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The Creative Writer in the Public Sphere

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by

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Summary

This thesis provides an analysis of the creative writer in contemporary Britain, using both literary and cultural theory to define and understand the roles available to the writer. It explores how these roles are interpreted by writers. The thesis offers new research and insights into the scope of current patronage practices, examines how the writer engages with these new roles, and assesses the potential impact on the writer, the reader and literature.

Based on research conducted in the UK, this thesis focuses on four major contexts: the writer in residence, the prize culture, the literary festival, and the writer in the blogosphere. It considers how the writer's role has been reconstructed in different social and cultural contexts. In addition, this study highlights writers' perception of their public role and their position in society; the multiple and complex power relations inherent in these roles; the increasingly public presence of the writer; the reader-writer relationship, and the impact on the literature produced. Reflecting my own literary interests and practices, it focuses on the work and experiences of poets and novelists, rather than on those of dramatists and non-fiction writers.

This study contributes to the as yet limited body of research into contemporary patronage practices. Furthermore, the thesis contributes to the historicising and theorisation of the creative writer which links the individual experience of writers with social and cultural structures and processes, making reference to the theories of Theodor Adorno, Roland Barthes, Pierre Bourdieu, Terry Eagleton and Jürgen Habermas. The research sheds light on the writer's struggle to maintain a balance between gainful employment and creativity while negotiating the complex power relations that affect their literary output and their socio-cultural relations with patron and public.

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For my mother and father,

Brigid and Séamus,

and my children,

Sam, Hugo and Jess

If he [sic] is to enjoy leisure and privacy, marry, buy books, travel and entertain his friends, a writer needs upwards of five pounds a day net. If he is prepared to die young of syphilis for the sake of an adjective, he can do on under.

Cyril Connolly, 1946: 144

There's no such thing as a job that will give you enough time to write.

Les Murray (in Crawford), 2013

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Chapter 1 Scope of Thesis

1.1 Introduction

Writing, writers, The Writing Life – if this last is not an oxymoron. Is this subject like the many-headed Hydra, which grows two other subtexts as soon as you demolish one? ... Hard to get hold of certainly. Where to start? At the end called Writing, or the end called The Writer?

(Margaret Atwood, 2009: 3)

We would be hunters of meaning, we would speak the truth about the world and about our own lives.

Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Merleau-Ponty', 1960.

Through the ages the writer has always fulfilled the role of social observer and reporter, analysing and recording events and emotions, and providing narratives of political, historical and psychological importance. These narratives bear witness to human triumph, courage, suffering and resilience; they may also question, openly challenge and denounce the failings and evil forces at work within society. As a result of producing thought-provoking, inspiring and entertaining works of literature, the established writer has enjoyed respect within both the literary and public spheres. I draw a distinction between these two realms as the writer normally needs to succeed in the literary sphere before gaining recognition in the public sphere. Once a writer is seen to have met the standards of value imposed by the literary establishment, and succeeded in having their work published, they are then in a position to assume roles in the public sphere. The precise positioning of the literary sphere in relation to the public sphere is the subject of some debate. For Habermas,

the literary sphere was a separate entity in which the practice of criticism and reflection on significant issues was pioneered before it entered the public sphere (Habermas, 1989 (1962): 51-56). For others, like Bourdieu, the literary field is placed within the social space, or public sphere (Bourdieu, 1996: 124). More recently, academics view the social space as being made up of a number of different spheres – private, public, social, cultural – which overlap at certain points (Fraser, 1992; Keane, 2000; Boeder, 2005). The positioning and interrelation of the various spheres is complex and late modernity has witnessed a broadening of the cultural sphere to include a range of channels and circuits of mass-popular culture and entertainment. This has led to greater exchange between spheres and a blurring or even dissolution of boundaries. The proliferation of media and the importance of media literacy have challenged the relevance of literature as a means of conveying important ideas and stimulating debate (McGuigan, 2011: 82-83). This does not mean that the creative writer is rendered redundant, or indeed reduced to some form of endangered species. This thesis demonstrates that an increasingly hybridised and diversified cultural and public sphere places new demands on writers. Not only must they meet the criteria of the literary establishment in order to gain respect in the literary sphere, they are also expected to operate successfully in the public sphere.

The title of this thesis – ‘The Creative Writer in the Public Sphere’ – suggests a very broad and wide-ranging area of research and one which could potentially form the basis of numerous avenues of enquiry. It has therefore been necessary, for the purposes of this research, to focus on some key roles and activities, those very contemporary forms of patronage, with which the writer may engage. My objective is to analyse the impact of contemporary patronage opportunities on the creative writer. The specific forms of patronage I address are those offered by the writer’s

residency, the literary festival, the prize culture and the blogosphere. In order to place these contemporary roles and opportunities in context I also examine the history of patronage and the post of Poet Laureate.

This thesis arose out of an attempt to understand the role of the creative writer in the public sphere and in particular the increasing complexities and challenges inherent in this role in the twenty-first century. It arose out of a desire to understand the following issues: how cultural and social events shape literary production and value; how the writer in residence influences the public's understanding of the writer and literature; what impact the prize culture exerts in evaluating the worth of a writer and literature; the social values which influence this judgment; the escalating dominance of the market in determining what gets published, and what effects contemporary patronage practices may be said to exert on the writer and literary production.

The broad research question is broken down into more explicit sub-questions which are dealt with in separate chapters. In Chapter One, after a definition of the creative writer and the public sphere, I outline the recent developments which affect the creative writer, including their increasing presence in academia. I also present an analysis of Pierre Bourdieu's theories in relation to literature and show how they provide a framework for this thesis. Chapter Two provides a brief history of patronage from the middle ages to the nineteenth century. Its purpose is to examine earlier forms of patronage, and to establish their effectiveness and the influence they exerted on writers and literary production. Habermas noted that early aristocratic patronage practices did not imply the existence of a serious reading public; patronage was rather a manifestation of 'conspicuous consumption' and that the aristocracy 'kept men of letters as it kept servants' (Habermas, 1989 (1962): 38). While early

forms of patronage encouraged literary production, a serious reading public only emerged in the first decades of the eighteenth century when the publisher replaced the patron as the author's commissioner and promoted the commercial distribution of literary work.

Chapter Three is devoted to the role of Poet Laureate. It defines the nature of the role, how it is perceived in society and within the literary sphere, and questions whether it exerts a positive or negative impact on literature. I felt it was important to analyse this role in detail as it represents one of the most distinguished forms of patronage and one which has persisted for more than three centuries. Chapter Four deals with the role of the writer in residence and focuses in particular on the experiences of poets rather than prose writers. It draws on my own empirical research and the Poetry Places archive which is archived on the Poetry Society website. This chapter asks why writers, particularly poets, engage in residencies and how successful these residencies are in terms of benefits to the writer and the participants. It explores the relationship between poetry and work and, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic production, asks if the presence of poets in the workplace contributes to the democratisation of culture. Chapter Five focuses also on a particular area of engagement for the contemporary writer, namely, the use of writing for therapeutic purposes. An analysis of theory coupled with an investigation of the practical experiences of writers in the field of Writing as Therapy contributes to an evaluation of the importance of this particular literary/therapeutic pursuit.

Chapter Six examines the post-traditional festival as an expression of public culture. It analyses the ways in which the festival can function as a platform for the writer in the public sphere and questions the ways in which festivals can contribute to and enhance cultural production and consumption. Chapter Seven analyses literary

prizes and determines the effects prizes, such as the Man Booker and the T.S. Eliot, may exert on the writing, dissemination and the reception of fiction. This chapter addresses the rise of the Booker and its continuing success against the background of the many literary awards which continue to flourish. Both the Booker and the Eliot may be said to exert a significant influence on the novel and poetry in the twenty-first century.

In Chapter Eight I show that the internet, far from undermining the efforts of the writer, in fact provides a new platform for literary expression. The medium exerts an influence in a number of ways: it frees the writer from the constraints of a publishing contract; it connects the writer with a vast reading audience; it allows for a free and immediate interaction between writer and reader; it promotes and facilitates an economically viable means of publication, and it allows the writer to engage in a new, challenging and creative space within the ever-changing public sphere. This chapter questions how the writer exploits opportunities offered by the Internet and examines the significance of the writer's colonisation of the blogosphere.

Analysing the different roles writers can assume in society is central to this research in order to dismantle prejudices and assumptions, held by many writers and cultural commentators, about the function and effectiveness of the writer in the public sphere. It is accepted that writers may influence thought and culture through their literary works yet their increasing presence in the public sphere is frequently questioned and criticised. This thesis examines the role of the writer in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. It considers the challenges posed and the opportunities offered to the writer by engaging with the public sphere.

Originally conceived as a study of the contemporary writer's residency, its scope expanded to encompass other significant forms of sponsorship or patronage. The modern writer's residency was launched in the mid-1970s with Vernon Scannell's 'disastrous spell as writer in residence on the Berinsfield estate' in Oxfordshire with the help of Arts Council funding (Ravetz, 2001: 227). Such residencies were relatively uncommon until the 1990s when the literary world witnessed an increasing proliferation of residencies not only in educational establishments and cultural institutions, but also in business organisations and a range of public places including parks, ports and prisons.

My early research explored this subject initially through a study of the Poetry Places Scheme (Poetry Society Website Archives) and through my own author interviews (Aherne, 2009). I conducted a number of interviews with poets and novelists to uncover the reasons which prompt writers to engage in residencies. This was an exploratory socio-cultural study which offered an insight into the world of the writer's residency which in turn raised many questions about other forms of contemporary patronage, namely, the literature festival and the prize culture. These individual developments – all phenomena of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century – have combined to exert a powerful influence on the writer and while they offer tangible benefits in terms of income and public profile, they may also be viewed as problematic for the writer. Such difficulties between writer and patron may arise due to conflict of interest, ethical issues, increasing pressures on the writer's time, the limiting effects of a commission or, often, the role transformation from reclusive artist to media figure which these activities necessitate.

Perhaps the most critical of these issues is the concern that a public engagement would have a negative impact on the writer's creativity and creative

output and that their work would be adversely influenced in terms of content and style. Concerns of this nature relating to residencies also extend to the spheres of literary festivals and the prize circuit, presenting the writer with conflicting pressures: the need for solitude versus the media limelight; the importance of finding a balance between time spent on creative work and the practical demands of public engagements; the desire to maintain an artistic if impoverished existence versus the need for financial support, and the mixed pleasures of peer review and public recognition. On winning the Booker prize in 2007, Anne Enright commented wryly on the transformation of her life from stay-at-home writer to international best-selling author, and its numbing effects on the creative impulse:

In 2008 I spent, on a rough count, 64 nights away from my family. Seven of those nights were spent on airplanes, the rest were spent in 30 or so different hotels. I know my fluffy towels from my scratchy, I have learned that much. In fact, I have learned little else.

(Enright, 2009: 10)

Enright's experience is all too familiar to writers who, on achieving a measure of success, are required to metamorphose from reclusive writer to thrusting sales person spending a disproportionate amount of time plying their wares on the increasingly commercialised national and international literary scene.

My research focuses on poets and novelists, rather than playwrights, scriptwriters, biographers and creative non-fiction writers with particular reference to poets. I have chosen to focus on poets and novelists for a number of reasons. Firstly, because I myself write poetry and fiction and this is, therefore, a familiar field. Secondly, the inclusion of other literary forms would have made this thesis unwieldy and too wide-ranging to be manageable within the limitations of a thesis. Thirdly, I

have not addressed the experiences of the playwright because a number of studies have dealt with this area of artistic endeavour (Ansorge, 1975; Craig, 1980; Khan, 1976; Wandor, 1986).

A further area which I do not explore in detail is that of the writer in academia largely because this is a subject which has formed the basis of a number of scholarly studies (Bell and Magrs, 2001; Dawson, 2005; Grimes, 1999; Harper, 2003, 2006, 2007; Kroll, 2006; Kroll and Webb, 2012; Morley and Neilson, 2012; Myers, 2006 (1996); Wandor, 2008). However, I do make some reference to this area in my introduction as a means of contextualising and historicising the role of the contemporary creative writer.

1.2 The Death of the Author and the Rise of the Creative Writer

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide an in-depth study of poststructuralist theory. However, I have made reference to those theorists who are most relevant to the study of contemporary English Literature, the position of the writer in the public sphere and the conflicted role of the contemporary creative writer.

In his essay 'La mort de l'auteur' French theorist, Roland Barthes, no doubt echoing Friedrich Nietzsche's 'God is dead' (Nietzsche, 2001 (1882): 109), pronounced the author dead. It was no coincidence that this essay appeared in 1968 when authority was being challenged all over Europe but particularly in academic institutions in Paris where both Barthes and his colleague Michel Foucault worked. The attack was essentially a political one against the author who was viewed as both product and promoter of the capitalist ideology.

Barthes wished to shift the focus away from the image of literature as ‘tyrannically centred on the author’ and to ‘substitute language itself for the person who until then had been supposed to be its owner’ (Barthes, 1977: 126). The absence of the author not only shifted the focus to the text but also had implications for the manner in which a text was to be read and interpreted, and the relative importance with which that text might be invested. The text was no longer a message from the Author-God but a ‘multidimensional space’ (Claasen, 2012: 5) containing a complex interweaving of words, metaphor, symbol and reference. Interpretation of the writing centred on form and structure and denied any form of authorial meaning. Barthes was ridding literature of the all-controlling Author-God; he reduced the writer to mere copyist, one who is only capable of repeating and mixing previous texts. The displacement of the author was accompanied by ‘the birth of the reader’ (Barthes, 1977: 130) as the reader is the one who explores and interprets the text. The reader, Barthes asserts, has no ‘history, biography, psychology’ (129) which implies that it does not matter who reads the text or what their expectations and background might be.

Foucault’s ‘Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur?’ written in response to Barthes in 1969, equally denies the author their existence and further investigates the implication of the author’s absence. Foucault defines what he refers to as the ‘author-function’ which denotes certain properties of the text – as object of appropriation, authentication, classification, ownership, and attribution – rather than a relation between a text and a person (LaMarque, 1996: 175). Poststructuralist theory raises the importance of the reader/critic and focuses attention on the text rather than on the author. It also follows and supports developments in the U.S. which stated that the author’s intention should not be a standard for judging the quality of a work of art,

therefore literary judgement should be based on the text rather than ‘author psychology’ (Wimsatt and Beardsley, 1954: 18). Reception Theory (Iser, 1978; Jauss, 1982) also had the effect of suppressing the author and promoting the reader and text.

The death of the author has been interpreted as a political attack on the domineering male, white, capitalist writer, and his involvement in racism, sexism and imperialism. Unfortunately for emerging black, female and marginal writers, the author’s death also denied authorship to those who had only recently ‘been empowered to claim it’ (Biriotti and Miller, 1993: 6). The response from feminist writers and critics was varied: some saw it as an opportunity to liberate feminist criticism from the need to link authorial biographical detail to the text (Walker, 1990); a further interpretation posited that poststructuralist theory had only killed off the male (sexist, racist, imperialist) author and, in the process, gave birth to the female author (Miller, 1991). Postcolonial writers equally felt that in the absence of the white, imperialist male their authorial time had come. Thus, feminist and postcolonial writers and critics helped to reinstate the writer at the centre of literary studies.

Furthermore, while the post-structuralists were burying the author, the publishing industry and the media were busy transforming the author into sales promoter and celebrity. It began with the placing of a photo of the author on the cover of their book; soon writers were giving interviews for newspapers and radio, and finally the writer began to appear regularly on television. The author’s trajectory from garret to grave to media glare has furthered the interests of the writer and indeed of the publisher for whom the writer is another pawn in the sales and marketing strategy.

The high profile and increasingly physical presence of the author, at festivals and readings, has, furthermore, delighted the reader who has never truly been comfortable with absentee authorship and has clung over the decades to the romantic ideal of the writer-creator (Aherne, 2011a and 2011b). A combination of the reader's desire to revere the author and the increasing dominance of celebrity culture have resurrected the writer and have cast him/her in the role of 'modern minstrel' (Nijssen, 1994) who wanders from residency to campus, from reading to review panel and from festival to awards ceremony.

The writer's ubiquity has been driven by the publishing industry where competition has become increasingly intense forcing publishers to engage in aggressive marketing strategies in order to secure the highest possible sales. Research into the reception of literary work reveals that literary critical perception is linked in part to an author's visibility (Janssen, 1991). Thus, those writers who are prepared, or are in the privileged position, to raise their profile both in the literary domain and the media generally are likely to achieve greater success in publishing, critical and financial terms.

A further development which raised the profile of the author and challenged the theorists was the writers' move from the garret to the ivory tower. The garret is 'the clichéd writer's retreat' and 'conjures images of a solitary author ekeing out a bohemian existence' (Dawson, 2005: 15). The metaphor assumes that the writing takes place at some remove from people and society before it is then released into the public sphere for critical scrutiny. The traditional garret conjures images of hardship and penury but also of great creativity and has become associated with poets and Grub Street hacks of the mid-seventeenth century. The ivory tower, with its academic research and the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, is also a place

which maintains a lofty position (both literally and figuratively) above and beyond political or worldly concerns and shares much with the writer's garret. However, though the academics were content to analyse, critique and explore the possibilities of literature they have, until relatively recently, been reluctant to share the academic space with the producers of literature.

Following the introduction of the first MA in Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia in 1970, and the first Creative Writing undergraduate degree at Middlesex University in 1991, the teaching of writing in universities became recognised as Creative Writing. The introduction of the Creative Writing degree and the Creative Writing department has led to the coinage of the term 'creative writer' to denote the poet, playwright, novelist or writer and distinguishes these writers from critical or academic writers. The term 'creative' is nonetheless problematic and has become somewhat removed from the realm of artistic endeavour; as Raymond Williams notes, it is now associated with the creative industries to the point where even 'advertising copywriters officially describe themselves as creative' (Williams, 1981 (1976): 74). Indeed, writers never refer to themselves as 'creative', 'creatives' or 'creative writer', preferring the less ambiguous title of poet, playwright or novelist.

The term 'creative writer' in the title of this thesis is used to distinguish the writer from the academic, critical, journalistic or business writer, but it also links the writer to the development of Creative Writing as a practice, process and subject of academic study. Creative Writing can be variously defined as a form of training for would-be writers; a therapeutic form of self-expression, or a way of studying and analysing literature (Wandor, 2008: 5). In relation to its position in universities Wandor also views Creative Writing as a possible solution to the crisis in English

Literature and a challenge to the sterility of literary theory; it is a discipline that has reunited the author with the text and located the author in a prominent position in the academy. Importantly, Creative Writing as an academic subject provides a new form of patronage for professional writers, one which offers financial independence, respect and prestige. It is not however within the scope of this thesis to examine the role of the creative writer in universities as this has been the subject of detailed study by other researchers notably Wandor (2008), Myers (2006), and Dawson (2005).

1.3 The Public Sphere

The public sphere is conceptualized as a space where individuals may interact and communicate, a space where people are free to express and exchange views. The public sphere is a social space with both cultural and political dimensions. The notion of the public sphere is based on studies by Jürgen Habermas who stated that ‘by the “public sphere” we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed ... in which private individuals assemble to form a public body’ (Habermas, 1974: 49). The public sphere occurs when individuals congregate on an equal footing to discuss the issues of the day. Habermas identified the coffee-house of the early eighteenth century as the site where an affluent middle class met to discuss literature and politics, thus creating a new public culture separate from the Court and the Houses of Parliament. The public sphere is noted for its social interaction, tolerance and accessibility. In the eighteenth century the notion of accessibility, by contemporary standards, was very limited as coffee-house society was dominated by men from a wealthy bourgeoisie and excluded women and the working classes. Women, although only from the upper

classes, enjoyed intellectual and cultural autonomy with the salon culture of the eighteenth century.

Habermas noted that the public sphere mediated between the ‘private sphere’ and the ‘Sphere of Public Authority’; he defined the private sphere as comprising ‘civil society in the narrower sense, ... the realm of commodity exchange and social labour’ while the ‘Sphere of Public Authority’ comprised the state and the ruling class (Habermas, 1989 (1962): 30). The public sphere crossed over both realms and ‘through the vehicle of public opinion it put the state in touch with the needs of society’ (31). Conceptually distinct from the state, the public sphere represents a site for ‘the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state’. Distinct also from the official economy, it is ‘a theatre for debating and deliberating, rather than for buying and selling’ (Fraser, 1990: 57). The basic belief in public sphere theory is that political action is steered by the public sphere, and that the only legitimate governments are those that listen to the public sphere: ‘[D]emocratic governance rests on the capacity of and opportunity for citizens to engage in enlightened debate’ (Hauser, 1998: 83).

Habermas was, ultimately, dismissive of the modern public sphere which, he claimed, was destroyed by the same forces that had established it. The ‘famous phrase “structural transformation of the public sphere” refers to the process in which expansion of the public sphere achieved democratic enlargement at the expense of the rational quality of discussion (and thus its ability to identify the best policies for the public interest)’ (Bennett, Grossberg and Morris, 2005: 284). Consumerism, the growth of the capitalist economy and the control of the media for political and commercial purposes all contributed, he claimed, to the erosion of rational-critical debate and, therefore, the corruption and decline of the public sphere. The mass

media, controlled by those in power, seek to influence behaviour whilst concealing their strategic intentions (Habermas, 1992: 24).

When *Structural Transformation* was eventually translated into English in 1989, though accepted as hugely influential, it was subjected to a number of core criticisms which formed the basis of a collection of essays edited by Craig Calhoun (1992) and appeared under the title *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Nancy Fraser suggested that, far from being inclusive, membership of Habermas's bourgeois public sphere was dependent on education and property ownership and therefore excluded a large proportion of the population; Seyla Benhabib's feminist analysis noted that issues that affect women are generally relegated to the private sphere and that therefore women are not fairly represented within the public sphere; Michael Warner challenged the heteronormativity of the public sphere which denies the rights of homosexuals (Warner, 2002), and Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge explored the notion of proletarian or excluded public spheres. These voices of dissent advocated the formation of counterpublics which would give the excluded a voice in the public arena.

Of particular interest to this thesis is Gerard Hauser's proposal that the public sphere should address issues of public interest, and the dialogue they generate, rather than focusing on the identity of groups engaging in discourse: 'emphasizing the rhetoricality of public spheres foregrounds their activity' (Hauser, 1999: 64). This suggests a fragmentation of the public sphere into a number of publics which form around issues. The rhetorical public sphere can unite a number of different groups from various sections of society, bringing them together in a common cause. Hauser's unique rhetorical interpretation of the public sphere 'explores the discursive dimensions of publics, public spheres, and public opinions' (11), the result being a

model of the public sphere that is discourse-based. It finds expression in a number of contemporary manifestations: the public march or demonstration, political graffiti, meetings and direct action organised by environmental groups such as Climate Camp, and internet-based campaigns and issues which are pursued through the channels of blog, Facebook and Twitter streams. I would also include in the rhetorical public sphere public meetings and debates in cultural and educational institutions and at literary festivals all of which offer a platform to contemporary writers enabling them to exert an influence not only on cultural and literary matters but also on issues of socio-political importance.

Writers have exerted an influence on society through the ages not only through their creative output but through their engagement with the public sphere. Not all writers have the inclination or temperament to assume public roles but the literary world has always exerted a huge influence on culture and society. This has found expression in assuming political roles (Andrew Marvell, Joseph Addison, Richard Steel, Hilaire Belloc); writing journals, essays and reviews (Samuel Johnson, William Hazlitt, George Orwell, Christopher Hitchens), taking up professorships at universities (Carol Ann Duffy, Sean O'Brien, Lavinia Greenlaw, Jackie Kay), writing literary reviews and critiques (D.J. Taylor, Colm Toibín, Hilary Mantel, Margaret Atwood), and engaging in social reform and philanthropy (Hannah More, Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, J.K. Rowling).¹

It has been suggested that 'the writer is the person who stands outside society, independent of affiliation and independent of influence. The writer is 'the man or woman who automatically takes a stance against his or her government' (DeLillo in Arensberg, 2005). There is also a notion that poetry has a particularly important role

¹ These examples represent a tiny proportion of the number of writers who engage with the public sphere in these ways.

to play, a view which was endorsed by former poet laureate Andrew Motion who noted that ‘poetry is a quintessentially independent-minded and fundamentally counter-suggestive thing’ and, underlining poetry’s power to ‘speak decisively to power’, further noted that by nature it ‘exists to challenge orthodoxies rather than support them’ (Motion, *The Guardian Online*, 2007). Over the centuries, many poets have engaged very publicly with important issues, not least of all Shakespeare in his dramas, Dryden with his political poetry, Pope with his satires and Tennyson in his unequivocal engagement with the times. Thomas Hardy explored economic inequalities; W.H. Auden raged against the rise of fascism; Ted Hughes wrote passionately about nature and the environment, and, more recently, Tony Harrison and Peter Reading commented on war, class divide and the state of the nation. The current poet laureate, Carol Ann Duffy, is particularly vocal on a range of issues including the teaching of poetry in schools, societal inequalities, and the importance of the English literary heritage. She has also been active in encouraging the community of poets, and instigating and supporting charitable events and societies which fundraise for people in need both nationally and internationally.

A writer is often expected to play a role in society not just as a cultural agent but as an activist or agent for change, giving views on moral, ethical and political issues. Writers in the U.K. often speak out against injustice but this responsibility is particularly apparent under repressive regimes as for instance in the former Soviet Union, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East where many engaged writers experience alienation, incarceration or exile. Of particular significance worldwide was the founding in 1921 of PEN (now PEN International) in London by Catharine Amy Dawson-Scott, a poet, playwright and peace activist. It is an organisation which

celebrates literature and promotes freedom of expression. The PEN International Charter states:

Members of PEN should at all times use what influence they have in favour of good understanding and mutual respect between nations; they pledge themselves to do their utmost to dispel race, class and national hatreds, and to champion the ideal of one humanity living in peace in one world.

PEN International website

English PEN campaigns for reform in a number of areas including libel law reform, securing UK visas for visiting artists and has recently been involved in the Leveson Inquiry. In these ways the contemporary public sphere is a space where writers may influence public opinion, political and legal systems and cultural issues in significant ways.

1.4 Pierre Bourdieu, Cultural Capital and the Literary Field

The term cultural capital is a sociological concept which was first articulated by Pierre Bourdieu in 1973 in his work with Claude Passeron ‘Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction’, and has now gained widespread popularity. The term refers to any non-financial social asset that would facilitate social mobility beyond economic means and examples might include social contacts, education, intellectual ability, style of speech, dress and even physical appearance. Originally, Bourdieu’s research was confined to education but has since been elaborated and developed in terms of other types of capital in *The Forms of Capital* (1986), and with reference to the arts and literature in *Distinction* (1984) and *The Rules of Art* (1996). For Bourdieu, capital acts as a social asset within a system of exchange, and the term is

extended ‘to all the goods material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation’ (cited in Harker, 1990:13) and cultural capital includes ‘the accumulated cultural knowledge that confers power and status’ (Barker, 2004: 37). This thesis refers to Bourdieu’s theories and specific forms of capital including economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital. The latter is associated with any form of cultural production which ‘is oriented to the accumulation of symbolic capital, a kind of ‘economic’ capital denied but recognised, ... and capable of assuring, under certain conditions and in the long term, ‘economic’ profits’ (Bourdieu, 1996: 142)

The concept of ‘the literary field’ (Bourdieu, 1996: 60) has also proved useful in analysing the contemporary literary sphere and exploring literary history.

Bourdieu defined it as a site which is governed by a number of key players – authors, publishers, critics and the general reading public – operating within a specific place and according to a number of rules. The structure of this field is paradoxical as, while it is dominated by market forces, it appears to deny the logic of the commercial market. A work of literature, as a commercial object, is assigned a certain economic value even though its literary merit cannot be defined in economic terms but only according to its symbolic value. Bourdieu demonstrates how the literary field is made up of two distinct spheres, the commercial sphere of the mass market and the restricted sphere in which symbolic value is dominant. Bourdieu notes that the literary field represents ‘an economic world turned upside down’ (81) as the greater the commercial success of a book, the less distinctive literary value it possesses.

The field of cultural production is split by two sets of values, the ‘autonomous’ and the ‘heteronomous’. At the heteronomous pole, artistic production conforms to the norms of any other form of commercial production: the work is

designed for a specific market with the aim of achieving commercial success and would include, according to Bourdieu, genre writing such as thrillers, historical romances, chicklit and ladlit. While this work may achieve economic success it is not considered by the literary world, or anybody else, to contain any kind of artistic merit and therefore cannot accrue ‘cultural capital’. Consecration as an artist belongs to the ‘autonomous’ pole of the field whose principles of production are founded on the notion of ‘art for art’s sake’ and freedom from economic or indeed social influence. Rewards in this part of the field are generally symbolic rather than economic although a small number of successful writers (usually novelists and some playwrights) succeed in attracting economic capital alongside their cultural capital.

Bourdieu is careful not to romanticize the artistic habitus² and notes that writers are professionals who decide what they will write, and how they will present their work, in the interests of maximizing their own gain – whether measured in economic, symbolic or social terms (Bourdieu, 1995: 11). It is now accepted that the contemporary writer, whether poet or novelist, will operate in this manner. While they approach their work with their own vision and aesthetic, they agree to appear at signings, readings and festivals, and to have their work promoted in every available media. As so many writers rely on grants, sponsorship and prizes, they tend to tread a careful line between freedom of expression and self-censorship. ‘Every expression,’ Bourdieu writes, ‘is an accommodation between an *expressive interest* and *censorship* constituted by the field in which that expression is offered’ (1993:90). In other words the contemporary writer must learn how to negotiate the media and commercially driven literary sphere while still satisfying the demands of the field of cultural production.

² Habitus may be defined as a set of socialised norms or tendencies that guide behaviour and thinking.

The essentially paradoxical nature of the literary field gives rise to a number of tensions, contradictions and struggles, not least of all changing and competing definitions of the writer and literature. At the centre of this conflicted space is the writer who must contend with changing expectations, value judgements, competition, the vagaries of the market, and the influence of the publishing world. Writers' choice of genre, themes and styles is also determined to a large degree by their own social and cultural capital gained from their social background, upbringing and *habitus*. In this way they may forge alliances and adopt different roles within the literary field which will afford greater or lesser financial or symbolic reward. As Bourdieu states:

... the unified literary field tends to organize itself according to two independent and hierarchized principles of differentiation: the principal opposition, between pure production, oriented towards the satisfaction of the demands of a wide audience, reproduces the founding rupture with the economic order, which is at the root of the field of restricted production.

(Bourdieu, 1996: 121)

The literary field therefore is more than a space in which literature is produced; it consists also of a number of complex relationships and interactions between the writer, the publisher, the critic and the reading public. Bourdieu explores the 'emergence' of the literary field (47; 113) thus suggesting that its creation was not only a gradual but also a challenging process and was frequently in a state of flux and conflict, 'anarchic and libertarian in appearance' (113):

... this universe ... is the site of a sort of well-regulated ballet in which individuals and groups dance their own steps, always contrasting themselves with each other, sometimes clashing, sometimes dancing to the same tune, then turning their backs on each other in often explosive separation (113).

As Bourdieu notes, the determination to preserve artistic integrity also involved ‘the refusal of all honours’ which would include the rejection of all forms of patronage, the slavery of dedications, appearances at literary festivals, or the acceptance of a literary prize. In this way the writer asserts their ‘principles of autonomy’ (Bourdieu, 1996: 60-61) which, alongside creative production, enshrine the role of the writer within the literary field. Bourdieu speaks of a literary world in which artists ‘emancipate themselves’ and reject ‘any master other than their art’; through this symbolic revolution the artist ‘causes the market to disappear’ (81). Paradoxically, although the market is an essential precondition for the emergence of the literary field the establishment of the field involves a denial of the market itself.

Bourdieu traces this symbolic revolution and the emergence of the literary field to the mid-nineteenth century when Gustave Flaubert and Charles Baudelaire were writing and championing the autonomy of the artist. Revisiting Flaubert’s literary stance gives the contemporary reader ‘a real chance of placing ourselves at the origins of a world whose functioning has become so familiar to us that the regularities and the rules it obeys escape our grasp’ (48). Bourdieu states that, by the end of the nineteenth century, ‘the hierarchy among genres (and author) according to specific criteria of peer judgement is almost exactly the inverse of the hierarchy according to commercial success’ (114).

While both Bourdieu and Viala comment exclusively on the French literary context, and Bourdieu notes that the emergence of the literary field is only evident after the French Revolution, their research and theories apply also to other cultural spaces. The views and philosophies expressed by Flaubert and Baudelaire find their counterpart in the English Romantic movement in the period from about 1780 to 1848. While vestiges of this symbolic revolution persist into the twenty-first century

the literary field in the UK (and elsewhere) has become increasingly complex and tensions between the commercial and the literary have become even more acute. It has become acceptable for all writers, including poets, to engage with the market particularly as both literary work and writer have become a kind of commodity.

Bourdieu insists that ‘one cannot fully understand cultural practices unless “culture”, in the restricted, normative sense of ordinary usage, is brought back into “culture” in the anthropological sense’ (1996a: 1). However, in his work, culture is rarely aligned with its anthropological definition and is generally synonymous with high culture only, that is, ‘the socially valorised symbolic productions which belong to the domain of arts and letters’ (Cuche, 1996: 81).

1.5 Conclusions

The creative writer faces a number of fresh challenges in the twenty-first century in the public sphere. Writers must embrace these challenges not only as a means of finding gainful employment but as a way of defining new identities for themselves within a complex and changing cultural sphere. In so doing, they may establish new modes of creative expression and redefine their own role within the cultural, social and public spheres. The literary sphere has been redefined by the theorists, academics and the media, a fact which offers the writer both challenges and opportunities.

Contextualising the role of the author in this way entails a consideration not simply of the current contexts within which the creative writer operates but also an appreciation of the historical roles which have preceded yet shaped and formed the

contemporary status. The following chapter explores this historical context in some detail.

Chapter 2 - A History of Patronage

There mark what ills the Scholar's Life assail,
Toil, Envy, Want, the Patron and the Jail.

Samuel Johnson, 'The Vanity of Human Wishes', 1749

2.1 Introduction

The contemporary writer may appreciate Samuel Johnson's wry observations on the writing life and his scornful equation of imprisonment with dependence on a patron. Today royal and aristocratic patronage has not entirely disappeared but has been reinterpreted and replaced by commercial sponsorship and government grants, through the Arts Council, in the form of residencies, fellowships, prizes and bursaries, and a thriving publishing industry. Johnson was fiercely proud of his self-sufficiency and lack of dependence on a patron yet, without the development of the book trade, he would not have been in a position to enjoy such independence.

Writing in 1925, Virginia Woolf reflected on the changing pattern of patronage over the centuries:

But who, then, is ... the patron who will cajole the best out of the writer's brain and bring to birth the most varied and vigorous progeny of which he is capable? ... The Elizabethans, ... chose the aristocracy to write for, and the playhouse public. The eighteenth-century patron was a combination of coffee-house wit and Grub Street bookseller. In the nineteenth century the great writers wrote for the half-crown magazines and the leisured classes.

(206)

This chapter presents a brief history of the patronage system, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. Paul Korshin notes that patronage is frequently viewed, pejoratively, as ‘an unfair external influence responsible ... for the success of a person whose merit is slight’ that can involve ‘favouritism, nepotism, special favours, and even moral scandal’ (Korshin, 1974: 453). In any era the patron-client relationship raises questions about the function and dynamics of patronage. Is the system beneficial to writers and literature? Do both patron and writer benefit from it? What can the wider public gain from such an arrangement?

In England there had long been a tradition within the court of employing a bard or scôp whose role it was to recite stories and poetry, for the entertainment of the monarch and the aristocracy. This practice evolved over the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries into a more formal patronage arrangement similar to that employed in Renaissance Italy, although on a somewhat less lavish scale. It was not until the later part of the sixteenth century that the nobility began to take literary patronage to heart at which time it ruled every aspect of society. The antechambers of the court swarmed with supplicants pleading for favours, money or positions. A poet hoping for a sinecure or a dedication fee would have to compete alongside everyone else and would be acutely aware of the fact that his services were inessential.

Patronage in Elizabethan and Jacobean England dominated political, religious and academic life and thought. All of the arts – painting, architecture, music, literature – were affected by the culture of patronage and it exerted an influence on every sphere of life (Lytle and Orgel, 1981). The system determined the ability of individual poets and writers to make a living but also had a significant influence on

how they lived their lives and how they interacted with other writers and benefactors. The patron in many cases was also dependent on a successful patron/client relationship as a patron's position in society could often be enhanced by the success of his or her client. The patron relied on the poet's skill in fashioning the most appropriate image of the patron not just in their life-time but for future generations. Securing a respected niche within the patronage system meant more than simply ensuring a reasonable income for the artist and prestige for the patron; it meant participating fully in the life of the time. In his work on Ben Jonson, Robert Evans noted that patronage during the English Renaissance was 'more than a matter of economic give-and-take' and that in fact it was 'basic to the period's life and *psychology* (author's emphasis) and crucially shaped Jonson's attitudes and experience' (Evans, 1989: 9).

But, how well did patronage work as a means of survival for the creative writer and how did the patron/client relationship function? Before the sixteenth century, literary patronage was the only means by which the creative writer could hope to make a living and in fact it provided a significant stimulus for the production and dissemination of literature (Urquhart, 1985: 2). Patronage arrangements were relatively straightforward and generally involved the patron, usually a member of the aristocracy or wealthy classes, offering 'financial help, payment in kind, or more indirect assistance' in exchange for 'dedications, entertainment, and prestige' (Drabble, 2000: 771). Many patrons were, furthermore, motivated by more pious and altruistic reasons and, like the fifteenth-century Sir Miles Stapleton, commissioned works 'to profyte hem that schuld come after hym' (Manzalaoui, 1977: 114). Patrons were generally, although not exclusively, noblemen; much has been written about the active and influential role that noble women played as literary patrons (Legge, 1963:

144). Work commissioned by patrons included writings in Latin and the vernacular, reference books and, often, devotional treatises on the lives of the saints (Lucas, 1982: 230).

While a number of books remained in sole ownership it was more usual to find that they would be circulated amongst friends and acquaintances as ‘books were scarce and it was ordinary good manners to share their contents among a group’ (Clanchy, 1979: 198). This apparent altruism was undoubtedly mixed with a measure of personal vanity. If a book, with a flattering dedication, was circulated amongst learned members of the aristocracy, a patron could flaunt their education, sophistication, status and literary good taste. Certain works, particularly historical, ancestral romances, could be used for propaganda purposes and enhance the standing of the patron and their family. It is evident therefore that literary patronage had a controlling and limiting effect on the type of literature produced as it was the patron rather than the writer who chose the topic of the work and the manner in which it should be written (Lucas, 1982: 230-23; Bennett, 1952: 5). The choice of writer was also largely under the control of the patron. Commissioned writers were usually known to the patron either because they were already part of the household, often fulfilling the role of chaplain or secretary, or because they had written similar works for friends or relatives of the patron. The benefits to the patron were obvious but the writer also enjoyed a number of advantages. Apart from the pleasure derived from writing, rewards came in the form of an annuity, promotion or ‘through the gift of clerical livings’ (Drabble, 2000: 771). Patronage also offered opportunities for contact with a wider audience with the possibility of further commissions (Lucas, 1982: 237 - 240).

In the course of the fifteenth century literary patronage underwent a number of significant changes. Most significant of these was the widening of the literate classes to include country gentry and the upper middle class who began not only to purchase books but also to act as patrons themselves. The growth in the book-owning market 'supported an increase in the commercial production of books, encouraged the production of cheaper books, [and] multiplied the demand for copies of vernacular texts' (Urquhart, 1985: 6). The growing demand for literature also gave rise to the gentleman amateur writer, such as Sir Richard Roos, Quixley and Peter Idley, who had little need of personal patronage. Literary patronage also became a more public activity as 'individuals commissioned works from authors (and printers) who were known for these activities outside the immediate circle of the patron' (McGoldrick, 1985: 155). Furthermore, no doubt encouraged by the growing literary market, writers began to take the initiative and actively sought out patrons for their work (Lucas, 1982: 239-40).

The patron-client relationship in operation up to the nineteenth century, on the surface at least, appeared to be an egalitarian exchange founded on mutual respect and admiration yet many of its beneficiaries appeared less than satisfied with its obligations and demands. Francis Bacon, commenting on friendship and the nature of the patron-client relationship, noted that there was 'little friendship in the worlde, and least of all betweene equals' and that in fact the only form of friendship that was in evidence existed between 'superior and inferior, whose fortunes may comprehend the one the other' (Bacon, 1966 [1597]: 38). This somewhat pessimistic view reveals much about the patron-client relationship which was marked by a power differential, competition and 'the pursuit of self-interest under the guise of disinterested devotion' (LaBreche, 2010: 83).

The term 'patronage' may be defined in a number of ways: the support given by a patron; the power to control appointments to office; a condescending manner; the regular custom attracted by a business, or, in the context of Roman history, the rights and duties or position of a patron (OED, 2006: 1290 – 1291). All of these definitions imply both a form of exchange and a hierarchical system. It would be simplistic to view patronage as a benign policy designed to encourage the development of the arts. In fact, patronage of the arts has always been a reflection of the political power relations in operation in any era. Sharon Kettering notes that patronage is 'an indirect form of power', a relationship through which the patron 'influences the behaviour of his clients' and ensures their compliance because of 'their indebtedness for past favours and fear of future reprisals' (Kettering, 1986: 3). A client is very clearly defined (in ancient Rome) as one who is totally dependent, a plebeian under the protection of a patrician. This meaning is derived from the Latin 'cliens' or 'client', a variant of 'cliens' or 'heeding', from 'cluere' meaning 'hear or obey.' The term originally denoted a person under the protection and patronage of another (Oxford Dictionary of English).

The etymology of the word 'patron' is derived from the Latin *patronus* 'protector of clients, defender', from *pater* 'father' (OED, 2006: 1290) which would suggest that patronage is firmly linked with patriarchal systems. While men may have dominated patronage practices from the start studies have nonetheless revealed that several aristocratic women were enthusiastically involved in the patronage of writers over the centuries and were particularly active in the Jacobean period. Amongst this group of women, mostly friends of the Queen, was Lucy, Countess of Bedford whose hospitality and gratuities were acknowledged in poems by Jonson

and Donne. Lady Mary Wroth, Lady Susan Vere and Elizabeth, Countess of Rutland all offered friendship and patronal support to the poets of the day (Parry, 2002: 133).

Patrons of literature and the arts belonged predominantly to the royal family and the aristocratic milieu, but might also include ministers and royal officers. In return for their patronage they received a number of different services from the writer. Men of letters composed occasional verse with elaborate dedications to their patrons and served as ‘literary advisors ... guiding their protectors in matters of taste’ (Shoemaker, 2007: 6). Their duties might also include tutoring children, as in the case of Samuel Daniel, fulfilling the role of secretary, like Edmund Spenser, or performing the duties of a spin doctor, as Dryden did for Charles II.

What did the writer stand to gain from the arrangement? The most obvious form of reward was financial, the one-off gift which might range from £2 to £3 (in the sixteenth century) ‘for an acceptable dedication’ (Parry, 2002: 125). Ben Jonson managed to derive a fairly regular income from James I for his court masques for which he was paid almost £40 a time (129). These occasional payments, however welcome, could not be relied upon to provide financial stability and the penurious writer would ideally aim to secure some form of pension, church living or minor office at court. John Donne took holy orders in 1615 and in 1621 the King named him Dean of St Paul’s, while Jonathan Swift was offered the post of Dean of St Patrick’s in 1713. In some cases a patron’s generosity was expressed through hospitality which might extend to invitations to dinner and even an offer of residence, laying the foundations, I would suggest, for the notion of ‘writer in residence’. The Romantic poets Keats and Coleridge relied on friends and patrons for such support. Perhaps, most important of all, were the social networking

opportunities offered through an acquaintance with a powerful and influential patron. This type of support offered entry into cultural salons where ‘wit and refined manners’ (Shoemaker, 2007: 10) were valued above class distinctions and offered writers the possibility of social advancement. Parry also notes that for patronage poets ‘the real attraction was the access to a setting where wit was valued and writers could display their talents and exchange opinions with the more cultivated members of the Jacobean court’ (Parry, 2002: 133).

The unwritten rules of the patronage arrangement demand that the client, or writer, demonstrate their loyalty and service in exchange for reward and advancement. These definitions underline the essentially unequal, yet personal and reciprocal, nature of the relationship. The patron is in a position to offer material benefits and in return the client pledges loyalty and service, and, in the case of the client-writer, prestige, culture, or in contemporary terminology, cultural capital. The varying and conflicting interpretations of cultural patronage provide opportunities for further detailed study which is not possible within the scope of this thesis. However, I challenge the notion that the patron-client relationship was ever transparent and altruistic and would suggest that the connection has always been complex and political and mirrored the power relations of the period. As Griffin notes ‘authors and patrons ... jockeyed for position and for authority’ (1996: 11) which would be indicative of a much more difficult power dynamic. On the surface, both patron and client feigned disinterest yet beneath their declarations of loyalty and devotion lurked an unease borne of dependence and insincerity. In such a context, the writer’s sense of literary autonomy is inevitably at odds with a patron-client relationship which requires an alignment of patron and client interests and demands. These features have prompted theorists to explore the equivocal nature of a relationship which is marked

by control on the one hand and discretion on the other, ‘a tacitly coercive and vitally interested process predicated on a fiction that it is free and disinterested’ (Montrose, 1980: 433). Piers Brown suggests that there was a potential inversion of authority between patron and client as all too often the patron might wish to appropriate the work of the writer and thus relied heavily on the loyalty of the ‘servant/writer’ who could potentially expose the patron to ridicule: ‘The implied secretarial author of the *Catalogus*³ abuses this trust by slyly purveying nonsensical books to his ignorant patron suggesting the frustration experienced by scholars who were condemned to subordinate positions despite their superior learning’ (Brown, 2010: 186). Despite outward appearances of sincerity, deception and dissimulation were recurring features of the patronage relationship. Even under privileged circumstances, as experienced by Jonson, Dryden and even Donne, the patronage game is always precarious and the exchange imbalanced: ‘the patron supplies the poet with food, shelter, wine, money, and influence, and in return, receives a poem which, in most cases, is described as a gateway to immortality’ (Smith 1995:33).

2.2 Theories of Patronage

Who made a lamp of Berenice’s hair?
 Or lifted Cassiopea in her chair?
 But only poets, rapt with rage divine?
 And such, or my hopes fail, shall make you shine.

Ben Jonson, *Rutland II.53-64*

³ *The Courtier’s Library* or *Catalogus Librorum Aulicorum*, is a satire on the patron-client relationship, written in 1650 by John Donne.

Patronage has been theorised in a number of different ways. It has been described as an expression of harmony between patron and artist (Mousnier, 1979; Fumaroli, 2002) while others highlight the importance of self-interest and competition (Kettering, 1986). It has been argued that the system enhanced the autonomy of writers (Jouhaud, 2000); that it represented a ‘site of contestation’ (Griffin, 1996: 11) and functioned as a source of both tension and inspiration, and, furthermore, that the relationship was a productive one even when, or because, it was challenged by writers (Shoemaker, 2007).

Conversely it has also been suggested that patronage acted as an obstacle to the creation of a literary field as defined by Pierre Bourdieu (See Chapter 1) and developed by Alain Viala (Viala, 1985: 51 - 84). Viala draws a distinction between two different types of patronage: *clientélisme* and *mecenat*⁴ where the former relates to non-literary duties (such as undertaking the role of tutor or secretary) and the latter represents the support of an artist for their artistic endeavours. *Clientélisme* focuses on service whereas *mecenat* may only be defined in aesthetic terms and represents the exchange of symbolic capital between patron and client. The writer acknowledges and celebrates the power of the patron and in return the patron ensures the writer receives a measure of public recognition. While Viala attempts to draw a distinction between the material and the symbolic, and suggests that patronage practices were either exclusively one or the other, it is obvious that both old-style and contemporary patronage practices are an expression of financial, cultural and symbolic exchange. In practice, as is demonstrated in examples given later in this chapter, attitudes to patronage, from both sides of the arrangement, are marked by a paradoxical mixture of idealism and cynicism.

⁴ Maecenas (c.70-8 BC) Roman Statesman, trusted advisor of Augustus and notable patron of poets such as Virgil and Horace (OED, 2006: 1054).

Viala also advances the view that patronage has operated as an obstacle to the ‘birth of the writer’, that through its manipulative nature, patronage negates its autonomy in the literary field. The patronage system only encourages writers who conform to the norms established by the ruling hierarchy and works actively to censor and suppress all other writing which might challenge or undermine authority. Only patrons, those who hold financial and political capital, possess the power of consecration. In this way the autonomy of the literary field generally, and the writer’s individual autonomy, are also denied which implies that many talented writers may have been overlooked, that a number of competent but compliant and uninspiring writers may have been promoted to positions of prominence and furthermore that talented writers may have been forced to express themselves in a manner which complied with their masters’ wishes but stunted their own creativity. A number of contemporary authors are also dubious about certain forms of patronage, such as residencies and grants, which they claim tend to stunt creativity (Appendix 2).

Robert Evans (1989: 39 – 40) sees in Jonson’s patronage poetry only insecurity and manipulation in that it plays on ‘his superiors’ insecurities’ and ‘threaten[s] their reputation and credit.’ Colleen Shea notes that a talented and skilful writer is in a position to negotiate the power relations successfully and secure a positive outcome for both parties (Shea, 2003: 199). Taking Jonson as an example she demonstrates how, through his works and epistolary dedications, he succeeds in asserting the poet’s symbolic capital, suggesting at times that it is equal to, or perhaps often greater than, that held by the patron. Conscious of the writer’s need for patronage, the poet’s pride and latent sense of superiority encourage him to take control of negotiations. A particular strategy he employs is that of patron construction. In other words, he creates the notion of the ideal patron and encourages

his patrons – the Countess of Rutland, Lady Aubigny – to attempt to live up to that ideal. If they fail as patrons they will ‘lie lost in their forgotten dust’ (*Rutland* II: 40); if they succeed as good patrons they can command respect and admiration in life and ultimately achieve a form of immortality: ‘It is the muse, alone, can raise to heaven’ (*Rutland* II: 41).

