committee; but they struck on the grounds that they were overworked and underpaid in that capacity; so at a time of financial cutbacks, we had no choice but to cut back on their hours and responsibilities, which meant, unfortunately, that we had to take them out of the classroom as teachers and focus on them as student assistants. The TAs celebrated their victory with a party, to which I was not invited; but what they were celebrating, sadly, was the loss of invaluable teaching and administrative experience that had served them well, especially when going on to look for jobs elsewhere.

I'm not going to dwell further on my time in the Head's office, except to say that, despite some of the difficulties I've been describing, they were very happy years for me. I worked with some brilliant colleagues, faculty and staff, who for the most part forgave my petty blunders, and who helped me find the right direction when I started to wander. And when I left the position in 1997, my department gave me a splendid sendoff, including gifts of a bottle of Amarone wine and a soccer ball, reflecting two of my main interests in life.

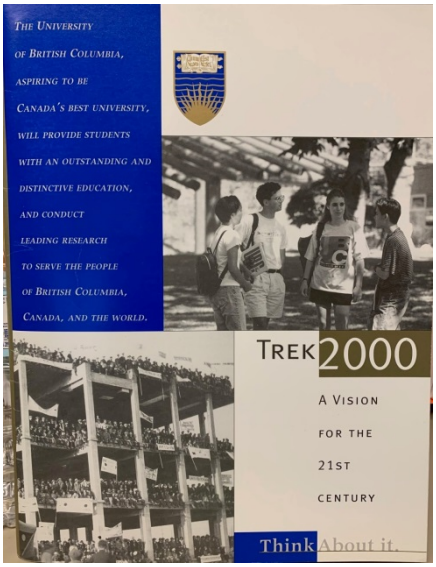
The last part of my active career was spent in the President's Office, working as an assistant to Dr. Martha Piper.

Dr. Martha Piper, President, 1997-2006, 2015-16

This could have been horrendous, given some of the events during that period, and indeed it began rather disastrously with the APEC debacle in 1997, when the 20 or so leaders of the Asia-Pacific Economic Conference came out to hold one of their meetings at UBC, which turned our campus into an armed and fortified camp for the occasion, with barricades closing off access to Marine Drive and snipers positioned on the roof of the Chan Centre. You may recall the publicity surrounding that event, and the actions of RCMP Sergeant Hugh Stewart, known as Sergeant Pepper. What I recall is Martha Piper and Dennis Pavelich, then VP External, standing uncomfortably close behind me while I typed, and dictating a draft statement on the excesses of police intervention and the University's disappointment at the Prime Minister's Office for its inept handling of the situation.

Experiences like the APEC riot made me long for the kind of battles characteristic of life back in the English Department, where there might be some bitterness on both sides, but at least no risk to life and limb. There, people might pour scorn on you, but they didn't swear at you in public meetings, or smash all the windows in your office, or block the driveway to your home, or send you death threats—all of which happened to Martha Piper and her staff at one time or another. We had sit-ins, too, of course, but that's just another day at the office for university administrators.

I learned many things working in the President's office, where I stayed for the duration of Martha Piper's presidency. From her I learned, for example, the value of an institutional vision—something I had treated with skepticism, if not contempt, before I was made responsible for helping to create such a vision, in the form of the much maligned *Trek 2000* document.



Despite some criticism of its aims and language, that project brought real focus, purpose, and accountability in ways that had not been evident before; and it was driven by Martha's intense determination to push UBC to new levels of excellence, along the track first laid by David Strangway, her predecessor. And in engaging in that exercise, I learned the importance of good communication: of consulting widely, listening carefully, then announcing decisions clearly in plain language. These were skills that all of us working for the President learned from her, and indeed that she demanded of us. People sometimes complained about all the emails and announcements they were getting from the President's Office; but they complained more when they thought information was being withheld or suppressed.

In the interests of time, I'm going to skip over my decade in the President's Office, so that I can tell you a little about my research—because after all, this is where we as academics are expected to make our mark. Most of my work as a published scholar has been in the area of textual criticism and editing, and for a number of years I was a member of a team of editors working on the Oxford editions of all the Brontë novels. This came about, in part at least, from courses I had taken as a graduate student—the history of the book, the study of textual transmission, and the history of printing itself; indeed, my favourite course was one in which we actually learned to work a handpress in the Bodleian Library.