Roland Mousnier, in his influential account of nobiliary patronage in early modern France, stressed the symbolic and affective aspects of patronage over the material (Mousnier, 1979). The relationship between master and dependant is ‘not a mere service relationship’ but one which requires ‘total devotion’ on one side and ‘a pledge of affection’ on the other. Mousnier’s romantic vision of patronage relationships, however, is easily challenged. The apparent display of respect and affection expressed through dedications and other forms of panegyric expression do not reflect the reality of patronage but present a ‘superficial veneer behind which historical players hid their real motivations and feelings’ (Shoemaker, 2007: 3). A number of factors, he notes, contributed to the gradual erosion of the patronage system in France: the appropriation of patronage networks by the autocratic Louis XIV, the philosophy of the Enlightenment which encouraged freedom of spirit and independent thought and, more recently, the influence of capitalism which commodifies both literature and the writer and replaces the patron with the market (107). While the influence of Louis XIV cannot be said to have exerted a great influence on aristocratic patronage practices in England, the Enlightenment and the rise of capitalism contributed to its transformation and demise.

Sharon Kettering also challenges Mousnier’s vision and sees patronage as a practical business exchange dressed up in courtly language of ‘loyalty’ and ‘affection’. In practice, writers rarely pledged absolute loyalty to one single patron;

for reasons of self-interest ‘multiple loyalties were not uncommon’ (Kettering, 1986: 9). It is perhaps convenient for the twenty-first century reader or writer to be dismissive of these declarations of fidelity and admiration. However, given the prevalence of such practices and recurrent linguistic hyperbole so typical of courtly patronage it is likely that these behaviours were accepted as the norm and embraced by those directly involved. Declarations and pledges of loyalty no doubt had a major significance within a system that lacked any other code of conduct, or any formal guarantees. Shoemaker notes that patronage, from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, is best understood ‘as a transitional, hybrid form of social organization ... between feudalism ... and the modern capitalist state’ (Shoemaker, 2007: 4). Yet because of its unpredictability the system was characterised by insecurity and competition in which a number of clients would vie for the favours of a single patron or a client might play off potential patrons against each other. In the absence of an economic and legal framework governing the production and dissemination of literature, attracting the attention of a wealthy patron was the only way of making a living.

2.3 Expressions of Loyalty, Promises of Protection

Many great works of literature were produced during Elizabeth I’s reign. The political success and economic prosperity encouraged cultural activity and many of the great writers – Christopher Marlowe, Edmund Spenser, Francis Bacon and William Shakespeare – flourished. Their works referred to the Queen and they enjoyed the patronage of members of Elizabeth’s court. Sir Francis Walsingham acted as literary patron to Thomas Watson, Thomas Nashe, George Chapman and

Christopher Marlowe. Other important patrons included William Cecil (Lord Burghley), Robert Dudley (Earl of Leicester) and Sir Philip Sidney. In the sixteenth century, while poetry continued to circulate, copied by scribes or by readers into personal anthologies, there was no author's copyright or royalties and no freedom of the press. Books had to be approved by the archbishop of Canterbury or privy councillors before being licenced for sale and the notion of writing as a professional career was non-existent. Strict censorship laws meant that religious rather than secular works were more prevalent. Within such conditions, writers were dependent on wealthy and influential patrons for support and protection and in turn patrons supported writers in the hope of having their achievements, intellect and generosity praised (Kettering, 1986).

With the suppression of the monasteries and turmoil in the church in the 1530s, patronage of writers became almost exclusively secular (Parry, 2002: 117). In the early Tudor period, a writer was content to have a powerful name at the head of their work in exchange for protection and a share in symbolic capital yet they rarely expected much financial reward. Most authors had a post in life and an affiliation with a great household. Dedications were mostly expressions of loyalty and gratitude yet, nonetheless, writers were not necessarily guaranteed future favours. In early Elizabethan times, because of strict censorship laws, writers needed the endorsement of a titled person to show not only that the work had some merit but also to demonstrate that their writing was unlikely to cause offence on religious or political grounds. This was a considerable concern throughout the sixteenth century when writing, purchasing or owning a book was to court danger and to raise suspicion; writers relied upon the protection of a powerful patron 'as a sufficient answer to accusations political or moral' (Sheavyn, 1967 [1909]: 27).

During Elizabeth's reign the ties between patron and protégé were weakened and even those few who enjoyed lifelong patronage, such as Roger Ascham, Samuel Daniel and Ben Jonson, did not have their needs totally satisfied through the patronage system. A year before he died, Ascham wrote a begging letter to the Queen requesting as little as £20 a year for each of his sons after his death. Jonson often complained about the system to which he was tied and was driven more than once to selling part of his library in order to raise much-needed funds (13). Samuel Daniel seems to have been largely content with the conditions of his position, complaining only that, as tutor to various families of the nobility, he was 'constrained to live with children' when he should be 'writing the actions of *men*' (13).

In later Elizabethan times, with increased stability, the aristocracy began to take greater responsibility for learning and writing in all fields. Many aristocratic men and women felt strongly about the condition of English letters and saw it as something of a national duty to encourage writers of promise (Parry, 2002: 135). Around 1581, Sir Philip Sidney wrote his *Apologie for Poetrie* in which he drew attention to the paucity of writing in England when compared with that in France and Italy. He went to great lengths to demonstrate the importance of poetry and writing generally through the ages and within the greatest civilisations, even mentioning 'our neighbour Countrey Ireland, where truly learning goes verie bare, yet are their Poets held in devout reverence' (Sidney, 1868 (1595): 22).

This prompted English men and women of eminent families to support talented writers as a matter of patriotic pride. Along with Sir Philip Sidney, Lord Burghley (William Cecil) and the Earl of Leicester were influential patrons of the

time. Sidney stands out as a great literary patron counting Edmund Spenser, Giordano Bruno and Richard Hackluyt among his protégés. Some ninety books were dedicated to Cecil including William Camden's *Britannia* (1586), a topographical and historical survey of Great Britain and Ireland. It was written in Latin so that it could be read both at home and in Europe and it was a work that established the identity of the nation (Parry, 2002: 122).

Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, encouraged a broad range of scholarship and learning and became Chancellor of Oxford University in 1564. He was a generous patron of scholars rather than literary writers, in particular of those with a more puritanical bent, and received many dedications from Robert Greene, John Florio and Edmund Spenser. Sir Philip Sidney, though not hugely wealthy, was dedicated to the promotion of art and literature and was himself a poet. His sister Mary, wife of William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, continued the patronage of many of his literary protégés after his early death in 1586. Her son William Herbert, third Earl of Pembroke, under the influence of his tutor, Samuel Daniel, followed in his mother's and uncle's footsteps and became patron to a number of poets and dramatists including William Browne, Philip Massinger, John Florio, John Davison, George Chapman and John Taylor.

Although not a major literary patron, Elizabeth I nonetheless received numerous dedications. John Foxe dedicated his *Actes and Monuments* (1563) to Elizabeth I and to Jesus Christ, thus paying tribute to the Queen's undisputed elevated status and perhaps acknowledging that the reward would be spiritual rather than financial. Spenser dedicated his *Faerie Queene* to Elizabeth, but also to sixteen other courtiers from whom he could expect little more than a mere nod of approval. The dramatist, John Lyly, petitioned Elizabeth in the hope of some tangible

recompense but to no avail (Parry, 2002: 125). Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex, poet, masque-writer and artist, was also the subject of many dedications. The Earl of Southampton, another of Shakespeare's friends and patrons, was eulogized by many writers including George Chapman, Joshua Sylvester, George Wither and Henry Lok (Sheavyn, 1967 [1909]: 17).

In practical terms, patronage took many different forms and often consisted of an annuity. Ben Jonson received £100 from the crown, and Prince Henry, son of James I, provided Michael Drayton with a pension of £10 and Joshua Sylvester with one of £20. Some patrons bestowed one-off gifts of money but this was never sufficient to provide a decent living. In medieval times some patrons sponsored their protégés through university with the purpose of directing them towards a worthwhile career in the church. Another method of bestowing patronage was through some official appointment such as secretary, clerk or tutor. While such appointments offered a means of subsistence they were not always sinecures and often left the writer little time to engage in literary pursuits, a complaint voiced by Spenser who for some time was made secretary to Lord Grey of Wilton. Another form of patronage common at the time was the practice of offering hospitality to the author. Sir Robert Drury opened his doors to John Donne and his wife and family, the Earl of Leicester played host to Spenser, and Ben Jonson enjoyed a five-year residency with Esmé Stuart, Lord d'Aubigny (19).

What becomes clear from this picture of patronage is that it was never efficient enough to support writers and certainly constituted an insufficient means of supporting all writers. Many were quick to express their discontent and Thomas Nashe's words sum up the feeling of his fellow writers:

All in veine I sate up late and rose early, contended with the cold and conversed with scarcitie; for all my labours turned to loss, my vulgar muse was despised and neglected, my paines not regarded, or slightly rewarded, and I myselve (in prime of my best wit) laid open to povertie. Whereupon ... I accused my fortune, railed on my patrons ...

(Nashe, 1885 [1592]: 5)

Also, the poet described in *Pilgrimage to Parnassus* spent many years in study hoping eventually to meet with ‘some good Mecaenus that liberalie would reward’ (Breton, 1592).

Changes taking place in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century provided new opportunities for the writer. The primitive beginning of a publishers’ market, the growing accessibility of books, renewed interest in literature in the court and the popularity of drama offered ‘alluring prospects of fame and profit to writers’ (Sheavyn, 1967 [1909]: 20). Those who took their role seriously as patrons of the arts were few and far between and were not always wealthy enough to provide sufficient support. The newly wealthy rising middle or merchant class did not see the need to take on these obligations or were simply indifferent to literature. It is not surprising that dedications to patrons at this time reveal some desperation, excessive servitude and more references to a patron’s charity than to their good taste or judgement. The dedication to the patron has produced some of the most oleaginous writing ever committed to paper and frequently reflects the writer’s dependence and need for protection. Spenser’s dedication of *Colin Clout’s Come Home Again* to Sir Walter Raleigh reveals a need for protection against detractors and censors:

The which I humbly beseech you to accept in part of paiment of the infinite debt in which I acknowledge myself bounden to you, for your singular favours, and sundrie good turns ...and with your

good countenance protect against the malice of evill mouthes, which are alwaies wide open to carpe at and misconstrue my simple meaning.

(Spenser, Early English Books Online, 1595)

Nicholas Breton dedicated *The Pilgrimage to Paradise* to the Countess of Pembroke in very elaborate terms:

Right noble Lady, whose rare vertues the wise no less honour, then the learned admire, and the honest serve: how shall I the object of fortune unto the object of honour presume to offer so simple a present, as the poetical discourse of a poor pilgrims travaile? I know not how but, with falling at the feete of your favour, to crave pardon for my imperfection.

(Breton, Early English Books Online, 1592)

Philemon Holland dedicated his translation of Pliny's *Naturall Historie* to Sir Robert Cecil thus:

The rare wisdom, justice and eloquence which concur in your person like the severall beauties of the rubie, amethyst, and emeraud, meeting in one faire opal, giveth a lovely lustre to your other titles no lesse than if the nine Muses and Apollo represented naturally that rich agat of K. Pyrrhus were inserted therein.

(Holland, Early English Books Online, 1601)

By contrast, although there is 'much contentious matter in them', Ben Jonson's many dedications differ greatly from the norm for the period and he 'never disgraces himself by abject flattery' (Wheatley, 1887: 70). He praised his deserving patrons in honest terms however and, in a radical move, dedicated *The New Inn* to the reader:

‘If thou be such, I make thee my patron, and dedicate the piece to thee’ (Jonson, 1984 [1629]: 48). Enjoying increasing popularity he is able to show increasing confidence in his own literary and diplomatic powers. He writes in disparaging tones about the noble Blackfriars audience who ‘dislike all, but mark nothing ... and by their confidence of rising between the acts ... make affidavit to the whole house of their not understanding one scene’ (49).

John Donne’s dedications generally and in particular to Sir Robert Drury, on the death of Drury’s daughter, reveal a kind of desperation. It is quite likely that Donne did not even know the girl (Drabble, 2000, 291) but had accepted the commission purely for monetary gain. In the sixteenth century a writer could hope to receive about forty shillings for a dedication, but even sums as little as half-a-crown were offered (Wheatley, 1887: 27). Many writers – Spenser, Jonson, Nashe – wrote of the humiliation they endured when forced to seek patronage in such a debased way, ‘to fawne, to crouch, to waite, to ride, to ronne’ as Spenser put it in ‘Mother Hubbard’s Tale’, a satire on the abuses of the Church and the evils of the court (Spenser, 1869 (1591): 521)

The system of patronage at the time encouraged an attitude of servility and, in some instances, fraud which Dekker enjoys exposing in his work *Lanthorn and Candlelight*. It was not beneath certain writers to have pamphlets published, often filched from other writers’ works, and then to dedicate each copy to a different patron in order to obtain as many fees as possible. Dekker describes how the fraudsters operated, travelling from one country house to the next ‘Like Pedlars’ selling their wares, and concluded that ‘to give books now’s an occupation/ One

booke hath seven score patrons' (Dekker, 1958 [1609]: 237). Wheatley exposes the hypocrisy and double-dealing typical of patronage practices at that time:

Sometimes writers found out that they had dedicated their works to the wrong people, and therefore cancelled their praises or transferred them to new men. Thus dedications to Cromwell were naturally not in favour after the Restoration. Bishop Walton's magnificent Polyglot Bible continues to be a monument of the political changes of the seventeenth century, and there still remain republican as well as loyal copies.

(1887:32)

2.4 Patronage and Patriotic Pride

The situation improved somewhat under James I who was much more responsive to authors than Elizabeth had been. James was interested in books, enjoyed the company of literary men and considered himself something of a poet and writer on religious matters (Parry, 2002: 128). Under his rule, court life flourished and was more open than in Elizabeth's time, and he welcomed poets, playwrights, philosophers and theologians into his court. Both he and Queen Anne enjoyed the theatre: James supported Shakespeare's theatre company The King's Men while Queen Anne encouraged the new art form of the court masque, furthering the 'stormy but fruitful collaboration' between Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones (Drabble, 2000: 539). The opulent masques were clearly not to everyone's taste and moralists noted a decline in manners in the Jacobean court where 'low revelry, foolery, and horseplay became common' (Sheavyn, 1967 [1909]: 195). Amusingly, particularly in the context of contemporary literary practice, Sheavyn displays a narrow and conservative view of literature. The lowering standards at court led to 'a decline in the literary taste of authors' citing, by way of example, the work of John Donne

whose writing ‘though full of genius, shows a reckless disregard of beauty and good taste’ (195). John Donne’s troubled career exemplified the uncertainties and failures of a literary life in Elizabethan and Jacobean times. However, Donne came to recognise the need for royal patronage and ultimately accepted the position of Dean of St Paul’s in 1621. It has also been suggested that patronage of the arts in Jacobean times was probably championed more by Queen Anne of Denmark rather than her husband (Barroll, 2001: 149). Among her protégés were John Florio, Samuel Daniel, Inigo Jones, the Dutch painter Paul van Somer and, of course, Ben Jonson. Her special interest in court masques meant that she supported a range of creative artists from poets and musicians to prop designers and tailors. Nonetheless, James was an important patron of the theatre his most significant act of patronage being the translation of the bible.

Prince Henry, in his short life, embraced the role of patron, building up an entourage of writers and artists who would project his chosen self-image as a Renaissance Prince in the Italian style: soldier, scholar, collector, connoisseur and Christian. He employed George Chapman, a political dramatist and translator of Homer. He also nurtured the talents of the poet Michael Drayton and generally inspired and welcomed the dedication of books that reflected his ambitions and enhanced his image in the public eye (Parry, 2002: 131).

The reign of Charles I saw a relative decline in literary patronage. Parry offers some explanation for this by suggesting that there were few outstanding patrons and less need for formal patronage arrangements as many of the significant writers of the time were gentlemen of private means or had some form of employment, often in the church (Parry, 2002: 136). It became more common for a writer to dedicate a book to a friend, usually of higher social status than the author.

Dedications tended to celebrate the shared values of author and dedicatee rather than making reference to the dedicatee's generosity or kindness. William Davenant dedicated his volume of poems *Madagascar* (1638) to Endymion Porter, a courtier and member of the landed gentry, and to Henry Jermyn, 1st Earl of St Albans. Increasingly, volumes of poetry appeared without any dedication including the posthumous volumes of Donne's *Poems* (1633), Herbert's *The Temple* (1633), Thomas Randolph's poems published in 1638 and Thomas Carew's in 1640. The practice of dedicating works to important statesmen declined. Fewer books were offered to Charles I than had been to James I while Archbishop Laud of Canterbury only received four or five a year during his period in office (1633-45) and very few were dedicated to Sir Thomas Wentworth during the 1630s (Williams, 1962: 37, 104, 114, 196). Even Philip Herbert, the Earl of Pembroke, whose family had been famed for their literary patronage, received fewer dedications than he had as heir apparent in Jacobean times. If in James's time there had been a trend for cultivating budding writers as a means of enhancing one's cultural and social capital, this seemed to go out of fashion under Charles I. One of the reasons for this could be that Charles was far more interested in the visual arts than in literature. In addition to this, theatre audiences were growing, therefore theatre companies and dramatists could survive more independently in the open market and had less need for aristocratic patronage.

The outbreak of the Civil War in 1642 marked the end of traditional patronage patterns. With the collapse of the court, the country had more pressing issues to contend with than the plight of the poet. With momentous consequences, censorship was not as strictly enforced as before which meant that publishing was exposed to free market forces for the first time (Parry, 2002: 137). Vast numbers of pamphlets dealing with contemporary issues poured from the press. Many of the

published poems and plays in the 1600s had been written by Royalists such as Carew, Waller, Crashaw, Vaughan, Suckling, Shirley, Cowley and Fanshawe. Any dedications to the King and Prince of Wales at this time were political expressions of loyalty rather than forms of flattery and supplication. After Charles's execution in 1649, old-style patronage virtually disappeared. Most books were dedicated to friends or to appropriate bodies such as colleges, courts of law or Members of Parliament.

Many publications, including William Dugdale's *Monasticon Anglicanum* (1655), were published through the subscription system whereby supporters of the project each sponsored a plate for £5, for which they had their name, coat or arms and a Latin phrase engraved in a cartouche. Others sponsored the project by promising to buy a copy of the published book. William Somner's *Dictionarium Saxonico-Latino-Anglicum* was published in 1659 through the subscription method (138).

John Milton's career exemplifies the developments of this period. In his youth he accepted commissions from the Countess of Derby and the Egerton family and solicited support from Sir Henry Wotton at the beginning of his Italian journey in 1637. With the opening of the new parliament however he became more radicalised and as a 'free-born Englishman' (Hadfield, 2008: 35) he rejected the notion of a patron. He no longer dedicated his writing to members of the nobility. Indeed some of his more political works such as *Areopagitica* were addressed 'for the Liberty of Unlicenc'd Printing, to the Parliament of England' (Milton, 1644, Project Gutenberg, 2006). In the writing of *Paradise Lost* he claimed to experience

the joy of divine inspiration leading him to discover the perfect patron in the guise of the Muse of Divine Poetry.

In the later seventeenth century following the Restoration, and in the eighteenth century, the patronage system as inherited from the Renaissance was still controlled by the ruling classes, the peers and country gentlemen. There was no rapid change from an aristocratic culture to a commercial culture, no sudden change from a Renaissance style patronage system to a literary marketplace. Nor, states Dustin Griffin, was there a 'golden age' of literary patronage in which the best English poets flourished and enjoyed handsome pensions (Griffin, 1996: 10). The golden age of patronage, Griffin claims, is a myth promulgated by disappointed writers who wanted to believe that the past was better for writers and that England was enlightened and enjoyed the same level of cultural patronage as France under Louis XIV. However, although both patron and writer might wish to blur the boundaries between art, cultural capital and monetary gain it should be acknowledged that there was always a reciprocal arrangement in which both sides benefited and that furthermore there has always been a political dimension to patronage. Although in the eighteenth century booksellers gained increasing economic power and cultural authority, they did not replace the traditional patronage system overnight and the influence of aristocratic patrons and the power of the marketplace operated in parallel for some time.

Dryden's patrons included the most powerful figures of his day. He dedicated works to members of the royal family (the King, the Queen, the Duke and Duchess of York, and the Duke of Monmouth), and political leaders in office including Danby, Sunderland, Clarendon, Clifford and Hyde. He also received

patronage from Lords Leicester, Chesterfield and Halifax and from Tories, Whigs, Protestants and Catholics. In his *Lives of the Poets* Johnson derided Dryden for the excessively flattering tone used in his dedications. Commenting on the dedication to the Duchess of York in *The State of Innocence* he notes that it is written ‘in a strain of flattery which disgraces genius, and which it was wonderful that any man that knew the meaning of his own words could use without self-detestation’ (Johnson, 2006: 95). Johnson acknowledges that the practice of offering flattering dedications was very much an accepted convention of the time but seems to have expected more from a poet of Dryden’s talent and intellect:

Of dramatic immorality he did not want examples among his predecessors, or companions among his contemporaries, but in the meanness and servility of hyperbolic adulation I know not whether since the days in which the Roman Emperors were deified he has been ever equalled except by Afra Behn in an address to Eleanor Gwyn.

(113)

This view of Dryden was accepted and perpetuated by later nineteenth-century commentators including Macaulay, Beljame and Wheatley who condemned Dryden, among other writers, who ‘sold their lying praises for money’ (Wheatley, 1887: 120).

Yet in his writing, and in particular in the prefaces, Dryden comes across as a proud, self-assured writer. It is therefore difficult to reconcile the image of servile dedicator with that of proud laureate and literary critic. Perhaps servility and pride go hand in hand. It is quite likely he was merely following the conventions of the day and demonstrating his mastery of the language of dedication and showing, as Johnson notes, that he is ‘more delighted with the fertility of his invention, than mortified by the prostitution of his judgment’ (Johnson, 1825: 294). The fact remains that, although Dryden enjoyed the endorsement of the monarch, he obtained

relatively little private gain from patronage. He obtained an income from the sale of books, his share in the King's Men theatre company, for which he wrote three or four plays a year, his salary as Poet Laureate and Historiographer Royal and rental income from his wife's property. In his preface to the play *All for Love* Dryden appears to attack one of his former patrons, Lord Rochester, ridiculing him as little more than a man 'of pleasant conversation.' He questions Rochester's ability to act as literary custodian and thus seems to question the aristocratic patron's traditional claim to preside over all matters cultural. In his later years his attacks on the system were less marked but he seemed to place the cause of the rights of the poet over those of the patron. The notion of 'rights', as Griffin points out, had a very high profile in late seventeenth-century life, especially after the passing of the Declaration of Rights in 1689 (Griffin, 1996: 85).

2.5 The Demise of Patronage and the Rise of the Booksellers

indebted to no Prince or Peer alive...
Unplac'd, unpension'd, no Man's Heir or Slave

Pope, 1903 (1734): 198).

In the first half of the eighteenth century the system of patronage, dominated by wealthy peers and the court, gradually gave way to a market-driven system of booksellers, authors and the reading public. Jonathan Swift, as an ordained Anglican priest with friends in both church and state, was part of the patronage system, unlike his Roman Catholic friend, Alexander Pope. And yet, he claimed, unlike many of his contemporaries, to place himself firmly outside of a system which he viewed to be

unfair and corrupt and ‘prided himself on his equal standing, his independence, and his freedom to speak his mind’ (Griffin, 1992: 197). None of his works, with the exception of *A Tale of a Tub*, is dedicated to a patron, which was highly unusual given the importance of patronage in the first half of the eighteenth century. Swift detested the notion that a writer had to be dependent on a patron for support. The notion of dependence and subservience disgusted him and he frequently wrote about the need to distance himself from the corrupting influence of patronage. His writing acknowledges that ‘the client has access but no real power’ and his poems on patronage function both as ‘confessions of weakness’ and ‘strategies (or fantasies) of retaliation in which the client finds a way to upstage the patron’ (Griffin, 1996: 110). Swift is never openly critical about his patrons but deals with the dilemmas of patronage through satire and playfulness. In ‘Horace’ he casts Robert Harley, ⁵ 1st Earl of Oxford, as Maecenas, while Swift is but a lowly, and somewhat incompetent, priest (Swift, 1841 (1713): 706).

While resenting the dependence that the patronage system imposed on the writer, Swift was also contemptuous of writers ‘that cringe for Bread’ (Swift, 1983 [1730]: 404) and even refused money offered by Harley for his work at the *Examiner* as he did not wish to view himself as a hired party writer, and refused to consent to a subscription edition of the *Examiner* papers which could have secured him £500. In a letter to Sir Charles Wogan he wrote that ‘the Taste of England is infamously corrupted by Sholes of Wretches who write for their Bread’ thus showing his disdain for those who only write for money and the adverse effect they exert on literary production and the reading public (Swift, 1762: 124). He made it clear in his dealings with others and in his journals that he was an equal to any politician or priest and free

⁵ Harley was an important patron of the arts and promoted the careers of Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope and John Gay.

to speak his mind. But though he vaunted his independence he functioned very much within the system, both as beneficiary and patron. Among the writers he actively promoted to the ministers were Joseph Addison, George Berkeley, William Congreve, Nicholas Rowe and Richard Steele (Griffin, 1996: 107). He seemed to delight in uncovering talent and giving it an opportunity to flourish and enjoyed assuming the role of patron as a means of displaying the power he could wield. In *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) Swift reinvents a world of patronage in which the roles of patron and client are reversed.

Pope was the first writer in England to succeed in making a living entirely through his writing. His *Iliad* was not dedicated to a monarch or other traditional patron but to his fellow writer, William Congreve. His biographers paint a picture of a man who was business-minded, managed a successful subscription, demanded rights from his booksellers, set up a printer and bookseller for his own works, retained control of his copyrights and generally remained financially independent. In this way he rose above the patronage system in an even more dramatic fashion than Johnson did some years later. Nevertheless, despite his commercial acumen, Pope liked to project the image of a gentleman writing for his own leisure and the pleasure of a few noble friends to whom he addressed many of his poetic epistles (Foxon, 1991; Mack, 1985).

Although Pope was proud of his independence and gentlemanly image, in fact he benefited in many ways from private patronage. As a young man he made the acquaintance of many older writers who not only encouraged his work but introduced him to the wealthy and influential. In this way he met up with William Walsh who provided valuable criticism, hosted Pope for six months at his house near

Worcester and introduced him to Jacob Tonson the bookseller. In a sense he managed to keep a foot in both the old and the emerging literary worlds. Some of the benefits he gained from ‘patrons’ (though he would probably have defined them as acquaintances and friends, at all times asserting his equality with them) included the gift of a home from John Caryll, South Sea subscriptions from James Craggs, Secretary of State and, in 1728, Burlington offered him the services of his lawyer and other servants. He enjoyed the hospitality of the wealthy and influential and was a frequent guest at the famous Walpole dinners in the 1720s. Lord Harcourt offered him a writer’s retreat in the summers of 1717 and 1718 at Stanton Harcourt and others helped attract the attention of book buyers and sellers. He operated at all times on an equal footing with his influential acquaintances and denied the existence of a patron-client relationship. He made very few dedications in his lifetime with the exception of *The Rape of the Lock*, which he dedicated to Arabella Fermor, and a humorous dedication to himself in an essay entitled ‘On Dedications’ in *The Guardian* in 1713 (Griffin, 1996: 130).

In his letters to contemporary writers there was much discussion about writing and its value. In Pope’s view there were three different classes of writers: the hack engaged in a sordid trade, the holiday or gentleman writer who writes solely for his own diversion (a role Pope flirted with stating that he wrote ‘To help me through this long Disease, My Life’ (Pope, 1734) and, thirdly, the ‘true’ poet who dedicates his life to poetry to the point of martyrdom. The true poet is beyond the censure or praise of a mere patron. Pope stands out also as a writer who had the confidence to deal with the printers and booksellers and embrace the concept of a reading public. Many of these ideas are presented in the *Preface* to his *Works* of 1717 (Pope, 1717, Google Books, 1717).

In his *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot*, through the three famous satirical portraits of Atticus, Sporus and Bufo, he explored the corrupt nature of the patronage system and sought to erase the social and political differences between patron and client by referring to those who supported him (Talbot, Summers, Sheffield) as his ‘friends’ rather than his ‘patrons.’ He declares himself to be ‘Above a Patron, tho’ I condescend/Sometimes to call a Minister my Friend’ (line 265-66). In this work Atticus represents the educated patron who is in a position to judge or commend the work of a writer but his support is withheld. Bufo, instead of feeding poets, starves them and is more interested in honouring the dead poet than supporting him while he is alive. Sporus, though not a patron himself, has the patron’s ear and is free to influence or corrupt. Spitting out ‘Politicks, or Tales or Lyes’ he rises by flattery, worships money, is a slave to fashion and encourages everyone else to behave in the same way. If Pope set himself above or apart from the patronage system he did so through his talents, hard work and ability to manipulate a range of systems in place at the time including traditional patronage, the subscription system and the emerging literary marketplace. Patronage was still the mainstay for the majority of writers and would continue to be so until the end of the eighteenth century. Owen Ruffhead noted that ‘though he lived among the great and wealthy, he lived with them upon easy terms of reciprocal amity, and social familiarity’ (Ruffhead, 1769: 380).

When Samuel Johnson launched himself into his writing career in the 1730s he joined a somewhat overcrowded profession writing for a relatively small public and at a time when the traditional patron was in decline: ‘The present age, if we consider chiefly the state of our own country, may be styled with great propriety the Age of Authors’ (Johnson, 1753, *Adventurer* 115, Online). However the thirties saw the rise of the magazines, the forties witnessed the development of the novel and the

increasing popularity of the circulating library, and by 1750 there was a new and growing interest in literature and intellectual matters generally across the country (Collins, 1928:19). Periodical essays were also enjoying continued popularity in the decade 1750-1760 with a range of periodicals on offer: *The Rambler*, *The Adventurer*, *The Connoisseurs*, *The Worlds*, *The Idler* and *The Public Adventurer*.

Johnson's famous letter to Chesterfield in 1755 marks a watershed in the development of modern authorship. Johnson took pride in his claim that 'no man... who ever lived by literature, has lived more independently than I have done' and declared that the booksellers were the real 'patrons of literature' (Boswell, 1786: 443). Nonetheless, like Pope, he benefited as a young man from a degree of patronage when he was offered encouragement, lodging, references and introductions, not to mention a job at Stanbridge Grammar School through the efforts of Cornelius Ford and Gilbert Walmesley. He sought direct private patronage, including from Lord Chesterfield (although he only received a £10 contribution towards the production of the *Dictionary*), he published some works by subscription, was offered (though he refused) a church living, and received a crown pension of £300 a year for more than twenty years (Drabble, 2000: 536).

Many of Johnson's reflections on the subject were explored in his *Rambler* essays where he warned about the difficulties of gaining support, the corrupting effect of flattery and the 'drudgeries of dependence' (Johnson, 1820: 211). His famous definition of a patron in his *Dictionary* as, 'One who countenances, supports or protects. Commonly a wretch who supports with insolence, and is paid with flattery', speaks volumes about his views on patronage (Johnson, 1755: 1465). In later years, by the time he had started writing his *Lives of the Poets*, Johnson was less

critical of the patronage system. While he lamented the problems associated with dependence he was nonetheless ready to recognise the merits of individual patrons such as the Earl of Dorset whom he described as ‘a man whose elegance and judgement were universally confessed, and whose bounty to the learned and witty was generally known’ (Johnson, 1854: 10). Halifax, he noted, was a patron who let no dedication go ‘unrewarded’ (85) and George Granville, deserved ‘reverence for his beneficence’ (307). His softened attitude could be explained by the fact that he was enjoying his government pension, secured largely through the efforts of Thomas Sheridan and the Earl of Bute as a reward for his contribution to literature... or perhaps he had just mellowed with the passing years.

In *The Age of Patronage*, Michael Foss concludes that by the mid-1750s old style patronage had declined making way for the author as independent professional who would enjoy popularity with the public through the publication of books (1971: 207). There was a development from a court-centred world to an increasingly middle-class world based on the market place, the rise of trade and manufacturing and the expansion of the voting franchise. By 1780 the growth in the reading population meant that writers like Oliver Goldsmith were able to earn a living through writing and it has been noted that with *The Life of Voltaire* ‘Dr Goldsmith cleared in one year £1,800 by his pen’ (Rousseau, 1974: 186). Periodical journalism also became quite profitable (Collins, 1928: 203); Thomas Holcroft, for instance, began in 1765 at the age of nineteen, to write in *The Whitehall Evening Post* for five shillings a column (100). Furthermore, writers were increasingly in demand to contribute to encyclopaedias with the publication of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1771 and the *Chambers’ Cyclopaedia* in 1778 (24).

The publishing of successive editions of new books was a further sign that the profession of letters was making good headway: Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776, 1781 and 1788) went to three editions and Hugh Blair's *Sermons* (1777) and Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) were equally popular (25). The rise of a new middle class and a greater reading public increased the demand for written work, whether in newspapers, journals, pamphlets or books. With the improvement of roads life became less static and travel and travel journalism became a very middle class pursuit. Communication between London and the rest of the country developed and books circulated more freely. It was not unusual to find the sixpenny volumes of poets even in the most ordinary households and 'women began to read and to write, and to rise above the dull monotony of the domestic round' (27).

The growth of the reading public and of popular literature from the 1780s to 1800 is a significant aspect in the development of the literary profession, creating a market and an audience and giving writers the opportunity to be truly independent from the old patronage system. In the 1790s, Edmund Burke estimated the reading public at about 80,000 readers, mostly living in London (29). To read Jane Austen's novels is to realise how literate much of society had become. References to books or reading in a Fielding novel were very rare whereas in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* there are references to reading throughout the novel. One of the significant developments of the century that contributed to the growth in the habit of reading was the introduction of the circulating library. This became very popular amongst all categories of reader regardless of age, gender or location and was especially popular with women who began to represent a significant element in the reading public (Collins, 1928: 29). These 'ladies who read' became something of a target for the

satirists and novel-reading young women begin to play a role in the plays of Samuel Foote and Richard Brinsley Sheridan (56). The introduction of the circulating library was initially mistrusted by the booksellers who feared it would have an adverse effect on business. In fact, the libraries worked in their favour, stimulating an interest in reading and a demand for more books resulting in increased sales (56, 93).

It is clear that by the 1780s patronage, in the traditional sense, had become less and less important and had outgrown its use. Aristocratic patrons were replaced by the bookseller, journalism and the reading public. The old patronage class also shifted with the times and accepted relegation in the face of the developing market. This did not stop some writers from lamenting the demise of a system which supported the struggling writer. Nonetheless, George III professed an interest in literature and art and provided pensions to a number of writers and artists in need. 1790 saw the founding of the Literary Fund, later the Royal Literary Fund, which was used to help many writers but its powers and finances were somewhat limited prompting Collins to comment on the ‘miserable dwindling ... from the magnificence of Montagu to the dreary efforts of organized relief’ (Collins, 1928: 125).

Despite Pope, Johnson and then Goldsmith declaring their independence, many writers, including William Cowper, George Crabbe and Robert Burns, continued to enjoy the support of those with power, money and influence. Dramatists benefiting from the system included John Home, Hugh Kelly and Sheridan. The earliest novelists were also beneficiaries of the patronage system: Henry Fielding was supported by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, the Duke of Bedford, Chesterfield and Lord Chancellor Harwick, and Lawrence Sterne survived on various church

livings through the influence of a number of patrons including the Archbishop of York, the Dean of York Cathedral and Lord Fauconberg. Another indication of the survival of patronage during the eighteenth century is the number of books produced by subscription, about 250 on average per decade rising to 498 in the 1790s (Griffin, 1996: 267). While books continued to be produced by the subscription method the presence of peers' names on subscription lists diminished with the progress of the century and were gradually replaced by the names of merchants, professionals and manufacturers thus indicating an increasing democratisation of patronage (289). Furthermore, this involvement of the rising merchant class in literary sponsorship coupled with the power and influence wielded by the bookseller in determining what would get published and therefore which writers would enter the canon had the effect of eroding the position of the nobility as sole arbiters of literary merit. This move was welcomed by Goldsmith who commented that readers were too easily 'sway'd in their opinions, by men who often from their very education, are incompetent judges' (Goldsmith, 1820: 315).

A factor which changed the nature of patronage in the course of the eighteenth century was the development of different types of patron who came increasingly from different levels of society and a wider geographical area. Furthermore, the founding of certain institutions gave patronage a more public flavour. The Society for the Encouragement of Learning was founded in 1735, the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Commerce and Manufacturers (commonly called the Society of Arts) was founded in 1754 and the Society of Artists was founded in 1759. It is interesting to note that, in the context of the current popularity of book clubs and groups, an increasing number of subscription libraries and book societies also began to emerge. The century also saw the founding of literary prizes,

in particular the Seatonian Prize (worth £10), established in 1751 as an annual prize at Cambridge University. In addition there were salons and literary circles which served to encourage, support and promote individual writers. As is often the case however, merit often went unrewarded and those who were rewarded became a little too comfortable and complacent. In 1760 Goldsmith, commenting on the demise of the old system said: ‘At present, the few poets of England no longer depend on the great for subsistence; they have now no other patrons but the public, and the public, collectively considered is a good and generous master’ (Goldsmith, 1910 [1760]: 65).

2.6 The Commercialisation of Literature

At the start of the nineteenth century publishing was still very much the monopoly of the big London houses but it was flourishing and seemed to outshine all other commercial enterprise in terms of growth. In the Elizabethan period, although booksellers existed, it was rare to find any outside London. By 1775, there were 150 booksellers in the provinces and 200 in the capital (Saunders, 1964: 94). In addition, every town by 1800 had its own circulating library. Up to this point poetry and drama dominated the literary scene but with more publishing opportunities, prose began to flourish and eventually to dominate. Saunders notes that the Augustan era launched a whole new wave of prose writing: biographies, essays, sermons, criticism, articles, handbooks, anthologies, encyclopaedias, dictionaries, and, eventually, when Puritan suspicions about the value of fiction had been removed, novels (95).

Alongside the roll of poets, there emerged a respected group of authors, the first genuine ‘professionals of letters’, a group which included Johnson, Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Goldsmith, Pepys, Bunyan, Swift and Boswell (95).

While the novel became increasingly popular, thus making it possible for novelists to become independent, professional writers, from the late eighteenth century and into the nineteenth many poets, including Blake, Coleridge and Wordsworth, struggled to sell their work (163). From 1810 to 1840 conditions improved a little, although Keats was rejected by the public and Wordsworth confessed to Tom Moore that before 1835 his writings had not earned him more than £1,000. Eliza Acton was advised by the fourth Thomas Longman: 'My dear Madam, it is no good bringing me poetry now. Bring me a cookery book, and we might come to terms' (Mumby, 1930: 283-4). Novelists, historians and other writers were flourishing at this time while Browning was driven to publish pamphlets at his own expense and without profit and even Tennyson struggled in his early years. The Romantic poets were in a very uncertain position in terms of financial reward but also in terms of social function. Dreamers and visionaries, their work was not always appreciated (Saunders, 1964: 162).

Fortunately for Blake he had been apprenticed early in life and earned a living as a professional engraver with the help of his wife who trained herself as a colourist and bookbinder. In 1783, two of his friends, the sculptor Flaxman and Rev. Henry Mathew advanced funds to have his *Poetical Sketches* published. In 1791 he had *The French Revolution* published, again with some help from his friends but unfortunately both books were complete failures. He subsequently printed his own works himself, embellished with his own engravings and illustrations and he offered these works for sale to a few select well-wishers and patrons, for instance William Hayley, and sold *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* at varying prices ranging from 30s to over five guineas, according to the means of the purchaser (Saunders, 1964: 164). His main income, though still quite meagre, came from his

paintings and engravings. Much of his poetry lay gathering dust in bookshops, a source of great distress for Blake who retreated into a sad and demented state. He often vented his frustration on his friends and patrons, referring to Cromek as ‘a petty sneaking knave’ (Blake, 1908: 213), to Flaxman as ‘a blockhead’ (220), to Stothard as ‘a golden fool’ (219) and to Hayley as ‘a pickthank’ (210).

Coleridge also failed to forge a career as a writer in letters, although in his case, this was not through a lack of opportunities. As a successful leader-writer for the *Morning Post* at four guineas a week, he was subsequently offered a share in the paper and £2000 for a more permanent post. He refused this offer saying, ‘I would not give up the country and the lazy reading of old folios for two thousand times two thousand pounds ... Beyond £250 a year, I consider money as a real evil’ (Coleridge, 1850 [1800]: xci). However, it is unlikely that Coleridge would have survived on £250 without the additional help of his good friends and patrons the Wordsworths, Tom Poole, Gillman, Byron and De Quincey. Though he earned little from his poetry his work did get into print and he made the modest sums of £20 for *Kubla Khan*, £80 for *Christabel*, £150 in addition to half the profits for *Biographia Literaria* and his play *Remorse* was staged earning him £400. Towards the end of his life he achieved State recognition in the form of a pension worth a hundred guineas a year from the privy purse in 1824, although this was withdrawn on the death of the monarch (Saunders, 1964: 168).

Wordsworth did not achieve significantly greater success in his lifetime than Coleridge. He was fortunate in not having to work for a living but spent his time travelling, writing and studying, enjoying the kind of life Coleridge would have wanted for himself. Eventually recognition came in the form of the sinecure of

Stamp Distributor for Westmoreland in 1813, a pension of £300 a year from the Civil List in 1842, and the public position of Poet Laureate in 1843 (169). Prior to 1835 his book sales were low, bringing in little more than £1,000 in total. Only much later in life did Wordsworth's poems become a profitable proposition and he was in his seventies before he achieved a significant level of public esteem.

Keats had little time in his short life to worry too much about success, public esteem, financial reward or indeed posterity. Without private means or regular employment he was dependent on the hospitality of his friends including Leigh Hunt, Hazlitt, Shelley, and the painter Severn. There was never any public audience for Keats' poetry until at least twenty years after his death but he continued to write with conviction and determination 'even if my night's labours should be burnt every morning, and no eye ever shine upon them' (Keats, 2004 (1895): 211). Poetry no longer occupied the special place it had held up to the Augustan era. Its status was challenged by the rise of the English novel, the emergence of the notion of the individual, dramatic developments in publishing, and a demand for romance by the public. Poetry was fighting for survival and the competition for the printed-book market became even more intense, peopled as it was with idealists and cynics, professionals and amateurs, aristocrats and revolutionaries, heroes and rogues, the exceptional and the mediocre (Saunders, 1964: 173).

In the nineteenth century most writers of note had a job in a separate profession, in private business or a Government service. Many were clergymen such as John Henry Newman, Charles Kingsley, Gerard Manley Hopkins; some were dons, including John Ruskin, Lewis Carroll and Mark Pattison; others were involved in education, for instance, Matthew Arnold was an Inspector of Schools before

becoming Oxford's Professor of Poetry. Wilkie Collins and Francis Jeffrey were barristers and many were involved in political or Government services including Lord Macauley, Lord Lytton, and Anthony Trollope. Robert Burns and John Clare worked as farming labourers and a small number of writers, including Edward Lear and Thomas de Quincey, enjoyed independence through private incomes.

The fortunes of some of the more well-known writers of the time varied considerably. Sir Walter Scott, both talented and popular, wrote to subsidize his extravagant life-style. By contrast, his contemporary Jane Austen lived a much more modest life and her earnings were meagre. She made profits of little more than £700 on her first four books, the other two being published after her death (182).

Lord Byron exploited the popularity of what we might refer to now as the 'romantic thriller' but could not quite come to terms with the generous rewards such writing brought. Both he and Shelley had the luxury of being able to live a life of leisure and write about what moved them, whether political or social. Shelley believed that a poet writes for himself and has no need of an audience; he is 'a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds' (Shelley in Rhys, 1886: 10). Although he struggled earlier in life, Tennyson's popularity grew after his appointment as Poet Laureate in 1850 and works such as *Idylls of the King* and *Enoch Arden* sold in tens of thousands. At the height of his success he was being offered £500 for a single poem – the Americans offered him £1,000 for any three-stanza poem and £20,000 for a lecture tour (Saunders, 1964: 189). He persevered and succeeded in convincing the public of the merit not only of his own work but also that of Shelley, Keats and Byron and even managed to revive public interest in Dryden. Like Wordsworth, he saw poetry as a

force for good in a very practical sense for a society facing scientific, industrial, political and commercial challenges.

Novelists in the nineteenth century also found it difficult to get published and make a living from their writing, though they had considerably more success than the poets. There are some notable success stories but this was by no means the case for all writers. Dickens started out as a newspaper reporter at the age of seventeen and, like Johnson, succeeded in achieving literary success in his lifetime. His contemporary, George Eliot, achieved a measure of commercial success while retaining professional integrity, largely through the support of her father and then her partner in her early years as a writer.

Thackeray would have preferred to write as an amateur than a professional but his writing for periodicals and the serialization of his novels in *Cornhill* earned him a salary of £2,000 a year. In the 1870s Matthew Arnold, the first Professor of Poetry, turned English Literature into a subject of specialized university study. Although he declared poetry ‘a complete *magister vitae*’, he had two publishers, Macmillan and Smith, and ‘the financial return from his literary labours was important to him’ (Buckler, 1958: 19). While Ruskin was born into a life of leisure his inheritance, like De Quincey’s, was soon dissipated, though much of it in support of needy friends and good causes and he took up writing as a means of earning a living. He lectured at working men’s colleges, thus gaining new readers and, like Morris and his friends, he came into contact with readers from the working class, a group who had never previously exercised any influence in the printed-book market. In this the possibility of a mass market for literature was created not only as a result

of educational reform and cheaper methods of production but also to some extent as a result of writers' political beliefs and social sympathies.

2.7 Hostility to the Market – A Return to Patronage

The turn of the century witnessed a rapid expansion and diversification of the literary market. The increased demand for literature was due in so small part to the achievement of near-universal literacy (estimated at 90% in the UK by the UNESCO report, *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*, 2006) which was a direct result of the Education Act of 1871. There was an increasing appetite for 'self-cultivation' coupled with a literary market-place which was eager to supply this new mass audience with the cultural goods they desired (Collins, 2010:49).

While publishers, agents and the newly-literate population were keen to participate in this democratisation of literature, certain writers – Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, E.M. Forster – viewed the development, and its commercial implications, as the very antithesis of sophisticated, literary culture. The modernists' resistance to this phenomenon, one which they believed would exert detrimental effects on both literature and readers, resulted in a return to private patronage, a pairing of culture with aristocracy and inherited wealth.

A prominent patron in the early part of the twentieth century, Lady Ottoline Morrell (1873 – 1938) provided support and encouragement to numerous authors, artists, painters and sculptors, most notably the Bloomsbury group. Those who benefited from her patronage included Virginia Woolf, T.S. Eliot, Lytton Strachey,

Siegfried Sassoon, Aldous Huxley and D.H. Lawrence;⁶ the painters and art critics Dora Carrington, Clive Bell, Roger Fry, Duncan Grant and Stanley Spencer were all guests of the Morrell's at their townhouse in Bedford Square or at Garsington Manor in Oxfordshire (Seymour, 1992). John Maynard Keynes also provided similar financial support to the Bloomsbury group.

James Joyce enjoyed the support of a number of patrons: W.B. Yeats helped to secure a Civil List Grant of £100 a year and Joyce also sold manuscripts to the American collector John Quinn, a patron of Josef Conrad. Sometime later he enjoyed the patronage of the American heiress Mrs Harold McCormick, and Harriet Shaw Weaver, his principal benefactor, supported him from 1914 until his death. Sylvia Beach also exerted a considerable influence both on Joyce and publishing practices of the time when she organised the publication of *Ulysses* by subscription in Paris. Publication through subscription had been very popular route to publication in the seventeenth century and meant that a book would be supported by the wealth 'cultured' classes and that the novel would enter private collections. The notion of the cultured, discerning collector no doubt appealed to the modernists, although in Joyce's case it also meant he could bypass any censorship issues. The first edition ran to 1000 copies and much is made of the high profile sponsors, or 'patrons', of this venture. Accounts describing the record book in which Sylvia Beach entered the names of the buyers from the United Kingdom highlight the literary credentials of Joyce's supporters. Names include André Gide, W.B. Yeats, Sherwood Anderson, John McCormack, Hart Crane, Djuna Barnes, and William Carols Williams (Rainey, 1998: 43). However, there is little doubt that many subscribers fell outside the

⁶ Lawrence also later enjoyed the patronage of Mabel Dodge Luhan who offered him a ranch on her estate. In fact, Lawrence refused but his wife Frieda accepted the offer in exchange for the manuscript of *Sons and Lovers*.

literary elite as the book would have been bought by collectors and investors who would be more interested in its commercial rather literary value.⁷ The venture proved successful and demand far exceeded supply (Ellmann, 1975).

Joyce, though he must have enjoyed the freedom to follow his literary desires, was nonetheless cynical about his coterie audience. He joked about his meagre public, his ‘six or seven readers’, and commented (referring to his own failing eyesight) that he sometimes found it difficult to ‘keep my eyes open – like the readers of my masterpieces’ (Ellmann, 1975: 221, 228). However, his patrons afforded him unfettered freedom from editors who might have questioned some of the more complex and challenging sequences in *Ulysses* and *Finnegan’s Wake*. Piell Wexler noted that ‘independent of market constraints, Joyce allowed his art to approach the limit of intelligibility’ (1997: 71). Like many other supporters of modernist art, Joyce’s patrons admired him, not because they necessarily understood his literary aesthetic, but because they respected his attempt to violate social and literary convention. For many modernist writers patronage was the only route to survival as their art was too challenging to fully engage the reading public of the day.

The problems associated with the development of modernist literary culture are explored in depth in a number of studies including John Carey’s *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (1992); Kevin Dettemar’s and Stephen Watt’s collection *Marketing Modernisms* (1996); Ian Willison’s, Warwick Gould’s and Warren Charnain’s *Modernist Writers and the Marketplace* (1996); Lawrence Rainey’s *The Institutions of Modernism* (1998), and Paul Delany’s *Literature, Money and the Market* (2002). Carey describes the situation quite clearly as ‘a hostile reaction to the

⁷ On June 5, 2009, a first edition of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* was sold in London for £275,000, the highest price ever paid for a twentieth-century book. www.guardian.com.

unprecedentedly large reading public created by late nineteenth-century educational reforms' (1992: 4). It was as if the very purpose of modernist writing was to exclude the newly literate masses from a higher form of literary culture. A number of modernist writers expressed their horror at the education of the masses which they felt would erode culture. 'That everyone can learn to read will ruin in the long run not only writing, but thinking too,' wrote Friedrich Nietzsche (1961: 67). D.H. Lawrence was also pessimistic about the impact of education: 'Let all schools be closed at once,' he declared. 'The great mass of humanity should never learn to read and write' (Lawrence, 1971: 144, 180). T.S. Eliot was equally concerned about the detrimental effects of education for the so-called masses. By educating everybody he believed 'we were lowering our standards ... destroying our ancient edifices' and paving the way for 'the barbarian nomads' to trample on our civilisation (Eliot, 1968: 185). Carey notes that although the masses could not be denied literacy, the intellectuals could attempt to exclude them from literary culture by making it complex and obscure (Carey, 1992: 16). It would be difficult to judge how deliberate this attack on the mass audience and commercial publishing was but Carey presents a good deal of evidence to support his views.

If the modernists were deliberately shunning the masses and turning their back on a potentially lucrative market then 'who,' asked Piell Wexler, and later Delany, 'paid for modernism?' (1947, 2002). In fact, many of the great modernist writers relied heavily on private patrons for their survival. These patrons formed part of what Delany refers to as 'the rentier class' – a group of individuals, which numbered almost half a million in 1911 (Collins, 2010: 50), who lived off inherited wealth. As noted by Delany:

Rentier culture distinguished itself from market-sensitive art by elaborating an ethic of refinement ... The art novel assumed a certain leisured sensitivity both in its readers and the characters it represented (337).

Modernists were keen to emphasise the unique and special nature of the patron-writer relationship. In *Am I a Snob?* (2003), Sean Latham examines the complexities and contradictions inherent in this relationship. He highlights the pains Virginia Woolf went to in order to link artistic autonomy and aristocratic sensibility: ‘Imagining herself as a member of a small literary nobility constantly under assault by the forces of modernity, she confess to Lady Ottoline Morrell that “I am an aristocrat in writing”’ (93). The need to avoid writing for a middle-brow market is a recurrent theme in her novel *Orlando* (1928). Published by Hogarth Press, a concern Woolf ran with her husband Leonard, *Orlando* was very successful and became a bestseller, a fact which does not seem to have caused Woolf any great concern as, given that the Hogarth Press belonged to her, she had effectively bypassed the commercial publisher and retained her own autonomy. This allowed for ‘a more rarefied exchange, in which quality fiction is written with the goal of publication ... but the taint of commodified culture is removed’ (Collins, 2010: 53).

For all their posturing about the masses, the evils of publication and commodification which, in retrospect, appears ignoble and somewhat laughable and irrelevant, the modernists exerted a huge and liberating influence on literature and the arts generally. The period, from the late nineteenth century to the end of the Second World War, was a time of confrontation with the public, the proliferation of non-mainstream cultural publications, and ‘the rapid dissemination of avant-garde works and ideas across national border or linguistic barriers’ (Drabble, 2000). In terms of patronage and support for literary endeavour, numerous opportunities became available to writers through Arts Council grants for writers and periodicals,

writers in schools projects, residencies, literary festivals and prizes, and, in the last twenty years, opportunities for writers to teach in universities. These more recent developments are dealt with in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

2.8 Conclusions

The history of patronage outlined in this chapter emphasises the ambivalent nature of the patronage system. In some senses this system is highly structured, yet informal; obviously hierarchical, yet challenged; apparently idealistic but in reality shot through with insecurity, competition, self-interest and the need for financial gain. Riddled with ambiguity, it is also difficult to be definitive about the impact it exerted on literary production. On the one hand is the claim that it subordinated literary activities to ‘aristocratic definitions of literature and culture’ (Ferguson, 2002: 37), a premise which could be construed as corrupting, negative and limiting. Another view interprets it in a more positive light: ‘the social energies created by the patronage system could also be productive and exhilarating’ (Shoemaker, 2007: 31). Whatever the theorists might assert, it is clear that it represented a dynamic system in which a writer might fail or succeed and for those with sufficient talent and motivation ‘it motivated both self-interest and idealism’ and proved that patronage could be ‘a force for cultural and intellectual dynamism’ (31). In contemporary terms, certain types of patronage could also be accused of reducing literature to Arts Council tick-box agendas. Yet given the diversity of literary projects supported by the Arts Council, local government and business it behoves writers to seize these opportunities and shape them according to their own artistic impulses and visions.

Chapter 3 - The Poet Laureate: Poets, Pawns and Propagandists

3.1 Introduction

There has been much debate about the relevance of the role of Poet Laureate in the twenty-first century and various commentators have questioned its impact on the nation, culture and poetry, for example, Cope (2008), McCrum (2009), and Sutherland (2002). In fact, a study of the office reveals that it has been the subject of debate and criticism since its inception in 1668⁸ and Laureates have been satirized for accepting the role, and their work mercilessly lampooned by their literary contemporaries. As one of the highest honours a poet can receive, the Laureateship carries with it significant opportunities to promote the importance of literature in the most influential circles available to a poet. However, a review of the research on the topic and my own study of a significant amount of laureate writing reveal that very few of the Poets Laureate have risen to this challenge. In fact, the majority have been content to produce dull and dutiful laudations while enduring criticism from both the media and the literary world.

The Laureate as object of satire and ridicule is not, as one might think, a recent phenomenon but one which dates back to the origins of the post. The tradition of laureate and anti-laureate began when John Dryden and Thomas Shadwell gave vent to their political, religious and critical differences in the form of satirical verse. The very political nature of the role and the conflicts this provokes has meant that the laureateship has always been beset with difficulties and controversies giving rise to a

⁸ Though appointed to the role in 1668 the letters patent confirming Dryden's status as Poet Laureate were only issued in 1670 (Russel, 1981: 1). Also of interest here is Hamilton's assertion that Dryden was preceded by a number of 'Volunteer Laureates' who wrote for the monarchy and received some level of remuneration for their efforts. These included Chaucer, Skelton, Spenser, Jonson and Davenant (Hamilton, 1879: xxx).

discourse of derision and often disgust. The political dimension of the role has led to charges of opportunism and the frequently lacklustre performance of poets who have held the office has invited criticism, examples of which are included below.

A satirical account of the office, generally attributed to Alexander Pope, appeared in the *Memoirs of the Society of Grub Street* in 1730:

In the first place the crown is to be mixed with *vine-leaves*, as the vine is the plant of Bacchus, and full as essential to the honour, as the *butt of sack* to the salary. Secondly the *brassica* must be made use of as [...] it seems the *cabbage* was anciently accounted a remedy for drunkenness [...] I should judge it not amiss to add another plant to this garland, to wit, *ivy* [...] as it is emblematical of the three vices of a court poet in particular; it is *creeping, dirty, and dangling*.

(Hamilton, 1968 (1879): 148-149)

In an early critique of the Poets Laureate its authors noted that the office has not always been held in high esteem:

This work is an attempt ... to give the origin and antiquities of an office, which, *if it in some reigns fell deservedly into contempt*, (my italics) was in earlier times graced by the genius of Jonson and Dryden, and has of late been brought into honourable connection with the names of Southey, Wordsworth and Tennyson.

(Austin and Ralph, 1853: v)

Walter Hamilton, in his book *The Poets Laureate of England*, was similarly dismissive:

It is an admitted fact that, with a few exceptions, the Laureates have been surpassed as poets by their contemporaries, and we therefore miss from the list many men who would have honoured the office by their names. Shakespeare, Milton, Pope and Byron, as Laureates, would have far more than compensated for the loss of Ben Jonson, Davenant, Cibber

and Southey, although these were by no means the dullest of the race.

(Hamilton, 1968 (1879): xi)

On the death of Tennyson, Poet Laureate from 1850 to 1892, it took the authorities some years to find a replacement. Commenting on the delay in finding a suitable candidate for the role a piece written for the *Sydney Mail* noted that:

Some critics of the situation say it is because the claimants have been so many, while others argue that not one has been found to worthily wear the singing-robcs the Laureate poet laid down. Others, again, find a reason in the suggestion that it is the intentions of the powers that be to let the title and office fall in abeyance... It may be admitted at once that the Laureateship is an anachronism, and that in some respects we might be better without it.

(F.J.D., The *Sydney Mail* Online, 1893)

Recent commentary on the laureateship also questions the relevance of the role and the qualities of the Poet Laureate. In a *Guardian* interview, Alan Jenkins, poet and *TLS* deputy editor, stated that ‘one is somehow queasy about writing which is about the Royals’ while A.N. Wilson in the same feature is more openly critical of the role:

The whole concept of the Poet Laureate is completely ridiculous and they shouldn't have one. When the idea of it started, poets had to have aristocratic and royal patrons in order to survive, but everything is different now. The masses are not interested in what the Queen wants anyway, so it's all a farce. And the forced subjects are bound to make the poetry worse.

(Addley, Barton and Fleming, *Guardian* Online, 2002).

The poet Peter Porter, in the same article, also noted that ‘the position has never commanded a great deal of interest or respect.’

Notwithstanding this negative rhetoric the office has survived into the twenty-first century and in recent years has been reimagined in a strikingly dynamic manner. Given the significance of this role over the centuries to poets, society and the monarchy it is important to consider the history of the post, how it has developed over time and how it may be interpreted today. Therefore, this chapter looks at the different poets who have taken on the mantle of Laureate and their success or otherwise in the job; it examines the changing role of Poet Laureate over the centuries and explores the value of the position to literature and society. Despite frequent criticism of the role and those who have held the office, the Poet Laureate is nonetheless a high profile figure with significant powers of influence. As it represents the highest role a poet can assume in the public sphere the subject is therefore very relevant to this thesis. When a poet accepts the role of Laureate they become a member of the royal household and it is this aspect of ‘residency’ and its function in fostering literature which has led me to include the chapter in this section on the writer in residence.

But what does it actually mean to be Poet Laureate? Various Laureates through the centuries have interpreted the role in different ways to satisfy either personal or more public/political agendas. In its early stages the Laureate was both the political and poetical defender of the monarch; this was important during the restoration when Charles II needed to win the support and confidence of the people. With later monarchs and Laureates this role appears to degenerate into that of panegyrist and paid flatterer, with the result that by the end of the eighteenth century

the Laureate is little more than a dutiful servant who can be relied upon to remain discreet and maintain the status quo. In the nineteenth century Robert Southey succeeded in rescuing its tarnished reputation and ensured that the office was regarded as an honorable distinction worthy of his immediate successors, Wordsworth and Tennyson. The twentieth-century Laureate becomes increasingly more populist paving the way for the very public figure of the twenty-first century Laureate who is an outspoken, accessible and respected champion of poetry, in all its forms, and of the community of poets.

The following sections provide a more detailed account of the individual poets who have held the office over the centuries.

3.2 Political and Poetical Defender

Happy the man, and happy he alone,
 He who can call today his own;
 He who, secure within, can say,
 Tomorrow, do thy worst, for I have lived today.

(Dryden, 2003 (1685): 65-68).

The role of Poet Laureate was originally devised as a means of inspiring the people's devotion to the monarch and John Dryden had sufficient motivation and talent to rise to that particular challenge; he was also content to exploit the privileges of the position whilst satisfying the demands of the monarch. Edward Kemper Broadus states that 'the role of the Laureate as poet-advocate and spokesman of the court began with Dryden and ended with Dryden' (Broadus, 1921: 74) suggesting

that Dryden was the only Laureate to engage fully with the political dimension of the role. He also maintained a close relationship with the monarch, a feat which only one other Laureate, Alfred Lord Tennyson, managed to achieve.⁹

In fact, it was Cromwell's death in 1658 which gave Dryden the subject for his first poem of any note and was prefaced with the following dedication:

Heroic Stanzas
consecrated to the glorious memory of his Most Serene
and Renowned Highness, OLIVER, late Lord Protector of
this Commonwealth, &c

It includes a number of panegyric verses in the following vein:

His grandeur he derived from heaven alone;
For he was great, ere fortune made him so;
And wars, like mists that rise against the sun,
Made him but greater seem, not greater grow.

(Dryden, 2003 (1659))

Just two years later, on the restoration of Charles II to the throne in 1660, Dryden promptly espoused the Royal cause and wrote '*Astraea Redux*, a poem on the Happy Restoration and Return of his Sacred Majesty Charles the Second,' in which he first insults Cromwell, citing as crimes the very qualities he had previously praised as virtues, and proceeds to sing Charles' many qualities:

Oh, happy prince! Whom Heaven hath taught the way,
By paying vows to have more vows to pay!
Oh, happy age! Oh times like those alone,
By fate reserved for great Augustus' throne!
When the joint growth of arms and arts foreshow

⁹ Ted Hughes developed a friendship with the Queen Mother in the course of his laureateship.

The world a monarch, and that monarch you.

(Dryden, 2003 (1660): 17)

As a powerful satirist, Dryden was a strong advocate and spokesman for Charles II and ‘he brought an authority to the laureateship which few of his successors have matched’ (Laurie, 1999: 18). Broadus noted that ‘*Annus Mirabilis* (1667), with its account of England’s prowess on land and sea, proclaimed Dryden as a master of panegyric ... but also rarely gifted as a pleader and exponent in verse’ (1921: 67). At Charles II’s request Dryden willingly accepted the role of poetic propagandist in return for £200 and a ‘butt of sack’. With a ready pen and, it would seem, an untroubled conscience, Dryden not only sang the monarch’s praises but also wrote satirical verse against the opposition, in particular the Earl of Shaftesbury. His mock-biblical satire, *Absalom and Achitophel*, dealt with aspects of the Exclusion crisis and featured Charles as King David, Monmouth as Absalom and Shaftesbury as his wily adviser, Achitophel.¹⁰ The concluding passage sounds a warning note as it affirms Royalist principles, and asserts David’s determination to govern ruthlessly if he cannot do so mercifully:

Must I at length the sword of justice draw?
 Oh curst effects of necessary law!
 How ill my fear they by my mercy scan!
 Beware the fury of a patient man.

(Dryden, 2003, (1681): 203)

Soon after the accession of James II, Dryden converted to Roman Catholicism and during James’s reign, ‘Dryden was a persistent and bigoted

¹⁰ Monmouth and Shaftesbury wanted to exclude the Roman Catholic James Duke of York as Charles II’s heir.

supporter of all the Court measures, and the attempts to reintroduce Popery were powerfully seconded by his poems' (Hamilton, 1968 (1879): 93). Lord Macaulay noted that 'self-respect and a fine sense of the becoming were not to be expected from one who had led a life of mendicancy and adulation' (Hamilton, 1968 (1879): 93-94). Criticized for being an unashamed sycophant, Dryden fell victim to the role betraying, as Samuel Johnson would view it, his true calling as a poet: 'he that never finds his error till it hinders his progress towards wealth or honour, [and] will not be thought to love truth only for herself' (Johnson, 1820, (1779-81): 308).

Despite his talent and dedication Dryden would not hold the post for life. When in 1689 William III came to the throne, Dryden, as a Roman Catholic, could not swear allegiance to the new Protestant King and therefore had to relinquish his offices including that of Poet Laureate. Notwithstanding his blatant opportunism, Dryden set a high literary standard for his successors and as T. S. Eliot remarked, he had the ability 'to make the small into the great, the prosaic into the poetic, the trivial into the magnificent' (Eliot, 1924: 205).

Dryden was replaced by his great rival Thomas Shadwell whom he had mocked in the satire *MacFlecknoe*: 'Shadwell alone, of all my Sons, is he/Who stands confirm'd in full stupidity.' Shadwell was a far less talented poet who, during his three and a half years in office, wrote no more than half a dozen set pieces (Russel, 1982: 23). His most significant contribution was 'Votum Perenne, A poem to the King on New Year's Day' (1690), which set the fashion for producing an ode each 1 January, an event that subsequently became a feature of the Laureate's duties. A section from his poem 'For Queen Mary's Birthday' (1691) is predictably dull and lifeless and illustrates all too clearly the plight of the Poet Laureate, Shadwell's lack

of talent and the inevitable difficulty of writing about the monarchy in any meaningful or sincere way in verse:

Welcome, welcome, glorious Morn,
 Nature smiles at thy return.
 At thy return the joyful earth
 Renews the blessings of *Maria's* birth.
 The busy sun prolongs his race,
 The youthful year his earliest tribute pays
 And frosts forsake his head and tears his face.

(Shadwell, 1968 (1691): 369)

Given the tumultuous political events of the late seventeenth century Shadwell was not short of inspiration. His failure to produce poetry of any great note could be attributed to his lack of talent or the possible need to write in a 'bland but safe manner' (Broadus, 1921: 88).

On Shadwell's death, Nahum Tate was appointed Poet Laureate, not because of any great literary skill but because his patron, the earl of Dorset, had become Lord Chamberlain on the accession of William III (Russel, 1981: 33): Tate was quite simply in the right place at the right time. 'If to be a sycophant is the true function of a court poet, Tate was the greatest of all the court poets' (*New York Times* Archive, 1922). He will be remembered for three works, none of which have any bearing on the laureateship: his collaboration with Dryden on *Absalom and Achitophel*; his reworking of *King Lear* complete with happy ending, and for his contribution to the *New Version of the Psalms of David* (1696), which included 'While shepherds watched their flocks by night'.

3.3 Panegyrists and Paid Flatterers

In rush'd Eusden and cry'd , who shall have it
 I, the true laureate, to whom the King gave it?
 Apollo begged pardon and granted his claim,
 But vow'd that till then he'd never heard of his name.

(John Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham, 1718) ¹¹

Many of Dryden's successors were poetic hacks and men of the theatre, more interested in the scandals and chatter of Covent Garden than in celebrating the lives of their monarchs. In fact it is significant that all Laureates from Dryden to Warton, with the exception of the Reverend Laurence Eusden, were satirists and dramatists which helped to keep them in the public gaze and brought greater financial rewards than the work of the poet. Contemporary readers and writers would struggle to recall the names let alone the work of a string of Laureates 'many of mediocre talent, chosen for reasons of fashion or political acceptability' (Booth, 1989: 808). The list of eighteenth-century poets who held the post runs as follows: Nicholas Rowe, a scholar, Laurence Eusden, the most obscure, Colley Cibber, the most satirized, William Whitehead, who attempted to shed the role of sycophant, Thomas Warton, a more romantic royal panegyrist, and Henry Pye, considered by many to have been the worst of all the Laureates (McSmith, *The Independent* online, 2009), although it seems unfair to pick him out for special damnation. The majority of these poets have dropped into oblivion as far as the public is concerned and have equally been largely ignored by literary history. Given that there were many other good poets to choose from (Isaac Watts, Thomas Gray, Thomas Cowper), one must ask why the role of Laureate in the eighteenth century was marked by mediocrity, a fact which further

¹¹ John Sheffield was a patron of Dryden, a friend of Pope and a statesman who held high offices but was 'neither esteemed nor beloved' (Drabble, 2000: 924).

diminished the prestige of the role. It is likely that the Laureates were chosen for their loyal support of the monarchy and could be relied upon to keep their own views to themselves. Despite social and political upheaval, these men were largely satisfied with producing inane odes in praise of the reigning monarch rather than providing insightful comments on the times.

It is hardly surprising therefore that, in the course of the eighteenth century, the Poet Laureate became a figure of fun. Both Eusden and Cibber were cruelly lampooned in Alexander Pope's *The Dunciad*. Pope, a Roman Catholic, would not have been eligible for the appointment and so he contented himself with ridiculing the role. He referred to Cibber in his epic poem, *The Dunciad* (1728), as the 'King of Dunces.' An anonymous contemporary wrote, 'In merry old England it once was a rule,/The King had his Poet, and also his Fool:/But now we're so frugal, I'd have you to know it,/That Cibber can serve both for Fool and for Poet' (Hamilton, 1879: 167).

Cibber endured the abuse with very good humour and was the first to admit that he did not take his laureateship very seriously stating that 'he wrote more to be fed than to be famous' (Broadus, 1921: 135). He had never claimed to be a poet (he preferred to write for the theatre) but if the King was happy to have him in the post he was quite content to produce a handful of odes each year in return for a very welcome fee of £100 and a butt of wine. Under a pseudonym he criticized his own Laureate verse : 'No Man worthy of the Name of an Author is a more faulty Writer than myself; that I am not Master of my own Language, I too often feel, when I am at a loss for Expression' (Russel, 1981: 69). The Poet Laureate's own admission of his literary failings, despite his disarming honesty, brings the role further into disrepute. When Cibber died in 1757 the Lord Chamberlain, Duke of Devonshire, the

reputation of the Laureateship might have been salvaged had Thomas Gray agreed to the appointment. Gray was very dismissive of the role and to his friend, William Mason, wrote:

Though I very well know the bland emollient saponaceous qualities both of sack and silver, yet if any great man would say to me, 'I make you rat-catcher to his Majesty, with a salary of £300 a year and two butts of the best Malaga; and though it has been usual to catch a mouse or two, for form's sake, in public once a year, yet to you, sir, we shall not stand upon these things,' I cannot say that I should jump at it [...] I should [...] think everybody I saw smelt a rat about me.

(Gray, 1900-1912 (1757): 373)

William Whitehead, though lacking Gray's fame and talent, was appointed Poet Laureate in Gray's place and remained in the post for twenty eight years, a period in office exceeded only by Tennyson, Masfield and Southey. At the time of Whitehead's appointment England was at war with France and involved in fighting in America and India as well as Europe. To his credit Whitehead introduced a new dimension to his role as Poet Laureate by addressing the public directly in his *Verses to the People of England* (1758), in which he made a passionate appeal to the nation to rally behind its leaders.

His first official ode, for George II's 75th birthday appeared later that year. Again, Whitehead attempted to be innovative and apparently, with a great deal of poetic licence, traced the king's ancestry in verse back to the year 963. His years in office were significant ones for the nation including the war with America and the birth of the United States and these events, rather than attempts to defend the King or support the government, coloured Whitehead's poetry. One hundred years after Dryden's appointment it was assumed that the Laureate's work 'would have little

power to sway opinion or effect change' (Laurie, 1999: 53). During this time he continued to write plays for the theatre as well as producing the required quota of official poems, enduring attacks from the satirists, who referred to his work as 'quit-rent odes' and 'pepper-corns of praise' (Southey, 1836: 124). When he died in 1785 his autobiographical work, entitled 'A Pathetic Apology for all Laureates, past, present, and to come', was found with his papers. This had been written for the benefit of his friends, rather than public consumption, and was only later published when William Mason produced a memoir of his life in 1788, noting that 'his prize-verses, already mentioned, have but little merit, if we deduct from them that of mere easy versification, which he seems to have acquired by sedulously imitating Mr. Pope's manner' (Mason, 1788: 10-14). Whitehead's reflections on the Laureateship seemed to capture the rather futile nature of the post of Poet Laureate:

Ye silly dogs, whose half-year lays
 Attend like satellites on Bays;
 And still, with added lumber, load
 Each birthday and each new year ode,

...

His muse, *oblig'd* by sack and pension,
 Without a subject, or invention –
 Must certain words in order set,
 As innocent as a gazette;
 Must some half-meaning half disguise,
 And utter neither truth nor lies.

(Whitehead, 1788, in Russel, 1981: 85)

When the reigning Laureate ridicules the role it is hardly surprising that later contenders might have reservations about assuming the mantle.

The two Laureates following Whitehead, Thomas Warton and Henry Pye, did little to enhance the role. Warton's most significant contribution to the post was to share his interest in medieval life and literature with the public, making him one of the great forerunners of the Romantic Movement (Russel, 1981: 89). He was fifty-seven when Whitehead died and had established himself as a distinguished Oxford scholar and versatile poet. With his new edition of Milton's poems due to be published he seemed like an excellent choice, a poet who would wear the laurels with some style. Long before his own appointment, Warton had expressed the view that 'the more than annual return of a composition on a trite argument would be no longer required' for an office which he deemed 'Gothic and unaccustomed to modern manners' (Warton, 1781: 404-5). Edward Gibbon also believed that the role of Poet Laureate reflected badly on both state and poetry and noted that 'the best time for abolishing this ridiculous custom is while the prince is a man of virtue, and the poet a man of genius' (1788: 504).

Despite his better judgment Warton nonetheless bowed to the demands of the post. His first official offering, the King's birthday ode, had to be written within a few weeks and did little to impress his peers. The satirists wasted little time in launching their attack in the form of an edition entitled *Probationary Odes for the Laureateship*.¹² In 1788 Warton was spared the trouble of producing a birthday ode as the king had sunk into insanity and a birthday poem would have been inappropriate.

Warton's successor, Henry Pye, was an equally uninspiring poet (Russel, 1981; Hamilton 1879) and was only appointed as other more worthy poets such as

¹² Eighteenth-century satirists, such as Pope and Swift, were keen to expose the follies and moral corruption of society in the neo-classical period. Satirists attacked all forms of hypocrisy including the role and work of the Poet Laureate.

William Hayley and William Cowper both refused the post (Tilney, 1980: 32).

Cowper's heartfelt objections are worth noting here:

Heaven guard my brows from the wreath you mention ...
It would be a leaden extinguisher, clapped on all the fire of
my genius, and I should never more produce a line worth reading.

(Southey, 1836: 4)

Pye's appointment was probably largely political and a reward for his loyal support of William Pitt (Russel, 1981). He held the post for twenty-three years during which time he produced a number of stale, mechanical odes, but otherwise brought little to the role. He lived through an age of extraordinary upheaval and change – war with France, the French Revolution, and the executions of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette. At home, nervous of the effects of the revolution on England, the government introduced draconian controls, suspending *habeas corpus* and banning all public meetings. Surprisingly, by twenty-first century standards at least, none of these momentous events and controversial measures feature in Pye's work and he appears to have contented himself with amiable platitudes, patriotic aspirations and loyal flattery. In his ode for the year 1793, in which Louis XVI was executed and England grew restless for reform, Pye happily turned his thoughts to a pastoral idyll:

Nurtur'd in storms the infant year,
Comes in terrific glory forth;
Earth meets him wrapp'd in mantle drear,
And the loud tempest sings his birth.
Yet, mid the elemental strife
Brood the rich germs of vernal life,
From January's iron reign,
And the dark months succeeding train
The renovated glebe prepare
For genial May's ambrosial air
For fruits that glowing Summer yields,

For laughing Autumn's glowing fields;
 And the stout swain whose frame defies
 The driving storm, the hostile skies,
 While his keen plowshare turns the stubborn soil,
 Knows plenty only springs the just reward of toil.

Hamilton noted that 'Pye succeeded Warton as Laureate; but for that fact his name would be forgotten' and confirmed that he wrote 'second-rate books on uninteresting topics' and a good deal of 'tedious rhyme which he meant for poetry' (Hamilton, 1879: 203).

3.4 A New Era

The nineteenth century marks a turning point in the history of the laureateship and it is largely due to Southey's determination to reinvest the role with a level of dignity and respectability. Over the years, a number of poets turned down the laureateship on the grounds that its image was tarnished and that the role would compromise their literary freedom. Equally, from the state's or monarch's point of view, it was not always easy to find the most suitable candidate. On Henry Pye's death the country had a wealth of talented poets, at least those whom we now recognize to have had talent, and yet, at the time, none were considered altogether suitable for the role. The unreliable Coleridge was a drug addict who later abandoned his wife and child; Byron delighted yet outraged society with accounts of his exotic travels and scandalous affairs; Blake whose work was never fully appreciated in his lifetime was viewed, like many of the Romantics, as an eccentric and a revolutionary, and Shelley was far too openly critical of George III to be a serious candidate. The Romantic poets with their imagination, passion and preoccupation with the self could not be relied upon to produce appropriate poetry twice a year in the form of safe New Year and birthday odes.

Initially the post was offered to Walter Scott but he was advised by the Duke of Buccleugh not to accept the ‘ridiculous’ role, proof that even into the nineteenth century the role is tainted with derision:

Any future poem of yours would not come forward with the same probability of a successful reception. The Poet Laureate would stick to you and your productions like a piece of court-plaister. Your muse has hitherto been independent – don’t put her into harness. Only think of being chaunted and recitivated by a parcel of hoarse and squeaking choristers on a birthday for the edification of the bishops, pages, maids of honour, and gentlemen-pensioners.¹³ Oh, horrible, thrice horrible!

(Lockhart, 1896: 243)

Scott refused but was generous enough to suggest that his friend Southey would make a more suitable candidate. Southey had earlier revealed both his own arrogance and distaste for the role when he wrote that he ‘thought it probable that the not-very-desirable succession’ might be offered him (Southey C.C. 1849-50: 41). He had also declared, again revealing something of his character and disposition that he ‘would not write odes as boys write exercises at stated times and upon stated subjects’ (40).¹⁴ Despite this inauspicious beginning, Southey assumed the laureateship and resolved to ‘execute it so as to give it a new character’ (41) and he continually spoke of his determination to behave ‘in a manner which ... might redeem the office from contempt’ (Speck, 2006: 185). Despite his self-confidence he took criticism badly and wrote that he regretted his office would ‘give occasion to

¹³ Here he refers to the tradition, established in the eighteenth century, whereby the Laureates’ words were set to music and sung on special occasions. It mattered little what the actual words were (George I hardly spoke any English) as long as ‘they lent themselves to musical composition’ (Broadus, 1921: 102). It is worth noting that at this time the Poet Laureate was paid £100 while the King’s Master of Music was awarded £200 (102).

¹⁴ He referred to the practice of writing the New Year poem as the Laureate’s ‘odeous’ duty.

the jests of newspaper jokesmiths' (Warter, 1856: 336). Southey's success in transforming the role is reflected in Wordsworth's ultimate acceptance of the laureateship and in his letter of acceptance Wordsworth declared himself honoured to do so as the office reflected 'a sense of the national importance of poetic literature' (Broadus, 1921: 183).

Though considered by some to be one of the greatest poets of his time, the publication of Southey's *A Vision of Judgment* (1821), written in commemoration of George III, received mixed reviews. His description of the King's arrival at the gates of Heaven made fairly dull reading but it was his preface, attacking the 'Satanic school of poets', as he had named Byron, Shelley and their followers, that enraged the Romantics. Byron responded savagely with a piece entitled *The Vision of Judgment* in which ridicules Southey's vanity, metrical incompetence and lack of imagination. In *Don Juan* (1819-24) Byron rhymes Southey with 'quaint and mouthy' and, in the dedication to this work, pours scorn on the beleaguered Poet Laureate:

You, Bob! Are rather insolent, you know,
 At being disappointed in your wish
 To supersede all warblers here below,
 And be the only Blackbird in the dish.
 And then you overstrain yourself, or so,
 And tumble downward like the flying fish
 Gasping on deck, because you soar too high,
 Bob, and fall for lack of moisture quite a dry Bob.

(Lord Byron, 1858: 521)

It is telling that over the course of Southey's long reign as Poet Laureate so many more respected and remembered poets lived and died: Scott, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats. (However, none would have been considered acceptable by the

establishment of the time.) Nonetheless, Southey brought a sense of purpose and seriousness to the role which was to mark a turning point and help to redefine the office as one to which the true poets of the day might aspire:

When he became Poet Laureate, he was determined to be more than just court poet ... he felt called to be the voice and sometimes the mentor of the nation ... he determined to comment in poetry on national events and to point out to Britain the path he believed that she should follow ... he saw himself in the office of Laureate as a spiritual as well as literary leader.

(Tilney, 1980: 366)

When Wordsworth picked up the baton from Southey in 1843 he became, at seventy-three, the oldest poet to accept the post. Many of his contemporaries were shocked at his acceptance especially considering his views of the establishment in his more radical youth. Robert Browning was deeply critical and Byron referred to him as another ‘epic renegade’ (McGann, 2002 : 41). In his initial letter of refusal, Wordsworth acknowledged the honour bestowed upon him and noted that it afforded him ‘high gratification’ but he feared the office ‘imposes duties which, far advanced in life as I am, I cannot venture to undertake’ (Grosart, 2005 (1876): 502). The prospect of writing official odes for birthdays, funerals and coronations did not appeal and, interestingly, for the first time in the history of the post, the then prime minister, Sir Robert Peel, excused him from such duties. Wordsworth took Peel at his word and did not produce a single line of poetry in the seven years of his laureateship.¹⁵

Can the post of Poet Laureate have any real significance or impact on the public if the incumbent fails to produce some meaningful work while in office?

¹⁵ Wordsworth’s lack of poetic output in this period can be attributed to his age and the grief he suffered on the death of his daughter Dora in 1847.

Does the absence of official odes detract from or enhance the role? And did Wordsworth's refusal or inability to write while in office demean the role in some way? He enhanced the stature of the post by refusing to write odes simply to order or in empty praise of the ruling monarch. While his lack of laureate poems make it impossible to offer any kind of literary critique the prestige associated with his literary merit was sufficient to raise the status of the role for future Laureates. The government must have realized that it was better to have a prestigious Poet Laureate who wrote nothing rather than a mediocre poet who wrote too much, though it is perhaps not exactly a ringing endorsement of the role. Wordsworth held the post until his death in 1850.

Documents in the National Archive and Broadus's study of the Poets Laureate (1921) both indicate that, on Wordsworth's death, Elizabeth Barrett Browning was considered for the role. The *Athenaeum* also proposed Browning as an appropriate successor stating that 'the appointment of a woman poet would be a fitting compliment to the Queen' (Ousby, 1993: 124). However she was not selected largely because the establishment was not prepared to appoint a female Poet Laureate; the country would have to wait another 159 years and a further eight Laureates before a woman was deemed suitable for the job.

When Tennyson's *In Memoriam* was published in 1850, Prince Albert was so moved, along with many others, that he persuaded Queen Victoria to appoint him Poet Laureate. Tennyson with his immense energy, his sentimental yet powerful verse, so typical of the Victorian era, and his interest in science and technology, embodied the spirit of the age. The country could feel it had a great poet, and an influential and outspoken character with whom they could identify:

Throughout his tenure ... when men called Tennyson the Laureate, they thought of him as the poet of England and the English, the poet-interpreter of the thought of his time, and the poet-sage.

(Broadus, 1921: 190)

Tennyson, the poet-sage, had no difficulty whatever writing odes and New Year poems and always managed to make them heartfelt, moving and powerful. The most successful laureate poem must be 'The Charge of the Light Brigade.' Tennyson had read an account of the battle in *The Times* written by the influential war correspondent William Russell and was so moved by Russell's article and the horrific nature of the battle that he wrote the poem within a few minutes of reading, lifting much of the language from the newspaper piece: 'blunder'd', 'glory', 'battery-smoke', 'shattered and sundered', 'flashed all their sabres bare.' Through Tennyson's use of this emotive language in his poetry and by engaging with the significant events of the day he succeeded in capturing the hearts and minds of the whole nation. The poem, sent to the *Examiner*; was printed on 9 December and two thousand copies were distributed to the British troops besieging Sebastopol. Through this one poem he demonstrated his talent and his confidence and challenged any notion that the national poet must, by definition, provide unthinking support to the establishment. In engaging with issues of the day Tennyson evoked sympathy and appealed to nationalist fervor yet stopped short of exploring the futility or immorality of war, a theme which has preoccupied the twenty-first century (anti) laureates. Tennyson was a very public figure who clearly enjoyed the prestige of the official role and the attention that was accorded him as a result. However, he soon began to tire of the inconveniences associated with high office and in a letter to his Aunt, Elizabeth Russell, he complains:

As for myself I am full of trouble and shall be for a long time
and by way of helping me out of it the 200,000,000 poets of
Great Britain deluge me daily with volumes of poems – truly the
Laureateship is no sinecure. If any good soul would just by way
of a diversion send me a tome of prose. O the shoals of trash!

(Tennyson, September 28, 1852, in Lang and Shannon, 1987: 45)

In addition to writing hugely popular poems, though they did not always meet with critical acclaim, he also succeeded in finding original ways in which to engage with his admiring public. In 1890 he made one of the first recordings of ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’. This can be heard on the Poetry Archive, with Tennyson using the ‘chanting’ style of reciting poetry, popular at the time, adopting a galloping rhythm in imitation of the unfortunate soldiers hurtling towards defeat and certain death. Another mode of reaching out to his public was through photography and the publicity he enjoyed as a result turned him into something of an icon. He was photographed in various poses including in sackcloth, in an effort to demonstrate his solidarity with the ordinary soldier. He was a hugely successful Poet Laureate and succeeded in celebrating monarchy and the nation at a time when most people were still proud of the Royal Family. Another aspect of his laureateship distinguishes him from his predecessors, namely, his close friendship with the Queen. This would not be a feature of the laureateship again until Ted Hughes accepted the laurels and subsequently developed a close relationship with the Queen Mother.

Tennyson eventually came to symbolize his era almost as much as Queen Victoria. He died aged eighty-three having held the post for forty-two years, longer than any other Poet Laureate, becoming the first British poet to become a truly national figure in his own lifetime. After Tennyson’s death the laureateship remained vacant for over three years, an indication of the difficulty that Gladstone

and Lord Roseberry had in finding a suitable successor. There was talk, as when Warton and Wordsworth died, of abolishing the role as there seemed to be no suitable candidate to follow successfully in his footsteps: Rudyard Kipling was only twenty-seven at the time, William Morris turned it down, Algernon Swinburne,¹⁶ an outspoken republican and controversial figure, did not meet with approval, and of course, although Christina Rossetti's name was suggested, as a woman, she would have been considered unsuitable (Russel, 1981; F.J.D., 1893). Eventually however it was agreed, despite the difficulty in finding a suitable successor to Tennyson, that such a break with tradition would be undesirable as it would sever the one official link between literature and the state. The post was offered to Alfred Austin.

Austin, along with Eusden, Cibber, Whitehead and Pye, is considered one of the worst Laureates in the entire history of the laureateship and the worst and least read English poet. His mediocre attempts at poetry and his poor public image seem all the more acute when compared with the success of his predecessor. Austin was appointed to the role largely on the basis of many years of journalistic service to the Conservative party. As Hopkins notes:

Alfred Austin was a Tory, and an articulate one; and these facts would certainly weigh with Lord Salisbury [...] One of Mr Austin's poems had a title Lord Salisbury could not but be pleased by: 'Why England is Conservative.'

(1955: 172)

Austin was chosen as he was 'dull and safe' and less likely to 'put a foot wrong' (173). How misguided Salisbury had been! Within weeks of his appointment Austin found himself at the centre of a diplomatic scandal with his first official poem 'Jameson's Ride.' Moved to write about events of national interest his Kipling-esque

¹⁶ "“May I die a Poet Laureate!” Swinburne was apt to exclaim in moments of stress rather as the rest of us might say. “God forbid!”” (Hopkins, 1955: 167).

poem paid tribute to Dr Jameson's disastrous attempt to overthrow Boer resistance in southern Africa. His work succeeded only in angering the Queen and embarrassing the government. It was generally agreed that it was a poor attempt at poetry in which he trivialized the seriousness of the situation in South Africa. A week later *Punch* published 'The Laureate's First Ride', one of the many parodies written in response to Austin's disastrous poem.

Say, is it a song? Well – blow it!
 But I'll sing it, boys, all the same
 Because I'm the Laureate Poet,
 That's the worst of having a name!
 I must be inspired to order,
 'Go, tell 'em, to save their breath!
 I can rhyme to 'order' with 'border',
 And jingle to 'breath' with 'death'.

(Punch, 1896)

Jameson was tried in London and sentenced to fifteen months in prison. In response to the event Kipling was to write what would become the Nation's favourite poem, 'If', in which he transforms the personal humiliation into something universal and moving: another example of the 'true' poet triumphing while the Laureate struggles.

It has been noted above that over the years Laureates have produced some substandard work in office but Austin surely plumbs the depths with his lines written for the Prince of Wales during a protracted illness: 'Across the wires the electric message came /He is no better, he is much the same' (Hannan, the *Telegraph* Online, 2008). Drabble notes that although publishing twenty volumes of verse, they were 'of little merit' and his appointment as Laureate was greeted with 'widespread mockery' (Drabble, 2000: 53).

The Laureateship and poetry had flourished throughout the nineteenth century through the work of the Romantics and the three reputable Laureates: Southey, Wordsworth and particularly Tennyson who raised the profile of poetry to the whole nation. This golden era seems to have faded with Austin whose appointment must be said to have exerted a negative effect on the prestige of the Laureateship. It was not until 1914 with Austin's death and the innovation of the war poets and the modernists that poetry would enjoy a revival and once again enter into the general consciousness.

3.5 Populism and Democracy

Poetry and sovereignty are very primitive things. I like to think of their being united in this way in England ... It's not clear what the laureate is, or does ... I'm sure the worst thing about it ... is the publicity it brings, the pressure to be involved publicly with poetry, which must be pretty inimical to any real writing ... It must be really more of an ordeal than an honour.

Philip Larkin, *Paris Review*, 1982

Robert Bridges, the only medical doctor to hold the post was appointed to the laureateship in 1913 on the eve of the First World War. One of his main contributions to the English language did not come in the form of poetry but in the founding, along with some other English scholars of the day, of the Society for Pure English, an organisation that was to exert a considerable influence on English letters for more than thirty years (Hamilton, 1991: 94). Bridges was later made chairman of the BBC Advisory Committee on Spoken English and was connected with the Oxford University Press, which he advised on matters of style, phonetics, spelling and typography.

Suffering under the scrutiny of the public gaze is an unfortunate consequence of taking on the mantle of Laureate and can prove particularly uncomfortable for the poet whose sensibility and reclusive nature make them unsuited to the role. Too often they are attacked either for the poetry they produce or for their failure to write anything at all. Soon after Bridges' appointment he was criticized for not publishing more poems as Poet Laureate. In 1913 the *New York Times* carried the story, 'King's Canary Won't Sing', demonstrating, even as early as 1913, the press's willingness to find fault with the laureate. Some years later, Bridges' silence was also the subject of the Prime Minister's question time when, in similarly derisory tones, a Mr Bottomley asked, "Is the right honourable Gentleman aware that a portion of the remuneration of the Poet Laureate consists of a certain cash payment in lieu of a supply of Canary wine, and has the Government considered the advisability of paying that part of his salary in kind on the off-chance of his getting inspiration?" (Stanford, 1984: 957)

In fact, the accusation was unfair as Bridges, already seventy-five years old at the time of the exchange noted above, had a number of war poems published between 1914 and 1918. Unfortunately his efforts seemed out of touch and lacked the emotional intensity of the World War I poets, Rupert Brooke and Wilfred Owen. The following is from 'The West Front', based on John Masefield's prose account of the battle of the Somme:

No country know I so well
 as this landscape of hell.
 Why bring you to my pain
 these shadow's effigys
 Of barb'd wire, riven trees,
 the corpse-strewn blasted plain?

(Bridges, 1920: 31)

The language is clichéd and the poem is a poor attempt to capture the horrors of war when compared with Owen's 'Dulce et Decorum Est':

If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues

(Owen in Day-Lewis, 1963: 55)

The Spirit of Man, an anthology of English and French poetry and prose was published in 1916. Its purpose was to console a nation devastated by war and was an attempt to capture the experiences of the ordinary soldier in the trenches. Described as 'highly successful' (Drabble, 2000: 133) it also contained a number of poems by Gerard Manley Hopkins, little of whose work had yet been published.

A number of reviews of Bridges' poetry speak of his love of classical form and, interestingly, his formal experimentation, but note also a lack of emotional depth. He is a poet 'whose poetry is always accomplished and finely wrought' yet despite his mastery of poetic style, 'we do not see in him any mastery of metre, still less any mastery of emotion' (*The Spectator* 82, 1899: 888). It has also been noted that his work is characterized by 'detachment, self-discipline, conscious intention, and scrupulous respect for the medium' and his significance in literary history is 'as a representative of his time rather than as a powerfully creative influence' (Perkins, 1976: 171-77). Although his *Testament of Beauty* 'met with high acclaim and sold extremely well' (Drabble, 2000: 133), at best his work might be viewed as transitional, bridging the gap between the Victorians and the Modernists. A note in *Who's Who in Twentieth-Century Literature* claims he 'never achieved poetic power' as his creativity was 'muted by innate conformism' (Seymour-Smith, 1976: 56).

Living a life of privilege – Bridges was educated at Eton, Oxford and afterwards studied medicine at St Bartholomew's Hospital (Drabble, 2000: 133) – he was perceived as a rather distant intellectual, cut off from the real world and the everyday experiences of ordinary men and women. One of his lasting contributions to the cultural heritage however was his decision to have Blake's 'Jerusalem' set to music showing that he was not afraid to acknowledge the power of earlier poets to speak to the people. His other significant action was that he arranged the first publication of the poems of his friend Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose work was to have a powerful influence on contemporary poetry. When Bridges died in 1930 he was considered to be a major poet although in these days his work has fallen largely into obscurity.

Bridges' successor John Masefield was much more a man of the people, a working class champion who liked to write about the experiences of ordinary people: fishermen, miners and ship builders. He was already a popular poet, playwright and novelist and on first being offered the post he hesitated. He could only be persuaded to accept when he was assured he would not be expected to publish. Ramsay MacDonald, the first Labour Prime Minister, chose Masefield for his affinity with ordinary people, a man who had 'little formal education, whose own life had been a struggle' (Laurie, 1999: 146). In the course of his Laureateship however he published verses on the launching of the *Queen Mary* (1934) and on the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963. On the outbreak of the Second World War he responded with a number of poems in praise of the young who had to face the ordeal of fighting for their country. Many of these poems became extremely popular, such as 'Paddington, Mother and Son', and were recorded and recited in pubs across the country (Spark, 1953).

Masefield, very much like his predecessors Dryden and Southey, was a prolific writer and produced fifty books of verse, twenty novels and eight plays. He was a dutiful Laureate and produced many odes on a regular basis which he submitted to the *Times*, always including a stamped addressed envelope should the editor wish to return his work. Masefield's best-loved and best-known poems were written long before he became Laureate in 1930 and he is perhaps best remembered for 'Sea-Fever', from *Salt-Water Ballads*, in which he expresses his love and longing for the sea:

I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's shaking,
And a grey mist on the sea's face and a grey dawn breaking.

(Masefield, 1919 (1902): 85)

Cecil Day-Lewis was one of the favourite candidates to succeed Masefield when he died in 1967. Somewhat rebellious and idealistic in his youth, like his predecessors Southey and Wordsworth, Day-Lewis had been a member of the communist party and spokesman for the so-called 'Auden Gang' of poets (Hynes, 1976: iv). Yet, by the time of his appointment in 1967 he had transformed himself into a pillar of the establishment pursuing many different careers at once including translator of classical texts, novelist, detective writer (under the pen-name Nicholas Blake), performer and Professor of Poetry at Oxford (Stanford, 2007). An important contribution as Laureate was his involvement with the Arts Council which he used as a means of promoting poetry, and supporting poets and poetry publishers. One of his missions was to encourage the Arts Council to join with the Publishers' Association to offer poetry publishers an annual subsidy against any losses they might incur

(Stanford, 2007: 218). His first official Laureate piece, 'Then and Now', was commissioned by the *Daily Mail* as a contribution to the 'I'm Backing Britain' campaign and was published on the front page of the paper on 5 January 1968. The poem was inspired by a group of typists who suggested everyone should work an extra thirty minutes a day without pay:

Be as you were then, tough and gentle islanders –
 Steel in the fibre, charity in the veins –
 When few stood on their dignity or lines of demarcation,
 And few sat back in the padded cells of profit. (9-12)

While such sentiments might reveal the Laureate's perceived desire to please the monarchy and the government it is unlikely that they endeared him to the trade unions. A further poem 'Hail Teesside!' was written when the new County Borough of Teesside came into being on 1 April 1968, this time commissioned by the *Evening Gazette*. 'For the Investiture' was written for Prince Charles and was printed in *The Guardian*. Such efforts at poetry were disappointing compared with the work Day-Lewis had produced before becoming Poet Laureate and in his last few years he not only had to suffer extreme ill-health but the growing conviction that he had written nothing of real value that would survive him. His only other notable achievement in those years was a series of poetry programmes for television, *A Lasting Joy*, before he died in May 1972 (Stanford, 2007: 315).

When John Betjeman was appointed to the post of Poet Laureate in 1972 he was already a popular poet. He had won the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry in 1960 and by the time he took office in 1972, more than 200,000 copies of his *Collected Poems* had been sold. He had not expected to receive the appointment commenting that he thought Philip Larkin was a more likely candidate (Russel, 1982:196). In an

interview with the *Times* he talked candidly about his own sense of failure, perhaps once again endearing himself to a British public that likes its heroes slightly flawed. ‘I don’t think I am any good,’ he commented, ‘and if I thought I was any good, I wouldn’t be any good’ (The *Times*, 10 October 1972). Although he was proud to have been offered the job he hated the obligations that went with it and poems written in office celebrating Princess Anne’s wedding, the Queen’s silver jubilee and the Queen Mother’s 80th birthday received a deservedly lukewarm response from the critics.