Textual editing, which includes the business of establishing the state and history of the text, gave my rather objectively-oriented mind a practical outlet. Here was literature in its most concrete and objective form—the printed page. What could be more straightforward than the business of determining the text? No more wrangling about meaning and interpretation, about organicism and the hermeneutic circle; rather, the critic's task becomes one of establishing what the author actually *said*, and stripping a work of the accretion of error that may have arisen during the course of its transmission. That is all true; but I soon learned that establishing a text is anything but straightforward.

Ideally the editor will provide the reader with as clean, complete, and correct a text as is humanly possible. In the case of the Oxford edition of the Brontës, we worked on the principle established by textual scholars before us, that the editor's role is to reconstruct, as accurately as possible, the text that best reflects the author's final intention—what the author wanted the reader to see.

Right away, however, you can see a problem: to make such a determination one must apply one's judgement as to what constitutes a "final intention," and where that line is to be drawn. A text is the product of many steps in a process that may involve many people—including the reader. The Clarendon Brontë editors worked tirelessly to produce what I think are still the best texts; but in the exercise of our editorial judgement, in our attempt to create the best

possible texts, one that we believed the authors would have wished for—we created texts that the authors themselves never actually saw.

Over time one's views may change. Here we are, forty years on—and I'm now working with another team of scholars on a new edition of the Brontë novels, this time a Cambridge edition; and the principles we're invoking would have my old supervisor Ian Jack, who was the general editor of the Oxford Clarendon edition, spinning in his grave. Working from the demonstrable fact that Charlotte Brontë's novels in manuscript are markedly different from their manifestation in print, we are going to produce critical editions based on the manuscripts, which come as close as possible to the author's original conception *before* the processes of revising, copy-editing, printing, publication, and critical reception took over. Those of you familiar with textual criticism theory will at once hear the ghost of the American bibliographer Fredson Bowers saying triumphantly, "When an author's manuscript is preserved, this has paramount authority, of course" (*Studies in Bibliography,* 17(1964): 223–228) a position I thoroughly rejected for many years. Now I embrace it—with some reservations, but nonetheless, I've moved in a direction I would never have anticipated!

Let me end with a general observation about life as a faculty member at UBC. At several times in my life I've been asked what advice I might give a younger colleague contemplating an academic career.

Perhaps the best advice I could give at this point is to become involved, and stay involved, in all facets of your profession. I've had numerous administrative appointments over my career, both inside and outside my department, both inside and outside the University. At some time or another I've complained about each of them—distracting, time-consuming, counter-productive, etc.—but despite the occasional (and inevitable) headaches, I've enjoyed them all. My colleague Dick Fredeman warned me early on not to get sucked into administration—it will really slow down your research, and cut into your publication record, he told me; and he was right. But that didn't stop him from dropping everything one year to take on responsibility as Acting Head; and he did that job well enough to change a lot of people's views about him.

The point about involvement in your department or faculty or disciplinary association is that it gives you a whole new perspective on your university; it brings you into contact with new people and fresh ideas, and rescues you from the myopia that sometimes afflicts colleagues who remain firmly fixed in one dimension, at the centre of their own universe.

A few weeks ago Daniel Levitin, emeritus professor of psychology and neuroscience at McGill, came to speak at the Vancouver Institute, and his visit coincided with the publication of his new book, *Successful Aging,* which has shot up to the top of the bestseller list in both Canada and

the US. In that book he asks the question, when is the best time to take retirement? And his answer, perhaps predictably, is: Never.

That's my notion of retirement too. Now that I'm emeritus, I might be forgiven for retreating into my shell and watching re-runs of *Downton Abbey.* But that would be no fun at all—and so I sit on a number of committees, a couple of which I chair; I run a couple of research projects; I volunteer for the Vancouver Institute; I do contract work for the Provost. And I am still immersed in my favourite kind of research, textual editing. In short, I am swimming as fast as I can, in all directions! Because if I don't, I'll surely sink like a stone.