Yet despite his rather limp Royal poems, Betjeman remained popular with his admiring public. Witty, endearingly middle-class and quintessentially English, he was very much a man of his times while at the same time expressing nostalgia for a certain type of Britain that was already disappearing. Because of this popular appeal he was the perfect Laureate for a growing television-watching nation; in the same way that Tennyson used the medium of recordings to reach out to the public Betjeman found the ideal means of communicating with his audience through television programmes. He adored being in front of the camera and referred to his television career as ‘money for jam’ (Lycett Green, 1995: 377).

Though he clearly enjoyed his relationship with the public, Betjeman’s letters reveal a loathing for his position as Poet Laureate. Just a year after his appointment he wrote to his friend Mary Wilson¹⁷ expressing his inability to think of a suitable verse. He wrote: ‘Oh God, the Royal poem!! Send the H[oly] G[host] to help me over that fence. So far no sign: Watch and pray’ (Lycett Green, 1994: 466) and like many of his predecessors he suffered the horrors of Laureate’s block (Lycett Green,

¹⁷ Wife of Prime Minister, Harold Wilson.

1995). In 1976, Prince Charles asked Betjeman to write a poem for the Queen's silver jubilee. The rather lacklustre result included the chorus: 'For our Monarch and Her People/ United and yet free/ Let bells from every steeple/ Ring out the Jubilee' (Russel, 1981: 198).

On Betjeman's death in 1984 finding a replacement was not straightforward. The most literary and politically suitable candidate would have been Philip Larkin but he declined the post when it was offered to him commenting in his trademark curmudgeonly way: 'I just couldn't face the fifty letters a day, TV shows, representing-British-poetry-in-the-Poetry-Conference-at-Belgrade side of it all.' To other friends he said simply: 'Think of the stamps! Think of the stamps!'¹⁸ (Motion, 1993: 56). He was also convinced at that stage that he had long since ceased to be a poet in any meaningful sense (rather like Wordsworth and to a certain degree Betjeman, in his later years). His one regret was that his refusal would pave the way for Ted Hughes: 'the thought of being the cause of Ted Hughes being buried in Westminster Abbey is hard to live with' (Plays International, 2002: 55).

The second choice, Ted Hughes, was not without its risks, given that he was a much more difficult and inaccessible poet when compared with either Betjeman or Larkin. The newspaper headlines heralded the appointment of Hughes as the new Poet Laureate with the lines: 'Poetic voice of blood and guts' (Skea, Online, 1985). Hughes' friends expressed surprise at the appointment, for, despite his recent OBE and Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry, Hughes was far from the conventional public figure. He was a blunt Yorkshireman, 'as likely as any of his fellow Yorkshiremen to call a spade a bloody shovel' (Skea, Online, 1985). But he wrote about nature, the

¹⁸ Andrew Motion noted that in his first year of office he spent his entire £5,000 allowance on postage stamps 'to reply to members of the public' (Lister, The *Independent* Online, 1999). This may indeed have been a statement of fact or possibly a wry reference to Larkin's cynical view of the laureateship.

English countryside and its wildlife in a deeply spiritual way firmly placing poetry, not on the fringes of life, but at the heart of everything that matters. He revered the monarchy which for him was the symbol of the spiritual unity of the tribe and this admiration for the Royal Family stood him in good stead. He developed a close friendship with Prince Charles and he got on extremely well with the Queen Mother to whom he offered gifts, along with his nature poems, of wild salmon and clotted cream. Evidence of the closeness of these relationships is revealed in his, perhaps overly fawning, letters to both Charles and the Queen Mother (Reid, 2007: 551-2, 651).

While in previous years the Laureateship had been criticised, ridiculed and despised Hughes embraced the role and attempted to raise it to the mystical and sacred status he felt it merited. Avoiding the issue of New Year odes and birthday poems he chose instead to 'revive the ancient idea of a sacramental monarchy that enshrined the spirit of a land and its people' in poems such as 'Rain-Charm for the Duchy', 'The Dream of the Lion' and 'Little Salmon Hymn' (Tonkin, *The Independent Online*, 2009). As passionate about fishing as he was about poetry, much of his work draws on his love of outdoor pursuits and of nature. In addition to investing the role with a mystical status he also used his position in more practical ways such as raising the issue of river pollution, petitioning politicians, including Margaret Thatcher, and eventually helping to set up the Rivers' Trust in Devon. In a recent Radio 4 programme Simon Armitage explored this novel aspect of Hughes' interpretation of his official role: the Poet Laureate as eco warrior (Armitage, BBC Radio 4, 2009).

In his work he went in pursuit of a sense of the sacred at the core of secular institutions and relationships. No doubt deeply sincere, his efforts to idealize the

monarchy today seem somewhat inappropriate and unconvincing given the twenty-first century perspective on a now rather tarnished and demythologized Royal Family. His high sentiments deserted him at the greatest moment of national crisis, Princess Diana's death, when he wrote the commemorative '6 September 1997': 'Holy Tragedy and Loss / Make the many One. / Mankind is a crowned, Holy / Mother and her Son.' Its failure to capture the essence of the tragedy and move the public can be attributed partly to the difficulty of 'writing to order' for such events. Furthermore, it also fails to capture Diana's character and, because of its insistence on abstract nouns – 'tragedy', 'loss', 'mankind' – along with the insincerity and saccharine sentimentality it fails also to move us on an emotional level.

3.6 Reimagining the Role

Hughes' death in 1999 paved the way for Andrew Motion. At that time, there was much Blairite talk, reflecting an end of millennium restlessness, of the institution needing to be reformed, like the NHS and the House of Lords, to make it fit for a twenty-first century democratic Britain (Hislop, BBC Four, 2009). In a modernising move, New Labour reduced the 'sentence' from life to ten years. 'I welcomed the idea that my tenure would last for 10 years,' wrote Motion, 'because the time limit encouraged me to feel that I was expected to be energetic' (Motion, *The Guardian Online*, 2009). However, he was also beset with doubts about how to transform the role and wondered whether the post could 'survive in any meaningful way, within our diverse culture and diffused society' without certain 'realignments', it being 'no longer possible or desirable to speak for a centred and simplified version of the nation' (Motion, *The Guardian Online*, 2009). Yet, I would suggest that the nation

has never enjoyed a centred, unified state and Motion's perception is merely an oversimplification of the rather complex political reality of previous centuries. When Dryden took up the post, in the aftermath of the civil war, religious and political fault lines ran deep. Tennyson, who undoubtedly lived at a particularly cohesive and united period in British history, was nonetheless charged with the task of welcoming a 'foreigner', the Princess of Denmark, to England in 1863 for her marriage to the Prince of Wales. In fact, far from being outmoded, the post of Poet Laureate is one whose time has come, that now more than ever are we in need of a 'public poet.'

Motion, though initially proud of the appointment, claimed to have had writer's block for four of those ten years. Much of his poetic output in this period is negligible, however he achieved a great deal for the status of poetry in that space of time. His aim, to revitalise the Laureateship, found expression in a number of significant projects. While in office, in addition to work celebrating royal occasions, he wrote about national events and current affairs. In this vein he wrote for the TUC about liberty, about homelessness for the Salvation Army, about bullying for Childline, about the foot and mouth outbreak, the Paddington Rail disaster, 9/11 and, First World War veteran, Harry Patch.

He had to face all of the dilemmas of a twenty-first century Laureate: how to connect with the Royal Family when so much is mediated and distorted through the press; how to steer an appropriate course between familiarity and sycophancy; how to write about the Royal Family when a significant proportion of the nation was either indifferent or hostile. There was also the increasingly disheartening pressure of dealing with media commentary which too often featured damning headlines along the lines of 'Poet Laureate writes another no-good poem'? (Bates, *The Guardian* Online, 2009). Perhaps Motion was being faithful to the ancient Laureate tradition of

producing mediocre verse. He is not the first Laureate to experience such a negative response from press and peers but he was endearingly honest about the difficulties he experienced and defended his right to speak his mind.

However there have also been some very positive responses to Motion's Laureateship. James Fenton found much to admire: 'I think Andrew did very well. He was a spokesman for poetry and he did some useful things. He behaved with dignity and he loved to put in an enormous amount of work, absolutely enormous. Really, he was the first Poet Laureate I can think of to take it seriously in that broad professional sense' (Brown, *The Guardian Online*, 2008). Although he claimed to be a royalist, like Hughes and Betjeman before him, he admitted that writing about events in the royal calendar was difficult 'because I don't know these people well', and added, 'However well or badly I write them, the world is full of people who don't like the Royal Family. It could be as good as *Paradise Lost* but they will still think it's going to stink' (Motion, Author Interview: 2010).

Although Motion has not suffered the same condemnation as his predecessors Cibber or Austin he has nonetheless been forced to defend his position on a number of occasions. Craig Raine commented that Motion had written some 'perfectly creditable' Laureate poems, noting also that it is difficult to write great poetry if one is constrained by the need to be inoffensive. 'Good taste is the enemy of literature,' he wrote, lamenting Motion's preference for discretion rather than honesty (Raine, *The Telegraph Online* 2005).

Motion's refashioning of the role is outlined in a reflective piece written at the end of his tenure and published in *The Guardian*:

Whereas most of my predecessors had interpreted the post as an honour,

I felt from the start that it was more like a call to arms. In fact, my main reason for accepting in the first place was that I thought it was time for a respectful kind of revision. Specifically, I thought the Laureateship needed to be changed from a courtier-like role into something more appropriate to modern times, which would be of benefit to poetry.

(*The Guardian Online*, 2009)

His greatest achievement is the manner in which he used the role to allow him to put poetry on the national agenda by developing educational schemes to improve the teaching of poetry in schools, setting up the *Writing Together* scheme and raising the profile of poetry through the development of the Poetry Archive. Like some of his more memorable and successful predecessors, Tennyson, with his early recordings, and Betjeman, with his radio and television appearances, Motion found the most appropriate and contemporary medium for promoting poetry – on the internet. Furthermore, he is not the first Laureate to discover the usefulness of being linked to the most powerful family in the country, the privilege it offers and the access to influence and money, all of which can be used to promote the importance of literature, and poetry in particular, in society.

Speaking at a Poet in the City event in the House of Commons in 2007 about the relationship between poetry and power Motion stated that ‘the sacred duty of poets is to tell the truth about humanity whatever those in authority have to say’ (Motion, 2007: 5). The language he used is telling – ‘sacred’, ‘duty’, ‘truth’, ‘authority’ – and he seems to borrow more heavily from the monarchical word hoard than that of the poet. To talk of ‘duty’ seems to run counter to the free spirit of poetry but he went on to say that ‘it is the duty to say what we think-and-feel to be true as individuals, and to express that truth in ways which are memorable and telling.’ In his speech he paid tribute to the many great poets who challenged the status quo and dared to ‘speak truth to power’: Shakespeare, Dryden, Pope, Shelley, Keats,

Tennyson, Hardy, Housman, Auden and Hughes. Only three of the ten named poets were Laureates which would suggest that the sacred duty of the poet to proclaim the truth at all costs finds freer rein beyond the constraints of the Laureateship.

After ten years, eight royal poems and 700 bottles of sherry, it seems likely that the numerous and time-consuming activities he took upon himself to promote poetry, rather than the pressure to write official poems for Queen and country, were the cause of his writer's block. With its token £5,750-a-year salary¹⁹ and 'butt of sack', the Laureateship has long been what Motion has affectionately termed an 'honorary joke' (Motion, *The Guardian Online*: 2009). In his hands, the role has mattered not so much because of the poems he has written in his public capacity but because he has used his position to make people listen, and to remind politicians and educators of his belief that poetry is not a 'weird addition to life but a primitive thing at the centre of life' (Motion, *The Guardian Online*: 2009). Andy Burnham, the culture secretary, paid tribute to Motion's tenure, praising him in particular for the work he did in raising the profile of poetry, commenting:

I have nothing but praise for the way Andrew Motion has interpreted the role – not only has he reflected the mood of the nation by writing poems in response to public events, but his enthusiasm in championing poetry has been an inspiration.
(National Arts Agency News, Nov. 2008)

There is no doubt that Motion's refashioning of the role paved the way for Duffy allowing her to adopt a more radical approach.

3.7 The First Woman Laureate

The appointment of Carol Ann Duffy as Poet Laureate in May 2009 marked a significant shift in our perception of the role and the image it is meant to project.

¹⁹ In fact Motion received an additional £16,000 to cover the expense involved in his work with schools.

Three hundred and forty-one years after Charles II named John Dryden the first Poet Laureate, a woman had finally been appointed to the most prominent literary position in England.²⁰ In 1999 Duffy was not, according to media reports, considered to be a suitable candidate for the job by Tony Blair's Labour government (Tonkin, *The Independent Online*, 2009). Equally, she had insisted, along with other possible contenders Seamus Heaney and Tony Harrison, that she would not be interested in being Laureate, a stance which highlights the political dimension of the role. Heaney also stated that his own reasons for refusing the position of Poet Laureate were mainly political. Heaney had been vocal in his distaste for the monarchy and the British aristocracy and objected to his inclusion in *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry*:

Don't be surprised if I demur, for, be advised
My passport's green.
No glass of ours was ever raised
To toast *The Queen*.

(Heaney, 1983: 9)

Harrison, a fervent republican, also made it clear that the role would be of no interest to him and elaborated on his views in the poem 'Laureate's Block' which was published in a collection of the same name in 2000:

There should be no successor to Ted Hughes.
'The saponaceous qualities of sack'
are purest poison if paid poets lose
their freedom as PM's or monarch's hack.

Nor should Prince Charles succeed our present Queen
and spare us some toad's ode on coronation.
I'd like all suchlike odes there've ever been
binned by a truly democratic nation.

²⁰ The fact that both the Welsh and the Scottish national poets are also both women, with Gillian Clarke holding the post in Wales and Liz Lochhead in Scotland, is a sign of increasing gender equality in the literary world.

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In the event the title was offered to Andrew Motion who was considered to be more of an establishment figure. Ten years later, Duffy reconsidered her position stating, ‘It is a great day for women writers. It highlights the way that women writers have changed the landscape of literature in this country’ (Higgins, 2009: 1). Compared with the nineteen previous Laureates, Duffy represents a dramatic break with tradition for a number of reasons. Not only is she the first female Laureate, the first openly gay Laureate and the first Laureate born in Scotland, she is also a remarkably popular poet in her lifetime. The *Bookseller* notes that Duffy’s sales far outstrip those of most poets, Laureate or otherwise, with estimates of annual sales reaching 100,000 copies of some titles (Allen, 2009) due, in no small part, to the fact that she, along with Simon Armitage, is one of the most widely taught living poet in British schools.

In terms of poetic style, she is deliberately not esoteric or oblique and, in her own words, she is ‘not interested, as a poet, in words like ‘plash’ – Seamus Heaney words, interesting words’ (Forbes, *The Guardian Online*, 2002). Her poetry is humorous, sharp and forceful, and never solipsistic. Much of her writing has been unreservedly feminist, exploring ways of breaking free from the past, of turning old stereotypes upside-down. Why then has she accepted what can only be described as the most conventional job in British poetry?

In 1999 she refused to be considered for the honour declaring: ‘I will not write a poem for Edward and Sophie. No self-respecting poet should have to’ (Williamson, *The Mail Online*, 2009). Her former editor, Peter Jay, agreed, calling the role a ‘poisoned chalice’ and not the best platform for a writer as ‘forthright and uncompromising’ as Duffy (Brooks, *The Guardian Online*, 2006). It is evident that in the intervening years Duffy’s views on the implications of accepting the role

underwent some changes. Given her place on the GCSE and A level syllabuses, the popularity of her work and increasing sales of her collections that she has now become very much part of the establishment, despite her candour and unconventionality. Maybe, like her heroines in *The World's Wife*, she is eager to explode a few more myths and leave her feminist stamp on the role. She could even transform the job and turn it into something worth aspiring to.

Duffy, unlike Motion, does not appear to be suffering from writer's block and since her appointment in 2009 she has embraced the role with energy and enthusiasm. Her latest collection *The Bees* contains numerous Laureate poems which deal with significant current events of interest to the general public. None of these could be described as 'royal odes' nor do they make any direct reference to the royal family. Her first poem as Laureate, 'Politics', tackled the scandal over British MPs' expenses in the form of a sonnet. Her second, 'Last Post', was commissioned by the BBC to mark the deaths of Henry Allingham and Harry Patch, the last two British soldiers to fight in World War I. Her third, 'The Twelve Days of Christmas 2009' (not included in *The Bees*), addresses current events such as species extinction, the climate change conference in Copenhagen, the banking crisis, and the war in Afghanistan. In March 2010, she wrote 'Achilles' about the Achilles tendon injury that left England Footballer David Beckham out of the 2010 FIFA World Cup and explores modern celebrity culture as a form of mythicisation. 'Silver Lining' (not included in *The Bees*), written in April 2010, acknowledges the grounding of flights caused by the ash from the Icelandic volcano Eyjafjallajökull. She also wrote 'Vigil' for the Manchester Pride Candlelight Vigil in memory of those who had lost their lives to HIV/AIDS.

Although, in 1999, she had objected to the requirement to write on the occasion of a royal wedding, Duffy wrote a forty-six line poem 'Rings' for the 2011 wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton. The poem celebrates the rings found in nature and does not specifically mention the couple's names:

I might
 have opened your palm to the weather, turned, turned,
 till your fingers were ringed in rain
 or held you close,
 they were playing our song,
 in the ring of a slow dance
 or carved our names
 in the rough ring of heart ²¹

(2011: 24)

In May 2012 she edited an anthology of sixty poems written by sixty contemporary poets, *Jubilee Lines*, to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. She has also written an exclusive poem for the *Liverpool Echo* after the report into the Hillsborough disaster revealed the truth about the tragedy. The 400th anniversary of the Pendle Witch Trials provides inspiration for a poem/installation which will appear etched into stone on the Witches' Walk from Pendle to Lancaster. Commenting on this commission she remarked that she was inspired by 'the echoes of under-privilege and hostility to the poor, the outsider, the desperate, which are audible still' (Duffy, Pendletoday website, 2012). Duffy's motivation appears to be sincere and yet her use of language, particularly her reference to 'under-privilege', highlights the conflict inherent within the role of Poet Laureate. The Royal Family enjoys the highest form of privilege in the country and as court poet she has a stake in this privileged society; her acceptance of the role requires her to question political allegiances which must undermine her egalitarian principles. However, Duffy has

²¹ Duffy wrote the verse with Stephen Raw, a textual artist, and a signed print of the work was sent to the couple as a wedding gift.

succeeded in speaking to and for the nation without causing offence to the monarchy and, although officially a member of the royal household, she has not abandoned her feminist and politically left-leaning ideals. In celebration of her appointment her first public statement was to showcase the work of a number of contemporary female poets in *The Guardian*:

The appointment of a poet laureate can be seen, quite simply, as a spotlight on the vocation of poetry. I feel privileged to be part of a generation of poets in Britain who serve the vocation of poetry; writers who - in glad company with their readers - regard poetry as the place in language where everything that can be praised is praised, and where what needs to be called into question is so.

(Duffy, *The Guardian Review*, 2 May 2009).

3.8 Conclusions

The output of many of the Poets Laureate has arguably been mediocre and largely unmemorable when compared with the work of their literary contemporaries. Perhaps this is due to the fact that it is a difficult, almost impossible, task to balance the interests of monarchy, national identity and poetry. If a poet is tied in this way to the establishment then it is not possible for them to exercise total freedom of expression. Therein lies the weakness and contradictory nature of the post and we must question whether poets whose ‘official verses paid for by an official salary and official butts of Malaga wine’ (F.J.D., *The Sydney Mail Online*, 1893) can retain their integrity and authenticity.

A defining feature of the role in more recent times is the expectation that the Laureate should speak to the nation on behalf of the monarchy. Yet it is not clear, as Ian Hislop suggests in ‘The Changing of the Bard’ (2009), that the nation is particularly interested in the pronouncements of this rather archaic establishment

figure. More recent holders of the post must have envied Dryden's well-defined role, clarity of purpose, ready-made audience and sense of loyalty.

However, within contemporary democracy our attitude to the monarchy is much more ambivalent than in Dryden's day and we perhaps have little need for empty odes that celebrate the lives of Royals who are largely irrelevant to the ordinary citizen. Of far more interest in today's media-driven society are the antics of footballers, film and pop stars, or indeed, the columns of gossip and scandal concerning the Royal Family in the tabloid press or the notorious you-tube clips presenting intimate details of princes on holiday.

The usefulness or purpose of the role of Poet Laureate has frequently been called into question over the centuries but certainly the majority (though not all) of poets and poet lovers would defend the role on the basis that, although it is a post without job description or any fixed purpose, it gives poetry a special place and status in the mind of the nation. Shortly before Carol Ann Duffy's appointment was announced Burnham revealed that he might even suggest a republican: 'We want the Laureate to be a figure of public importance and someone who will promote poetry' (Eden, *The Telegraph Online*, 2009). At this time there was also much debate about the archaic nature of the post with its blatant gender bias and there was some pressure on the Queen and the government to redress the balance by appointing a woman Laureate.²²

Nonetheless, three leading female poets ruled themselves out of contention. Wendy Cope, Fleur Adcock and Ruth Padel said the post of poet to the Queen was archaic, financially unrewarding, considering the necessary commitment, and

²² This view was evident in media coverage in 2008/2009 and covered in Chloe Garner's Books Blog entry, 'Why we need a female Poet Laureate', www.guardian.co.uk, 5 June 2008.

guaranteed to stifle their own writing (Brown, *The Guardian Online*, 2008).

However, the press and the public expect their Laureate to write official poems yet, as media coverage demonstrates, they are all too eager to criticise such poems when they appear. Cope, initially a front-runner for the post, commented that ‘the only way to get rid of that expectation is to abolish the post’ (McCrum, *The Guardian Online*, 2009). Any poet can write about public events without holding an official title and arguably the best way for a poet to serve the art is to write truthfully and convincingly on subjects which inspire them.

To his credit Motion, through hard work and commitment (though not necessarily on the basis of his poetic offerings), succeeded in transforming the dubious honour into a job worth having. In the final months of his Laureateship, he had time to reflect on what he had achieved and was in the unique position (unlike previous ‘lifers’) to offer advice to the next Poet Laureate:

Be warned. If you interpret the job as I have done – that being Poet Laureate means not just writing poems but trying to champion poetry – you will find there is an unimaginable difference between leading a relatively private life and the public life suddenly required of you. It is not just about having to get up early to appear on the Today programme. It is everything that comes with having your life picked over.

(Motion, *The Guardian Online*, 2008)

The majority of contemporary poets would not find the role of Poet Laureate attractive. Their comments suggest that it is creatively stifling, outmoded, staid and tied to the establishment in such a manner as to deny the true poet any authenticity (Appendix 2). However, while many view it as the antithesis to everything a poet believes and does, Carol Ann Duffy has embraced the role with flair and enthusiasm.

Her poetry in the role is topical and challenging and although it has been criticised for its lack of originality and banality of expression (Hill, *The Guardian Online*, 2012) she has at least demonstrated that writer's block does not pose a problem. She has shown her determination to continue Motion's transformative work in order to make the post relevant in the twenty-first century. She shares the role with what she would term the community of poets and indeed uses her emolument to fund a new poetry prize – the Ted Hughes Award for New Work in Poetry – with a view to encouraging innovation in poetry. All of her initiatives in post reveal her desire to embrace the poetry community as a whole and to involve her contemporaries in as many projects as possible. This sharing of the role and her refusal to gain from it financially underline her democratic and egalitarian principles and elevate the Laureateship to one of respected ambassador for poets and poetry.

Chapter 4 – The Writer in Residence

4.1 Introduction

In this study of writers' residencies I wish to draw on Bourdieu's theory of symbolic production and I will comment on the dichotomy between the view of poetry as high culture and the construction of poetry as popular or accessible culture. In this chapter I will make specific reference to the Poetry Places residency scheme organised by the Poetry Society in 1999. I will also refer to my own interviews with writers conducted in the course of my research. This chapter addresses the opportunities and challenges which the writer encounters as writer in residence. It explores the nature of this particular form of engagement with the public sphere, analyses the outcomes of this engagement and assesses the impact exerted on the writer, the public and literature.

Bourdieu's theory of art and culture concerns itself largely with high culture and the superiority of high culture in relation to the more popular forms. However, many of his concepts such as 'cultural capital' and 'symbolic production' may also be applied to a study of popular culture even if this contravenes his original theories. I would suggest that while Bourdieu's concepts shed light on the nature of the field of cultural production, his model is perhaps a little too rigid to account for the complexity and diversity of contemporary culture which tends to blur the boundaries between so-called high and low art. His theories also fail to take account of the richness and diversity of the more popular forms of cultural production and ultimately remain too firmly entrenched within the cultural doxa. Although Bourdieu emphasises the importance of engaging with debates within the field of cultural

production he is more concerned with limited definitions of cultural output rather than on exploring the outcomes of cultural activity.

In Chapter 3 it was noted that the Poets Laureate were frequently treated with contempt for accepting the role and for their poetic output in post. Similarly, the image promoted in the media of the writer in certain types of residencies is presented through a discourse of amusement or derision. Andrew Motion has commented on the conflicted attitude of the public and the media towards writers in this country stating that although there is a great appetite for writing there is also ‘a great and gossipy desire to mock writers in general (and maybe poets in particular)’ (Motion, *The Guardian Online*, 2009). In the deeply ironic ‘Engineer’s Corner’, Wendy Cope captures the manner in which poets’ work is undervalued when compared with more practical occupations. Her poem was written in response to the Engineering Council’s advertisement in *The Times* lamenting the absence of an ‘Engineers’ Corner’ in Westminster Abbey.

We make more fuss of ballads than of blueprints –
That’s why so many poets end up rich.
While engineers scrape by in cheerless garrets.
Who needs a bridge or dam? Who needs a ditch?

(Cope, 1986: 1)

In addition to a discourse of ridicule there is also a limited understanding of what a writer’s residency entails and a deceptively artificial picture of homogeneity is presented concerning the nature of residencies when in fact the range of projects undertaken by writers can be very varied and diverse. I have also sought therefore to present an understanding of residencies which explores and embraces this diversity.

The aim of this section is to undertake a detailed exploration of residencies in the UK, addressing in particular the role of the writer in residence and the impact this has on the writer. I intend to examine the history of the residency and how it has evolved since the mid-twentieth century. I will also explore the extent to which both location and social context can influence a writer's residency. The role offers the writer a more public profile than they would normally be accustomed to and I will therefore examine the impact of this public scrutiny and, further, will attempt to determine any significant change in public perceptions with regard to the writer. Ultimately the purpose of the residency is to offer the writer patronage and to encourage them to write; this chapter will therefore explore the qualitative and quantitative impact of the residency culture on literature.

4.2 Poetry and work

'It's not work. You don't sweat.
Nobody pays for it.
You could advertise soap.'

(Basil Bunting, 'What the Chairman Told Tom', 1966).

'Money is a kind of poetry.'

(Wallace Stevens, 'Adagia', *Opus Posthumous*, 1957)

Although the media made much of the incongruity of locating a poet in a corporate place in fact many well-known poets have been very familiar with the everyday world of work: T. S. Eliot spent the most productive period of his life

(1917 – 1925) ²³ working in Lloyd's Bank of London, Philip Larkin earned his 'screw', as he called it, as a librarian at the University of Hull, William Carlos Williams and Dannie Abse were both doctors and Wallace Stevens, one of America's greatest poets, worked as a lawyer and an insurance executive. Stevens carried a briefcase with his business papers in one compartment and his poems in another, in order, he said, to 'keep them completely separated' (Brazeau, 1983: 172). It is interesting to note that despite having spent most of his working life in a corporate office neither business nor finance features in his poetry or criticism. His reference to money and poetry is perhaps his manner of synthesising the two very disparate elements of his life. It could be the poet offering a measure of comfort to the hard-pressed businessman or the businessman discovering poetry in an unlikely place, a notion which is reinforced by another of his adages that 'poetry is a means of redemption' (Stevens, 1957: 160). Given Ezra Pound's influence on Stevens it is also a reference to Pound's Canto 97 'which offers page after page of poetry minted exclusively from the annals of cash' (Sieburth, 1987: 142).

Traditionally, however, most poetry has avoided the subject of work. The Romantics saw poetry as an escape from the horrors of an industrial society and for the Modernists, poetry was what Eliot's 'hollow men' needed but could not hear. The poet and critic Dana Gioia, for many years an executive with General Foods, complained that 'while it [poetry] has unlocked the doors to a poet's study, living room, and bedroom, it has stayed away from his office' (1992: 112). For most of the twentieth century poetry also seemed to avoid factories, hospitals, banks, shops and restaurants and it was only in the 1980s that poets started to explore the creative possibilities of work as suitable subject matter for poetry. In their introduction to *For*

²³ In October, 1922, Eliot published *The Waste Land* in *The Criterion*.

a Living: The Poetry of Work, editors Nicholas Coles and Peter Oresick note that ‘the customary separation between poetry and the working life is breaking down’ (Coles and Oresick, 1995: xv). Most of these poems were written in the 1980s and 1990s and reflect working practices in the post-industrial era from ‘flipping burgers’ to ‘Wall Street brokerage’ with numerous examples of ‘clerical drudgery’ (xvi). Some years later another anthology, *The Poetry of Business Life*, featured the work of ‘business poets’ which included poets who work, or had worked, in business and those who had chosen to write about it (Windle, 1994). It includes poems by contemporary poets such as James Autry and Dana Gioia alongside Shakespeare, Chaucer, Tennyson and Kipling. Commenting on the anthology, poet and businessman Ted Kooser expressed the desire to replace the management text books in business organisations with this anthology with a view to injecting a little humanity into American business. ‘Poetry has a way of making life and work meaningful,’ he noted, ‘something the management “gurus” have not yet stumbled upon’ (Kooser, 1994). The work included in these anthologies would confirm that many of the twentieth century’s most prominent poets worked in business ‘with no apparent fatal damage to their Muse’ (Windle, 2006: 459) and yet ignored their working life as a subject for their poetry. This group includes T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, A. R. Ammons and James Dickey. Many other twentieth century poets commented on the world of the executive from the sidelines. W.H. Auden drew a distinction between the successful entrepreneur of old who enjoyed a life filled with ‘huge meals, more palaces filled with more / Objects, books, girls, horses’ and the contemporary corporate manager who cuts an altogether less romantic, indeed, more tragic figure ‘working too hard in rooms that are too big / Reducing to figures / What

is the matter' (Auden, 1951: 36). In 'Executive', John Betjeman adopts a more mocking, satirical tone and captures the glib mediocrity of modern corporate-speak:

You ask me what it is I do. Well, actually, you know,
I'm partly a liaison man, and partly P.R.O.
Essentially, I implement the current export drive
And basically I'm viable from ten o'clock to five.

(Betjeman, 1974: 27)

The senseless accumulation of redundant adverbs - 'actually', 'partly', 'essentially' and 'basically' - and the vagueness of the businessman's purpose and role, summed up in the meaningless acronym, all serve to underline the false self-aggrandisement that lies at the heart of corporate life. Peter Porter and Gavin Ewart worked in advertising agencies thus finding a business use for their creative way with words. Ewart's humorous office-based poems include 'Office Friendships', 'Advertising Elegiacs' and 'The Caged Copywriter'. 'Office Friendships' captures the sexual innuendo which enlivens and dominates business life to the point where work becomes something of an irrelevance. 'Myra sits typing' not letters or business reports but 'notes of love'; Nicky walks up and down the office but only to flaunt her body, and Clive's 'suggestive talk' provides a welcome relief from 'wives and work' until it is time to go home 'at half past five' (Ewart, 1980: 153). Dana Gioia offers a darker and more existential view in which office life appears to be devoid of humanity. The figures that haunt the office remain nameless and are referred to only as 'the man' and 'the women', and the paraphernalia of the business world - 'two well-marked calendars, / Some pencils, and a telephone' - take on greater significance than the people who would use them, and the world is reduced to 'four

walls, a desk, a swivel chair, / A doorway with no doors to close, / Vents to bring in air' (Gioia, 1986).

Even poets have to find some means of making a living but the business world is not one which appeals to all. Hugo Williams expressed his distaste for all administrative chores, particularly the annual tax return, in 'Desk Duty': 'A piece of worn carpet on the floor / proves how long I've been sitting here / shuffling my feet / opening and closing drawers' (Williams, 1990: 21). Williams's 'Oh my God. The idea of an office' (Cooke, Guardian Online, 2006) is a *cri de coeur* and one which no doubt resonates with many contemporary poets who are all too aware of the Larkinian toad squatting on their life. Larkin, however, was very proud of the fact that all of his poetry was written 'in the evenings, after work, after washing up ... It was a routine like any other' (Phillips, *Paris Review* Online, 1982). In 'Poetry of Departures' Larkin conjures up a Gauguin-like escape from the drudgery of work and imagines he would 'swagger the nut-strewn roads/ Crouch in the fo'c'sle/ Stubbly with goodness' (Larkin, 2003: 64). This imagined escape from the world of work is reminiscent of John Ashbery's 'The Instruction Manual', in terms of theme if not form. In Ashbery's poem to escape the boredom of his task the technical writer/poet conjures up a 'dream of Guadalajara' an exotic retreat far from the world of work (Ashbery, 1956: 14). Larkin, though he contemplates escape, opts for the safer alternative and never finds the courage 'To shout *Stuff your pension!*' (Larkin, 2003: 62) and settles instead for the 'in-tray' and 'the loaf-haired secretary' (90), preferring to counterbalance poetry with the real world of work.

Nonetheless over the last twenty years a number of poets admit to finding inspiration in the world of work. Irish poet Dennis O'Driscoll enjoyed his career in

the Revenue and Customs Office, a job that offered ‘stimulating subject matter’ for his poetry and freed him from ‘the obsessive anxieties which bedevil the isolated full-time poet’ (O’Driscoll, Poetry Society Website). O’Driscoll’s collection *The Bottom Line*, immersed in the world of ‘Official standards, building regulations,/ fair procedures for dismissing errant staff:/ ... patent numbers, EC directives, laws’ (O’Driscoll, 2004: 89) presents a multi-voiced portrait of business managers and bureaucrats and captures the hostility of office life:

The hidden pain of offices: a mission
statement admonishing me from walls,
the volatility of top brass if sales volume
for a single line falls one per cent.
And customers' righteousness, their touching
faith in the perfectibility of man.

(95)

Jane Routh, no doubt echoing Eliot’s views, notes that whether you work full-time, part-time or not at all ‘what needs to be written gets written regardless’ (Routh, Poetry Society Website). As a small farmer, Routh finds inspiration in the land, tree-planting, tractors and animals, and her outdoor life is reflected in the poetry she writes. For her the worst day job would be poetry for then ‘what would there be to write about?’ (Routh, Poetry Society Website). Jean Bleakney, who works in a garden centre, is enthusiastic about the inspiration derived from her day job stating that ‘sensory stimuli and metaphors abound, plus a sprawling vocabulary and lots of people contact’ and while concurring with fellow poet Robert Saxton that there is little time for poetry during working hours, ‘plenty of seeds are sown for sure’ (Bleakney, Poetry Society Website).

4.3 Poetry Places

In 1998 the Poetry Society received a substantial grant from the 'Arts for Everyone' budget of the Arts Council of England Lottery Department to put into effect an innovative scheme to bring poetry to new audiences. This two year programme of residencies, placements and projects opened up new opportunities for a wide range of poets to work in partnership with diverse organisations and groups. The Poetry Society's evaluation of the project concluded that the scheme created a sense of momentum in raising the profile of poets and poetry nationally and had led to further inspiring new projects which would benefit both poets and sponsoring organisations (Poetry Society Website).

Poetry Places was not an experiment in chaining poets to desks to see if their creative spirits were enhanced or thwarted. The scheme was a means of subsidizing poets, a modern form of patronage, whilst at the same time raising an awareness of poetry in some unlikely places. The aim was to inject some humanity into the nation's bloodstream while giving poets the experience of working in a completely different environment. John Agard, known as 'the Bard at the Beeb', exerted a considerable impact during his residency in the Education Department at the BBC. His work led to interviews on Newsnight and The Media Show and his poems were featured in the *Independent* and the *Times Education Supplement*. With many television appearances, public talks and readings his residency was pronounced a 'dazzling success' and the BBC was so pleased with the project that they employed him for a further six months at their own expense (Agard, Poetry Society Website).

Agard's account of the residency highlights an important theme that runs through the whole Poetry Places scheme, namely that of 'soul'. He stressed the

importance of ‘human connectedness’ and for a broadcasting corporation he believed there was a need to embrace poetry ‘as a way of engaging the soul of audiences’ (Agard, Poetry Society Website). The suggestion seems to be that in the workplace we are emotionally neglected, that we are in need of a kind of spiritual nourishment and that poetry is a means of providing this.

The link between poetry and the soul is a theme which has preoccupied the poet and consultant, David Whyte. He spent some time working with companies using poetry to help employees cope with organizational change. His brief was to address ‘the hidden and neglected side of organizational life, where a woman’s or a man’s soul has been forced to reside, like Tolkien’s character Gollum, in dark and subterranean caves’ (Whyte, 1997: 3). Organizations are depicted as soulless places where employees are forced into a faceless, conformist hierarchy, intent on exploiting the planet while suffering a life of ‘ineffable blandness’ (8). Whyte’s work with these organizations was an attempt to bring the insights of the poetic imagination out of the garret into the boardroom and onto the factory floor. Though he was invited to undertake this work he was initially very sceptical, not wishing to be tainted by the experience of working with a profit-driven world, not wishing to contaminate ‘the fluid language of the soul with the dehydrated jargon of the late twentieth-century workplace’ (10). And yet Whyte took up the challenge and used the language, vision and imagination of the poet to reclaim and reinterpret the life of the soul within the context of work.

Dana Gioia was also writing in the mid-nineties about the changing nature of poetry and the role of the poet in contemporary society. He called on poets to rise out of their self-referential world and bring their talents back into mainstream society,

criticizing poets for the deliberate creation of a poetry sub-culture (Gioia, 1992: 1). He noted that the proliferation of literary journals and presses was a response less to an increased appetite for poetry among the public than to the need of amateur poets and writing teachers for professional validation and ‘like subsidized farming that grows food no one wants, a poetry industry has been created to serve the interests of the producers and not the consumers’ (Gioia, 1992: 8). No poet was allowed to admit to this predicament in public and as no one outside the sub-culture could care less, a polite hypocrisy was maintained. Although Gioia was speaking in the context of American culture a similar situation exists in the UK also and perhaps one that is even more precious. A large number of poets working in education find that they are writing for an increasingly diminishing readership and put much of their energy into educational endeavours. Outside of the classroom ‘poets and the common reader are no longer on speaking terms’ (9) and poetry had become increasingly marginalized as an art form.

But why should anyone care about poetry? Gioia stressed the importance of bringing the joy of poetry back into public culture: ‘it’s time to experiment, time to leave the well-ordered but stuffy classroom, time to restore a vulgar vitality to poetry and unleash the energy ... trapped in the subculture’ (21). Within this context therefore the Poetry Places poets were sent out to every corner of the country and charged with the task of making poetry accessible again, in shops, hospitals, offices, libraries, parks, pubs and tattoo parlours. So what made this project so special? After all, poets through the centuries have always drawn inspiration from a variety of different locations and subjects – Andrew Marvell’s ‘The Garden’, W. H. Auden’s ‘Musée des Beaux Arts’, Larkin’s train in ‘The Whitsun Weddings’ and W.B. Yeats’s ‘foul rag and bone shop’. The difference of course is that for a writer in

residence the garden, museum, train and shop have become more than a source of personal inspiration for the poet. The writer in residence is expected to provide services for the sponsoring organisation in the form of writing workshops, counselling sessions for employees and creativity workshops for managers. Furthermore the writer was welcomed to these places in a deliberate and public manner, often with a degree of media attention. At the same time however, due to the novelty of the programme, the poets who took part in the Poetry Places scheme were frequently felt as though they were on display, like a museum exhibit or side-show freak, and on demand, for the pleasure and entertainment of a bemused, sceptical, sometimes scornful and frequently apathetic public.

Reflecting on his residency at Marks and Spencer, Peter Sansom noted that ‘there is a popular belief that poetry and business don’t and perhaps shouldn’t mix’ (Sansom, Poetry Society Website). Given that Sansom’s teaching and publishing centre based in Sheffield is called ‘The Poetry Business’, his view that ‘poetry is in part a business, from which people sometimes make a living’ is hardly surprising. Some fortunate poets manage to sell their poetry in their lifetime – or earn awards and prizes – but for the most part are obliged to supplement their income in a variety of ways such as journalism, running workshops, taking on a residency or doing a regular day job. What is the intrinsic value of poetry and is it a commodity to which the business world, or anybody else, may apply a price tag? ‘As tradesmen say everything is worth what it will fetch so probably every mental pursuit takes its reality and worth from the ardour of the pursuer - being in itself a Nothing,’ Keats wrote to his friend Benjamin Bailey (Keats, 2004 (1895): 98). Tradesmen are not interested in the commodity per se, or even whether the consumer wants or needs it; their sole aim is to sell the product, be it a sonnet or a sweater, and make a profit in

the process. Although Keats' poems, unlike Byron's, did not fetch much in his lifetime, he knew his own worth, 'I think I shall be among the English Poets' – and also how the market worked – 'after my death' (Keats, 2004 (1895): 215).

When poets write it is also irrelevant to them whether anyone needs their poems or not, the difference being that poets write poems for poetry's sake and, according to Sansom, 'it's the selling that's irrelevant to us' (Sansom, Poetry Society Website). Poetry written primarily to sell, to exploit a niche or supply a demand, will be 'synthetic, factitious, dead' (Sansom, Poetry Society Website). Unfortunately, as if to prove his own point, Sansom has since sold his services to the Morrison's supermarket chain and duly produced some rather dull and uninspired doggerel:

A rattling good roast

Seal the beef with seasoning.
Lower it in a sizzling pan,
Preheat your oven, gas mark 6
Now here's the plan:

Pop it in a roasting tin
Baste it and jacket it in foil
Park it in the heat for a couple of hours

Off with the foil
Half an hour to cook it through.
And that's you.
Let it stand. Then you can
Raise a toast
And carve the roast!

(Sansom, Poetry Society Website)

Clearly Sansom is not claiming this is poetry; he is merely 'doing a job, just as a copywriter might ... and many writers have written advertising jingles without thinking to collect them in their next book of verse' (Szirtes, 2014: 3).

In my discussions with writers and poets it became obvious, despite the increasing proliferation of writers' residencies, that the writing community is divided on the value of the residency to either writer or audience. Fiona Sampson noted that many of the Poetry Places placements were 'trivial' and 'could potentially discredit poetry', that too often these residencies 'drain your energy' and that they 'are not appreciated in 'literary circles' (Appendix 2). Graham Mort remains sceptical about such efforts 'to popularise poetry', while Carol Rumens feels they have a beneficial effect as 'it means poetry reaches different kinds of people'. Matt Harvey was immensely proud of his invitation to act as writer in residence for the Wimbledon Tennis Championship while George Szirtes questioned the value of his placement in Downham Market library (pp). While acknowledging the obvious and very welcome financial rewards for writers, there is a certain unease amongst writers in taking on the role of writer or poet in residence, the demands it makes on the writer and the designs it imposes on the literature produced.

On being appointed poet in residence at a conference on interprofessional learning and practice healthcare, Lesley Saunders, although welcoming the commission, found herself questioning in anticipation 'what kinds of integrity, intrinsic to poetry, need to be made room for in such relationships' (Saunders, 2006: 504). The nature of poetry, she suggests, seems to run counter to the realm of research and the world of work. Saunders outlines the differences between poetry and research (505) and, elaborating on her reflections, notes that there are many ways in which poetry (as a creative 'product') differs from a commercially-produced commodity. Both are products of a creative imagination and yet poetry seeks to present rather than sell itself or anything else; poetry offers insights rather than profits; it explores possibilities rather than attempting to compete; it remains

(playfully) ambiguous rather than conforming to specification; its nature is closer to play than work; it seeks to ‘make new’ rather than innovate; it proceeds by association and image rather than expectation or proven need; it seeks to ‘stir the memory and fertilise the unconscious’ (505) rather than satisfy needs or whims, and it communicates the unsayable rather than descending into marketing-speak or cliché. The difference, Saunders notes, is that ‘poetry was a way of not having to conclude that there were no conclusions’ and further that poetry is a response which respects ‘the integrity of the unknowable without being impelled to remain wordless’ (505). Poetry therefore has the capacity to inform, guide and illuminate in a range of settings, to encourage creativity and to provide a means of describing practice. However, one must remain circumspect about ‘the desirability of poetry being pressed into serving some purpose other than its own passage from silence into language’ (506).

Yet the poet or writer in residence has become an increasingly familiar figure in education, health, local government, sport and business. Is it possible for the poet to remain true to their art while serving a commercial patron? And what can the poet contribute to the world of business? In response to such questions a number of participants in the Poetry Places project spoke of the bemusement and even mistrust that their presence in the workplace evoked. The business environment is after all a space governed by the clock and profit, while poetry is timeless and devoid of monetary value; the business world demands action and productivity yet poetry encourages both reader and writer to pause and reflect. Lavinia Greenlaw, who spent her residency at Mishcon de Reya, noted that there are ‘problems’ with poetry as ‘unlike sculpture or art, poetry is intangible, more ephemeral’; in a results-driven

economy, indulging in the activity of writing or discussing poetry may appear to be 'a waste of money', therefore an empty pursuit (Appendix 2).

George Szirtes, in a number of residencies which included First International Writing Fellow at Trinity College, Dublin, and a Poetry Places residency at Downham Market Library, found the experience 'disorientating' particularly when the host organisation was uncertain about the role the poet should play for the duration of the residency. In Downham Market Library this provoked 'a sense of shame and uselessness' and provided little inspiration for new work. A sense of dislocation and absurdity, however, can often be very fruitful for the poet's own work and at Trinity College an initial unease gave way to a creative phase which resulted in a series of poems (Szirtes, Appendix 2). Experiencing similar difficulties, John Burnside's Internet Poetry Project ground to halt partly due to technical difficulties but also because of a lack of interest in workshop participation: 'people seemed uninterested in others' work' (Burnside, Poetry Society Website, 1999).

To understand the poet's role in society, and therefore in a workplace residency, it is necessary to define what function, if any, the poet fulfils. Peter Abbs notes that the poet needs to be existentially grounded, linguistically brilliant, culturally aware and deeply metaphysical (Abbs, 2006). Stating that 'poetry has long wielded moral agency in society' Saunders also notes that the role of the poet must stem from an ethical base (Saunders, 2006: 507). This echoes Seamus Heaney's assertion that the ethical stance enshrined in a poem 'remains as a standard for the poet, so that he or she must then submit to the strain of bearing witness in his or her own life to the plane of consciousness established in the poem' (Heaney, 1995:4). Heaney further elaborates on the essential role of the poet as witness and emphasises

‘poetry’s solidarity with the doomed, the deprived, the victimised, the underprivileged’ (Heaney, 1988: xvi). In *The Government of the Tongue*, Heaney speaks of the links between ‘song and suffering’ and the way in which ‘the compulsion to identify with the oppressed becomes necessarily integral with the act of writing itself’ (Heaney, 1988: xvi). Heaney reminds us of Chekhov’s visit to the Sakhalin penal colony to record the conditions under which the prisoners lived, to live with them, interview them and subsequently publish a book about his experiences. In this way Chekhov was justifying his occupation, ‘earning the free joy of his fiction by the hard facts of his sociological report’ (xvi). Similarly, Robert Lowell’s year in prison as a conscientious objector during the Second World War allowed him ‘to earn the right to the luxury of practising his art’ (xvii). Although the poet is frequently called to bear witness s/he must nonetheless recognise the reader’s mistrust of ‘poetry that has a palpable design upon us’, that in fact poetry should be both ‘great and unobtrusive’ (Keats: 2004 (1895): 81) and should not strive to be ‘about’ anything except itself. If poets were to focus on their ethical role in society it is unlikely that they would be comfortable working within certain commercial organisations such as banks or other financial institutions, oil companies, pharmaceutical industries and even the large supermarket chains. Even if they felt sufficiently confident to ‘bite the hand that feeds it’ accepting payment from such institutions would be untenable for the ethical writer.

To consider therefore, what the poet in residence might achieve even within an ethical organisation, what the relationship of poetry is to the sponsoring organisation, is to look beyond the purely representational and the didactic. Clare Morgan, in her book *What Poetry Brings to Business* (2010), offers some insights into what poetry can teach the business professional and suggests that reading and

interpreting poetry, in addition to infusing life with beauty and meaning, can develop a range of useful skills. These would include the ability to deal with ambiguity and complexity, the development of empathy and ways of allowing creativity to flourish (Morgan, 2010). *What Poetry Brings to Business* presents ways in which reading and thinking about poetry offer businesspeople new strategies for reflection on their companies, their daily tasks, and their work environments. The goal is both to increase and broaden readers' understanding of poems and how they convey meaning, and also to help readers develop analytical and cognitive skills that could be beneficial in a business context. The insights and analysis explored in Morgan's book offer new ways of thinking about poetry and business alike.

4.4 Poetry as Commodity

The poem has a lot in common with the marketable commodity. The poet produces a series of poems which then reach the reading public through the publisher. Poems may deal with death, the essence of being, the nature of existence, and many other intangibles and uncertainties; however, as a collection in book form they constitute a marketable product in search of a consumer. Both T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound were faced with the problem of promoting the value of modernist poetry to an uninitiated audience. They achieved this through publishing articles, reviews and poems written by the poets of the time in a periodical called *The Dial* and later in the *Criterion* (Morgan, 2010: 12). In this way they reached out to new audiences and effectively created a market for modernist poetry thus exerting a huge influence on twentieth-century British culture.

Yet how poetry offers itself as a useful tool for business strategists is another matter. In his essay 'The Reading Process: a Phenomenological Approach',

Wolfgang Iser notes that the critical reading of literary texts promotes the ability to pose important questions and to make significant connections, and furthermore that ‘it also entails the possibility that we may formulate ourselves and so discover what had previously seemed to delude our consciousness’ (Iser, 1972: 299). Poetry especially demands that the reader engage in a ‘creative process that is far above mere perception of what is written’ (Iser, 1972: 283). While this constitutes an acceptable route for the general reader or student of English literature it is perhaps still not obvious how this might relate to a business setting. With a view to justifying the use of poetry in the world of commerce Morgan maps out the specific benefits of reading poetry for her executive audience. Table 1 below, referring specifically to Billy Collins’s ‘Introduction to Poetry’ (Collins, 1996), is an extract from Morgan’s book and lists some of the skills that can be developed through reading poetry.

Table 1

The poem is	Which develops ability to
Multidimensional	* Detect different modes of meaning
Not offering closure	* Deal with ambiguity and uncertainty
Not based in a logical deductive mode	* Handle non-resolution
Showing the ordinary as extraordinary	* Make associative connections
	* Question givens
	* Raise awareness of complexity

(Morgan, 2010: 24)

Although Morgan’s analysis is accurate and suited to her purpose, there is a sense that this approach diminishes the work of art and the poet’s efforts in some way.

While great art might suffer, poets can only benefit if Morgan finds and creates new audiences for poetry especially if these groups continue to read and purchase poetry collections. Morgan’s assumptions and methodology are not entirely original and

may find their source in work carried out by the language theorist Iván Fónagy whose work revealed poetry to be highly effective in preventing ‘automatic perception’ or the tendency to make assumptions about what things mean or are going to mean (Fónagy, 1961: 194-201).

Morgan’s engagement with the business world is a recent venture; nonetheless the use of literature in executive training has a longer history. In the US the company ‘Movers and Shakespeares’ have been teaching American leaders critical business skills through Shakespeare’s greatest works since 1997. More recently the British company ‘Shakespeare in Business’ has developed a management training programme that combines the wisdom of the bard with contemporary business needs. Their courses bear titles such as ‘King Lear and Succession Planning’, ‘The Merchant of Venice and Effective Decision Making’ and ‘The Tempest and Managing Resistance to Change’.²⁴ Another company called ‘The Leadership Company’ runs a workshop for managers titled ‘The Director’s Cut’. Tony Hall, one of the founders who has taught leadership at Cranfield Business School, says the course is partly about changing preconceptions and notes that it challenges the notion that ‘the arts aren’t commercial and businesses aren’t creative’ (Hall in Chibber, BBC News Online, 2009).

Both poets and organisations stand to gain from this type of collaboration. Such activities offer poets worthwhile work and the opportunity to engage with society while securing a valuable income and useful function. Organisations can also benefit through increasing their focus and creativity and more effective communication. Poet Brian McCabe takes on numerous projects and residencies because ‘it is good to be useful in the community and to be seen to be useful’ and

²⁴ ‘Julius Caesar and the Challenge of Leadership’ might be one they could add to their portfolio.

adds that through certain residencies ‘writers can demonstrate that they have a place in society and the community and that this place is worthwhile and valued’ (McCabe, Appendix 2).

4.5 Accessibility

A key element of contemporary cultural debate concerns the notion of ‘accessibility’ in the arts; it is a recurrent theme in this thesis as it has an important bearing on the manner in which the writer produces their work and in their engagement with the public sphere. In the 1960s the Minister for Arts, Jenny Lee, promoted the policy of making the best in art available to all: the RSC were to perform in the workplace; classical music concerts should be available to people on low income, and new creative work should be promoted alongside the classics. Subsidies were designed to benefit the writer/artist, the publisher and the consumer, in short the Arts Council’s specific objective was ‘to increase the accessibility of the Arts to the public throughout Great Britain’ (Arts Council Website). In many ways this mantra of ‘Art for Everyone’ has been enshrined in British arts policy as is still evident in the Arts Council of England’s current aims and objectives which seek to ensure that ‘more people experience and are inspired by the arts’ and that ‘every child and young person has the opportunity to experience the richness of the arts’ (Arts Council England, 2012: 12). Unfortunately, with major cutbacks in arts funding in 2011, these lofty ideals must now be achieved within severely restricted budget allowances which stipulate that ‘over the four-year period 2011-2015, the percentage budget cut for funded arts organisations will be 14.9%’ (Arts Council Website).

This democratization of culture in the 1960s focussed on the ‘civilising value of the arts’ and emphasised the importance of access of the general public to various forms of high culture (Matarosso and Landry, 1999; Baeker, 2002). In this way mass audiences gained access to cultural works which hitherto had been beyond their reach due to lack of income or education (Evrard, 1997). The notion of cultural democracy emerged in 1970s, largely as a critique of the democratization of culture, which was seen as a ‘top-down’ elitist homogenizing approach to culture that ignored cultural expressions and practices outside of the mainstream canon (Matarosso and Landry, 1999; Baeker, 2002). Cultural democracy implies not only access to cultural works but also access to the means of cultural production and distribution. This has led to discussions on inclusivity, popularity and accessibility and, as mentioned above, a desire to dismantle elitist notions of culture. Thus, not only must theatres, concert halls and museums be accessible but there is the implication that literature itself must be written and presented in an accessible manner if it is to avoid labels of pretentiousness and exclusivity. Furthermore, there is a debate around the notion that cultural production should occur within all levels of society. The literary community is very much divided on this issue with Geoffrey Hill, Oxford Professor of Poetry, stating that:

The word accessible is fine in its place; ... public toilets should be accessible ... there is no reason why a work of art should be perfectly accessible.

(Potts, Guardian Online, 2002)

Writer and broadcaster Jonathan Meades adopts a similarly dismissive view of accessibility stating, somewhat controversially, on a BBC4 television broadcast that it ‘means nothing more than being comprehensible to morons’ (Meades, 2013).

On the other side of this debate is the poet, and Poet Laureate, Carol Ann Duffy whose work, contrary perhaps to her own wishes, is invariably described as ‘populist’ (British Council Website) and ‘accessible’ (O’Riordan, *The Telegraph Online*, 2010), although usually in a positive sense. Often at the centre of controversy, Duffy invited further censure when, on the launch of a poetry competition for schoolchildren, she drew parallels between texting and writing a poem stating that ‘the poem is a form of texting ... it’s the original text’ (Duffy, *The Guardian Online*, 2011). Her views, though endorsed by some (Lundberg, 2011; McCrum, 2011) were rejected by Hill who maintained that texting might be democratic English but only ‘pared down to its barest bean’ or indeed it might not be democratic at all, that in fact texting represents ‘cast-off bits of oligarchical commodity English’ (Flood, *The Guardian Online*, 2012). Duffy’s attempt to draw parallels between texting and poetry is not completely misguided and was inspired by the importance and aesthetics of literary concision. A poem, she states, ‘is a kind of time capsule ... it allows feelings and ideas to travel big distances in a condensed form’ (McCrumb, 2011). Conflicting views on whether literature should remain within the restricted field of high culture highlight the divide within the literary community where different views of the nature of literature are constructed and diverse meanings and values are attributed to it. This debate has the tendency to define cultural outputs in limited terms of high or low art.

Of further relevance to this debate also is Bourdieu’s assertion that cultural objects are not solely the result of material production (Bourdieu, 1993). Equally, or perhaps more importantly, are his comments in relation to symbolic production which he refers to as ‘the production of the value of the work or ... belief in the value of the work’ (Bourdieu, 1993:37). Thus artists, or in this case writers, may

produce work according to their own exacting standards but it is the ‘institutions of consecration’ which pass judgement on literature and invest it with symbolic value. The many different players in the field – critics, arts commentators, academics, reviewers, cultural institutions – all, as Bourdieu notes, participate in this process of symbolic production. It is within the context of this discourse of value and purpose that I wish to examine the writer’s residency.

The relevance of this debate to Poetry Places is that the underlying philosophy of the scheme was that poetry should be accessible to all, that everyone is capable of writing poetry and that all barriers to the enjoyment of and participation in reading and writing poetry should be removed. Despite the enthusiasm of the Poetry Society, who organised the scheme, and of the participating poets, I would suggest that their pioneering spirit was not shared by the literary community as a whole. This apparent clash between high and low culture and between the defenders of poetry as high culture (Andrew Motion, James Fenton, Geoffrey Hill, Craig Raine) and those who would advocate greater inclusivity and accessibility (Sean O’Brien, Carol Ann Duffy, Tony Harrison, Simon Armitage) prompts a reassessment of Bourdieu’s theoretical framework and the traditional opposition between the high and the popular which defines it. However, it would be somewhat simplistic to view the British poetry community as one which is starkly divided between an Oxbridge or metropolitan elite and the more populist and political provincialists.

In fact it is clear that poetry is ‘the most radically decentralised and democratic of all the arts in Britain’ (Newey, *The Guardian Online*, 2003) and the London poetry scene is no more significant than that of any other region. Of the twenty-two major poetry book publishers listed on the Poetry Library website, two are based in Ireland, eight in London and twelve in the regions, and only thirteen of

the eighty small press publishers are based in London (Poetry Library Website). Regional arts boards provide funding for magazines and pamphlets which are also produced throughout the country and encourage opportunity and diversity within the poetry publishing world. Due to the lack of financial reward and poetry's heavy reliance on subsidies there is less concentration of resources in the metropolis and the south east generally.

As Bourdieu's theories focus on the symbolic capital of high rather than popular culture the whole notion of making poetry accessible, encouraging the ordinary individual to write poetry, would not feature within the Bourdieusian framework except as some form of popular (working class) culture, a culture completely dominated by high culture. However the field of cultural production, the poets or agents of cultural production, are themselves divided on the value of accessibility in literature and on the wisdom of launching poets into the workplace for the dubious benefit of an unsuspecting public.

For Bourdieu culture means high culture, yet it is possible that this definition is outmoded or at least inadequate to interpret what is actually happening in the contemporary literary field. Rather than trivializing the writing of poetry, the Poetry Places scheme has done much to bridge the divide between poet and worker; it has drawn public attention to the importance and enduring value of poetry, and has highlighted the 'plight' of the contemporary poet.

4.6 The Origins and Development of the Residency

I'm sceptical about such efforts to popularise poetry or return it to its ancient community roots, ... Poetry, like jazz, is a difficult art form, and if it is to retain that level of reward for readers, it is unlikely to become popular.

(Graham Mort, Appendix 2)

Private faces in public places
Are wiser and nicer
Than public faces in private places.

(W. H. Auden, *The Orators*, 1932)

A forerunner of the writing residency in this country took place in universities in the 1960s. These were really what would now be called fellowships, an arrangement by which poets were employed by university English departments for a specified period of time during which they offered talks and workshops and pursued their own work. But a residency these days, particularly in the commercial sector, is a working assignment, which brings the poet into contact with the business world and its various echelons of employees.

The modern residency was launched in the late 1970s when Vernon Scannell was installed as writer in residence in a new village in Oxfordshire. There was, however, a lot of ill-feeling in the town because it seemed as though Scannell had jumped the housing queue. Scannell recorded his experiences in his memoir *A Proper Gentleman* (Scannell, 1977). Given a very open brief it seemed he was expected to take up residence and continue to write poetry. However, wishing to take on a more active role he ran a writing workshop, and frequently visited schools and local arts groups. Thus the modern residency, with its combination of a ‘real-world’ setting and community participation, was born. Unfortunately for Scannell he attracted the wrath and derision of a number of members of the community who failed to appreciate the purpose of his role. Gangs of uncontrolled youths would taunt “Scannell, poet” – as if I were a member of a persecuted minority, a Jew in an anti-

semitic society, a black amongst racists' (Scannell, 1997: 136). 'Po-et, po-et' (140), they would call after him, an indication of the debased position the poet held within certain sectors of society. During the long hot summer of 1976, these youths, not content with verbal abuse alone, threw stones at Scannell, put glass under his tyres and shouted through his letter-box (140). An ex-boxer, and therefore not typical of his ilk, Scannell feeling increasingly angry and imprisoned by his residency, longed to retaliate. Such is his strength of feeling that he confesses that the taunts and jibes 'bring out the murderer' in him (140).

Ian McMillan, whose first residency was in Padgate, Lancashire in 1984, remembers a proliferation of these posts in the early 1980s: 'It was interesting that in dark, dark times for the arts, residencies like this flourished' (Lea, *The Guardian Online*, 2007). His Padgate residency was split between the local library, the local school and the community centre on an estate. He conducted readings, ran a lunchtime club, held workshops and invited guest writers to give talks and run workshops. The work in the wider community was 'more nebulous' but involved activities in old folks' homes and a community centre with a pub (Lea, *The Guardian Online*, 2007).

A second wave of residencies began in 1998 when the Poetry Society was awarded an Arts for Everyone grant from the Arts Council for its Poetry Places project. This two-year scheme created high-profile, six-month residencies for twenty-three poets from Simon Armitage at the New Millennium Experience Company to Roger McGough at BT. The idea was to introduce poetry in unexpected places and to ensure that ordinary people could engage with poetry without the threat of intimidation. The purpose of these residencies was to celebrate poetry and creative

writing and to use it as a means of casting light on other life experiences and situations. They also represented an important form of patronage for aspiring writers.

It is difficult to offer a precise definition of a writer's residency as, despite outward appearances, there is great variety and diversity within the role. It could be defined as a retreat, a consultancy, an engagement within the community, a series of workshops, a teaching post, a way of life, a form of therapy (for writers and participants), a source of income, or enlightenment, or a path to notoriety and success. It is a multi-faceted role which is interpreted and performed in different ways depending on the location, the host organisation and the audience. Writers-in-residence work in a variety of places, from corporate organisations (banks, solicitors' firms), retail outlets (bookshops, shopping centres, fish and chip shops), education centres (schools, colleges, universities), arts organisations (museums, theatres, arts venues), criminal justice settings (prisons, young offender institutions) and community-based spaces (local libraries, youth groups, clubs). The potential list is endless.

In practice a good residency offers the host institution a kind of consultancy and fulfils three basic aims: it provides the writer with an income and a place in which to develop their own writing; it brings the writer into contact with the public, and it generally results in the production of some form of literary work. Residencies can vary in length from a few days up to a number of years. The balance between finding enough time to write and dealing with the public can often prove difficult to achieve with some writers fighting to preserve their own writing space while others actively assume the public role with enthusiasm. The latter often have a very strong sense of their pioneering role in ensuring that 'poetry reaches different kinds of

people – people who wouldn't sign on for a writing class or study for a degree' (Rumens, Author Interview, 2009: 2).

The history of the contemporary residency arguably dates back to 1917 when Robert Frost was invited to Amherst to teach the writing of poetry to English Students (Crawford, 2001: 226).²⁵ This particular kind of residency, or fellowship, within the university system was adopted much later in the UK and became quite popular in the 1980s and 1990s though it is less common now (Rumens, Personal Interview, 2009: 2). Another type of residency, outside of academia, may take the writer to a cultural institution, such as Somerset House, places of literary tourism (or pilgrimage), such as Dove Cottage or the Brontë Parsonage, or any number of museums and galleries. The Royal Literary Fund (RLF) also assists authors who experience financial difficulties. The charity, founded in 1790, for the relief of poor and distressed authors, contributes to the advancement of public education and, in 2000, set up a scheme of Fellowships at universities and colleges.²⁶

The Scottish Arts Council (SAC) has a well-established residency programme in which a writer is paid a basic salary for up to three years. Half of this is paid by the SAC, allowing the writer time for their own work, and the other half is paid by the host organisation – a regional library, an arts organisation, or increasingly, an institution such as a hospital, prison service or museum – which usually requires the

²⁵ In fact Frost was the second writer to be taken onto the faculty as he was preceded by the novelist and drama critic Stark Young who had previously taught at the University of Texas .

²⁶ An RLF Fellowship lasts for one academic year and involves one-to-one tutorials, held on two days a week, which help students develop their academic and expository writing skills, focussing on such issues as researching and structuring essays, clear presentation and expression, writing abstracts and CVs. There may also be occasional seminars but in general the rest of the week is free for the Fellow to concentrate on her or his own work.

writer to run workshops and projects on specified themes (Scottish Arts Council Website).

As referred to above, in 1998 the Poetry Society received a substantial grant from the 'Arts for Everyone' budget of the Arts Council of England Lottery Department to put into effect an innovative scheme to bring poetry to new audiences. This two year programme of residencies, placements and projects opened up new opportunities for a wide range of poets to work in partnership with diverse organisations and groups. The proliferation and diversity of residencies finds its origins in the Poetry Places scheme which sent poets to locations not traditionally associated with the arts such as supermarkets, fish and chip shops, an agricultural show, a gas platform and a tattoo parlour. It was the presence of poets not only in educational institutions and arts organisations but in the corporate world and the commercial sector which marked a turning point for the writer, the residency and the public. The novelty of these residencies generated a great deal of interest in the media producing headlines such as 'From the Garret to the Boardroom' and 'They Wandered Lonely as a Paperclip' (Agard, Poetry Society website, 1998). Peter Sansom's residency at Marks and Spencer prompted Peggy Hollinger of the *Independent* to write 'M & S hires in-store poet to promote counter culture' with Tracy McVeigh at the *Express* indulging in a little humour at Sansom's expense with 'lurking among the Y-fronts and woolly cardigans' (Poetry Society Website).

Yet, despite the continuing prevalence of this type of residency and the media coverage it generates, the phenomenon has attracted little academic attention. There is much to be gained from conducting research and analysis into the writer in residence. This research could reveal significant insights into how writers engage with society; how these very public roles affect society's perception of the writer; the

changing social and cultural function of the writer; the impact of the residency on culture and literature; the construction of a literary world in different geographical and social contexts, and the socio-cultural construction of individual and collective selves.

4.7 Features of the Residency

What brings the residency alive for the host organisation and the participating individuals is the way in which the writer interacts with participants. The most traditional expression of the connection between writer and reader is the text, usually in its printed form. The residency however makes it possible for the writer and reader to meet and for the participant to hear the spoken version of the poem/prose, and participants frequently have the opportunity to attend a series of creative writing workshops. In fact, the workshop is a hugely popular (especially with participants) and regular feature of a residency.

While most writers in residence engage with participants in this way it is important to note that the poets who took part in the Poetry Places project often found more innovative means of interacting with the public, bringing poetry to life in unexpected ways. Adisa took some schoolchildren from Greenfield School out to Woking Park to create a poetry trail through the park. Gary Boswell, working with Norfolk District Council's Environmental Health Department, promoted the importance of recycling by writing and collecting poems about recycling rubbish. The residency found him carving sand poems with a plastic spade on the Cromer shoreline much to the delight of hundreds of Bank Holiday visitors. Later, in an effort to draw links between recycling and poetry he held the world's first Poetry

Jumble Sale at the local theatre. As part of the Torrington Revels and Commons Fair, poets Matt Black and Phil Bowen rode a bus for twelve days, reading and creating poems with the commuters in a project called 'Just the Ticket'.

The physical presence of the writer is a key element in any residency and again, as I point out in Chapter 6 on the Literary Festival, it is the physical presence of the writer which invests the residency with a special significance both for the host organisation and the participating audience (Goldsworthy, 1992/93; Meehan, 2004). With the cult of the author the physical presence of the writer, rather than the text on the page, has gained increasing importance and it is this factor which is so appealing to the host organisation and participating individuals. Thus, through the residency, it is possible to meet the writer, hear them speak and more importantly begin to learn something of the 'sacred art' of writing. This is more than mere entertainment; it is an initiation into the literary world, an insight into the creative mind and an opportunity to engage in the creative process.

The location of the residency, whether in the country or the city, football stadium or legal practice, is also significant to the experience. The culture, language, behaviour and setting shape the experience of the residency, both for writer and participant, in distinctive ways. George Szirtes's residency at Downham Market Library brought him into contact with two very diverse groups, the elderly and young mothers. He was, he said, 'relieved to get visitors at all' and in the surgeries he offered it was mostly pensioners (though only twelve in total) who spoke to him or sought his advice: 'These old people mostly had lives and travels they wanted to set down on paper and we had a good time talking about how that might be done. I am still in touch with a couple of them' (Szirtes, Poetry Society Archives, 2000). In the legal world of Mishcon de Reya, Lavinia Greenlaw emailed poems to staff, posted

poems in the lift and ran writing workshops. The benefit to Greenlaw was that she discovered a new lexicon which helped to inform her own writing and demonstrated a commitment to introducing poetry to new worlds. When questioned about the attitude of the legal world to poetry she admitted that the response had not always been positive but that this did not detract from her residency or the aims of the Poetry Places project as a whole. In the business of bringing poetry to the people the experience ‘is just as fruitful when the reaction is negative’ (Greenlaw, Personal Interview, 2009: 2).

Residencies therefore are not just pedagogical occasions but represent important sites for the construction and reconstruction of meaning (Bernstein, 1998: 372). Each residency produces new work and fresh insight into the writing process as these varied factors interact in new ways. This study thus seeks to explore not only what the writer has produced as a result of the residency but what impact the writer can exert on the community with which they are in contact.

Bourdieu (referring to Flaubert’s aesthetic stance) explores the position of the writer in *The Rules of Art* in this way:

The concern to keep one’s distance from all social roles (and the gathering places where the people occupying them commune) requires a refusal to bow to the expectations of the public, to follow them or to lead them, in the way the authors of successful plays or serials do ... The more the artist affirms himself as such by affirming his autonomy, the more he constitutes the ‘bourgeois’ as ... inapt at loving the work of art, at appropriating it in a real way, that is, symbolically.

(Bourdieu, 1996: 79)

However, the very nature of the contemporary residency demands that the writer engages with the public and these interactions and networks challenge the notion of

the writer as a solitary figure making it impossible for the writer to distance themselves from social roles. As if in response to the challenge of the French theorists (Barthes, 1977 (1967); Derrida, 1967; Foucault, 1977) the roles which writers now adopt ensure that ‘the author is returned to the centre’ (Wandor, 2008: 160) and is no longer expected to linger on the margins. In this age of literature festivals, literary prizes with their elaborate prize-giving ceremonies, readings and residencies the writer is expected to engage with the public and although this engagement could present certain challenges it nonetheless also offers the potential to explore new, creative opportunities.

The public appearance of the author not only challenges the conceit that the author is dead but also foregrounds the role of the reader in literature and the importance of the writer-reader relationship.²⁷ For a text to be fully realised the writer must engage with an audience and the creative work is only fully realised through contact with the reader. The Marxist approach to literary criticism defines art as a social practice: ‘We may see literature as a text, but we may also see it as a social activity, a form of social and economic production which exists alongside and interrelates with, other such forms’ (Eagleton, 1976: 60). No longer ‘the God-like figure who mysteriously conjures his handiwork out of nothing’ the writer has become very much like their readers and followers, ‘a worker rooted in a particular history with particular materials at his (sic) disposal’ (Eagleton, 1976: 60).

While Adorno (1991) and Bourdieu (1989) would imply that audiences are limited in their ability to decode a text many theorists recognise the important role of the reader. Fiske (1989) and Giles and Middleton (1999) suggest that the audience are active participants in the creative process, capable of interpreting meaning and

²⁷ Given that the public at such events is as interested in the writer-as-individual/celebrity as in the writer/producer of text per se.

actively constructing new ones. Umberto Eco notes that ‘the reader as an active principal of interpretation is a part of the picture of the generative process of the text’ (Eco, 1979: 4). Stanley Fish suggests that it is the reader who invests the text with meaning and that ‘the reader’s activities are at the centre of attention, where they are regarded not as leading to meaning but *having* meaning’ (Fish, 1980: 158). As there is no stable basis for meaning there is no single correct interpretation of a text: meaning inheres not in the text but within the reader. In her research on performance poetry, Gregory contends that poetry is ‘a social product; produced, performed, consumed and understood within groups’ (Gregory, 2009: 36).

The views of these theorists and the determination of contemporary writers to engage with a range of public roles challenge Bourdieu’s views on literature and the role of the writer. The majority of poets who participated in the Poetry Places project would situate themselves on some middle ground between Gregory and Bourdieu and would accept that while creation rests with the author, the audience is free to interpret the work. This debate concerning the writer’s contact with society and issues surrounding cultural production and cultural realisation raises questions about the author’s presence or absence and whether the work of literature can be seen as a static product on the page closely defined by the author’s intentions or as a work-in-progress which can only be completed through the active engagement of the reader.

The residency therefore, when successful, plays a key role in promoting the work of the author and the author’s career. Mort notes that his residencies offered both ‘a rewarding creative experience’ and ‘raised (my) profile as a writer’ commenting that when the writer interacts with a wide range of individuals it can ‘demystify the way in which writers work and talk about their writing’ (Mort, Personal Interview, 2010). A number of writers have also found that residencies have

uncovered for them new modes of expression and new approaches to writing which inform the creative process. Alice Oswald spoke of the creative process during her Poetry Places residency on the river Dart:

So I decided to take along a tape-recorder. At the moment, my method is to tape a conversation with someone who works on the Dart, then go home and write it down from memory. I then work with these two kinds of record - one precise, one distorted by the mind - to generate the poem's language. It's experimental and very against my grain, this mixture of journalism and imagination, but the results are exciting. Above all, it preserves the idea of the poem's voice being everyone's, not just the poet's.

(Oswald, Poetry Society Website)

Still others spoke of the new audiences for their work and the opportunities for interaction. For example, Kate Clanchy took up a residency with the British Red Cross in order to raise awareness of their work through a different medium, namely, poetry:

My most important task was to enable volunteers and staff to record what they did, and so demonstrate how valuable that work is. The response was varied and rich – so rich in fact, that we decided to draw together some of the results in this anthology to celebrate the power of humanity ... I have also gained many rich experiences for myself.

(Clanchy, Poetry Society Website)

John Gallas at ASDA in Oadby commented on a range of different factors which contributed to the success of his particular residency, contrary to expectations:

...it's unusual (and therefore attracts attention), unstuffy (and so without conventional expectations of style and subject matter), accessible (therefore open to anyone), ordinary (so without a hint of academia), surprising (therefore likely to encourage humour), and busy (thus increasing the immediate exposure of what's being written, and what's

written. While I'm sure nearly anywhere would do for a Poetry Place, these qualities could be capitalized on to produce a kind of poetry that fitted my bill: new subjects, plain styles and real forms.

(Gallas, Poetry Society Website)

Writers' residencies can be viewed within a number of contexts: the democratisation of literature, the promotion of cultural sites for commercial exploitation, the desire on behalf of the host organisation to enhance their public image through a share in cultural capital, the need for arts sponsorship and the opportunities it presents for contemporary writers. It is clear therefore that the role is beset with complexities and ambiguities in which the writer's role and the importance of literature are questioned.

4.8 The Importance of Location

Both the writer and the literature produced are influenced by the location and the host organisation in which the residency takes place. There is also a reciprocal process where the writer exerts an influence on those with whom they have interacted. Becker's (1982) study of the ways in which artworks are created can be of relevance here. He suggests that all works of art are never the product of a single artist and the input of the community of people who produce, disseminate and consume art is also important. Creative activities are characterised by 'common or joint activities or concerns tied together by a network of communication' (Kling and Gerson, 1978: 26). As such they are complex, dynamic and unbounded and must be understood 'in terms of the shared meanings and joint actions of their participants' (Gregory, 2006: 60).

The location of the residency is also vital to the creative process. As mentioned above, Alice Oswald's *Dart*, the culmination of her three-year residency on the river Dart in Devon, is a record of different characters associated with the river 'linking their voices into a sound-map of the river, a songline from the source' (Oswald, 2002: vii). Matt Harvey's residency at the All England Club (Wimbledon) resulted in a series of poems about the game of tennis, the players, umpires, groundsmen and the location itself. During his residency at Dove Cottage hosted by the Wordsworth Trust, Adam O'Riordan worked on a collection which was inspired by the landscape of the Lake District and the lives of the Wordsworths. An examination of these works demonstrates how they have been influenced by the location, not only in theme, but in language, form and structure.

What is so creatively powerful about the residency is that it breaks habitual patterns (the poet or novelist sitting alone at a desk) and thrusts the writer into an unfamiliar and even hostile setting such as a prison, a psychiatric hospital or even down a mine. It also casts the writer and the audience in a new light in which the writer must respond to the demands of their audience and the participant must engage more actively with the written word. Breaking established habits and conventions brings with it a certain freedom and new forms of inspiration which is liberating for the writer and allows them to experiment with new creative forms.

Mario Petrucci's residency at the Imperial War Museum (again part of the Poetry Places project) resulted in an innovative approach to public poetry. The poems which formed part of the trail were designed to multiply and expand the context of individual artefacts on display and a much wider range of viewer response. To define this poetic form Petrucci offers us the neologism 'multicaptioning', a concept which forms the basis of his textual-visual

‘literARTure’ in museums and other public places. It is striking also that the text of the poems, juxtaposed with artefacts in the museum demanded not only an intellectual and emotional response from visitors but also a physical one. In order to read a text they had to crouch, peer, turn and reach out, and in so doing, ‘bringing a fresh and suggestive physicality to their readings’ (Mario Petrucci Website).

Though constrained by the location and the exhibits, and conscious of Heaney’s warning not to ‘rampage permissively in the history of other people’ (Heaney, 1988: 165) in other people’s tragedies, Petrucci, like many poets, found a new form of creative inspiration from these very constraints. For instance, the poem ‘Trench’ is viewed through a telescope and sighted on a distant pillar on a flight of stairs used by visitors. The use of the telescope to view the poem frames and modifies the way the poem is read and the language of the poem is also conditioned by this new space, far from the conventions of the page in a book:

The hard end-rhymes emphasise a sniper-like scanning of the eye, while the ... opening lines ... suggest ... the morbidly sinister ‘game’ the soldiers are playing. Those textual factors combine with the physical action of ‘sighting the poem’.

(Mario Petrucci Website)

Jane Rendell, in *Art and Architecture*, noted that:

Petrucci’s poems deal with the emotional conditions of war, the suffering ... The effect of these tiny poems placed next to enormous pieces of metal is powerful. Placed in intriguing places, like the treasure at the end of a hunt, these poems achieve something more complex than the pleasure derived from finding what one is already searching for. They produce an atmosphere of disquiet.

(Rendell, 2006: 125)

Novel approaches to literary expression however also generate debate and dissent. Indeed, many resident poet/writers deliberately seek and promote novel expressions and definitions of literature aimed specifically at challenging traditional definitions of poetry associated with the dominant literary world. It is not surprising then to find that many writers and academics question the value of certain types of residency and the kind of writing it produces. The exercise could have the potential to devalue literature and the writer's role as the writer is forced into ever more contrived expressions which value accessibility and popularity above serious literary expression. In this respect, Mort, for example, states that 'popularity is a kind of chimera and that it actually militates against the way poetry works against the grain of consensus to create realisations through discomfort' (Mort, Appendix 2). Such comments question the validity of certain residencies in terms of their value to the writer and the perceived outcomes. Yet, many of our respected poets today, all recipients of major poetry prizes, have taken part in Poetry Places and many, other similar other residencies. These would include: John Burnside, Gillian Clarke, Ian Duhig, Lavinia Greenlaw, Philip Gross Tobias Hill, Mimi Khalvati, Fiona Sampson and Matthew Sweeney and George Szirtes, amongst others.

Whilst a number of theorists (Adorno, 1991; Bourdieu, 1989) have questioned the value of 'popular' culture it is less common to find proponents of popular culture who challenge the validity of high culture (Harrington and Bielby, 2001). Nonetheless, there are some 'subcultural' theorists, such as Hebdige (1979), Willis (1977, 1978) and Thornton (1995) who question the cultural status quo. The term 'subcultural capital' was coined by Thornton who wished to distinguish between the cultural currency of dominant groups in society and that associated with

‘other less privileged domains’ (Thornton, 1995: 11). In fact, Thornton chose as her subjects, clubbers, who perhaps do not fall into the same category as writers-in-residence. Nonetheless, her argument has relevance here in that writers should be free to choose their milieu and location, and be free to explore the creative possibilities within those parameters. A good poet can write successfully on any subject – tattoos, horse-racing, football, Marks and Spencer meal deals – and a mediocre poet will never write a noteworthy poem no matter how many nights they spend at Hawthornden Castle, Yaddo or Djerassi. Certain writers may resent the perceived constraints imposed by the residency yet others embrace the challenge and stimulus of the new locus of creativity which takes them beyond the page, the garret and the university and into the community which for too long has been excluded from the creative world (Makhijani, 2005; Smith and Kraynak, 2004).

4.9 Conclusions

Despite the unease which some of the more unusual residencies prompted it would be wrong to dismiss outright the benefits they have offered writers and their new audiences. In Bourdieusian terms, the writers stand to gain economic and social capital, the host organisation accrues a share of cultural capital in return for sponsoring the event and audiences enjoy a measure of cultural capital through their association with the writer, participation in workshops and attendance at performances.

As noted previously, media coverage tended to adopt a somewhat derisory note when referring to writers in residence. However, since the presence of a poet in a football stadium (Ian McMillan, Sarah Wardle), the appointment of a ‘canal

laureate' touring England's waterways (Jo Bell), or the writer perched on the white cliffs of Dover (Julian Baggini), the status of the writer in various unexpected residences has now achieved a level of acceptance and respect. When Wardle accepted the residence at Tottenham Hotspur F.C. she had two major objectives: to use the experiences a source of inspiration for her poetry and to demonstrate to the public 'that poetry is about contemporary things and there's no subject that poets don't write about' (Freeman, BBC News Online, 2004). Her poems were printed on programmes for home games, in effect bringing poetry to as wide an audience as possible.

The spread of residencies in schools, colleges, universities and libraries, and in prisons, department stores, parking lots and supermarkets, law offices and railway trains, was once viewed as an ideology peculiar to the closing years of the twentieth century. In 1999, the Editorial of *PN Review* expressed scepticism about the benefits of the phenomenon commenting that the 'provision of residencies in ephemeral environments ... may benefit the writer with emoluments but will have little or no impact on the culture of those who pass through the environment and collide, briefly, with the tired Imagination' (*PN Review* Online, 1999). Nonetheless, despite such cultural pessimism, residencies have continued to proliferate to the point where it is now no longer unusual to find a poet or writer on a bus or a train, a canal or a river, or in a supermarket or airport. Furthermore, the ubiquity of the writer/poet in residence has not only offered the contemporary poet a valuable form of patronage but has also encouraged more people to write poetry and indeed to express their interest in writing poetry. It is as though Ian McMillan's hope that the 'split between writer and reader, performer and audience' has finally been dissolved.

Chapter 5 – The Healing Pen: Poetry as Therapy

5.1 Introduction

Hast thou, Prometheus, never learnt that words
Are the physicians of distempered rage?

(Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*)

I think we get a closer description of the way it [poetry] has always operated if we regard it as nothing more than a facility for expressing that complicated process in which we locate, and attempt to heal, affliction – whether our own or that of others whose feeling we can share. The inmost spirit of poetry, in other words, is at bottom ... the voice of pain – and the physical body ... of poetry, is the treatment by which the poet tries to reconcile that pain with the world.

(Ted Hughes, 10 November 1982)

This chapter looks at residencies which introduced poets to a range of healthcare settings with a view to promoting poetry for healing. It provides a background to the use of poetry in healing, makes reference to research in the area, and examines the benefits to participants and poets. It also seeks to evaluate these projects in terms of outcomes and explores whether these can be viewed purely in therapeutic terms and if the work produced can have any artistic merit.

It is important to address this aspect of the writer's role in the public sphere as many writers' residencies take place in care settings which in turn has led to the development of groups of creative writing professionals. These professionals have in turn undertaken research in the therapeutic arts and continue to develop their practice in these areas alongside their own creative work. This type of work and research places the creative writer in an important and influential position in the public sphere.

Two major organizations which link writing and welfare are the Writers in Prison Network (WIPN), which is part of the Prisoners' Education Trust, and Lapidus, an organization which 'provides networks and information for people interested in writing and creativity for personal development and in working with others' (Lapidus Website). It works with a number of communities, individuals and groups, and runs projects in health and social care environments and in the community. It also supports people with disabilities, chronic illness, terminal illness and mental health problems, as well as refugees, offenders and others facing social disadvantages and challenges to their health and wellbeing.

The WIPN, working within the broader remit of providing education for offenders, is funded by the Arts Council England, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the Prison Service. Describing itself as 'one of the leaders in the field' (WIPN Website), it offers creative arts residencies in prisons over 1-2 years and shorter special projects. Directed by Clive Hopwood and Pauline Bennett it has created over 100 residencies since 1992, and employs professional novelists, poets, screenwriters and journalists to work with staff and offenders. Delivery methods are varied and can include one-to-one surgeries, workshops and courses offering poetry, fiction, journalism and scriptwriting and producing books, magazines, CDs, DVDs and performances. WIPN are confident yet modest about the benefits of the arts in prison. They state quite clearly that 'writers in residence are not teachers but they share skills ... they are not counsellors but they listen ... And they are not therapists but their work is therapeutic' (WIPN Website). The arts generally, and writing in particular, offer a means of improving communication skills and increasing self-esteem and confidence.

Although I interviewed a poet/musician working in prison, I do not intend to conduct an in-depth study of the effects and benefits of creative writing in prison. A good deal of recent research is already available in this area concerning the benefits of the arts in prison and the experiences of its practitioners: (Riches, 1991; Wilson, 1998; Di Girolamo, 2000, and Tardivo, 2001). WIPN's role in assisting prisoners in the acquisition of human and social capital, thus contributing in a significant way to desistance from crime, is well researched and documented by a number of academic criminologists: (Farall, 2002; Maruna and Immerigeon, 2004; McNeill and Whyte, 2007 and the Ministry of Justice, 2012).

A recent evaluation of the WIPN by the Hallam Centre for Community Justice highlighted many of the problems experienced by writers in prisons:

Key challenges for Writers in Residence have been: 'battling through' prison bureaucracy and processes; the transient nature of the prison population resulting in inconsistent group size/attendance; lack of access to resources, particularly IT; limited understanding of both prison regime and culture (for new writers); working with prisoners who may have complex emotional needs, and/or be uncooperative, disruptive and disrespectful. Many of WiR experience their Residency as 'emotionally draining'.

(Hallam, 2012: 3)

However, the important contribution writers make to prison life is also acknowledged as the report notes that they have 'a crucial role in "assisted desistance" by focussing on offenders' strengths rather than the risks and challenges which they pose' (Arts Alliance, 2011 in Hallam, 2012: 5).

My observations of the writer in prison revealed more of the difficulties and challenges of assuming such a role rather than the potential rewards. The environment is (obviously) repressive and intimidating; the teaching facilities were

adequate but limited, and the atmosphere within the workshop was simmering with tensions due in large part to certain disruptive individuals in the group. No doubt these are the conditions which so many writers in prison face daily but I believe they persevere because of the worthwhile nature of the work. I also suspect that the challenging and uncomfortable environment feeds their own creative impulse and acts as a stimulus to their own writing. The techniques employed by the poet to encourage his group to write were stimulating and largely effective but his choice of material was not always suitable: introducing a group dominated by young Asian males to Philip Larkin's 'This be the Verse' was brave if ill-advised. The outraged reaction to the language and sentiment, which brought the session to an abrupt end, might have been anticipated.²⁸

In this chapter I wish to focus instead on residencies in care settings partly because of their innovative and beneficial nature and also because a significant proportion of the Poetry Places poets (10%) were involved in residencies which involved writing as therapy. Much of the theory of writing as therapy is based on the notion that the process of writing the self produces not only a positive cathartic effect but also a therapeutic one, and that the process leads to personal development. If professional writers acknowledge this aspect of writing then there is no reason why the general public might not benefit from writing in the same way. This chapter, therefore, will explore the thinking and theories behind creative writing as therapy, and will look specifically at the healing powers of poetry. It looks at current theory, presents the experiences of a number of practitioners, both therapists and experienced writers, and attempts to evaluate this practice. It will look specifically at the Poetry Places initiative which placed many poets in healthcare settings, exploring

²⁸ It is interesting that Larkin's poetry can still provoke such a strong reaction.

the many benefits and possible pitfalls of such activities. It will also explore the writing-as-art-or-therapy debate and try to establish whether such writing is purely an exercise in self-expression or if, in some instances, it might also have some artistic merit. Is it possible, as poet Ann Kelley claims, to ‘turn patients into poets’? (Kelley, 1999).

5.2 The Theoretical Basis for the Use of the Arts in Therapeutic Settings

Because creative writing is almost always drawn from personal experience, it carries with it some profound truths about the self and the psyche. In his paper ‘Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming’ Freud sought to discover ‘from what sources that strange being, the creative writer, draws his material, and how he manages to make such an impression on us with it and to arouse in us emotions of which, perhaps, we had not even thought ourselves capable’ (Freud, 1959: 143). Freud compares the creative writer to a child inventing his own fictional world, using fantasy and daydream to liberate the self in a way that engages the reader. Through this process, the writer is able to liberate their own and the readers’ deepest fantasies and wishes through the art form of writing.

For Freud, writers assume a place in the psychological topography half-way between neurotics and ‘normal’ adults. Like neurotics, writers feel compelled to communicate their fantasies and are largely, unlike the average adult, unafraid or unashamed to do so.²⁹ In this sense creative writing is a form of confession similar to that made by the neurotic through their symptoms or to their analyst. What makes literature therapeutic, for both writer and reader, is the fact that through it we live out

²⁹ ‘A person who publishes a book,’ Edna St. Vincent Millay quipped, ‘wilfully appears before the populace with his (sic) pants down.’ (Millay, 1972: 220)

our own dreams and desires, and encounter problems and dangers but in a safe manner without the threat of negative consequences. Art and literature act as a form of play or pleasure to compensate us for what is lacking in the reality of our everyday (repressed) lives.

The case for the use of art and literature in the therapeutic setting is also based on the Jungian notion of 'giving emotional disturbance visible shape' (Fryrear and Corbit, 1992: xiii). Thus the image, or writing on the page, becomes a more tangible focal point to be confronted, discussed and potentially changed. Through the reading and writing of poetry individuals can access their deepest fears and anxieties making them more accessible and ultimately comprehensible. Much of Jung's theory was based on self-understanding through self-knowledge. Through memory and the recording of memories on the page, the participant can examine different parts of the persona, that is, the masks they present to the outside world. Speaking specifically about art, although the same principles may be applied to creative writing, Jung stated that 'emotional disturbance can also be dealt with ... not by clarifying it instinctually but by giving it a physical shape' (Jung, 1960: 78). The physical act of writing and the words on the page which form the narrative are an integral part of the healing process.

Also of importance here is the fact that technical and aesthetic proficiency is not significant to the healing process; it is more important to engage in the activity with playfulness and imagination in order to confront the unconscious. Jung based these theories of the active imagination on experiences from his own life. Suffering from a severe breakdown he withdrew from normal life and spent time by a lake building miniature cities. This creative activity eventually led to the retrieval of a childhood phantasy, a process that paved the way for his recovery (McGregor, 1989:

247). Never prescriptive about the methodology Jung declared that his aim was ‘to bring about a psychic state in which [my] patient begins to experiment with his own nature – a state of fluidity, change and growth where nothing is eternally fixed and hopelessly petrified’ (Chodorow, 1997: 87).

The theory and practice of art and writing therapy have polarised therapists and writers alike. Those who pursue a more scientific or rational approach tend to remain sceptical about the claims made for writing therapies. At the same time many writers (detailed in the next section) are respectful of the sometimes arcane nature of writing therapy and maintain that science cannot explain everything about the human psyche. McNiff (1992) quotes Jung as warning that if we attempt to apply too much rational thought to creativity and the workings of the mind, ‘the bird is flown’ (65).

5.3 The Treasure House of All Misfortunes ³⁰

Poems, regardless of any outcome, cross the battlefields, tending the wounded, listening to the wild monologues of the triumphant or the fearful. They bring a kind of peace. ... The promise is that language has acknowledged, has given shelter, to the experience which demanded, which cried out.

(John Berger, 1991: 21)

In *Negotiating with the Dead* Margaret Atwood explores the writer’s calling in order to understand what motivates and drives the writer to write. She ponders the three questions ‘most often posed to writers, both by readers and by themselves: *Who are you writing for? Why do you do it? Where does it come from?*’ (Atwood, 2003: xix). She lists the many different reasons which prompt an individual to write and offers responses from writers, both real and fictional, taken from interviews,

³⁰ From Zbigniew Herbert, 2007.

autobiographies, readings, lectures and conversations. The reasons listed are many and various but a number are very pertinent to the subject of this chapter as they reveal something of the cathartic nature of writing and the sense that writing has another dimension beyond even the creation of art or indulgence in a pleasurable pastime. Many writers confess to the deep-felt need to put pen to paper and the satisfaction or even liberation that this activity produces. The various relevant responses to Atwood's question included:

To excavate the past ... Because I knew I had to keep writing or else I would die. Because to write is to take risks, and it is only by taking risks that we are alive. To produce order out of chaos ... To express myself ... To name the hitherto unnamed ... Because to create is human ... To rectify the imperfections of my miserable childhood ... Because I was possessed ... To cope with my depression ... To bear witness to horrifying events that I have survived ... To allow for the possibility of hope and redemption.

(Atwood, 2003: xix – xxi)

Without doubt, the common thread that runs through these responses relates to the writer's need to delve into the self. In a recent interview on BBC Radio 4 for *Open Book*, Jeanette Winterson, discussing both her recent depression and her new novel, was unambiguous about the therapeutic effects of writing: 'Art saved me; it got me through my depression and self-loathing, back to a place of innocence' (Winterson, 2009). In a bid to understand how the process of writing functions in this therapeutic or cathartic way, Atwood goes on to explore what is involved in the process of creative writing and the acts of self-discovery and identity creation it entails. Writers through the ages have used very similar metaphors to describe the experience of writing. Dante begins the *Divine Comedy* with an account of finding himself in a dark, tangled wood, at night, having lost his way (Dante, 1307-1314). Richard Skinner, perhaps echoing Virginia Woolf's dark room and lantern motif, says that

writing is like driving at night when all you can see is what the headlights illuminate and the rest is in darkness (Skinner, 2009). Continuing this preoccupation with ‘darkness’ and a sense of the deep anxieties associated with writing, the French novelist Marguerite Duras noted that writing was like:

Finding yourself in a hole, at the bottom of a hole, in almost total solitude, and discovering that only writing can save you. To be without the slightest subject for a book, the slightest idea for a book, is to find yourself, once again, before a book. A vast emptiness. A possible book. Before nothing. Before something like living, naked writing, like something terrible, terrible to overcome.

(Duras, 1993: 7)

In a similar vein, Seamus Heaney’s words ‘All I know is a door into the dark’ (Heaney, 1969: 3) describe the creative process as a retreat or descent into darkness, and the work of the poet as one which is conducted in darkness. The motif had already been explored in *Death of a Naturalist* where Heaney spoke, not of creating light and thus banishing the darkness, but of creating sound, or words, within the darkness as a means of finding the self: ‘I rhyme / To see myself, to set the darkness echoing’ (Heaney, 1966: 46). Atwood concludes that writing is closely linked ‘with darkness, and a desire or perhaps a compulsion to enter it ...to illuminate it, and to bring something back out to the light’ (Atwood, 2003: xxii).

At a recent talk Hanif Kureishi, although somewhat cynical, did not completely dismiss the value of writing as therapy. He assured his audience that writers often indulge in therapeutic writing to achieve a kind of catharsis but then his advice about this type of writing was to ‘rip it up and throw it away afterwards’ (Kureishi, Talk at Faber and Faber, 2009). The ‘unedited splurge’ is not art; it does not have any meaning for, or appeal to, a reader. A true writer’s urge is to satisfy

their audience: ‘the real therapy is that you’re connecting with other people’ (Kureishi, 2009).

Poetry for healing, poetry in health, writing therapy, bibliotherapy, personal development, self and reflexivity, writing myself – the terms are many and, it can be noted, increasingly solipsistic. Beginning in the US in the seventies the idea of a link between poetry and healing has generated a huge amount of activity in therapeutic settings. The National Association for Poetry Therapy (NAPT), an organization made up of health professionals and poets, provides certification and registration for poetry therapists who are united by their ‘love of words’, and their ‘passion for enhancing the lives of others’ and themselves (NAPT website). In the UK and since the late eighties the practice of facilitating poetry workshops in care settings has emerged out of the Health Care Arts movement and is therefore viewed as an arts activity, rather than a medical intervention, which complements professional care (Sampson, 1999: 8).

Although the notion of ‘poetry therapy’ may conjure thoughts of Californian New Ageism, in fact the link between poetry and healing has a long and varied history. In ancient Greece a hospital at Epidaurus adopted a holistic approach to healing – healthy mind, healthy body – and offered its patients both a ‘sanctuary’ to promote physical well-being, and a theatre, with the purpose of healing mind and soul (Sampson, 1999: 6). Also, the word ‘therapy’ comes from the Greek word *therapeia* meaning to nurse or cure through dance, song, poem and drama. Asclepius, the god of healing, was the son of Apollo, god of poetry, a point which underlines the close connection between medicine and the arts.

There is a perception, in the UK at least, that people turn to poetry at a time of ‘crisis’, whether in a private or a public context. Fiona Sampson claims that ‘the

shared but intensely personal experience of catharsis which public performance of poetry can generate may be traced back to the origins of tragedy in Greek religious ritual' (Sampson, 1999: 14). It has become increasingly common to read a poem at a wedding or funeral – the recital of W.H. Auden's 'Funeral Blues' in the film *Four Weddings and a Funeral* no doubt contributed to a popularization of the current trend. Furthermore, the public outpouring of grief on the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, found expression not only in floral but also poetic tributes, revealing once again a startling need for the 'ordinary' individual (as opposed to the practising poet) to express private emotions in a very public way through the medium of poetry. Much of the poetic outpouring on the occasion of Diana's death, though sincere, was worthless and strikingly unmemorable, not least of all the offering from the then poet laureate, Ted Hughes (mentioned in Chapter 3). But, the point is that there was an *impulse* to poetry and it is this impulse that guides practitioners in their belief that poetry, or creative writing generally, can work as a form of therapy.

Poetry as therapy is used for all age groups across a range of care settings including GP practices, hospitals, psychiatric units, hospices, care homes for the sick, disabled or elderly, and in prisons. The writing workshops can vary enormously depending on the needs of the user group. Poetry can be read or written; it can be written individually or in groups; it can be read silently to oneself or aloud. More often than not however it concentrates on shared writing sessions, with the poet/therapist providing models, encouraging responses and offering guided writing. Where some patients are prevented through illness or disability from writing their own work the poet may act as scribe (Sampson, 1999).

In the therapeutic context, poetry, though it comes 'ready-stuffed with everyone's preconceptions about status, education and skill' (Sampson, 1999: 18) is

rarely led by any notion of culture. In practice, the urge to write, and the quality and quantity of poetry are not determined by class or education. The process is open to all and depending on the individual it may be a heartfelt cry for help, a protest, an exercise in self-discovery, or an experiment. The beneficial aspects of poetry as therapy are associated more with the process than the product and so in a poetry-for-healing session all participants are equal whether they write poetry, prose, gibberish or nothing at all. The main purpose of the sessions is to give individuals the opportunity to express their fears, anxieties or hopes, on the page and in so doing experience some form of relief or catharsis which contributes to the healing process.

Poetry as an aid to healing is used in a number of ways. Professional therapists, clinicians and carers choose to use poetry as they believe it can enhance or supplement the care they offer their patients. In addition, there are professional poets working in care settings whose work 'adds value' to professional care. This added value is often very difficult to quantify. It may be something as simple as providing opportunities for enjoyment and interest in what are often very difficult and stressful settings. It can help participants to relax and to relate to care staff in a more personal way. It is, furthermore, an activity that can empower individuals, allowing them to develop self-confidence and encourage new ways of thinking and talking. Sampson also talks of the 'humanising' effect of such activities where the individual, all too often, is just 'a case', and a difficult one at that, where professionals are viewed with fear and mistrust, where language is more of a barrier than a means of communication.

Can poetry offer genuine therapeutic benefits? Both the reading and writing of poetry can be beneficial as poetry is an art form that allows us to find expression for our deepest and most complex feelings. Not all poetry deals with major emotional

issues but, if questioned, the majority of people would describe poetry as being essentially an expression of emotion, and it is a literary form of expression that has long dealt with complex emotional themes – grief, fear, loss, mental distress, love. There are numerous examples of such work in contemporary poetry: Douglas Dunn’s *Elegies*, Raymond Carver’s *A New Path to the Waterfall*, Matthew Sweeney’s *Beyond Bedlam*, Ted Hughes’s *Birthday Letters*, Philip Gross’s *The Wasting Game*, Thom Gunn’s *The Man with Night Sweats*, Jo Shapcott’s self-elegy *On Mutability*, and Christopher Reid’s *A Scattering*, to name but a few of the many different examples of elegy and elegiac poetry. In his study *Elegy*, David Kennedy (2007) states that ‘elegy in English poetry has always been ... a mood rather than a formal mode’ and has frequently been expressed in a range of styles and forms including ‘sonnets, *terza rima*, blank and free verse’ (2).

Furthermore, as has been noted in Chapter 7, the elegy strikes a chord with the reader of poetry and these collections are regular winners of literary prizes. The frequency with which poets turn to elegy as an expression of loss and grief, the positive public response this expression receives and the fact that these collections so often win prizes, all help to reinforce perceptions of poetry as a form of catharsis and a means of healing.

5.4 Writers and Mental Illness

Men have called me mad; but the question is not yet settled, whether madness is or is not the loftiest intelligence – whether much that is glorious – whether all that is profound – does not spring from disease of thought – from moods of mind exalted at the expense of the general intellect.

(Edgar Allan Poe, 1969 (1842): 638)

Writers, and poets in particular, are no strangers to emotional turmoil, depression, mental instability and other demons prompting research that links poetry with the tortured mind. According to a study by Kay Redfield Jamison, poets are thirty times more likely to undergo a depressive illness than the rest of the population, and twenty times more likely to be committed to an asylum (Jamison, 1996: 75-100). In Feb 2011 BBC Radio 4 broadcast a programme *Out of the Vortex*, a study of poems inspired by depressive illnesses. In the programme Irish poet Matthew Sweeney chose poetry that spoke to him, from the classics of John Clare and Emily Dickinson to that of more contemporary writers such as Kit Wright and Jean “Binta” Breeze.

The programme also explored the manner in which the unconscious, which drives poetry, has a way of jumping and lurching in ways that forge new connections between previously unconnected objects thus providing new and original ways of seeing the world. However, it is also in the unconscious that the voices of the irrational lurk. The poems chosen by Sweeney covered a range of moods – humour as well as gloom, calm as well as chaos – and explored how mental disorder, rather than being a condition suffered by a few, can overshadow and invade the lives of so many. Sweeney, whose collection *Beyond Bedlam* found its origins in mental distress, demonstrates that the act of writing can help offset the advance of chaos, shaping it into the order of words.

Paradoxically, whilst writing could be described as a means of exorcising demons the activity is also linked with illness and mental instability. A study by James Kaufman in the US in 2003, published in the journal *Death Studies*, revealed that poets are more likely than any other type of writer to die young (Kaufman, 2003). Kaufman collected data on 1,987 writers, from the nineteenth and twentieth

centuries, that included age at death, health issues and causes of death. He found that poets lived an average of 62.2 years, non-fiction writers lived for 67.9 years, novelists for 66 and playwrights an average of 63.4 years. A number of celebrated poets barely made it to middle age: Sylvia Plath gassed herself at the age of thirty; Anne Sexton was only forty-six when she took her own life, and Dylan Thomas died at age thirty-nine after falling into an alcoholic coma.

In his study, Kaufman was keen to discover the factors that led to the early deaths of those who write poetry. Though the facts he uncovers are fascinating, his observation that ‘if you ruminate more, you're more likely to be depressed, and poets ruminate’ is perhaps a little predictable if not facile. He states that poets have an earlier death rate because they work in a subjective, emotive field often associated with mental instability. His findings were backed up by Arnold Ludwig, a retired professor of psychiatry at the University of Kentucky, who looked at more than 1,000 prominent people in eight creative profession and ten non-creative professions. He found, perhaps unsurprisingly, that psychiatric disturbances were much more common in artists. Suicide rates are much higher amongst poets than any other literary writers and the general public, and poets are more prone to depression and bipolar disorder (Ludwig, 1995: 126-158).

In this context, the lives of the poets David Gascoyne and Ivan Blátny are also relevant. Gascoyne (1916 – 2001) published his first volume, *Roman Balcony* (1932), when only sixteen, and in 1935 *A Short Survey of Surrealism*, which established him as a champion of Surrealism and revealed the influence of European literature on his work (Drabble, 2000: 396). Partly due to persistent toothache and partly out of boredom Gascoyne became addicted to Benzedrine Sulphate a drug which helped to fire the imagination but also resulted in psychosis causing insomnia,

voices in the head and eventually difficulties with writing. After a manic episode, (which involved breaking into the Elysée Palace to warn De Gaulle of the coming apocalypse) Gascoyne was institutionalized where he withdrew from life and slipped into wordless depression. His startling rescue and rehabilitation occurred when Judy Lewis, a volunteer at Whitecroft Hospital, read Gascoyne's poem 'September Sun: 1947' to a group of inmates. Recognising his own work, Gascoyne was drawn out of silence to announce to the group that he was the poet. Although Lewis was not at first convinced by his claim to be the author of the work his identity was proven (Fraser, 2012: 356). Rescued by his own poem, Gascoyne gradually returned to normal life and continued to write until his death in 2001 (399).

Another example of a mentally ill poet and literal redemption through poetry is the story of Ivan Blátný (1919 – 1990). Blátný fled his native Czechoslovakia in 1948 to escape the communist régime. In 1954 he was hospitalized in Essex with mental health problems. Breakdowns of his emotional and mental health led to long-term stays in wards and closed hospitals and a complete silence from writing between the mid-1950s and about 1970. Opinions vary as to the severity of his condition, with diagnoses ranging from schizophrenia to simple terror that if he ever left hospital he would be returned to his homeland. He was to remain institutionalized for the rest of his life, in Ipswich and later Clacton-on-Sea, or 'Bohemia-on-Sea' as Nick Drake calls it in his poem 'Cigarettes for Mr Blatný.' For a long time he was ignored, his writings were discarded and destroyed, and his claims to being a major Czech poet were regarded as delusions of illness. A chance meeting in 1977 between one of his nurses and someone who knew Blatný in Czechoslovakia revealed his status as poet. Relieved of his lampshade-making duties, he was given a typewriter as part of his occupational therapy. Thereafter he

began writing again, often experimenting with English in complex ‘Blátnyisms’, and also creating a synthetic poetry in Czech and English (Wheatley, Georgiasam Blog, 2008). This is most clearly seen in his last book *Pomocná skola Bixley* (literally *Bixley Remedial School*) a manuscript of which was taken back to Prague in 1981, first published in Toronto in 1987 and republished a number of times with variant readings of its text. Blatný had achieved fame early back home, with four books of poems before he turned thirty. That he was a major Czech poet – and moreover one of immense interest – is now acknowledged and editions of his early and late poems, of his letters and manuscripts from the 1990s were published in editions of five, six and seven hundred pages in the Czech Republic (Watts, 2001).

Does the research suggest that writers are unusually unbalanced people who turn to writing for therapeutic support? Or, if the price of rumination is mental torment and even early death, what prompts professional carers to look to creative writing, and poetry in particular, as a means of therapy? Given the results of various studies it might be tempting to conclude that writing is more likely to push an unstable individual further into illness and depression. Poets and writers generally will acknowledge creativity frequently stems from mental conflict. Furthermore, many celebrated writers admit to a *need* to write, are conscious (mostly, but sometimes belatedly) of what it reveals about the nature of self and value the catharsis or ‘personal development’ they achieve through the process of writing. Byron, in a letter to Thomas Moore, blamed inactive writing periods, (and not the syphilis he had contracted), for his mental instability:

If I don't write to empty my mind, I go mad. As to that regular, uninterrupted love of writing ... I do not understand it. I feel it as a torture, which I must get rid of, but never as a pleasure. On the contrary, I think composition a great pain.

(Lord Byron, 1821, Letter 404 in Moore, 1830: 138)

In her reflections on her experience of writing *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf makes it clear that while writing the novel satisfied her desire to create a work of art there was also a further, initially unconscious, dimension to the activity. She had been troubled for over thirty years by the early death of her mother and on completing the novel she realised she had done ‘for (myself) what psycho-analysts do for their patients. I expressed some very long felt and deeply felt emotion. And in expressing it I explained it and then laid it to rest’ (Woolf, 1985 (1939): 72-183). This realisation came after she had finished writing. In Woolf’s case it was not a planned outcome and the therapeutic benefit she may have derived from her writing came in an unconscious way rather than by design.

The American poet, Anne Sexton, spent a number of years in mental hospitals and started writing at the age of thirty, as a means of recovery. In the *Paris Review Interviews*, she talks about the relationship between poetry and therapy and the link between the unconscious and writing: ‘Sometimes... I understand something in a poem that I haven’t integrated into my life. In fact, I may be concealing it from myself, while I was revealing it to the readers. The poetry is often more advanced, in terms of my unconscious, than I am. Poetry after all milks the unconscious’ (Sexton, 1989: 257).

Some writers believe that the object is to lose the self in writing, the loss of self being the key to creativity. T.S. Eliot wrote of this ‘loss of self’ in the writing process as an ‘escape from personality’; the writer is the vehicle through which feelings and emotions ‘enter into new combinations’ (Eliot, 1957: 26). Writing therefore is not about self-expression but about tapping into experiences and emotions that are most appropriate for the work of art. And yet this notion of self-

less writing seems to move away from the view that writing is an intensely personal experience. Commenting on Sylvia Plath's poetry, Ted Hughes noted that 'no poem can be a poem that is not a statement from the powers in control of our life, the ultimate suffering and decision in us' (Heaney, 1988: 61).

For some writers however creative writing involves a conscious quest for self. In his journal of 1920 Hermann Hesse's description of writing as 'a long, diverse, and winding path, whose goal it would be to express the personality, the 'I' of the artist so completely, so minutely in all its branchings' (Hesse, 1960: 80) suggests that it is through the process of writing that the writer gains self-knowledge and validates identity. Contemporary poet Selima Hill has a 'sense of joy, gratitude and relief at being a writer' and believes that this joy is not the exclusive preserve of so-called professional poets but something that everyone who writes can experience. (Although she would never use the term 'therapy', Hill's experience of writing poetry is 'redemptive... transforming the chaos of distress into order... offering myself back to myself and to others... getting stuff hidden inside out on to the page' (quoted in Sampson, 1999: 59). However, there seems to be a contradiction here. Creative writing is described as a deeply personal experience yet also involves moving away from the self and becoming impersonal. David Lodge noted that Eliot's desire to conceal the self was an effort to 'conceal the very personal sources of his own poetry from inquisitive critics' (Lodge, 2002: 17). The professional writer must therefore be capable of achieving a kind of internal distancing, opening up a space between the self and the material. According to Seamus Heaney the poet needs 'to get beyond ego in order to become the voice of more than autobiography' (Heaney, 1988: 148). This seems to suggest that uncontrolled autobiographical writing is somehow suspect or inferior to the art of poetry or fiction, a thought echoed by

Hilary Mantel when she confessed she used to think autobiography was ‘a form of weakness’ (Mantel, 2004: 6). Heaney goes on to comment on a number of Sylvia Plath poems, in particular ‘Daddy’ and ‘Lady Lazarus’ in which he believes she fails to create sufficient distance from the self; the poems are ‘slighted in favour of the intense personal need of the poet’, unlike ‘Edge’ which achieved ‘objectivity, a perfected economy of line’ and was therefore a stronger poem than many of the others (Heaney, 1988: 164-65, 168).

5.5 Writing as therapy

This is where writing as therapy and writing for the purposes of creating a work of art differ. The debate may go on in literary circles but it is not one which troubles the professional carer. Their practice is based on the ideas expressed by professional writers and they have been using creative writing for many years in a variety of different ways to supplement and enhance patient care. For over twenty years (in this country, but longer in the US) there has been a growing interest, amongst therapists, analysts and counsellors, in the use of autobiography and creative writing as a means of gaining insight into the self, of dealing with psychological problems and traumas or of coping with difficult life experiences such as illness, ageing and death. Since the 1980s a group of clinicians, medical students and academics has met to discuss literature and the ways in which it can offer insights into medical practice. Robin Downie, Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow founded, along with Sir Kenneth Calman, the movement now known as the ‘medical humanities’ – the use of literature and other arts and humanities in the education of health care professionals. He states that ‘poems... can make a large impact on a student or doctor and develop intuitive understanding’ and

he uses literature to help medical professionals understand the impact of medical interventions on the individual patient (Downie, 2003). Another approach was adopted by Ceri Davies, Senior Occupational Therapist, who ran a weekly poetry group at an acute mental health unit. She was so pleased with the results that she decided to undertake further training at the University of Sussex. Psychotherapist, Cheryl Moskowitz uses poetry in her counselling work as a means of getting her patients to uncover and give expression to their deepest fears and anxieties. A prose writer and poet as well as a psychodynamic counsellor, and founder member of LAPIDUS (Literary Arts in Personal Development), Moskowitz uses poetry in her counselling work because 'looking closely at disintegrated parts of ourselves and our experience not only opens up vast new roads of fictional possibilities, but puts us in touch with hidden truths about ourselves and new ways of managing them' (Moskowitz, 1998: 37).

In addition to this enthusiasm on the part of professional carers the practice is also furthered by the presence of writers working in institutions such as prisons, hospitals and day centres where they are involved in writing workshops with a wide spectrum of client groups ranging from those with mental health problems or learning disabilities, to stroke victims, dementia sufferers and the terminally ill. In the past these writers worked very much in isolation and had to develop their own working methods and techniques. More recently there have been conferences on the topic and papers in journals such as the journal of the National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE). In 1994 the Poetry Society established a Special Interests Group on Health, Healing and Personal Development and this, in 1996, constituted itself into the Association for the Literary Arts in personal Development, LAPIDUS, with the aim of continuing research and development in the field (Poetry

Society website). It is not surprising therefore that as part of Poetry Places the Poetry Society sponsored a number of health-related residencies for poets.

The practices and experiences of both writers and carers can vary greatly. Many therapists adopt a very structured approach, often based on Freudian or Jungian psychoanalytical theories. Celia Hunt, convenor of 'Creative Writing and Personal Development' at the University of Sussex, makes use of fictional autobiography to help patients towards greater self-understanding and a sense of identity. The writing technique she employs with patients, including the fictionalising of early memories, provides insight into the writer's/patient's past and often provides a key to the present structure of the writer's personality (Hunt, 1998: 21-34). Jeanette Winterson's comment that 'if you continually write and read yourself as a fiction, you can change what's crushing you' (Winterson, BBC Radio 4, 2009) would support claims that writing can be used as a means of self-realisation or reconstruction of identity through literature. Allowing patients to explore their, usually unconscious, emotions through fiction is far more powerful and revealing than simply asking patients to 'tell their story'. A similar technique is employed by Moskowitz who draws on Robert Louis Stevenson's celebrated story of psychic opposites, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. She encourages her patients to create fictional characters that might be defined as 'good' or 'bad', 'well' or 'ill'. These characters must then interact in the story in such a way that they ultimately exchange something of significance, the purpose being 'to find a way through story or fictional narrative to bring split parts of the self back together into some kind of productive union' (Moskowitz 1998: 43). Moskowitz uses this model, 'writing the self', as a means of reconciling conflicting emotions in patients.

Gillie Bolton, poet and teacher of writing, also held a Research Fellowship in the exploration of therapeutic writing within primary care at the Department of General Practice at the University of Sheffield. She has trained doctors, nurses and counsellors to offer therapeutic writing to their clients, as well as working with patients herself. She has written extensively about her work most notably in *The Therapeutic Potential of Creative Writing* which develops the three basic tenets of the therapeutic writing method:

Trust yourself
 You can't write the wrong thing (echoing Jung's theories)
 Give yourself the gift of this writing

Her project in Sheffield involved six GPs and explored the possibility that GPs might 'prescribe' creative writing instead of medication for patients with both physical and psychological problems. Feedback from the pilot project was positive but mostly informal and anecdotal and there is a need to devise a more robust evaluation of the effects of creative writing in these contexts if it is to be adopted on a wider scale. In her book *The Therapeutic Potential of Creative Writing* Bolton offers counsellors practical information and a range of writing exercises suitable for use in a variety of therapeutic contexts (Bolton, 1999). As a practitioner she is also in a position to offer insights from her own experience. Engaging in the 'writing as therapy or art' debate, Bolton maintains that, in practice, there is no real distinction between the two. All writing relies for its impact on highly charged material and 'that charge comes from the emotional relationship of the writer with their writing: their desire or need to write' (Bolton, 1999: 11). Therapeutic writing is creative, 'its very creativity is one of the therapeutic benefits' (13). While writing can have a beneficial cathartic effect it is important to distinguish between the process of writing as therapy and the end

result which, without rigorous revisions and refinements, could not in any sense constitute a real work of art. Plumbing the depths of the soul and psyche may produce valuable material on which to base a piece of writing but is not until the correct form is found and developed that the writing can come close to embodying a true poem. As Ezra Pound noted, 'I believe in technique as the test of a man's sincerity' (Pound, 1918). Bolton's 'tenet' that you can't 'write the wrong thing' (see above) is appropriate in the therapeutic context misleading and misguided in the truly creative sense as it fails to take into account the different stages in writing, the endless revisions which are required to turn an emotional outpouring into a finished poem. Equally damaging to the integrity of poetry is the practice amongst established poets of 'rampaging so permissively in the history of other people's sorrows' (Heaney, 1988: 165). Poetry which deals with war and conflict is sometimes presented as a means of bearing witness and showing solidarity with those who are experiencing the trauma and suffering associated with war. Thus Jackie Kay, in a discussion at the Aldeburgh Poetry Festival (2012) on 'Poetry as a Lifeline', may talk about presenting 'a voice for the voiceless' or the way in which poetry can offer 'survival strategies when faced with a range of extreme situations', although her claims for poetry were not shared by fellow panelist, Fady Joudah. (Aldeburgh, 2012). I would suggest that such an approach to writing poetry is potentially exploitative as it can amount to little more than a commodification of other people's misery.

Poet Graham Hartill, taking his inspiration from James Hillman's idea of soul-making (Hillman, 1990, 1992), uses words and images to tap into the deep sources of the self (Bolton, 1999: 13). His consultations are about writing as a form of healing and participants are encouraged to create their own metaphors of self.

During workshops, everyone reads their work to the group and this is interspersed with a chorus which every participant repeats. The end result, according to Sampson, is often 'less literary reading and more sacred chant' (Hunt and Sampson, 1998:12). I would stress however that the skills of the facilitator are crucial to the success of writing therapy and should include not only expert literary skills but also training and experience in dealing with patients with mental health issues and that the therapy can only be conducted within a well-formulated ethical framework.

Colin Archer, writer and creative writing tutor, took on the role of scribe in his work with terminally ill people in hospices (Hunt and Sampson, 1998). In his experience writing was valuable as both process and product, providing valuable benefits through catharsis and communication. Writing in hospices took many different forms – it served as a distraction from pain, it was a means of filling the long, empty hours, and fulfilled the desire to leave something behind for family and friends. It also provided a way of understanding illness and approaching death and was a way of finding shape and meaning to life.

It would be unprofessional, and in some cases potentially dangerous, to make exaggerated claims for the benefits of poetry in healing. And yet many healthcare professionals use creative writing generally, or poetry more specifically, to help patients to deal with their disabilities and illnesses. Dr Robin Philipp's study on poetry and healing, featured in the *British Medical Journal*, sparked a major debate and was the subject of sixty media reports (Philipp, 1994). In some cases individuals benefited from reading poetry either through the incantation of rhythm or because they found comfort in identifying with the themes of the published poems. For others, writing poetry provided a useful outlet for expressing emotions.

5.6 Poetry Places and Poetry in Healthcare Services

Building on the research and experiences of these professionals and poets, the Poetry Places scheme helped to facilitate a number of innovative poetry-in-health projects. Not all poets are inclined to work with their art in this way and yet the Poetry Places scheme seems to have had an important and lasting impact on the participating organisations, the poets in residence and the individuals with whom they interacted. The following pages look specifically at the experiences of the poets placed in healthcare settings and attempt to evaluate the success of the project with comments from the poets involved.

The most significant of these included Debjani Chatterjee at Sheffield Children's Hospital; Rogan Wolff on the Hypen-21 project; Rose Flint at Dean Lane Family Practice; Mohandra Solanki at East Midlands Centre for Forensic Health; Claire Calman's work with Imperial Cancer Research Fund, and Ian Duhig's project with Nottinghamshire Community Drugs Service.

5.6.1 Debjani Chatterjee at Sheffield Hospital

The hospital residency is not of course meant to benefit only the people at the Children's Hospital. It is also very importantly for my benefit. The residency is inspiring me to write my own poetry for children. One of the positive outcomes of my residency will be a collection of poems, *Animal Antics*, which will be published this summer at the end of my residency by Pennine Pens of Hebden Bridge in association with The Poetry Society.

(Chatterjee, Poetry Society Archive, 2000)

Debjani Chatterjee would not have taken up a poetry place at Sheffield Hospital if she did not believe in the therapeutic effects of writing: 'Poetry is life-affirming; that is why I find it – in and out of hospital – such an invigorating tonic.'

That is also why I hope that my poetry residency, although the hospital's first, will not also be its last' (Chatterjee, 2000). During her six-month residency Chatterjee spent time mainly with children she met in the hospital's main reception area, in the outpatients' waiting room, the 'potting shed', A and E, the parents' dining room, and the chaplaincy, reading poems and performing her own work. She also worked with hospital volunteers and staff and contributed poetry-related news items and poems to the hospital's regular newsletter.

Concerning the writing-as-art-or-therapy question, Chatterjee's response is sincere though perhaps predictable: 'Any writing can be therapeutic ... you are very aware of it in a hospital environment.' It is unlikely that a poet would consider taking up a residency in a health environment without having some faith in the therapeutic effects of writing although proving or evaluating the results of such an intervention remain problematic. Nonetheless, in her dealings with the children at the hospital, Chatterjee felt the poetry sessions made them happier, distracted them temporarily at least from thoughts of the procedures they were about to endure, spread a general air of well-being and gave them a sense of achievement when they worked on and completed a poem. In her readings, Chatterjee confined herself to a more light-hearted repertoire as a means alleviating stress and pain. While one cannot doubt her commitment and sincerity, looked at objectively, I would suggest that her role was reduced to that of children's entertainer and perhaps a magic show and some balloon modelling might have been just as effective, in the circumstances, as reciting poetry. Her admission that she regretted, due to lack of time, not being able to engage more seriously with the children and to encourage them to write in a way which would help them deal with the pain, fear, boredom and frustrations of hospital life suggests

that she herself found her interventions of limited use in the face of serious illness and trauma.

Chatterjee had also hoped to enthuse the play workers at the hospital and encourage them to carry on with the writing activities after her residency but it would appear that they were not convinced of the long-term benefits of such a strategy. The play workers found the whole notion of poetry ‘difficult’ – a comment made by many participants in a range of Poetry Places settings. The play workers at the Sheffield hospital found it sufficiently challenging to encourage the children to work with crayons and paper, let alone with pencil and words, when all the children really wanted to do was watch television or play video games. Perhaps with some audiences it is a matter of striking a happy balance between production and performance, application and entertainment. It would seem that although Chatterjee invested a huge amount of energy in her work at the hospital there is some doubt as to the lasting impact her efforts may achieve. She expressed the hope that the Poetry Exhibit, produced during her stay, would continue to be a fixture with new works being added on a regular basis. However, it seems that, although a welcome feature of her residency, it was not continued for very long afterwards.

5.6.2 Rogan Wolff: Hyphen-21

Rogan Wolff’s Hyphen-21 project focused on producing a set of A3-size poster poems for display in hospitals. With David Hart he commissioned poems by over fifty contemporary poets including Fleur Adcock, Andrew Motion, Sujata Bhatt, U.A. Fanthorpe, Carol Ann Duffy and Jackie Kay. Wolff was more realistically non-committal about the benefits of poetry as therapy: ‘I hesitate to lay claims for poetry it cannot meet. Poetry can make waiting rooms more human. But it won’t turn them

into treatment rooms or rescue us from the predicaments of our time' (Wolff, 2000). If poetry adds another dimension – beauty, truth, meaning – to the world then it is justified. Where patients are encouraged to write poetry this can act as a form of therapy but he was quite clear that the main purpose of his project was to promote poetry, to take it to new places and to audiences who might be in greater need of its therapeutic qualities than others. During his involvement the project enjoyed a high level of support; however, poets-in-residence have expressed concern that once they draw to an end, such projects lose momentum and are rarely maintained due to lack of funding, time or enthusiasm on the part of regular healthcare staff: 'The scheme relies absolutely on individual networking and consistent individual enthusiasm. The idea cannot be implemented by management directive' (Wolff, 2000).

5.6.3 Rose Flint: Dean Lane Family Practice

Rose Flint was an enthusiastic and experienced practitioner of poetry as therapy when she took up her residency as 'Poet for Health' at the Dean Lane Family Practice in Bristol. As an addiction counsellor she had already been using poetry and creative writing to help her clients. In an attempt to take a more holistic view of health and wellbeing, the doctors at the Dean Lane Practice referred certain suitable patients to Flint to see if poetry and creative writing would help with their particular complaints. Flint became convinced of the benefits to the patient of expressing feelings through writing, not that self-expression alone works as a cure *per se* but that 'these (creative writing) sessions could run in doctors' surgeries and hospital (as) an extension of more orthodox treatments' (Flint, 2000). She described the whole

experience as an ‘incredible residency’ and expressed the desire to get involved in many more similar projects.

Her experiences at the surgery provided material for her subsequent appointment at Bristol University to teach a modular course on writing and personal development. Such short courses have become increasingly common and popular and the University of Sussex offers an MA in *Creative Writing and Personal Development*. According to convenor, Dr Celia Hunt, it is the only post-graduate course that deals with the range of theoretical approaches to thinking about the field, including theory of the author and autobiography, educational theory, theory of social narratives and the role of narratives and metaphors in counselling and psychotherapy. Residencies and commissions in health care settings provide a means of supporting the artist/poet while (re)integrating poetry into the real world.

5.6.4 Mahendra Solanki: East Midlands Centre for Forensic Health

Mahendra Solanki’s residency in the East Midlands Centre for Forensic Health at Arnold Lodge was not designed to promote writing as therapy. Familiar with the benefits of art as therapy, the Centre had already employed an Occupational Therapist and a Senior Arts Therapist. Solanki was invited by Dr Richard Byrt to work with the centre ‘in furthering creative and expressive activities for patients, not as a form of therapy’ (Byrt, 2000). The creative writing sessions he conducted were seen therefore as a leisure pursuit rather than one designed to cure illness or alleviate suffering. Despite this objective, according to Byrt, patients often claimed to have ‘gained therapeutic value though that wasn’t the project’s remit.’ From Solanki’s point of view his placement was not always easy or straightforward and given his

target audience he had to operate within strict security guidelines to ensure his and their safety. Initially, much of Solanki's energy was focused on counteracting complaints from patients about poetry. It was a form they found difficult to understand (a view, as mentioned above, expressed by many residency participants) and they reported 'mostly unpleasant experiences of poetry in school' (Byrt, 2000).

It would seem however that the venture was largely successful and on completion of the Poetry Places project, Byrt found further funding (from a local charitable trust, East Midlands Arts, and out of the Hospital's budget) to ensure that Solanki could continue his work at the Centre. Byrt was impressed with how Solanki dealt with the patients in encouraging them to sit and exchange views and in the subsequent evaluation of the project the development of this relationship of trust, rather than the writing itself, was seen as a measure of the success of the project. Importantly, the social interaction prompted by the reading, writing and discussion of poetry was more important to Byrt than the use of poetry as self-expression, therapy or as an exercise in creativity. We have to ask, therefore, if indeed the project really required a poet and the use of poetry. It is tempting to suggest that Solanki, like Chatterjee at the Sheffield hospital, could have been replaced with any sympathetic individual – counsellor, nurse, teacher – who would have been prepared to sit, listen and read with such patients. Nonetheless, the aim of bringing poetry to new audiences was achieved and Solanki was given the opportunity to promote poetry as a pleasurable and rewarding experience. The fact that Solanki was invited and agreed to return for a second residency must count as some measure of success for the scheme, this particular poet and poetry generally.

5.7 Conclusions

Poetry therapy does not necessarily result in good poetry or even any kind of poetry. Generally conceived as a means of helping individuals cope with traumatic events, such as war, rape, torture, domestic abuse, life-threatening conditions or mental illness, it is often referred to as ‘transformative writing’ (Reiter, 2009). Reiter defines transformative writing as ‘[...] the intentional use of writing for psychological change and well-being’ (3), and defines the ten principles as mastery, ritual, safety, witnessing, freedom/poetic license, venting and containment, the magic of the poetic, creativity, integrating parts into a whole, and transformation of time, space and matter.

The value of putting disturbing thoughts into words has been reaffirmed frequently by James Pennebaker whose research demonstrates positive physical benefits derived from expressive writing (Lepore and Smyth, 2002). However, exploiting poetry for purely restorative purposes diminishes the aesthetic value of a poem. Furthermore, psychotherapist Perie Longo notes that the positive effects of poetry therapy result from feelings of connection: ‘One of the benefits of poetry reading and writing is not only does it help define the ‘I’, but strengthens it. This is necessary if we are to be a part of the world’ (Longo, 1999: 1). The rhythm and imagery of creative writing and poetry reveal a truth and significance beyond the self which enables connection with the rest of the world.

Arlene Hynes (1994), a proponent of biblio/poetry therapy in the US, identified the four key stages essential to the poetry therapy session: *recognition*, of an experience or emotion expressed in the poem; *examination*, in which the individual probes feelings and reactions and begins to use language to define them; *juxtaposition*, in which the individual is encouraged to counteract old (negative)

behaviours with new and more constructive ones, and *application to self*, a phase in which cognitive insights are integrated into the self (53). It is at this stage that the individual will begin to create their own work: ‘creation’, as Rob Merritt (2009) notes, ‘can be curative’ (239).

Hynes’s model makes a lot of good sense from a therapeutic point of view and Merritt notes that the individual may also engage in some form of creative process. This of course does not imply that the resulting work can necessarily be described as true art even if the individual has uncovered an emotional truth and produced some self-expressive texts. Experience, creativity and craft, with an emphasis on detailed revision and reworking, are the necessary elements to produce an authentic piece of literature. I would furthermore object to Merritt’s treatment, in the same article, of Yeats’s poems which, he claims, ‘models [Hynes’s] bibliotherapeutic practice’ (239). ‘No Second Troy’, Yeats’s poem about his unrequited love for Maud Gonne, is given the following analysis:

Why should I blame her that she filled my days
 With misery (**Recognition**), or that she would of late
 Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,
 Or hurled the little streets upon the great.
 Had they but courage equal to desire?
 What could have made her peaceful with a mind
 That nobleness made simple as a fire,
 With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind
 That is not natural in an age like this (**Examination**),
 Being high and solitary and most stern?
 Why, what could she have done, being what she is (**Application to Self**)?
 Was there another Troy (**Juxtaposition**) for her to burn?

Although Merritt’s point is clear, it seems oddly reductive to view the poem purely as a model of Hynes’s poetry therapy in action. However, he asserts that Yeats’s poetry is ‘a sacred space’ (242) and ‘an Asclepian temple’ (246), from which one

emerges comforted, even healed, and in this way he pays homage to the integrity of the emotion expressed in the poem. I would suggest that Yeats's poetry could be used in any workshop situation as a model of good poetry and a point of departure for creative work; however, to suggest that Yeats 'models' Hynes's therapeutic scheme diminishes the aesthetic value of the poetry.

Studies have shown that writing about traumatic events can lessen pain symptoms in those with rheumatoid arthritis and improve the lung function in asthmatics [...] can lower depression rates and reduce anxiety in those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder [...] and guide those who have suffered the death of a loved one in transforming grief into personal growth. Participation by prisoners in writing groups is known to reduce recidivism and poetry fosters restorative justice. The practice of poetry therapy is used with battered women, in suicide prevention, and as an adjunct to psychotherapy.

(Lengelle and Meyers, 2009)

Poetry is not, in itself, therapeutic; it could indeed be dangerous. Poetry therapy relies heavily upon the actions of an individual therapist, with poetry simply a tool in the analytical process to engage the patient.

(Michael Lee, 2006)

This chapter has explored the discourse which writer/therapists construct around bibliotherapy, its nature, purpose and value, strengths and limitations. Many of the concerns which are central to this discussion are highlighted in the comments above. In the first, Lengelle and Meyers emphasize the role writing can play as a form of healing in a range of contexts. They echo the views of many bibliotherapy practitioners who uphold its liberating, cathartic and healing properties. Reservations about poetry as therapy are reflected in Lee's words of caution. Indeed there are a number of ethical issues at stake. The writer/therapist needs appropriate skills and training in order to be able to deal with traumatised participants and to find suitable

ways of encouraging therapeutic writing. It is also important that the writer/therapist maintains the correct level of honesty in relation to the work produced in such workshops and where this work might be positioned in relation to the literary output of an established writer.

Viewed from a strictly therapeutic stance a number of studies have demonstrated that poetry therapy is more than a mere fad and has been proven to produce beneficial results. Researchers have discovered that writing about emotional issues leads to an improvement in health and well-being (Pennebaker, 1997; Pennebaker, Colder and Sharp, 1990). In a study of poetry therapy and schizophrenia Shafi values the therapy not as a means of developing creativity but as a tool for providing insights into the person's psyche (Shafi, 2010).

The increasing use of bibliotherapy may exert positive or negative influences on the writer. Whilst it may introduce poetry into new settings, thus widening the audience for poetry, increasing poetry's impact, and creating career opportunities for a growing number of poets it may also be viewed as potentially stressful and limiting for poets in a creative sense, thus reducing their poetic output. Leading a poetry therapy session can be a very emotionally demanding experience and one which would not appeal to or suit every poet. There is an obvious need for training in this area to ensure that the needs of both participants and practitioners are safeguarded. Victoria Field, a certified poetry therapist and a contributor to and co-editor of *Writing Routes* (Bolton, Field and Thompson: 2011), remains positive about the benefits of poetry therapy both for traumatised individuals and the practising writer:

There's a paradox that whilst writing is usually a solitary activity, there are many benefits of writing in groups: gentle pressure from the facilitator, unexpected suggestions and the heightened state that comes from being with others can all lead to strange synchronicities that energise the writing and encourage people to greater self-awareness and creativity.

(Jessica Kingsley Publications Blog, 2011)

However, it would be apt to finish this chapter with the words of Christopher Reid speaking about his book *A Scattering* (2009), a tribute to his wife who died of cancer in 2006. When asked if the writing was in any way therapeutic he admitted that the writing of the collection was a kind of therapy 'but without any cure at the end of it' (Reid, Costa Book Awards Interview, 2010).

Chapter 6 – The Literature Festival

Can you imagine Kafka at the Hay festival?
A Samuel Beckett signing?

Robert McCrum, Radio 4, 2013

6.1 Introduction

The aim in this chapter is to study literature festivals in relation to the role of the creative writer in the context of chosen methodological and theoretical approaches. The literature festival provides a rich occasion for the analysis of the role of the writer in the public sphere and, furthermore, to question the notion of ‘high’ and ‘low’ art, elitist versus democratic approaches to culture, the consumer versus the aesthete. This aesthetic public sphere has not been the subject of a great deal of research (Jones, 2007:75) yet festivals offer rich opportunities to explore and analyse not only literary concerns but also issues relating to politics, sociology and ethics. In this chapter therefore I will examine the writer-reader interface and study the festival as a hybridized cultural location based on commercialism, participation and expression. This chapter asks whether the high-profile, media-controlled and publisher-driven festival serves the interests of the two key participants, the writer and the reader, or if the ‘festivalisation’ of literature detracts from the writer/reader relationship and the literary experience, of both writing and reading.

The success and popularity of the literature festival has taken many of its participants by surprise as it was long thought that literature, the written word, could not easily be celebrated through the medium of the festival. Writers’ groups and readings, in bookshops and on campus, have a long history but they have always

been small-scale events and generally attendance at such gatherings was, and still is, limited to a largely academic elite. That this has changed is illustrated by the proliferation of literature festivals throughout the country and the record attendances they command. Because of the scale of these events, the high attendance and the barely-disguised commercial thrust, cultural commentators might be tempted to conclude that the festivalization of literature points to a decline in aesthetic culture. However, the study of festivals shows a much more complex picture, allowing for a range of cultural experiences where popular culture happily co-exists alongside expressions of high culture.

This chapter examines post-traditional³¹ festivals as expressions of public culture. Sociological studies tend to view the post-traditional festival as somehow inferior to the traditional festival. Amongst certain academics, it is also deemed less worthy of research precisely because of its lack of association with religion and therefore its inability to reveal much concerning society's self-representation (Sassatelli, 2011: 14). Also, as society is itself secularized, these events may be viewed as ersatz festivals lacking in any deep significance. Yet, the proliferation of arts festivals, and in particular literature festivals, would suggest, not a lack of authenticity but a continued desire within society to socialise, to engage in a particular form of cultural production and consumption and to debate the issues of the day. The contemporary literature festival reveals much about the public cultural sphere in twenty-first-century Britain. My interest lies in discovering the ways in which the festival provides a platform for the writer in the public sphere and what the writer stands to gain or lose through participation or non-participation in such cultural events. It also examines festivals as sites of more open cultural politics and

³¹ Festivals which are no longer associated with pagan or religious customs or events.

how the very public and discursive nature of festivals can contribute to and enhance cultural production and consumption.

A post-modernist view of culture ³² emphasises the importance of accessibility and democratisation; it argues in favour of a culture which is both ‘relational and discursive’ and one which ‘involves the articulation of ways of seeing the world’ (Delanty, 2008: 42). Culture is primarily concerned with creativity and participation rather than economic gain, though finance is, at some level, essential for the production, distribution and enjoyment of culture. The contemporary literature festival can be described as creative, performative, communication- and debate-oriented. Furthermore, the fact that it relies on the participation of the public suggests not only that there is a high level of democratization but also a sense of cultural citizenship. Their discursive nature generates both conflict and engagement through exchange, debate and discussion and as such they are representative of the national cultural public sphere. Jim McGuigan’s definition is useful as he notes that:

... the cultural public sphere is not confined to ... ‘serious’ art, classical, modern or, for that matter, postmodern. It includes the various channels and circuits of mass-popular culture and entertainment, the routinely mediated aesthetic and emotional reflections on how we live and imagine the good life. The concept of a cultural public sphere refers to the articulation of politics, public and personal, as a contested terrain through affective – aesthetic and emotional – modes of communication.

(McGuigan, 2005: 435)

³² I refer here to the notion of culture, as defined by Raymond Williams, as ‘the independent and abstract noun which describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity. This seems often now the most widespread use: culture is music, literature, painting and sculpture, theatre and film.’ (Williams, 1983: 92)

Ron Jacobs's reference to an 'aesthetic public sphere' – one which combines 'cultural criticism with social commentary' (Jacobs, 2006: 11) – also describes the nature of the contemporary literature festival.

Given that a significant percentage of funding for festivals comes from the public purse there is a notion that access to cultural experiences is a basic right for all. It would be difficult to find fault with the Arts Council objective of 'art for everyone', yet the debate between democratic and literary notions of artistic merit or value continues. While tensions exist between artist and consumer/reader these tensions are further heightened by the blatant commercialism of the publishing world and the sensationalist workings of the media. Yet these tensions are felt in every sector of the literary sphere as Casanova observes in *The World Republic of Letters*: 'What is being played out today in every part of the world literary space is ... a struggle between the commercial pole... and the autonomous pole, which finds itself under siege' (Casanova, 2004: 168-169).

The last twenty years has witnessed an exponential rise in the number of literature festivals held in cities, towns and villages throughout the UK. While it is difficult to put an exact figure on the number of such literary gatherings³³ it is estimated that there are in the region of 250 events of this kind each year (Tivnan and Richards, *The Bookseller Online*, March, 2011). The proliferation and increasing popularity of literature festivals must be understood within the context of innovations in urban development and management (Quinn, 2005: 928) and state initiatives via the Arts Council to embed the arts in public life with the purpose of delivering 'great art to everyone by championing,

² New festivals emerge every year and many arts and music festivals such as Latitude and The Big Chill now include literary events. (www.literaryfestivals.co.uk)

developing and investing in artistic experiences that enrich people's lives' (Arts Council England, 2010: 11).

The rise of the literature festival may also be attributed to the influence of the publishing industry which has been pleased to identify a commercial opportunity and has increasingly lent its support to such events not only through sponsorship but also by encouraging, or coercing, authors to attend in order to promote and sell their work. Furthermore, the literature festival provides an ideal platform for the promotion of writers as celebrities, a strategy shrewdly espoused by organisers and publishers, manipulated by the media and enthusiastically embraced by an increasingly celebrity-obsessed public for whom attendance at festivals, with its promise of meeting the author, has become a kind of national obsession. One has to question whether the desire to 'meet the author' represents a legitimate aspect of an intellectual engagement with literature or if it is merely another manifestation of the public's adulation for the celebrity, in this instance the literary celebrity. Furthermore, I would suggest that organisers are content to exploit this fetishization of the author with a view to attracting larger numbers to their festivals.

Literature festivals were originally conceived as a means of promoting contact and communication between writers yet the past twenty years have witnessed the transformation of the festival from low-key literary tête-à-têtes to 'a growing and vibrant sector of the tourism and leisure industries' (Arcodia and Whitford, 2006: 2) which can exert important socio-economic and political influences on the host community. Their broader cultural significance has also increased as audiences are encouraged to engage not only with writing but with discussions and debate around important socio-political issues (Starke, 1998: v).

The transformation of the festival from a cosy and elitist literary ³⁴ salon to an international, multi-cultural, multi-arts, participatory celebration provides a platform for interactions between a number of distinct yet interdependent groups: writers, readers, publishers, booksellers, arts organisations and the media. The festival as the site of conflicting and competing literary, civic and commercial interests gives rise to this chapter's central questions: What role does the writer play in the festival? How much autonomy does the writer have? Given the perceived commercialization of the literature festival, is this an appropriate role for the writer? Are notions of commercial success and literary value mutually exclusive? What does the literature festival say about the writer/reader relationship?

Literature festivals transform the solitary pleasures of reading into a communal, and also commercial, event. Although relative latecomers to the festival scene, literature festivals are now enjoying unprecedented popularity with new festivals appearing each year; this development provokes a mixed response. Sebastian Faulks expressed a certain scepticism about the future of the literature festival with his comment that 'every town, village and hamlet now has a literature festival; we are reaching saturation point' (Faulks, *The Bookseller Online*, June 2006: 1). ³⁵

The festivalization of literature is a curious development as an art form based on words and serious debate does not readily lend itself to the usual displays of performance and theatrical entertainment normally associated with traditional festivals. Literature festivals are promoted by their founders and organisers as 'celebrations of literature' yet cultural pessimists (Dessaix, 1998; Starke, 2000;

³⁴ A review of the literature concerning early literary festivals has led me to conclude that they were 'cosy and elitist'.

³⁵ The rage for festivals shows no sign of abating with Faulks himself receiving seventy festival invitations a year.

Meehan, 2004) view these events as thinly-disguised marketplaces of consumer-driven cultural consumption. The most obvious commodity on display at the festival is the vast array of books arranged enticingly in rows and stacks on strategically placed tables. Undoubtedly those who attend festivals derive pleasure and perceived cultural and social capital from the opportunity to mingle with like-minded people. Yet what draws an audience to a festival, and what gives the festival its unique flavour, is the presence of the living author who has the power to elevate a mundane book sale into a pilgrimage or quasi-spiritual gathering.

Another striking feature of the literature festival is the time devoted to the discussion not only of literary matters but increasingly to the debate of political and social issues. Festival organisers perhaps take their cue from practices common to other literary gatherings, such as the Irish Summer Schools – Merriman, McGill – where political issues are keenly debated and the event is used as a platform by politicians to lobby participants.

The information presented in this chapter comes from a variety of sources: archives, festival programmes, background and historical data, media reports, interviews with key informants (festival directors, promoters and participating writers), fieldwork observation and audience response. I have focussed on key areas such as the inception and history of particular festivals, their programme of events, funding, location and participating writers. My findings are based on a study of a number of different festivals including the Times Cheltenham Literary Festival, the Sunday Times Oxford Literary Festival, the Ilkley Literature Festival, the Humber Mouth Festival, the Aldeburgh Poetry Festival and the Beverley Literature Festival. A detailed study of these festivals may not be totally representative of the festival scene, which is characterised by the proliferation of smaller-scale and specialised

festivals in a range of settings. However they are all well-established events claiming both high cultural prestige and commercial success. The Beverley Literature Festival operates on a smaller, more local scale and, while it claims success, it perhaps lacks the national impact of the larger festival. The contemporary festival functions in a number of key ways: it acts as a platform for communicating literary value to the public; it provides unique opportunities to present new writers from other countries or from the periphery of the literary space; it promotes communication across literary boundaries, and it reflects developments in the publishing market. It also provides a charged and vibrant space in which all stakeholders have the opportunity to be represented, to compete and to negotiate.

6.2 Research into the Literature Festival

While the popularity of festivals has undoubtedly grown and their nature becomes more diverse, much of the research concerning these events tends to focus on marketing, organisation or leisure management and is limited to an exploration of the economic impact of festivals on host communities (Long and Perdue, 1990; Hall, 1992; Frey, 1994; and Gibson and Stevenson, 2004). Other studies explore the social impact (Arcodia and Whitford, 2006) and a further study by Merfeld-Langston explores the links between culture and politics and how festivals, specifically the 'Lire en Fête' book festival in France, form part of a government cultural policy to influence and shape the way the general public responds to literature (Merfeld-Langston, 2010).

Although studies of festivals are emerging as an important field for postgraduate research, most analysis remains within the sphere of urban event

management with little evidence of research appearing in literary academic publications. The lack of research into the cultural impact of literature festivals is perhaps due in part to the fact that academic literary research tends to be largely text-based and therefore ignores the impact and influence of public and popular activities such as festivals. Considerably more literary research has been conducted in Australia (Starke, 2000; Seffrin, 2006; Ommundsen, 2007, 2009; Stewart, 2009) and in the United States (Dayan, 2000; Moran, 2000; Dowd et al, 2004). These studies have charted the rising popularity of the literature festival (Seffrin, 2006) and a number of commentaries suggest that writers' festivals only serve the commercial interests of the publishing industry and that their promotion through the media trivialises the literary arts, which in turn contributes to the decline of the public sphere (Dessaix 1998, Starke 2000, Meehan 2005). The literature festival, as microcosm of the literary sphere, is frequently criticized for its increasingly commercial flavour. Research into the literary aspect of festivals reveals that literature festivals highlight the steady erosion of literary values because they concentrate on the promotion of the commercial interests of the publishing industry at the expense of engaging in the 'serious stuff of writing' (Starke, 2000: 249-251).

Some recent studies focus on the role of the writer and the impact of the festival on the writer and public culture (Meehan 2005; Lawson 2005; Llewellyn 2005) with the conclusion being that festivals distract the writer from their main purpose in life, that is, writing, and the writer's engagement as a mere performer or celebrity/curiosity at the festival detracts from their true role. A further study by Wenche Ommundsen explores the experiences of festival audiences and draws the optimistic conclusion that '[T]he popularity of festivals does not spell the end of literary culture so much as the remarkable ability of this culture to

adapt itself to new environments without losing its distinctive features’

(Ommundsen, 2009: 33).

More recently there have been a number of studies into the sociology of festival. Examples of sociological studies include Chalcraft, 2007; Santoro, 2006; Sassatelli, 2008, and Segal, 2007, with further work on the festival’s importance within cultural sociology undertaken by Gerard Delanty, Liana Giorgi and Monica Sassatelli in *Festivals and the Cultural Public Sphere* (2011). These studies examine the sociological importance of the festival and the role creativity and artistic projects play in relation to public culture, and their contribution to a more democratic society (Art Festivals and the European Public Culture, 2008). By far the most significant research conducted in the field concerns itself with issues of urban development and renewal. Festivals are used as tools to promote and enhance cities and thus render these locations more attractive to its residents. They may be used as part of a strategy to attract and nurture certain demographics and are also used as a means of securing investment. A prime example of this is the transformation which takes place in locations which have been awarded City of Culture status. The aim of the initiative, which is administered by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, is to ‘build on the success of Liverpool’s year as European Capital of Culture 2008, which had significant social and economic benefits for the area’ (Inside Government website).

In her research paper, Bernadette Quinn warns against the dangers of viewing festivals purely in economic terms (Quinn, 2005: 940) and suggests that a broader socio-cultural appreciation of such events would lead to greater gains beyond the purely economic. Referring to Isar’s report for UNESCO in which

he describes a festival as ‘quelque chose d’exceptionnel, qui sort de la routine ... et qui doit créer une atmosphère spéciale’ (Quinn, 2005: 930), she recognises the value of conducting a more multi-dimensional research into festivals to assess whether they meet ‘their undoubted potential in animating communities, celebrating diversity and improving quality of life’ (Quinn, 2005: 927). She further emphasises the importance of landscape and the relationship between the identity of a particular people and the space they inhabit. As well as contextualising place and ensuring a sense of continuity they provide a platform for ‘shared histories, shared cultural practices and ideals... where...cultural inheritance and social structures...are revised, rejected or recreated’ (Quinn, 2005: 932).

This chapter addresses the shortcomings of existing critiques, arguing instead for recognition of the fact that there is a great diversity in the world of literature festivals and within this complex diversity it may be possible for all writers, both celebrated and lesser-known, to participate and yet retain their aesthetic integrity. While some festivals have become overpoweringly commercial (Hay, Edinburgh, Cheltenham) others maintain a more understated approach (Bridlington, Aldeburgh, Beverley). For publishers, and indeed writers, they represent sites of commercial transaction but it would be reductive to view the festival as a purely business-oriented event. Festivals are important sites of public culture which provide unique opportunities for, and enhance the role of, the writer in the public sphere. Given their recent proliferation literature festivals represent important sites for authorial validation and consecration.

There is no shortage of research in the areas of creativity, literary production, public culture, media, the public sphere, and, to a lesser degree, artistic celebrity, yet

the complex interplay between these fields, the multi-faceted nature of these literary events as manifested in the literature festival is relatively unexplored territory (Sassatelli, 2011: 12). To focus on only one aspect would be to ignore the special and unique flavour of the festival and the opportunities it offers the writer to engage in a range of important activities including self-promotion, book sales, meeting the public, but perhaps most important of all, engaging in a very public, visible and influential manner in the cultural, or more specifically, literary public sphere, a key role for the contemporary writer.

6.3 The Importance of Festival: A Historical Perspective

Festivals have a long history and have found expression in a number of different forms including feasts, ferias and carnivals. In Classical Antiquity special events – harvests, solstices, the arrival of spring – were celebrated in a manner which included feasting, as well as dance, music and poetry. While artistic expression formed an integral part of pagan rites and rituals these modes of expression were not invested with any cultural value. The notion of carnival finds its roots in Ancient Rome when the public celebrated the Saturnalia, a period of feasting and merriment in December and a predecessor of Christmas. During this carnival period a ‘king’ was chosen from amongst the people and was invested with the power to command his subjects in an arbitrary and outrageous way, in parody of the prevailing master-servant relationship. Rabelais’s descriptions of feasts and festivals give an insight into customs and traditions in the sixteenth century and show how these events were used as a means of self-expression and also a challenge to authority (Rabelais, 1929 (1532, 1544)). The deeply subversive nature of the Saturnalia, with its role reversal and challenges to authority persists through the centuries to the point where festival

becomes a means of expressing and, to a degree, ritualising social conflicts, and voicing social demands (LeRoy Ladurie, 1979).

Commentary on urban festivals still represents a relatively small though developing field of academic research (Seffrin, 2006: 6), but there is a substantial amount of documentation covering the origins and history of festival (Duvignaud 1976; Falassi 1987; Burke, 1994). The first festivals can be traced back to the Ancient Greek celebrations of gods and heroes through to the Middle Ages where festival is associated with chaos, disorder, fun, mischief and a general flouting of the rules. In his work *Rabelais and his World*, Mikhail Bakhtin explored the popular festive culture, its origins and its significance in the Middle Ages, its presence in Renaissance literature and the traces of ancient traditions which can still be found in contemporary festival culture despite attempts to suppress and eradicate these practices over the centuries. The concept of festival is common to all civilisations, and communities have always set aside time and space for communal celebration and festivities. These festivals have always been quite separate from everyday routine and have centred on activities which allowed people to express themselves in playful, creative and spiritual ways.

Though festivals have pagan origins, rooted in the seasonal agrarian cycle, the rites and rituals were incorporated into the major celebrations within the church calendar, namely, Carnival/Mardi Gras, Easter, Corpus Christi, Harvest Festival and Christmas. The arts in the form of dance and music were ever-present but although they formed an integral part of the festivities they were not the central focus. Deep emotions also found symbolic expression in rites and rituals involving the use of water, fire, masks, costume, mock fights and the slaughter of animals. There was a shift from a simple expression of joy, which marked earlier festive events, to a

complex interplay of the mystical, the ritualistic and the symbolic (Bakhtin, 1968: 10).

While subversion, catharsis and illicit pleasures persisted as themes in festivals throughout the centuries, Emile Durkheim also identified an element of joy and excitement, an outpouring of communal emotion, which he referred to as 'collective effervescence' (Durkheim, 1912: 171). Furthermore, Rousseau's enthusiasm for the socially unifying force of festivals, the sense of belonging to a community, is a theme which is explored in a number of studies (Duvignaud, 1976; Friedrich, 2000). Rousseau believed fervently in the transformative and unifying power of rituals enacted during festivals, claiming that festivals can 'make them (the people) discover themselves in each other and love each other, so they will be even more united' (Friedrich, 2000: 3). Perhaps this is why post-revolutionary France instituted a calendar of festivals with a view to providing legitimate opportunities for people to gather in the hope of engendering a spirit of unity. A similar political use of festival was apparent in 1930s Germany when festivals were used as a means of persuading the people 'to believe in a confident and united nation' (Friedrich, 2000: Forward), a tool which Hitler exploited to the full when he came to power.

Elements of carnival are still very much in evidence in contemporary festivals: feasting, fireworks, music, the challenge to authority through discussion and debate, and an increasing emphasis on accessibility and inclusivity in relation to both writers and readers. Discussion with festival organisers and a study of festival programmes reveal festival directors' desire to attract members of the public from all social strata and the importance of including serious, celebrity and lesser-known authors who write in a variety of genres.

The transition from carnival to the contemporary literature festival is a shift from the use of the arts as a means of celebration to a position where the arts are the subject of celebration. While the contemporary literature festival retains many features of the traditional feast or carnival, culturally and intellectually it finds its origins in the coffee house societies and literary salons, which began to emerge in the seventeenth century ³⁶ (Habermas, 1962; Goodman, 1994; Kale, 2004). Salon culture, including London's coffee houses, France's salons and Germany's Tischgesellschaften, encouraged enlightened and vigorous discussion on a range of topics including the arts and politics and the ideas and theories expressed were published in the leading political and literary journals of the time. These salons marked the beginning of a political public sphere and had an important impact on the development of literary criticism and an input into the process of democratization (Habermas, 1962, 92-93). Furthermore, the coffee houses and salons marked a shift of economic and cultural capital away from the feudal structures of a society dominated by the aristocracy in favour of the educated middle classes. While the contemporary literature festival can trace its origins to the literary salon the obvious difference is that the festival operates on a larger scale and takes place very much in the public sphere – in town halls, tents and teashops – rather than in the esoteric confines of the literary salon. Although ground-breaking for their time, attendance at such salons was limited to those who wielded power in society: the upper classes, noted intellectuals and celebrated writers (Schmid, 2013). Nonetheless, despite differences which reflect changes in society, literature festivals still retain many of the rituals and features associated with literary salons. One aspect which both literary salons and contemporary literature festivals share is the 'celebrification' of writers.

³⁶ Many salons were run by educated women such as Elizabeth Montagu (1718-1800) in England; Mme de Stael (1766-1817) in France, and Margaret Fuller (1810-1850) in the U.S.

Celebrated authors were lionised at the houses of hostesses well into the nineteenth century as Harriet Martineau testifies in her autobiography (Martineau, 1877).

6.4 The Evolution of the Literature Festival

The major socio-political events of the last sixty-five years – the post-war era, the transformation of society in the late 1960s, the era of the Cold War, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the continued expansion of the European Union – have all exerted an impact on cultural activity and have shaped the development of the contemporary festival. The post-war period ushered in a new era, and political and economic regeneration paved the way for a renaissance in the arts. In the aftermath of the Second World War, Europe was culture-starved which led to considerable investment in reinvigorating the cultural field. Culture was used as a means of uniting people and countries and proved a vital tool in rebuilding a sense of identity in a war-torn world. It was in this spirit that many festivals came into being and many of the prominent festivals – Avignon, Cheltenham, Edinburgh, Wexford and Venice – were promoted by arts practitioners as a means of strengthening cultural values, to ‘emphasize the good forces [and] ... the positive elements of human culture’ (Miller, 1996: 31), and to improve communication between European countries. Many arts festivals were closely associated with some of the larger cities in Europe but the first modern festivals in Europe and the in the UK began flourishing in the regions far from the capital cities, a development which firmly relocates the cultural capital outside of the city and its immediate environs. The regional location of festivals challenges the inflexibility, indeed prejudice, of established cultural institutions which are largely located in London and other major

cities, and demonstrates that small and regional towns have a cultural heritage worth celebrating.

The 1960s sparked an important turning point for festivals as challenges to society found artistic expression in cultural events. While in the past festival (and culture generally) was used to define and maintain social distinctions, the 1960s and 1970s saw a move towards artistic experimentation, a redefinition of culture and a challenge to accepted definitions of ‘high’ and ‘low’ art. This was an era which also witnessed the birth and success of the rock/pop festival a development which also challenged notions of cultural value. In 1964 the founder of the Avignon Festival, Jean Vilar, was already asking the question ‘Où vont les festivals?’ (Vilar, 1964, in maisonjeanvilar.org, 2003). In his article for the *Revue Janus* his reflections and analysis were strikingly premonitory:

Que représentent finalement ces festivals de l’été aux yeux du public?
 Tourisme? Passe-temps d’un soir? Esthétisme des petits loisirs?
 Shakespeare en veux-tu ? En voilà. Perception des taxes municipales?
 Accroissement des recettes des commerçants?

(Vilar, 1964, in maisonjeanvilar.org 2003)

The rationale that informed the post-war proliferation of festivals was now under interrogation as writers and artists increasingly explored innovative modes of expression. Conscious that literature, and the festival, could become too institutionalised and therefore fail to challenge the artistic norms of the time, Vilar insisted that ‘cependant, les inclure absolument dans la vie culturelle, sociale, du pays me paraît non moins nécessaire désormais’ (Vilar, 1964, in maisonjeanvilar.org 2003). The response to this spirit of rebellion in the arts led to the inauguration of a fringe festival at Avignon in 1967.

At that time, the only literature festival in operation in the UK was the Cheltenham Festival (it would be another twenty four years before the launch of the Ilkley Literature Festival) which in 1964 found itself in financial crisis resulting in the cancellation of the festival that year. The following year witnessed the appointment of a new, younger festival director, Ian Hamilton (Bennett, 1999: 47). The festival opened with a discussion titled ‘Pop Culture’, an unequivocal bid to appeal to a new generation, and a line-up which included a number of musicians, George Melly and Ewan McColl, the ‘unstuffy academics’ Christopher Ricks and Richard Hoggart, and a pair of East German poets (Bennett, 1999: 47), all of which marked the move towards an espousal of youth culture and greater internationalisation, and underlined the importance of inclusivity. In 1967, Arts Council funding, feminism and censorship featured as topics of debate reflecting concerns within the writing community and society in general.³⁷

From the 1980s and up to the present day the festival was exploited as a means of stimulating urban regeneration, and a study of festival literature and research on festivals shows that the language of protest, accessibility and democratisation gives way to that of investment and promotion. The festival became a commercial venture involving local authorities and other stakeholders whose main focus was the development of tourism and the staging of elaborate urban entrepreneurial displays designed to attract capital. The three distinct phases that the festival has undergone in recent times – post-war unification, 1960s protest, urban regeneration – have been studied in detail by Bianchini who defines the three stages as ‘the age of reconstruction’, ‘the age of participation’ and the ‘age of city marketing’ (Bianchini (1999) in Delanty, Giorgi and Sassatelli, 2011: 26)

³⁷ In her address to the traditional Foyle’s lunch Barbara Cartland denounced the ‘avalanche of dirt and filth that has come over our country’ (Bennett, 1999: 52).

The turn of the millennium marked a new phase in the cultural public sphere in which literature festivals play an increasingly important role and which I would define as ‘the age of inclusivity, plurality and diversity.’ The most rapid growth in the number of festivals launching in this country has taken place in the last decade (UK Literary Festivals website). This proliferation of festivals in the last ten years can be attributed to a number of factors beyond the sphere of literature production, such as city regeneration and image-making; national cultural policies and funding; a growing public involvement with the arts and literature, and changes in society including increasing cosmopolitanism and multi-culturalism. Developments in the publishing industry have also transformed the ways in which literature is produced, marketed and distributed, which in turn have placed new demands on writers to raise and maintain a greater public profile as a means of maximizing sales. What better opportunity for an author to gain valuable publicity than at the literature festival? This blatant use of the literature festival as promotional opportunity, under the pretext of ‘celebrating literature’ has of course led to charges of the commodification of both literature and the writer.

A further noteworthy development in festivals over the last five years is the appearance of the creative writing workshop in the programme of events. This means that the general public gains an insight into the creative process and, perhaps in a re-enactment of ancient carnival rites, is allowed to play not the role of king but of poet for the day. Apart from the particular enticement this offers the public, from the point of view of organisers, and many writers, facilitating this level of audience participation represents the ultimate in ensuring the accessibility and democratisation of an activity which had previously been viewed as somewhat exclusive.

6.5 The Contemporary Festival

As mentioned above, at their inception festivals were much smaller events than they are now and were not necessarily launched with a view to presenting writers and their work to an external audience. Motivation for their establishment stemmed from a desire for writers and intellectuals to meet for networking purposes and to reflect on literature, its role in society and the conflicts and influences at play within the field of cultural production. The Cheltenham Literature Festival, the first literature festival in the UK, launched in 1949 is a good example of this (Aherne, 2011a). Brain-child of the local spa manager, it was the writer John Moore who organised the festival, its main aims being to bring writers together and to promote new writing. These ideas were further refined in the ensuing years and by 1953 the festival aims were defined as, ‘an interchange of views between platform and audience, writer and reader, critic and publisher and librarian and bookseller and buyer of books’ (Bennett, 1999: 25).

More than fifty years later, the Beverley Literature Festival was launched with very similar aims and ideals, with the specific objectives of celebrating literature in all its forms and involving the participation of an enthusiastic public (Aherne, 2011b). When questioned about the importance of ‘pleasure, entertainment and joy’ Festival Director John Clarke responded that these factors were ‘Absolutely central ... I want people to feel they have been part of a unique process of discovery through dialogue’ (Clarke, Author Interview, 2011). The interdependence of the writer and reader in the world of literature is indisputable and it is this special relationship on which the success of the festival as a cultural event is founded. In the second decade of the 21st century

inclusivity, eclecticism and thought-provoking originality appear to be the aims of most organisers as demonstrated in the publicity material for these events:

Here at Cheltenham we've been challenging, provoking and celebrating the best in the world of books for more than 60 years; in 2011 we take our boldest step yet. ... This is a truly thrilling year for us; there's never been a better time to visit the Festival.

(Cheltenham Literature Festival Brochure, 2011)

Welcome to Ilkley Literature Festival 2011. Full to the brim with inspiring events! ... This year's a bumper year, with more than 200 events ... Ilkley in October is a wonderful place and there's always a tremendous buzz in the town.

(www.ilkleyliteraturefestival.org.uk)

... Kay Ryan believes that good poetry puts 'more oxygen into the atmosphere: it just makes it easier to breathe.' Nowhere is the air more revitalising than at Aldeburgh during the first weekend each November.

(www.thepoetrytrust.org)

These examples could be used to demonstrate that organisers have replaced the discourse of literature and intellectual debate with the hyperbole of PR and Marketing yet the programmes of events are proof of a more serious engagement with both literature and important socio-political issues. Furthermore the growing attendance year on year at festivals across the country would suggest that the audience for literature festivals is growing and widening. Nonetheless, my study of the profile of festival attenders and other surveys (Ommundsen, 2009; Bennett et al, 1999) confirm that festival audiences are predominantly 'middle-class, middlebrow, middle-aged and female' (Ommundsen, 2009: 22).

The predominance of women in festival audiences is too often greeted with suspicion, alarm and ridicule, rather than celebration and respect, as though the ‘feminisation of literary culture’ (Bennett et al, 1999) posed a threat to literature and, in some inexplicable manner, debased literary culture. A similar survey of reading groups in the UK by Jenny Hartley revealed the ‘most obvious and unsurprising’ fact (Hartley, 2001: 25) that membership of book groups is largely female. All-female groups account for 69 per cent of the groups; 4 per cent are all-male. Although some of the oldest book groups, including one dating back to the 18th Century,³⁸ are all-male, today reading groups are viewed, often dismissively, as a female leisure pastime rather than an intellectual pursuit. Publishers have long been aware of and have profited richly from women’s love of literature and are more than happy to target and attempt to manipulate women readers through various ill-conceived and insulting marketing ploys. These include the design of book covers in soft, pastel, ‘feminine’ colours and images, a practice recently deplored by more serious female literary authors including Lionel Shriver who suggests that publishing’s notion of what women want is ‘both dated and patronising’ (Shriver, 2010: 34). This marketing approach exerts a negative effect on writers who are not only dismissed in this manner by the literary establishment but are also denied access to a significant sector of the reading public. Many writers remain sceptical however about the influence of book groups on recognition of literary merit and book sales. D.J. Taylor noted that, ‘there are some very depressing modern tendencies – book groups I find incredibly depressing, because it’s always the same kind of book they read’ (Taylor, Appendix 2).

³⁸ The oldest group still going started with seventeen men (and seventeen rules) in Dalton-in-Furness in Cumbria and has always met in licensed premises (Hartley, 2001: 26).

The gender issue is viewed as a problem within the organisation of festivals, hence the growing inclusion of more events in festival programmes which promote non-fiction literature, particularly history, science and travel, reflecting organisers' and publishers' desire to attract a more diverse audience and raise the level of male participation. Furthermore an increasing number of children's and youth events helps to attract families and a younger demographic. These programming decisions are made by festival directors not only to attract a more diversified audience but also in response to audience suggestion and publishing statistics on reading habits and preferences. While many festivals began life as poetry festivals which featured lengthy readings and esoteric discussions amongst proponents of 'high art' they have become increasingly diversified and 'undifferentiated' (Baudrillard), or 'de-differentiated' (Lash, 1990: 11), over the years and while poetry is still evident in most festival programmes there is an increasing preponderance of 'commercial' fiction and non-fiction genres such as biography, history, politics and science.

While the middle-aged and female tend to predominate, the survey figures show a growth in attendance across all age groups. The importance of inclusivity, conviviality and participation has greater resonance with and relevance to today's literature festival and literary culture generally than outmoded theories of high and mass culture.

The rising number of festivals and their regular annual occurrence has challenged organisers to mount a completely original festival each time and, with their commercial imperative and globalised cultural stamp, there is a danger that they could become bland imitations of their more colourful and spontaneous predecessors, totally lacking in that special Durkheimian effervescence. Given the current economic climate with its consequent Arts Council cuts there is no guarantee that

festivals, especially the smaller and perhaps less orthodox ones, can survive from one year to the next.³⁹

6.6 Pierre Bourdieu: Cultural Capital and Cultural Consumption

The majority of book festivals have little to do with literature. All these celebs... the joke was made, I think in *Private Eye* last week and looking at the advertisements for the Cheltenham Literary Festival and they said there is one actual writer amongst all the photographs.

(Taylor, Appendix 2)

In her paper, 'Literary Festivals and Cultural Consumption', Wenche Ommundsen borrows from Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'literary field', and in particular the 'social genesis of the literary field' (Bourdieu, 1996: xvii), to reflect on the nature of festival culture and proceeds to demonstrate, according to the Bourdieusian principle, that 'the social conditions of the production and reception of a work of art, far from reducing or destroying it, in fact intensify the literary experience' (Bourdieu, 1996: xvii). As she states:

the nature and intensity of the literary experience in the festival setting ...displace and modify but do not destroy the pleasure of the text, which proves remarkably resilient whether enhanced by other pleasures or subjected to critical scrutiny.

(Ommundsen, 2009: 19)

Given the tension between proponents of high and low art, and the ongoing debate in the literary world concerning elitism versus accessibility, the festival, even with its heavy commercialism and media-driven hype, represents a compromise, a meeting point for all 'players' (to use Bourdieu's term), an

³⁹ Is the recent announcement of the sale of Bournemouth Literary Festival (reserve price £15,000) by its founder Lillian Avon an early sign of decline in the festival industry, a reflection of Arts Council cuts or a classic case of organiser burnout?

opportunity for the writer to engage with the public, and for the inquisitive public to meet with the object of their admiration. Thus, the literature festival, like the literary field, is not defined only by the opposing forces of literary value versus commercialism but consists of a multi-dimensional site in which different players - writers, readers, publishers, organisers, publicists – wield varying levels of power or capital which may be economic or symbolic (Bourdieu 1984) but also social, political and educational (English and Frow, 2006).

In the literary world, for both producers and consumers of literature, it is generally taken as given that symbolic value is far superior to commercial value and bestselling works. Any writer that settles for economic gain alone cannot be considered a true artist:

The only legitimate accumulation for the author ... consists in making a name for oneself, a name that is known and recognised, the capital of consecration – implying a power to consecrate objects ... hence of giving them value.

(Bourdieu, 1996: 148)

Cultural pessimists condemn the commodification of culture as they fear it stifles critical faculties, induces alienation, degrades artworks, and protects the capitalist system against internal challenges. However, the phenomenon of 21st century literary celebrity, which permits certain authors both financial reward and cultural kudos, represents a challenge for the cultural pessimists. Does commercial success necessarily represent a decline in cultural value? Is it not an inevitable consequence of the demise of traditional ecclesiastical or aristocratic patronage and the rise of the literary marketplace? Perhaps the literary writer has little to fear from the over-commercialization of the literary sphere. As Cowen outlines in his book *In Praise of Commercial Culture*, commercial enterprise

may also play an important part in fostering cultural production as consumption of cultural pursuits and activities tends to rise in wealthier and more productive societies (Cowen, 1998: 16, 47). It matters little whether publishers flood the market with bestselling blockbusters as long as authors such as Salman Rushdie, Ian McEwan or Margaret Atwood are not deprived of an appreciative audience. The fact that Kathy Lette can sell more books than Margaraet Atwood is irrelevant; what is more important is that serious writers reach their audience. In fact, the efficient distribution of different types of book signifies that the market is flourishing and operating to optimum effect. Literary fiction is no less a commercially mediated label than chicklit or ladlit; it is simply marketed to readers who consider themselves to be above other more commercial categories. The publishing machine views literature only from the point of view of its market and is content to exploit every opportunity for financial gain, regardless of literary merit. The differentiation of the market is both a challenge and an opportunity for the publishing industry and the writer. Writers' views on the commercialization of literature vary with many accepting the inevitable need to embrace the new culture. As D.J. Taylor commented, 'the front of house stuff promotes the celebs, popular stuff, what the Victorians called 'biblia abiblia' – books that are not books. But I think that's inevitable. In the current commercial landscape literature has to be a part of the commercial mediatized razzmatazz. Otherwise we can go out to the margins and die there' (Taylor, Appendix 2).

Viewed as an organization, it is evident the literature festival engages in the kind of commercial exchange typical of business relations. However, there the comparison with commercial organizations ends. Festivals are largely non-profit-making events subsidized by local councils, the Arts Council and occasionally

sponsored by local businesses. In order to attract as diverse an audience as possible, prices for admission to events are deliberately kept low (prices range from £5 to £10) and usually offer reductions for children, students, un-waged and senior citizens. Festivals rely heavily on voluntary or underpaid work from the organizers, writers and members of the public who clearly value the social and cultural aspects of the festival experience above any kind of financial gain. In the last decade, the larger festivals, such as Cheltenham and Hay, have relied increasingly on media sponsorship. Hay's sponsors include Sky, Sky Arts and *The Telegraph* while Cheltenham relies on sponsorship from *The Times*. In the past media and commercial sponsorship was viewed with suspicion (Bennett, 1999: 82), however it is now an accepted fact that events of this kind would simply not function without this financial support. However, festival organisers are constantly forced to review such commercial arrangements and to balance financial pragmatism against cultural authenticity and identity.

6.7 Literary Celebrity: The Reader/Writer Relationship

Literary celebrity is not a recent phenomenon; numerous literary figures in the past – Lord Byron, Charles Dickens, Lord Tennyson, Oscar Wilde, Virginia Woolf, to mention a few – inspired varying levels of respect, fascination and outrage during their lifetime and have continued to do so even beyond the grave. To some degree this kind of celebrity may be linked to the construction of the British literary canon (English and Frow, 2006: 39) and finds its basis largely in the literary achievements and innovations of these authors rather than in mere commercial success or even social controversy. A striking feature of the contemporary literary field is the ubiquity of the vast media

machine which seeks to transform authors into celebrity figures. Furthermore, the media influence in the publishing world harnesses popular fascination with these constructed personalities in order to secure commercial gain. As Loren Glass notes in her work *Authors Inc* 'celebrity makes authorship a corporate affair' (Glass, 2004: 59). While some authors embrace the trappings of fame and many others are wary of its potentially corrupting effect the fact remains that 'celebrification' appears to be unavoidable in the cultural as in every other sphere of contemporary society to the point where we have become 'almost swallowed up by its insistent presence and by its paraphernalia' (Braudy, 1997: 599). The intrusion of celebrity into the literary world, the distinct shift of focus from text to author, from literary debate to the cult of the literati, has prompted critics to question whether literature, writers and indeed readers have been degraded in the process (Starke, 2000; Meehan, 2004).

What factors have contributed to the rise of the literary celebrity? While the economics of the publishing world and the commodification of literature are responsible for the creation of block-busting authors it would be wrong to assume that only economic capital is at play in the literary field. Writers do not necessarily have to emerge as the victims of cultural commodification and in certain instances may utilise their symbolic capital by taking responsibility for the creation of their public persona, thereby controlling the nature and effects of celebrity through carefully selected media and festival appearances and indeed through the type and quality of literature they produce. Readers may also exert a profound influence on the creation of a celebrity and elevate a writer to a form of sainthood though largely with a view to promoting their own social or psychic agendas (Ferris, 2001: 28). Similarly a text may develop a life of its

own, become a cult classic and propel an unsuspecting author to fame (Wicke, 1998: 387).⁴⁰

The growth in the number of book awards, book-of-the-month, book-of-the-century selections, Richard-and-Judy and other book club recommendations, Big Read and radio polls, prize shortlists, with the attendant media hype, have all contributed to the creation of author celebrity. This regular round of competitive forums ensures that every year, or even every season as in the world of fashion, there will be a slick collection of tastefully packaged tomes and a fresh crop of celebrity (ideally, young and attractive) authors parading on the literary catwalk and making guest appearances at the smartest literature festivals. While the culture industry continues to operate in an increasingly relentless yet complex manner the most charismatic of celebrity authors are not necessarily the celeb-turned-authors but those writers who have managed to bridge the gap between what Bourdieu (1993) referred to as the ‘restricted’ and ‘general’ fields of production. In other words they have earned respect within the literary and academic community and have also achieved commercial success. For some, popular success is viewed with suspicion leading to charges of inauthenticity, impurity and abandonment of principles (Radway, 1990: 703; Rubin, 1992).

When questioned, the majority of festival-goers will state that the main reason for attending the festival is to meet and to listen to the authors they most admire. This feature has led to charges that the literature festival is little more than a media-driven spin-off from fly-on-the-wall television documentaries, and proof that

⁴⁰ For instance, *Belle de Jour* author Dr Brooke Magnanti, E.L. James, author of *Fifty Shades of Grey* and Thomas Pynchon who has been celebrated ‘as an artist who shuns celebrity’ (a position he shares with J.D. Salinger (English, 2005: 223).

festivals have little to do with a true literary experience. The literature festival forms part of the celebrity production process and is exploited by writers, organisers and publishers with author appearances programmed to coincide with book launches, short-list nominations and prize winning. The festival tends to feature a crowd-pleasing mix of author-turned-celebrity and celebrity-turned-author, a formula favoured by organisers and sponsors alike as it is the one most likely to attract large audiences. If literary celebrity is created through a combination of talent, personality, controversy and media ‘production’, the other ingredient which helps sustain the notion of literary celebrity is the reader’s fascination with the author and the reader’s desire to meet, and share the same space as, the object of their adoration. So it is in these sites of authorial presence – the tents of Hay-on-Wye, the town hall in Cheltenham, the teashops in Henley – to which adoring readers flock in their thousands to listen and talk to their revered authors, and generally, though not always, to buy their books. It is in fact the personal presence of the author which draws readers to festivals, the readers’ desire for ‘authorial authenticity’ (English and Frow, 2005: 51) and the readers’ ‘romantic’ desire to discover the author not only through but behind the text, which guarantees the continued success of these events. This shift from text to author personality characterizes the festival scene.

Readerly adulation casts the writer in the sometimes difficult role of performer, a role which does not necessarily appeal to the often naturally ‘reclusive’ writer. Taking on the role of performer is problematic as it is impossible for the writer and their work to occupy a stage in the same way as other performers, such as actors or singers, as the writer cannot embody the medium in the same way as other performers. Yet, for the reader, the text is viewed as a reflection of the inner life, real or imaginary, of the author. Reader

fascination with the writer has been interpreted by some as a fascination with the public persona and has little to do with an engagement with literary matters. In *Star Authors*, Joe Moran takes a bleak view of the commodification of the writer claiming, with reference to Alan Spiegel's comments, that 'the turning of contemporary authors into public curiosities serves them up as part of the meaningless ephemera of consumerism' (Moran, 2000: 3). There is a sense that writers are the subject of the prurient rather than literary curiosity of their followers, that the audience is only really interested in the possibility that they might catch a glimpse of their heroes as real people who might 'fight, fall in love, hit the bottle, or do delightful, horrible and outrageous things' (Sullivan, 1998: 5).

The reader's intense veneration of the physical presence of the writer is the subject of Michael Meehan's work in which he states that 'the festival lives by 'carnality', by the turning of the 'Word into Flesh', by the materialisation of culture, the manifestation of 'Real Presence' (Meehan, 2004/5: 1). Less 'carnival' (a farewell to meat) and more 'festival' (an opportunity to feast and celebrate) Meehan describes the literary event as a quasi-religious, eucharistic ritual. The metaphor is apt when one notes that the event has its own characteristic liturgy: introductory address, reading, question and answer session, and discussions, culminating in the communion of writer and reader at the book-laden table with the final benediction of the author who signs the book and then offers it, like a consecrated host, to the idolizing reader. The mass-produced, consumer product, the book, is thus transformed, 're-invested with singularity' (Meehan, 2005: 6), through the intimacy of the communion between writer and reader, into a potent form of symbolic capital, and the author-reader

bond is sealed through the imprint of the author's signature in the book. In this interpretation, the literature festival reclaims its original (traditional) spiritual connotations except that in this re-enactment literature is the new religion and the author its high priest.

A further interpretation of the reader-writer relationship focuses on the notion that the authorial presence provides reassurance for the reader. It is as though the writer's physicality can somehow concretise the text, that in a sense the writer's body represents 'something tangible, solid, stable, reliable: an anchor for all that endless, shifty language' (Goldsworthy, 1992: 50).

Whatever the power of the promotional machine throbbing away in the background, it is the interaction between writer and reader which humanizes the event; the writer basks in the glow of adoration and the reader gains access to the inner sanctum to participate, on one level at least, in the creative process. The activation of the creative capacities of the reader is even more marked in recent years with most festivals now offering creative writing workshops which provide further opportunities for the reader not only to 'possess' but to identify with the writer.

6.8 Festival: A Celebration of Writers

British Arts' defines the literary festival as 'a celebration of arts, a platform for performance and a forum in which to bring entertainment and knowledge to the general public' (www.britisharts.co.uk). In the contemporary literature festival the 'platform' could be interpreted as representing an opportunity for any of the participating stakeholders – organisers, sponsors, town councils, audience or writer – but in this case it will be taken to refer to the writer experience. Many of the better

literature festivals provide opportunities for younger, less well-established writers to make valuable contact with other recognised authors, publishers and a wide variety of audiences. The writer DBC Pierre is an example of an author who achieved recognition in the publishing world as a direct result of being included in the Hay programme. His first novel, *Vernon God Little*, was showcased at the festival in 2002 and in the following year he received a major literary accolade when he was awarded the Man Booker Prize which demonstrates that the festival and prize culture can exert an important influence on the career of a writer.

Given the number and variety of festivals, all literary forms are represented to one degree or another and so it is possible for most writers to participate in festival culture. All of the major festivals – Hay, Cheltenham, Edinburgh, Oxford – have a broad and a varied programme with a balance of fiction, non-fiction and poetry. Some festivals are linked to a special genre, such as the Theakston's Crime Writing Festival in Harrogate, the Crystal Palace Children's Book Festival and the Asia House Festival of Asian Literature. Others are dedicated to the work of a chosen writer: The Dylan Thomas Festival in Swansea, the Graham Greene International Festival in Berkhamsted, the John Clare Festival, the Coleridge Festival and the To The Lighthouse Festival in Cambridgeshire. Still more are devoted exclusively to poetry including Aldeburgh, Bridlington, Bristol, Ledbury and Scotland's StAnza Festival at St Andrew's.

Increasingly festivals have sought to offer more diversity by sharpening the entertainment value and promoting discussion and debate not only on literary but also on social and political themes. Thus, the Cheltenham festival boasts four major strands in its programme; in addition to literary fiction it plays host to celebrities and media dons from the worlds of art and architecture, history (an increasingly popular

choice for a number of festivals), entertainment (including food and wine) and science (a subject which is growing in popularity as it relates to environmental issues and religious matters).

While much has been written about the negative impact of the commercialisation and globalisation of festivals there is evidence to prove that a number of festivals provide a platform for the expression of new artistic movements and a few of these are explicitly specialised in this goal. The London Word Festival, now in its fifth year, is a self-styled alternative literature and arts festival which runs for a month in London's East End. Its website proclaims the innovative, ground breaking nature of its achievements in the following way:

The 2010 festival demonstrated our renewed focus on commissioning and producing unique events: we commissioned folktronica musician Leafcutter John to rewire Basil Bunting's Modernist poem 'Briggflatts'; developed a jazz-spoken-word-graphic-novel hybrid show, *Avant! Noir!*; and produced the poetry-film-music 'play of voices' *Shad Thames, Broken Wharf*. With comedian Josie Long we produced *One Hundred Days to Make Me a Better Person* an online public creativity from over 1000 self-betterers of all shapes and sizes spread out across the world.

(London Word Festival, 2011)

In the same vein, *The Avant*, described as a 'meta festival' and subtitled 'a Festival of the Progressive Arts', takes a decidedly avant-garde approach to programming and makes the following claims for its festival:

The aim is to bring innovative and experimental poets, both Irish and International, together with performers, film makers, artists and musicians, with a focus on working from the modernist and experimental traditions established by figures such as Joyce and Beckett.

In this way, festivals help to showcase new and emerging writers while helping to establish new genres and generate new work.

Literature Festivals may also result in festival-inspired literature such as the novel *Amorous Causes*, written in 1967 by Richard Boston, which was based on the author's experiences at the Cheltenham Literature Festival. The narrative has a discussion panel tackling the question 'The Novel – is it dead?' and, in the spirit of the times, the festival speakers launch themselves into a 'state of 1968-style revolt and proclaim themselves the Dalchester Free Festival' (Bennett, 1999: 53). If writers felt the pressure to conform in the late sixties, the level of organisation and slick programming today has driven many writers to lament the passing of a golden age when writers' festivals (Cheltenham and Ilkley) were intimate affairs designed to bring writers together in an informal way and to engage with small but enthusiastic audiences rather than commercially-driven circuses pandering to the needs of publishers and literary celebrities. Even the Hay Festival, deemed a literary and commercial success, is not without its detractors:

It's a pity the whole thing has become a celebrity festival, not an author's festival. Of course there are some very fine writers there this year. But the whole thing of festivals has become about book sales and marketing, nothing to do with meeting readers. They argue that if they're selling your book then you don't get a fee. But I like to get a fee unless I choose to be a patron or a friend which I am to one or two small festivals. I don't want £100,000 and I don't see why Bill Clinton did, and he's not an author.

(Margaret Drabble, in Johnson, *The Independent Online*, 2009)

Drabble's comments regarding remuneration highlight the inequalities between various speakers and writers and reveal how festivals, in many ways, operate to a certain degree as commercial organizations: the greater or more 'serious' the writer/speaker, the larger the fee.

The author Terence Blacker, who has written numerous novels, was baffled by the reaction he received when his suggestion to read from his biography of the theatre impresario and author Willie Donaldson was rejected by the Hay Festival on the grounds that it would only work if it was ‘glammed up a bit’ with celebrity readers. Penelope Lively added her weight to these arguments with the claim that the Hay ‘lacks a personal quality’ (Johnson, The *Independent* Online, 2009). The writing community is very much split on the issue of commercialization versus authentic literary experience and for each author that complains there is another who embraces the new festival culture. Many are philosophical about the situation and accept that ‘everybody is affected by it’, indeed that ‘commerce has always run the market’ (Taylor, Author Interview, Appendix 2). Thackeray and Dickens exploited the market by writing in monthly instalments.

Notwithstanding this polarisation of views, the contemporary festival is instrumental in nurturing and championing innovative writing and commissioning new works. A significant number of festivals offer special commissions for writers to produce poems or fiction on a theme related to the festival or its host town. Every year the Humber Mouth Festival sets aside a certain percentage of its budget to fund commissioned works and the initiative has resulted in unique collaborations between local artists and writers. Cheltenham, Hay, Manchester, Durham, York, Brighton and Canterbury have also provided writers with funding and opportunities to create new work through writing projects and special commissions. Creative writing competitions with the open participation of the established writing community and the general public are also closely associated with festivals. These competitions offer even greater opportunities for a more democratic and inclusive approach to the

production of literature. Successful works are showcased during the festival and there is usually a celebratory, prize-giving ceremony.⁴¹

In the early 1960s Habermas expressed his pessimism about the future of the public sphere claiming that capitalistic, consumer-driven behaviour would undermine the critical reasoning abilities of the individual and society, that we would move from a ‘kulturrasonierenden zum kulturkonsumierenden Publikum’ (Habermas, 1962: 247). However, the growing popularity of literature festivals with an increasing element of both literary and political debate would suggest that the public sphere is still very vibrant and seeking new and novel means of expression. In fact in recent publications Habermas, still unconvinced about the quality and impact of public debate, suggests that although public debate exists, especially on the internet, the quality of public exchange is ‘inferior’, that ‘discussion is not what it used to be’ as it is deeply disorganised and very suspect because it is channelled through a range of mass media (Habermas, 1998: 307).⁴²

Despite Habermas’s misgivings, it is interesting to note that the festival, although promoted in the media, is not experienced through the media; it happens in real time, through the meeting of readers and writers in a chosen, very physical location. Sassatelli speaks of the ‘concentrated space-time frame’ which creates ‘the sense of unique, one-off experiences, for which it is important to say “I was there”’ (Sassatelli, 2011: 18). Her comments imply that the literature festival is now capable of capturing a kind of ‘effervescence’ previously only experienced during religious

⁴¹ In the history of festivals such events have not been without their problems. In 1973 at Cheltenham, Roald Dahl sabotaged a short story prize-giving ceremony by regaling the audience with a reading of his own short story ‘The Great Switcheroo’, a tale written for *Playboy* that included a number of sexually explicit passages on the subject of wife-swapping, causing unease amongst the audience and the chair of the festival committee, Frank Littlewood, to storm out of the hall in disgust (Bennett, 1991: 58).

⁴² Habermas does not comment on the literary public sphere which could imply that he views it as irrelevant or unreliable because of its commercialization.

events, or perhaps music concerts. They also highlight the fact that although many large literature festivals operate as highly professional organizations it is still possible to experience the unique, the spiritual and the unpredictable. The festival's very strong connection with location further enhances the cultural experience; 'successful festivals create a powerful but curious sense of place, which is local ... but which often makes an appeal to a global culture' (Waterman, 1998: 58). Although the festival may take place in a small market town such as Beverley, participants may have a sense of connection with worlds beyond the limits of St Mary's Parish Hall or Toll Gavel Church.⁴³

Furthermore the festival places the writer at the centre of the cultural public sphere, raising the profile, lending prestige and returning the writer to their rightful place as 'unacknowledged legislators' (Shelley, 1909 (1840)). At Cheltenham the topics for discussion have always been wide-ranging and challenging: as early as 1950 they discussed literature and politics, in 1954 the topic was history and literature and, more recently, in 2008 the theme was the family, and in 2011, travel. John Clarke, director of Beverley Literature Festival is equally determined to explore the links between literature and the public sphere:

Yes, we debate social and political issues ... A festival should give space to its audience to discuss the current issues of the day with people who spend their time considering these matters professionally.

(Clarke, Interview, 2011)

6.9 Conclusions

This chapter presents literature festivals as significant events which fulfil important functions within the literary public sphere. I have underlined the tensions

⁴³ These are regular venues for readings during the Beverley Literature Festival.

arising from the polarised nature of attitudes to these events and the arguments which persist on both sides of the divide. Detractors of the literature festival maintain that they merely represent sites of popular entertainment designed to appeal to the masses. This view would appear to reaffirm the fact that rigid cultural hierarchies still persist. This argument is countered by those who view the festival as a critical, countercultural framework which challenges taste distinction and cultural gatekeeping.

The value of the literature festivals is further questioned when they are viewed as highly commercialized, globalized events which are stream-lined and branded and show little variation from one to the next. The Hay-on-Wye Festival which has expanded enormously in the last decade, and now includes a number of international events, is often viewed as an example of event culture rather than literary culture. Its director, Peter Florence, is often referred to as a 'cultural entrepreneur' and is seen as the person to speak to when launching a new literature festival (Giorgi, 2011: 40). It is true that many contemporary literature festivals have been forced to evolve from informal gatherings of poets to structured literary meetings with public and commercial interests. This is a route which festivals have had to pursue in order to survive from one year to the next. Ensuring continuity and quality requires expensive resources and as arts funding becomes increasingly difficult and unstable, organizers seek more commercial sponsorship to ensure survival. Defenders of the literature festival claim that despite the involvement of large corporations intelligent management can ensure that festivals continually push out the boundaries and produce daring cultural events marked by originality and experimentation. Where literature festivals are linked solely to urban renewal and

regeneration there is the danger that the authentic community cultural experience is replaced by a stylized but superficial touristic event.

Do literature festivals represent a trivialisation of high culture or do they point to a genuine democratisation of art for all? Democratisation of society has had the effect of expanding the middle classes and encouraging the diversification of cultural taste. The literature festival provides an opportunity for celebrating and promoting cultural diversity and is also an active agent in the process of democratisation of literature. Giorgi also suggests that it can play a role in overcoming the fragmentation of the public sphere as observed by Habermas (Giorgi, 2011: 42).

My research in this area allows me to conclude that the contemporary literature festival contributes in an important way to the literary sphere as it celebrates literature in a very public manner; it offers opportunities to different writers, both known and unknown, to reach out to a wider audience and exert an important influence in the public sphere; furthermore, it broadens and diversifies the reading community while providing a platform for serious debate.

Chapter 7: The Contemporary Prize Culture

7.1 Introduction

I wonder whether it's time to call a halt with book prizes. There's probably a case for cutting down on the number of awards.

(Kingsley Amis, *Today* programme, BBC Radio 4, 1995)

In this chapter I will analyse the contemporary prize culture, with particular reference to the Man Booker Prize (to be referred to as the Booker) and the T.S. Eliot Prize (which I will refer to as the Eliot). I have chosen one fiction prize and one poetry prize to establish if there are any differences in structure and effect between the two prizes and have specifically chosen the Booker and the Eliot as they both command significant levels of prestige and publicity.

I will present a history and structure of the Booker and the Eliot and will evaluate these prizes as arbiters of cultural prestige. I will also examine eligibility criteria for these prizes and present an analysis of winning writers in terms of nationality, gender, educational background and age/seniority with a view to identifying any bias towards a particular writer profile. I will also focus on the prize-winning novels and poetry collections in order to establish trends in theme, structure and narrative technique within each decade of each prize.

Using Bourdieu's theories as a framework, I will also explore the cultural-financial exchange which occurs between writer and sponsor and examine the effects of this exchange on the writer and the literature produced. I will question the Booker's claim to reward 'the best in literature' (Booker Prize Online), and will examine the extent to which prizes are influenced by socio-cultural constraints, and

determine whether prizes exert a pernicious or beneficial effect on the writer and literature. Finally, I will present the writer's response to the prize system with particular reference to protest and rejection, or what Bourdieu refers to as 'strategies of condescension' (Bourdieu and Haacke, 1992).

As few academic studies of the literary prize phenomenon exist it has been necessary to study newspaper arts pages and literary journals in order to evaluate the literary prize culture. I have also made use of the Man Booker Prize Archive and commentary from authors and prize judges in the form of essays or as reported in the media.

7.2 Origins of the Literary Prize

'All sort of quarrels fracasseries lampoons libels and duels.'

Sir Walter Scott, 1820

Literary competitions, awards, honours and prizes have existed for many centuries, and have their origins in the Olympics of Ancient Greece. However, the contemporary prize culture could traces its origins to 1820 when George IV instituted the Royal Society of Literature whose specific aim was to 'reward literary merit and excite literary talent' (The Royal Society of Literature website).⁴⁴ The literary community at the time was somewhat sceptical about the Society and its aims, and responded with contempt to the announcement of the Society's intention to launch a literary award, the Gold Medal for Literature.⁴⁵ Such was the strength of

⁴⁴ The RSL currently administers two prizes, the RSL Ondaatje Prize and the V S Pritchett Memorial Prize, and three awards, the RSL Jerwood Award for non-fiction, Companions of Literature, and the Benson Medal, all of which now command considerable respect in the literary community .

⁴⁵ Not to be confused with the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry instituted by King George V in 1933 at the suggestion of the Poet Laureate Dr John Masefield. It was originally awarded to British subjects but was extended in 1985 to include poets from the Commonwealth countries (www.royal.gov.uk).

feeling against the proposal that Sir Walter Scott felt compelled to write to the Society to express his outrage at the notion of a literary prize. He objected strongly to the fact that a mere medal, with little or no economic value, could appeal to either the established and commercially successful writer (such as himself), or even those ‘of great talent and genius’ who struggled financially (such as Coleridge or Charles Maturin).

Scott predicted numerous problems with the proposal. ‘Writers of genius’ would refuse to be associated with it, causing subsequent embarrassment for the Society which would inevitably be forced to offer the medal to writers of lesser stature. This would then diminish the Society’s and the medal’s worth, and would further alienate the literary elite. ‘What can be expected but all sort of quarrels fracaseries lampoons libels and duels?’ Scott asked (Grierson, 1934: 404). His words might well describe the theatrics which are a feature of many contemporary literary awards, particularly the Man Booker Prize. Scott and a number of his contemporaries, including the poet laureate of the time, Robert Southey, were resistant to the notion that the Society (and King George IV) possessed the power to confer literary status. Bourdieu recognises this ‘moral indignation’, very typical of the Romantic era, which prompted writers to refuse to submit to ‘the forces of power or to the market ... which makes certain *littérateurs* pursue privileges and honours’ (Bourdieu, 1996: 60). Only serious writers possess this ‘power of consecration’ (224). When awarded the medal in 1827, Southey condescended to accept the prize, yet refused to attend the conferral. He subsequently traded in the medal for a silver coffee pot for his son and daughter-in-law (Williams, 1987: 296). His gesture made it clear that the medal was only worth the material it was made of and beyond that it had no cultural value.

This negative response to the literary prize in the early nineteenth century is echoed by critics of the contemporary prize culture, particularly prizes sponsored by commercial institutions. Criticism questions the fairness and relevance of selection criteria, the objectivity of the judging process, judging panels' openness to diversity in terms of the nationality of writers, subject matter and different literary styles, and the influence of cultural values and trends on the judging process. The custom of awarding prizes for art, despite its long history dating back to the Greek drama and arts competitions in the sixth century B.C., also raises issues about the complex relationship between art, money, politics and society.

Much of the problem lies in defining the nature of the literary prize. It could be defined as a kind of competition. However, the notion of literature as a form of competition in which there will be a single winner and so many losers seems out of place in the context of culture and is an exercise which many writers find objectionable. John Berger denounced the emphasis on 'winners and losers' in his speech at the Booker ceremony in 1972 (Berger, 2003: 253). On being told by an interviewer, after winning the Booker in 2009, that she was the 'top writer in the world' Hilary Mantel's first response was that 'it's not the Olympics' (an ironic reference to the prize's ancient origins perhaps) and, that 'progress of the heart – which is what your writing is – cannot be measured like the progress of your feet on a racetrack' (Mantel, *Intelligent Life* Online, 2010). Distaste for the element of competition is also evident in Julian Barnes's description of the Booker Prize as 'posh bingo', a definition which nonetheless allows writers to find comfort in the suggestion that the outcome is governed by chance rather than unfavourable comparison with other 'competitors' (Brown, *The Guardian* Online, 2011).

The literary prize is sometimes praised as a means of encouraging young talent yet, with the exception of prizes which are specifically targeted at the young, it is more often the case that older, published, more established writers, and writers who have already won a number of prizes, tend to win. This is particularly true of the Booker and the Eliot as my analysis of these prizes demonstrates (Aherne, 2012a, 2012b).

The prize may be viewed as a reward for excellence, as a significant contribution to literature, or as recognition of a lifetime's achievement. When this kind of recognition involves financial reward a specific monetary value is attached to the literary work and the prize-giving process therefore assumes the attributes of an economic transaction. As James English notes in *The Economy of Prestige*, the word 'prize' has its etymological roots in money and exchange: 'The word is traced to the Latin *pretium*: "prize," "money"; akin to the Sanskrit *prati*: "against," "in return."' (6). However, despite such parallels with the world of commerce, the prize industry follows its own rather idiosyncratic logic in an attempt to downplay the commercial thrust and to promote the cultural value. Thus, a prestigious award such as the Prix Goncourt in France carries less cash value, currently 10 euro, than the East Riding of Yorkshire Open Poetry Competition for which the first prize is £1,000; the highly successful and wealthy novelist Ian McEwan, who perhaps amongst all novelists has little need for further financial support or public recognition, is awarded £20,000 for his Booker Prize entry in 1998; the relatively low-income poet Alice Oswald will accept the £5,000 Ted Hughes award in 2009 yet refuse to be considered for the £15,000 T.S. Eliot Prize in 2011, and scores of writers and academics take on the largely unrewarded task of judging the merits and demerits of literary works on behalf of wealthy corporations such as the Booker Group plc, Whitbread plc (now

the Costa) and Orange. For these corporations the prize money is a very insignificant sum when compared with their turnover and profits, and this type of corporate spending on cultural events is offset by a number of benefits including tax incentives (HMRC Online – Tax incentives for Charitable Giving), increased visibility and revenue, the projection of a ‘charitable image’ and exclusive opportunities for networking and promotion.

The literary prize could be viewed as a gift to the struggling writer. However, the concept of the gift is not straightforward and a reflection on Jacques Derrida’s theories on the paradox that underlies the practice of giving tends to erode the notion of the prize as gift. Within the context of the literary prize the gift would appear to be offered by the foundation or corporation to the writer. Or are the roles of donor and receiver reversed? Is the writer in fact the donor, offering their work to their readers, to the organizers of the prize, and to society in general? Nonetheless, if it is a true gift then ‘*it is necessary [il faut] that the donee not give back, amortize, reimburse, acquit himself, enter into a contract and that he never have contracted a debt*’ (Derrida, 1992: 13). If the gift is acknowledged as such then it can no longer be called a gift and any form of exchange ‘is quite simply to annul the very possibility of the gift’ (76). The prize as cultural-commercial exchange therefore cannot be defined as a gift either.

Problems emerge when attempting to define the literary prize as competition, encouragement, reward or gift, even when it appears to contain elements of all of these transactions. It is this hybrid and somewhat suspect nature of the literary prize which accounts for the scepticism and ambivalence it provokes amongst academics/theorists (Bourdieu, 1996; Huggan, 2011), cultural commentators

(McCrum, 2011; Gekoski, 2011; English, 2005; Norris, 1995) and writers (Amis, 2010; Mantel, 2010; Barnes, 2011; Banville, 1981).

The great proliferation of prizes in recent years has inevitably had the effect of devaluing the cultural prize per se. The proliferation would further suggest that the literary prize is little more than a manifestation of a consumer society which can measure literary achievement only in terms of popularity, celebrity or readability. Rather than encouraging and offering patronage to a rich variety of cultural expressions it seeks to impose a bland, mediagenic ‘McCulture’ (English, 2005: 3), so typical of fashion parades and television talent shows, on the world of literature. In this context literary prizes are perceived less as a means of honouring literature than ‘a contamination of the most precious aspects of art’ (3). Christopher Hitchens viewed the prize industry as little more than a risible exercise in self-promotion and ingratiation, ‘a kind of extended essay in the cultivation of self-esteem and positive reinforcement’ in which panels of notables make decisions about the distribution of ‘honours, garlands, plaques, wreaths, bribes, logrollings and party favours’ (Hitchens, 1993:20). In 1994, journalist Richard Gott described the prize as ‘a significant and dangerous iceberg in the sea of British culture that serves as a symbol of its current malaise’ (Gott, 1994: 22).

We are accustomed to engaging with art and literature on a personal level – writer to reader, artist to viewer – this is how we are taught to experience great art and literature in schools and universities. It is as if we are encouraged to ignore or deny the economic exchanges which are necessary to the production of cultural products in order to develop a true sense of aesthetic worth. The contemporary literature prize has become a powerful yet contentious instrument of legitimation which serves sponsors’ and publishers’ interests well, yet places the writer in an

aesthetic and ethical dilemma. Bourdieu notes that ‘those who want at any price to avoid assimilation to bourgeois art and the effect of social ageing it determines must refuse the social signs of consecration – decorations, prizes, academies and all kinds of honours’ (Bourdieu, 2011 (1996): 123).

Since the early days of the Booker Prize to the present time commentary in newspapers and journals reveals a level of cynicism or even open hostility to the cultural prize with critics frequently questioning the value of these awards. In his recent diatribe against poetry prizes, featured in the *Fortnightly Review*, Peter Riley notes that ‘the big prize structure has met with a lot of resentment, and therefore attack, including accusations of favouritism, corruption and narrowness’ and while acknowledging that much of this response may be attributed to ‘sour grapes’ Riley insists that the judging process lacks a certain rigour (that many judges ‘couldn’t tell a good poem from a decayed kipper’). He further suggests that a more robust set of recognised standards be used to judge competitions (Riley, *Fortnightly Review* Online, 2012). However it is difficult to establish exactly what those definitive points of merit might be. David Solway has noted in his collection of critical essays *Director’s Cut* that ‘the issue of aesthetic judgement is notoriously cloudy and insecure’ (Solway, 2003: 194), yet he has nonetheless produced a set of evaluative criteria for the judgement of poetry: intrinsic significance, thematic unity, metaphorical coherence, formal resonance with tradition, and memorable language (Solway, 2003: 200). A novel may be judged on the basis of plot, character, prose style, complexity of structure and theme, depth of feeling and originality. Yet even with such criteria in place response can vary from one judge to the next with judges often relying on some ‘gut feel’, when writing ‘makes you often feel, and continue to feel, that your internal planes have shifted, and that things will never, quite, be the

same again' (Gekoski, *The Guardian Online*, 2011). Where there is a panel of judges the selection of a winner becomes even more problematic with outcomes increasingly influenced by the judges' status, ego and reputation: 'To survive the scrutiny you must understand that (much as you love winning them) prizes are not, or not necessarily, a judgment on the literary merit of your work' (Hilary Mantel, *Intelligent Life Online*, 2010).

7.3 A History of the Booker Prize and an Assessment of its Current Status

The Booker prize has the tendency to drive people a bit mad with hope and lust and greed and expectation. When you win you realise that the judges are the wisest heads in literary Christendom.

(Julian Barnes in Brown, *The Guardian Online*, 2011)

Prizes don't make writers and writers don't write to win prizes, but in the near-glut of literary awards now on offer, the Booker remains special. It's the one which, if we're completely honest, we most covet.

(Graham Swift, The Man Booker Prize Website)

In presenting a historical background to the Booker prize I also wish to explore the following issues: how and why the prize was set up; why it has endured for so many years; how its continued prestige and popularity may be understood; who has benefited from the prize, and potential negative aspects of the Booker prize and the prize culture.

In 1968 Booker McConnell Ltd was a multinational group worth £28 million with interests based largely in the Caribbean, in Guyana, in sugar, rum and engineering. During the 1960s it had begun to diversify and concentrate its business interests in the UK. Given their commercial base they would appear to be an unlikely

sponsor for a literary award, however, taking advantage of special provisions in the tax law, they had in fact moved into the book business in the mid-sixties through the purchase of the copyrights from bestselling authors such as Agatha Christie, Ian Fleming and Dennis Wheatley (Sutherland, 1981: 11). The Artists' Services division, although a very small part of the group, was extremely successful, producing profits of £100,000 in 1968. Sponsorship of a book prize as well as helping them to improve their image in the UK would also provide a means of promoting their copyrights business and give them access to leading players in the publishing world.

When Tom Maschler of Jonathan Cape approached Booker McConnell with a view to securing sponsorship for the prize he could not have anticipated how significant the prize would become. However, it was clear that while rewarding writers he also hoped the high-profile prize would boost sales not only for fiction in general but specifically for novels published by Cape. James English, in *The Economy of Prestige*, notes that in fact over the first twenty-five years of the Booker Prize Cape dominated the prize with as many as twenty shortlisted books and four winners (English, 2005: 200). By securing an external sponsor, Cape would not incur any costs (the prize money, initially £5,000, and costs associated with judges' expenses and hosting the reception would be borne by Booker) and could also therefore compete for the prize without accusations of nepotism. The Artists' Services division of Booker were open to the idea of sponsoring a prize as they had already begun 'to think of ways of showing their appreciation for [their] success in the form of establishing bursaries, scholarships or prizes' (Goff, 1989: 13).

Having overcome the problem of finance, the Booker faced a number of other challenges. Lacking the cachet of older prizes – the James Tait Black Memorial Prizes (1918) and the Hawthornden Prize (1919) – it also had to compete with the

‘second generation’ of book prizes which had emerged during and after the second world war, namely, the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize (1942), the Somerset Maugham Award (1946), and later, the W.H. Smith Award (1959). In 1968 the Booker also had to compete with a new wave of prestigious prizes: *The Guardian* Prize and the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize (both in 1965) and the Silver Pen (1968). What distinguished the Booker from all of these prizes, initially, at least, was the amount of prize money, thus emphasising economic over symbolic prestige. The prize money was increased to £10,000 in 1978, rising further to £15,000 in 1984, to £20,000 in 1989 and it currently stands at £50,000 (The Man Booker Website).

In 1968 it was agreed that the Booker would be awarded to ‘the best novel in the opinion of the judges’ (a review of the Booker Archives and media commentary makes it evident that judges have always been deeply divided on what constitutes ‘the best novel’), and that the novels submitted were to have been published in the period between December 1st and November 30th of the following year. Any novel by a British, Commonwealth, Irish or South African citizen which had been published for the first time in Britain between these dates was eligible. Publishers were allowed to recommend two novels from their lists and the judges were free to call in any others which they felt worthy of nomination. The shortlist of the novels was to be announced between four and six weeks prior to the winner being chosen in order to increase publicity. Over the years the rules of the Booker underwent a number of changes. In 1970 it was agreed that the awarding of the prize would take place in the autumn instead of the spring and in 1971 the administration of the prize was taken over by the National Book League, later known as the Book Trust. In 1975 publishers were allowed to submit four novels for consideration and subsequent years saw the increase of the shortlist from two to six.

When Dame Rebecca West presented P.H. Newby with a cheque for £5,000 in 1969 it marked a new era in literary prizes partly because it was the largest literary prize offered in this country thus providing the author with an unprecedented form of financial independence. Socio-economic factors have always influenced the production of art and literature though economic factors have often been blamed for the perceived decline of the novel. In 1932 Q.D. Leavis noted in *Fiction and the Reading Public* that literacy and a mass market for fiction, with the inevitable varying tastes for different genres of fiction which these developments necessarily produce, led to a fragmentation of the reading public and a resultant fragmentation of the novel into genres and sub-genres. This development, she contended, exerted a deleterious effect on the quality of literary fiction. These views have since been soundly disputed with subsequent literary critics presenting new interpretations of the changes in literary value. Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1992 (1957)) lamented the loss of an authentic popular culture and denounced the imposition of a mass culture by the culture industries. Studies carried out in the sixties and seventies explored the influence of socio-political and economic factors on literature and the role of the writer in society (Findlater, 1963; Hall, 1979). In his *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983) Terry Eagleton wrote that what counts as literature and good taste 'only serves the ruling power-interests of society at large' (Eagleton, (1983) 1994: 203). In his view the study of English literature as an academic discipline was designed largely 'to diffuse polite social manners, habits of "correct" taste and common cultural standards' (17). Taking his lead from Hoggart, Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson, Eagleton also maintained that popular culture was as worthy of serious study and respect as Shakespeare and Shelley thus firmly opposing Leavis's stance.

An analysis of writers' earnings carried out by Sharon Norris sheds some light on the economic conditions under which literature was being produced in the 1960s:

...in 1965, that is, three years before the setting up of the Booker Prize, fifty per cent of writers lived off earnings from a second job, and only forty-four per cent of those who made a living from literature earned more than £500 per annum. Furthermore, two thirds of writers earned less than £6 a week, and only one sixth made more than £20. To put this into a broader perspective, the average wage per annum for a male non-manual worker at the time was just under £1,500.

(Norris, 1995: 14)

Even compared with George Orwell's poverty-stricken hack in 'Confessions of a Book Reviewer' (Orwell, 2012 (1946)), or Reardon and his impoverished companions in George Gissing's *New Grub Street* (not to mention BBC Radio 4's 'author, pipe-smoker, consummate fare-dodger and master of the abusive email', Ed Reardon) making a living from writing alone must have been almost impossible in Britain in the 1960s. Thus, the Booker prize at £5,000 equated to a little more than three years' wages, therefore providing the author with just enough financial support to complete another novel. A prize of this magnitude would have an enormous influence on any writer, especially an impoverished struggling young writer, and could encourage the practice of writing 'to order'. Although no writer would ever admit to writing a novel just to win a prize it is worth examining the Booker-winning novels to uncover evidence of standardisation and to evaluate the criteria used to assess these literary offerings. With the rise of the business-sponsored award, and the conflation of literature and economics, it is inevitable that literature and the evaluation of fiction might be filtered through a business rather than purely literary ethic. It is clear that fiction writing cannot survive without some form of financial

support, but literature is in danger of losing its critical force within the context of the increasing commercialization of culture. Bourdieu notes that the refusal ‘to play the game of art as art’ implies that ‘the business of art is reduced to the business of money’ (Bourdieu, 2011 (1996): 223 – 224).

7.4 The Booker Prize: A Winning Profile

Part of the reason the prize is heralded internationally is because the judges stand as a guarantee of literary weight and seriousness of intent. If the public, publishers and writers don’t trust in the competence of the judges then they don’t trust the prize. If they don’t trust the prize then it becomes just another literary award.

(Man Booker Prize Website)

7.4.1 The Booker: Nationality

The Booker prize is open to the citizens of Britain and the Commonwealth, the Irish Republic, Pakistan and Bangladesh, to the countries, that is, in which English is either a native or official language. In *Consuming Fictions*, Richard Todd points out that the prize has had a very significant impact on the contemporary novel published in Britain:

Where the novel in English was formerly simply British and American in the public view, Booker-eligibility has gradually enabled the literary energy that was once at the former Empire’s centre and directed outwards to the colonial periphery, by a process of post-colonial transference, to be directed back at the enfeebled centre. The result is a literature that is significantly different in kind, tone and experience from the mainstream serious literary American novel.

(Todd, 1996: 77-78)

This would suggest that the Booker has had a major influence on a very wide range of emerging writers, not only from Britain but from the various nations of the Commonwealth. If this is the case then one would expect to see a representative number of writers on the shortlist from Ireland and the various Commonwealth countries. It would also suggest that the prize has had a major impact on the type of literature produced over the last forty years or so. I have examined the Booker shortlists from 1969 to 2011 to discover the extent to which the prize rewards a certain type of writer or literary form.

I believe that the novelist treats the most serious subjects, and is an entertainer as well. By 'entertainer' I mean someone who does not write for academics or foreign students, and whose books are not read out of duty but for a variety of more 'human' reasons: e.g. for people who want to live outside of themselves in imaginary characters.

(P.H. Newby, phnewby.net, 1974)

The first two Booker shortlists, in 1969 and 1970, were almost exclusively British, with the exception of the Irish writers Elizabeth Bowen and William Trevor in 1970. In 1971 V.S. Naipaul won the Booker with *In a Free State* and Mordechai Richler's *St Urbain's Horseman* was shortlisted. The Australian writer Thomas Keneally was shortlisted in 1972, 1975 and 1979, and Nadine Gordimer, South African, was joint winner in 1974. The Irish author Brian Moore appeared on the shortlist in 1976, 1987 and 1990, and the South African novelist André Brink was shortlisted in 1976 and 1978. While the Britain-centredness of the Booker in the 1970s is undisputed, it is all the more remarkable, and perhaps a tribute to the judging panels of those years, that three of the prizes in that decade went to non-British writers: V.S. Naipaul in 1971; Nadine Gordimer in 1974, and Ruth Praver Jhabvala in 1975.

The increasing presence of non-British writers on the Booker shortlist becomes more apparent from the 1980s onwards when the prize began to live up to its stated aim to reward novelists from Britain *and* the Commonwealth. From 1980 to 2011, ‘only’ fifteen out of thirty-two Booker winners were British nationals. In the decade from 1980 to 1989 British dominance of the shortlists had dropped to sixty-three per cent and from 1990 to 1999 this percentage had dropped again to fifty-three per cent and rose only slightly to fifty-seven per cent in the decade from 2000 to 2009. While Anita Desai was shortlisted in 1980, the first writer from the Indian subcontinent to win was Salman Rushdie in 1981. V.S. Naipaul and Nadine Gordimer were winners in the 1970s, however the 1980s would produce far more non-British Booker winners: Salman Rushdie (British but of Indian origin) in 1981; Thomas Keneally (Australian) in 1982; J M Coetzee (South African) in 1983; Keri Hulme (New Zealand) in 1985; Peter Carey (Australian) in 1988, and Kazuo Ishiguro (British but of Japanese origin) in 1989. Five of the winners in the 1990s were non-British (allowing that the very nationalistic James Kelman must be defined as Scots rather British), and in the first decade of the twenty-first century, only two out of the ten Booker winners were British. Up until the 1990s these postcolonial presences ‘prompted criticisms of “tokenism”’ (Todd, 1996: 81) but it is obvious that in the twenty-first century the non-British writers have dominated the prize not only as winners but have also had a significant impact on the shortlists where over forty per cent of the writers have been non-British.

Writing in 1996, Todd observed that, ‘London remains the publishing centre for the vast majority of Booker-eligible fiction’ (81), a fact which has not changed since then. While a number of smaller publishing houses located outside of London such as Dewi Lewis, based in Stockport, and Tindal Street Press, based in

Birmingham, feature on the shortlists, all Booker winners, from 1969 to 2011, have been published by London-based publishing houses. The shortlists have included increasing numbers of Irish, Scottish and Commonwealth authors over the years since the prize's inception, yet even these writers have entered into publishing arrangements with London publishers as it would appear to be a significant factor contributing to Booker success: 'Each year's Booker "winners" are not just the novelists and their books: the winners include publishers and agents who are positioned to negotiate foreign and film rights' (Todd, 1996: 81), and the situation has not changed for writers and publishers today.

The steady pluralist trend in the history of the Booker has very significant implications for the development of the novel in Britain. As Todd points out, three of the winners in the seventies – J.G. Farrell, Ruth Praver Jhabvala and Paul Scott – wrote nostalgically about the British Raj, although often, as in the case of Farrell and Scott, with a good measure of irony (82). In 1981, with Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, the viewpoint switched dramatically from British to Indian, from colonizer to colonized, signalling the rise of the postcolonial novel. The Booker prize made it possible for the reading public to appreciate fiction which was published and 'legitimated' in Britain yet offered a multi-cultural view of the world. The trend continues into the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s with at least half of the shortlisted novels offering a picture of life outside Britain. This development supports the view that a certain kind of novelist could write a 'generic' Booker winner (Norris, 1995). Nonetheless, the postcolonial influence is a dynamic, rather than negative, cultural force which has helped to revitalise the English novel (Todd, 1996: 95).

7.4.2 The Booker: Gender

In 1996 Todd noted that ‘of the twenty-nine winners (including joint winners) between 1969 and 1995, ten (about a third) have been women’ (Todd, 1996: 83). Little has changed in the intervening fifteen years. Of the forty-three winners (including joint winners) between 1969 and 2011, fifteen (just over a third) have been women: five in the 1970s; three in the 1980s; three in the 1990s, and four in the 2000s.

Furthermore, Todd tells us that there were all-male shortlists in 1976 and again ‘more controversially’ (83) in 1991, a decade, one presumes, that would have witnessed greater parity between the sexes. The subsequent outcry no doubt contributed to the demand for greater recognition for fiction written by women culminating in the inauguration in 1992 of the Orange Prize for Fiction, an international prize awarded only to female authors.⁴⁶ Its original founders and supporters expressed concern that, ‘despite the ratio of books by men published to books by women, the leading literary Prizes often seemed to overlook female authors’ (Orange Prize for Fiction website). This bias towards male writers was not repeated in subsequent years although there were many years – 1986, 1992, 1994, 1995, 1998, 2004 and 2008 – in which the shortlist contained only one female author. When, in 1973, the shortlist consisted of three women and one man, the award went to the male writer, J.G. Farrell. Subsequently, shortlisted women have been in a majority only in 1977, 1978, 1981, 1985, 2003, and 2006, with Iris Murdoch winning in 1978, Keri Hulme in 1985 and Kiran Desai taking the prize in 2006. In 1970,

⁴⁶ This is now called The Women’s Prize for Fiction since Orange withdrew their sponsorship.

1984, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1996 and 2009 three women and three men were shortlisted, while in every other year, male writers dominated the shortlist.

One might expect a correlation between underrepresentation of women on shortlists and a male-dominated judging panel. Since 1969, only eight out of a total of forty-three Chairs (therefore less than twenty per cent) have been women: Fay Weldon (the first female Chair) in 1983; P.D. James in 1987; Victoria Glendinning in 1992 (was this a deliberate move to compensate for the male bias in the 1991 shortlist?); Carmen Callil in 1996; Gillian Beer in 1997; Lisa Jardine in 2002; Hermione Lee in 2006, and Stella Rimington in 2011. In only three of these years was the winner a woman: Penelope Lively in 1987, Arundhati Roy in 1997 and Kiran Desai in 2006. Although women are underrepresented on shortlists and as Chairs there is less inequality in the composition of judging panels; out of the 202 judges, 114 have been male and 88 female. Todd notes that between the years 1988 and 1995 the gender ratio in women's favour had decreased, with only one year, 1990, containing more female than male judges (84). In the intervening years, 1996 to 2011, this ratio has increased with women dominating the judging panel in eight out of fifteen years. Yet in those fifteen years, out of seventy-five judges forty-two, therefore the majority, have been male.

The gradual increase in the number of female judges is a noticeable trend in the period 2000 - 2009, with a ratio of twenty-two female to twenty-eight male judges. Information gathered from *The Writer's Handbook* (2013) shows that the majority of London's publishing houses are dominated by men, although women are well represented as literary agents. Furthermore, it is not always the case that women in positions of power, whether as publishers, agents, Chairs or judges, will necessarily champion the cause of women writers. In 2002, with a female Chair, Lisa

Jardine, and a majority of women judges on the panel, only two of the shortlisted writers were female, Carol Shields and Sarah Waters, and the prize was ultimately awarded to Yann Martel. In 2003, with a male chair and a male-dominated judging panel, four of the six shortlisted authors were female, though DBC Pierre took the prize. 2006 is more significant in gender-political terms when a female chair and a female-dominated panel selected a shortlist which included four female writers and awarded the prize to Kiran Desai.

These statistics indicate that women, particularly women from Commonwealth countries in Africa and Asia, are under-represented on shortlists (ninety-one out of two hundred and forty-nine) and as Chairs (eight out of forty-three), less so as judges, and that male domination persists, as in the period 2000 – 2009 there were twenty-two female judges to twenty-eight male.

7.4.3 The Booker: Education

With reference to the issue of education as a determining factor in achieving Booker success, it can be observed that, the majority of Booker winners, that is, thirty-three out of forty-two winning authors (over seventy-five per cent), received a university education, and fourteen of these attended either Oxford or Cambridge. Financial hardship prevented James Kelman, Ben Okri and Paul Scott from achieving any great educational qualifications but did not hinder literary success. Both Peter Carey and Nadine Gordimer dropped out of university and John Banville chose not to pursue a university education. Nonetheless the above figures show that the Booker Prize is heavily biased in favour of those with a university education. It is worth noting here with reference to university education that there is a perception

that Booker winners are invariably the product of the University of East Anglia's Creative Writing programme. However in forty three years of the Booker only three graduates of the programme won the prize: Ann Enright, Ian McEwan and Kazuo Ishiguro.

It is also significant that a large proportion of panel judges are university and Oxbridge graduates and indeed the literary journalists who provide commentary on the authors and novels also belong to the same elite and that 'there have always been close links between academia, the media and the Booker Prize, and the prize's ability to command a high level of press coverage has been among its most distinctive feature' (Norris, 2006: 146 – 147).

7.4.4 The Booker: Age/Seniority

While the Booker has sought to reward young and less well-published authors the statistics would suggest that more senior novelists are recognised on a regular basis for their lifetime's achievement and their contribution to literature in English. Concerning the issue of seniority and generation, Todd notes that 'in 1978 and 1980, the Booker went to two of Britain's most distinguished senior novelists, Iris Murdoch and William Golding respectively' (85-86). The 1980 Booker was of particular interest as the shortlisted Anthony Burgess was viewed as the obvious challenge to Golding, thus pitting two of the most senior and respected authors against each other. In 1981 the entire shortlist stimulated public interest as, along with newcomers Salman Rushdie and Ian McEwan, it featured a number of established and respected authors: Molly Keane, Doris Lessing, Anne Schlee and Muriel Spark, with the prize, as noted above, going to Rushdie. In 1985 the first-time novelist, Keri Hulme, won

the award despite the presence of both Iris Murdoch and Doris Lessing on the shortlist.

In the decade 1980 to 1989 the younger generation dominated with six winners under fifty years of age and just four winners over fifty, including Anita Brookner and Penelope Lively in 1984 and 1987 respectively. A similar pattern emerges in the decade from 1990 to 1999. Judging panels in the twenty-first century appeared to favour the older more established writers with seven out of a total of twelve winning authors ranging in age from fifty (Alan Hollinghurst in 2004) to sixty-nine (Howard Jacobson in 2010). ‘The Booker Prize was not merely concerned to notice younger, promising but less well-established writers’ (Todd, 1996: 86). In fact in forty-three years of the Booker there have been twenty-three winners under fifty years of age and twenty-two winners between the ages of fifty and sixty-nine which would prove that the prize seeks to recognise both young and older writers alike, and that in fact age is not barrier to becoming a Booker winner.

Experience as a novelist is perhaps a more important criterion than age. The Booker has been won on only four occasions by first-time novelists: Aravind Adiga (2008); DBC Pierre (2001); Arundhati Roy (1997), and Keri Hulme (1985), and while these authors have enjoyed commercial success in terms of sales, particularly the first three, they have not, with the exception of Roy, enjoyed great critical acclaim.⁴⁷ The vast majority of winning writers had numerous novels to their name before winning the prize with thirty-nine out of forty-five having had three or more novels published before being awarded the Booker Prize. Eleven out of forty-five had published ten or more novels before winning the Booker including Julian Barnes,

⁴⁷ *The God of Small Things* is the only novel written by Roy. Since winning the Booker Prize, she has concentrated her writing on political issues.

Howard Jacobson, Hilary Mantel, John Banville, Thomas Keneally, Iris Murdoch and P H Newby.

On the question of age as a defining aspect of a typical winning profile, Norris, whose study includes both shortlisted and winning authors, notes that in 1969 ‘none of the shortlisted authors nor any of the judges was especially young’ (Norris, 1995: 108), a fact which reflects trends in the literary establishment of the time. As shown above, over the four decades and more of the Booker, the prize favours both older as well as promising young authors, despite Norris’s assertion. The 2002 shortlist featured the eventual winner Yann Martel and Sarah Waters, both under forty, and both Carol Shields and William Trevor whose combined age was one hundred and forty-one (Norris, 2006: 148).

7.5 A Short History of the T.S. Eliot Prize

The Nobel is a ticket to one's own funeral. No one has ever done anything after he got it.

(T.S. Eliot, 1948, in Asher, 1998: 110).

Prizes are arguably more important to poets than to other writers as it is one of the few ways to gain some form of recognition and financial support. Prize proliferation is as much of a problem in the poetry world as elsewhere as no award can serve as an infallible measure of achievement but failing to win a prize has a negative effect on sales and also leaves a poet feeling marginalised and undervalued. The proliferation of poetry prizes can also lead to specialization, driving poets into ever narrower niches instead of fostering creativity in the broadest sense. This is particularly true of prizes for which there is one single judge. The T.S. Eliot prize has striven to avoid such accusations by ensuring there is a panel of judges and that these

judges are well-respected, practising poets themselves. Unlike the Booker there is no room for ‘celebrity judges’ on the Eliot judging panel. However, this strategy has not been without its controversies with accusations of cliquishness and coterie politics, back-stabbing and back-scratching, threatening to compromise the integrity of the prize. Given that the poetry world in the UK is a relatively small and closed community, accusations of this kind are inevitable, yet a survey of the statistics would seem to corroborate some of these claims.

The T.S. Eliot Prize was inaugurated in 1993 to celebrate the Poetry Book Society’s fortieth anniversary and to honour its founding poet. The £15,000 prize money (with runners-up receiving £1,000 each) was donated by Eliot’s widow, Valerie Eliot, and awarded to the best collection of new poetry published in the UK and Ireland in the past year.⁴⁸ Considered to be ‘the largest and most prestigious award of its kind’ (Poetry Book Society website) it has been described by Andrew Motion (former Poet Laureate) as ‘the prize most poets want to win’ (Poetry Book Society website). The rules as established by the Poetry Book Society stipulate that the members of the judging panel be selected by the Society thereby creating an elitist form of symbolic prestige. In 2012 Carol Ann Duffy (current Poet Laureate) was Chair and the other two judges were the poets Michael Longley and David Morley. The emphasis on prestige and the importance of the symbolic reward is paramount yet the increase in prize money from an original £1,000 to the current £15,000 makes concessions to the importance of financial reward for poets. Traditionally, poets, of all writers, have earned very little from their work and the prize money represents a substantial boost to the income of winners, and an encouragement for the nation’s talented poets. Poetry prizes are significantly smaller

⁴⁸ Since Valerie Eliot’s death in 2012, the prize is supported by the T.S. Eliot Estate.

than fiction prizes but the T.S. Eliot remains the single most financially rewarding of the annual poetry prizes in the UK.

While it sets out to reward the ‘best’ collection it is not necessarily instrumental in fostering or uncovering young or little-known talent not least because a poet needs to be published before they can be considered for the prize. It is noticeable from the list of winners that the prize has been increasingly monopolized by the UK’s and Ireland’s leading poets. The list of winners features John Burnside in 2011, Derek Walcott in 2010, Philip Gross in 2009, Sean O’Brien in 2007 and Seamus Heaney in 2006, all of whom are male, and over 50 years of age when receiving the prize, and all of whom had published at least five collections, and often many more, before winning the prize. It may come as no surprise to women poets that the male to female ratio on the winners’ list is 15:4, that is, almost four times as many men winning as women. Female poets have long felt that they have been overshadowed, and indeed overlooked, in comparison to their male counterparts and the results of this analysis point to a continuing gender bias in the awarding of poetry prizes. Many women poets, not least Carol Ann Duffy, have commented on the difficulty of achieving success in the male-dominated world of poetry.⁴⁹

7.5.1 The T.S. Eliot Prize: Winning Poets

The T.S. Eliot is probably the most important prize in English poetry. It gets good press, boosts sales, and has the biggest prize money. Part of its commercial success can be attributed to its simplicity – one prize for one collection, which helps focus public attention. For the poet there is the pleasure of recognition too; the list of previous winners is very strong, it reads like a canon of contemporary English poetry.

(Hamilton in Brown, *The Guardian Online*, 2009)

⁴⁹ Although the situation has improved Carol Ann Duffy remarked that in her early days of writing, male poets were ‘very patronizing and very randy’ adding that ‘if they weren’t patting you on the head, they were patting you on the bum’ (Savage, BBC News Online, 2009).

The Eliot is considered to be the ‘most coveted award’ (Jury, The *Independent Online*, 2007) which recognises traditional mainstream poetic brilliance. While the prize rewards originality it can hardly be said to encourage any form of experimental writing. It is awarded for ‘the best collection of new verse first published in English in the UK or the Republic of Ireland’ (Poetry Book Society website). Given this stipulation, it is perhaps unsurprising to discover that the list of winners is dominated by British and Irish poets.

With Britain and Ireland dominating the prize in fourteen out of nineteen years (over 73%) there is little opportunity for poets of other nationalities to win the prize. For the purposes of this study I have chosen to count Don Paterson and John Burnside as Scottish rather than British poets, and George Szirtes as Hungarian-born rather than British (though if included in the British tally this would push the British/Irish success in winning the prize to almost 79% of the total).

Nonetheless, the prize has recognised the contributions to poetry of a number of non-British poets, notably Mark Doty, an American poet who won in the third year of the prize in 1995 with *My Alexandria*; Les Murray, the eminent Australian poet who won in 1996 with *Subhuman Redneck Poems*; the Canadian poet Anne Carson who won in 2001 with *The Beauty of the Husband*, and Derek Walcott, from St Lucia, who won in 2010 with *White Egrets*. While British poets undoubtedly dominate the winning list it is interesting to note that a British poet did not win the prize until 1998, when the award was in its sixth year. On that occasion it was offered to Ted Hughes for *Birthday Letters* a poetic account of his relationship with Sylvia Plath. There is a sense that he was awarded the prize not least for that

particular collection but for his lifetime's contribution to poetry and also perhaps because he was at that time suffering from cancer, and was to die later that year.

In terms of gender it is obvious that the prize has been won more frequently by male than by female poets. In the period 1993 to 1999 the winners of the Eliot were all male. It was not until 2000 that the prize was offered to a woman leading to charges that the award was a kind of 'private club for male poets' (Kennedy, *The Guardian Online*, 2002). Since then the prize has been poor in recognising the talent of women poets; out of nineteen winners only four have been women: Anne Carson (2000), Alice Oswald (2002), Carol Ann Duffy (2005) and Jen Hadfield (2008).

In terms of age, the majority of poets, eight out of nineteen, or 42%, were in their fifties on winning the prize. Three winners were in their thirties, forties and sixties, and one, Derek Walcott, was eighty-one when he was awarded the prize. The vast majority therefore have been over forty-five, middle-aged, and with, unsurprisingly, a significant body of work behind them at the time of winning. Particularly prolific poets include John Burnside, George Szirtes and Seamus Heaney with eleven collections each; Paul Muldoon, Les Murray, Ted Hughes and Carol Ann Duffy, with thirteen (the magical number) collections each, and Michael Longley and Derek Walcott with sixteen and seventeen collections respectively.⁵⁰ Those poets who collected the prize while still in their thirties – Don Paterson, Alice Oswald and Jen Hadfield – had only published one previous collection on winning. It is also unsurprising to note that these winning poets had already received a number of other prestigious awards prior to winning the Eliot. Duffy leads the table with fourteen awards followed by O'Brien and Burnside with ten each, then Heaney with eight

⁵⁰ These figures do not include contributions to anthologies, co-authored works, selected or collected works.

including a Nobel prize for literature, and both Szirtes, Longley and Walcott with six.

Educational attainment proved to be a defining feature of Booker winners and the same is true of the Eliot. All of the winning poets, with the exception of Hugo Williams, who nonetheless, attended Eton College, Don Paterson who left school at sixteen to be a musician, and George Szirtes who went to an art school, attended university with many of them going on to take postgraduate degrees. Studying classics and attending Cambridge are also characteristics of the winning profile. Furthermore, with the development of Creative Writing as a university subject over the last ten years many of these poets now teach and are professors of Creative Writing at British universities including John Burnside and Don Paterson at St Andrew's, Philip Gross at Glamorgan, Lavinia Greenlaw at East Anglia, Carol Ann Duffy at Manchester Metropolitan and Sean O'Brien at Newcastle. These roles enhance their influence in the academic and literary world and contribute significantly to their cultural capital.

The publishers Faber and Faber dominate the list, particularly in the early years, winning eight times in nineteen years. This is perhaps unsurprising given Eliot's links with Faber and the prestige and influence that Faber wields in the publishing world, particularly in poetry publishing. Bloodaxe published the winning poets in 2004, 2008 and 2009. Both Picador and Jonathan Cape won the prize twice with a single win each for Carcanet, Gallery Press, Knopf and Wake Forest University Press.

7.6 The Booker and the T.S. Eliot: A Comparison

I now wish to present a comparison of the two prizes and their position as arbiters of cultural prestige, specifically addressing the issues of whether the promotion of literature through the prize system is accompanied by a construction of cultural capital. Within the media, and to some degree in the academic sphere, both prizes command respect, each presenting as the most high-profile prize within their respective fields of literature, but differences arise in how they construct and command cultural capital.

When Tom Maschler of Jonathan Cape first put forward the idea, in 1968, of inaugurating a new literary prize for the contemporary novel the suggestion was that it should be modelled on the most prestigious prize in France, the Prix Goncourt. Martyn Goff, the Booker administrator from 1972 to 2006, envisioned the prize as upholding the prestige of the Prix Goncourt while at the same time striving to ‘reward merit, raise the stature of the author in the eyes of the public and increase the sale of books’ (Man Booker Website, Archives). Goff expressed the hope that the Booker would ‘help to narrow the all too frequent gap between artistic and commercial success’ (Man Booker Website, Archives). This outspoken conflation of art with commerce contrasts sharply with the aims of the T.S. Eliot prize which seeks to reward the best collection of poetry but refrains from specifically promoting commercial success.

The difference in conception between the Booker Prize and the Eliot is also reflected in the prize rules. In the early years, the Booker was to be judged by an annually selected panel consisting mainly of writers and literary critics and commentators but which would also include a ‘man on the street’ (Man Booker

Website, Archives). The token position of non-literary, non-academic reader was offered to a range of celebrity figures, people in the public gaze who might be trusted to represent the views of the general public. Such populist judges have included Nigella Lawson, celebrity chef, Joanna Lumley, actor, and the comedian and actor, Sue Perkins. In addition to the household name, the panel usually included an academic, a literary journalist and a writer, usually a novelist, although a number of poets have made an appearance on previous judging panels including Philip Larkin (chair in 1977), Peter Porter, John Fuller, Anthony Thwaite, Wendy Cope and Simon Armitage. This strategy of spreading the power to award prestige amongst a range of commentators, rather than limiting it to a closed jury of peers, suggests a more democratic or populist approach to the legitimation of literature especially when compared with say the James Tait Black Memorial Prize which is judged exclusively by members of the academy, i.e. the Professor of English Literature at the University of Edinburgh along with a panel of PhD students.

‘The judging process does not “make” winners: it spots them, not always in the most obvious places,’ said John Sutherland, chair to the panel of judges for the 2005 Booker (Man Booker Website, 2005). This deliberate intention to avoid elitism and to look beyond the obvious choices could explain the tendency to reward non-British writers for works which challenge the norm or present a non-British view of the world. In the last 10 years only 40 per cent of the winners were British with those non-British winning writers presenting a post-colonial or outsider view of the world. Examples of this literary stance include Yann Martel’s *Life of Pi*, DBC Pierre’s *Vernon God Little*, Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* and Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger*.

A further point of difference between the Booker and the Eliot relates to the value of the prize. A major aim of the Booker from the outset was to offer a significant financial reward for the prizewinning novelist, a strategy which ensures that symbolic prestige is measured in terms of economic value. However, the aim of its founder, Tom Maschler, was to inaugurate a prize which would not only reward the novelist financially, and also stimulate sales, but would also confer prestige on the author. He must also have been aware of the benefits publishers would reap from the prize, and the publicity and sales it would generate for his industry. His ultimate aim was to develop a prize which would command the same respect as the Prix Goncourt in France, thus aiming at the literary end of the market: 'Booker's model, as has always been admitted, was the Prix Goncourt, yet at £5,000 Booker's prize money was very much higher' (Todd, 1996: 61). Even today the Prix Goncourt is worth only ten euro with winners suggesting they are more likely to frame their cheque rather than cash it in at the bank. Of course, winning the Goncourt guarantees huge sales for the writer.

Despite these differences (the structure of the judging panel and the monetary reward) between the Booker and the Eliot there are certain points of convergence between the two prizes. For instance, the Eliot has learnt the importance of building a level of anticipation and suspense amongst the reading public by adopting a Booker-like approach to long and shortlists. Although there is no longlist as such for the Eliot, poetry publishers submit any number of books for consideration to which is added the Poetry Book Society's four choices of the year. As many as 104 books were submitted in 2011, as large a selection if not larger than many Booker longlists, the number of submissions hinting at a new vibrancy in the poetry book market. The

judging panel then chooses eight books for the shortlist, one of which is selected finally as the winner.⁵¹

Furthermore, the Eliot would appear to align itself with the Booker in the manner in which it embraces cultural spectacle. The growth of the middle classes, increasing affluence and a rise in leisure time are factors which have contributed to the rise in consumption of all products, including cultural goods. This fact, coupled with media influence, has stimulated a demand for cultural spectacle, even in the literary field, the least ‘mediagenic’ of all the arts (English, 2005: 34). The annual Booker dinner and award ceremony has been televised since 1981 and has been held at a number of prestigious banquet halls – the Café Royal, Claridge’s, the Stationers’ Hall, two decades at the Guildhall, and, most recently, at the British Museum. Similarly, on the eve of the judges’ final decision, all of the Eliot shortlisted poets are invited to take part in a public reading at the Southbank’s Royal Festival Hall. In January 2011, the event was attended by over 2,000 members of the poetry reading public. The winner is then announced the following evening at an awards ceremony most recently held at the Haberdashers’ Hall.

In his introduction to *Prize Writing*, Martyn Goff lists the ingredients which have contributed to the growing importance of the Booker Prize over the years: judicious management, a level of suspense, the careful selection of respected panels of judges, the level of prize money and of course the frisson of scandal (Goff, 1989: 11-12). James English has further shown that the prize culture not only conflates economic capital with cultural capital, but also adds what he refers to as ‘journalistic capital’ which is measured in terms of scandal, celebrity and notoriety stating ‘there seems never to be a shortage of prize scandals ... all of which ultimately derive from

⁵¹ The 2014 T.S. Eliot prize has a shortlist of ten.

the scandalous fact of the prizes' very existence, their claim to a legitimate and even premier place on the fields of culture' (English, 2005: 190). Scandal, or the threat of it, is a key element of the cultural spectacle, its main purpose being to attract and hold the attention of the reading public. Many writers have commented on the Booker's ability to provoke scandal and Margaret Drabble has written that 'if the Booker shortlist does not arouse bitter controversy and scandal, then it has failed in its task of stimulating public interest' (Drabble, 1989: 50). While the poetry world might hope to operate outside of the sphere of scandal it has nonetheless been beset with controversies of its own with accusations of coterie politics often detracting from the awards ceremony and the value of the prize.

7.7 Bourdieu and the Prize Culture

In *The Rules of Art* (1996) Pierre Bourdieu outlines his theories concerning artistic and literary production making reference to the problems inherent in corporate sponsorship. Bourdieu's rejection of corporate sponsorship of the arts stems from his belief that it compromises intellectual and artistic autonomy. As noted above, Bourdieu describes the literary field as one which is structured around two opposing poles, one within which market values apply, the other 'restricted' pole, which deals with 'artistic' matters. This polarised structure makes it possible to distinguish writing which is commercially driven from writing which is more literary. Bourdieu argues that the field and those who operate within it are governed by its own internal rules. An important principle within the field is 'disinterestedness' which can be defined as a disavowal of commercial interests and profits. Disinterestedness, and the autonomy of the artist, are paramount as artistic autonomy represents 'one of the last critical countervailing powers capable of

opposing the forces of economic and political order' (339). It is furthermore the artist-intellectual's duty to uphold this autonomy which is constantly under attack from external hostile forces, namely from the commercial world.

An obvious example of such a threat presents itself in the form of commercial sponsorship or 'alliances between certain economic enterprises... and cultural producers' (344). Bourdieu is deeply suspicious of such alliances claiming that artists are not fully aware of the implications of their relations with the commercial world and have therefore not developed 'appropriate systems of defence' (345). Market pressures are increasingly operating within the literary field and Bourdieu maintains that 'cultural producers will not find again a place of their own in the social world unless ... they agree to work collectively for the defence of their own interests' (348). Wary of the infiltration of the art world by market forces he calls upon artists to resist and to mount a struggle against the 'symbolic violence' perpetrated by the commercial world.

The notion of symbolic violence is pertinent to the Booker Prize for a number of reasons. In the first instance there is the image of a large and successful corporation which exploits the relatively meagre economic status of the majority of authors who subsist on reduced incomes, merely for the purpose of marketing their own company (identity) and product. Secondly, it presumes to equate cultural value with economic value, and, thirdly, it purports to reward literary excellence when in fact, viewed objectively, it becomes obvious that as the Booker management committee, judging panel and shortlisted authors belong to a particular social elite they are more likely to reward those writers who belong, or pretend to belong, to the same social milieu. Sharon Norris notes that 'this at the very least calls into question

whether the “best novel” is assessed on aesthetic grounds or in relation to social values’ (Norris, 2006: 141).

While commercial patrons, or sponsors, of the arts couch their benevolence in terms of appreciation of the arts and a desire to encourage the artist, it is clear that their endorsement of the arts is an exchange of economic for symbolic capital and with the assistance of the media they are guaranteed a very positive public profile in exchange for their benevolence especially given the increasingly elevated status of art and literature in a society of growing middle classes.

Booker’s strategy was carefully devised and ensured maximum benefits by choosing fiction – an art form which is perhaps more marketable than many of the other arts. By choosing to sponsor literary fiction, which commands respect in every field and is guaranteed to win a response from the media, the public and the literary world, they were determined to reap the maximum benefit from this literary reward. The original impetus to set up the Booker had come from two publishers, Tom Maschler and Grahame Greene, both from Jonathan Cape, whose stated aim was to introduce a prize to rival the Prix Goncourt, but whose underlying motives, at a time of recession in the publishing industry, were designed to stimulate book sales.

While Bourdieu finds commercial sponsorship deeply questionable the alternative, state sponsorship, though not ideal, at the very least can ensure that struggling artists receive the support they need. The greatest drawback here would be one of censorship in one form or another. Apart from the obvious political censorship, many artists applying for state-sponsored grants today are expected to comply with a number of bureaucratic requirements, all of which can compromise and limit artistic expression and, at a basic level, distract the artist from the creative task in hand.

The individuals who dominate the upper echelons of government and business are those who wield decision-making power and have access to the media. These players come from a privileged social background, one of power and influence, and belong to a milieu, or in Bourdieusian terms, ‘habitus’, in which there is a tendency for members accept what they have learned to be the ‘natural order of things’. The journalists play their role in the literary prize charade as ‘poor men’s intellectual guides’ (Bourdieu, 1996: 31). Yet the true qualities of intellectualism – ‘rigour and independence’ (Norris, 1996: 145) – are absent.

Although Bourdieu’s arguments are based on French social, educational and cultural systems much of his thinking can be applied to the Booker Prize. A review of the educational background of those involved with the Prize reveals that a high percentage of writers, judges, organisers and journalists are Oxbridge graduates, and therefore possess the educational, social and economic capital that accompanies such an elitist education. Furthermore, as Norris notes, the University of East Anglia also has a significant influence on the Prize. This influence was most obvious in the 1980s. Malcolm Bradbury (founder of the MA in Creative Writing at UEA) was on the judging panel. In 1989 when Kazuo Ishiguro, a graduate in of the UEA Creative Writing MA, won the Booker, David Lodge, a UEA Creative Writing Fellow was one of the judges. However, as pointed out above in my survey of Booker winners, only three of these winners were UEA Creative Writing graduates. UEA’s influence may have been more obvious in the 1980s, however since then with the proliferation of Creative Writing MAs in universities throughout the country and the emergence of other prestigious writing courses such as those organised by Faber and Faber and *The Guardian*, UEA’s special position seems to have diminished.

However, as Norris notes, shortlisted authors ‘have impressive cultural, social and educational credentials’ (148). In 1969 when P.H. Newby won the Booker, the shortlist included two dons, three established writers, two Oxbridge graduates and the head of BBC’s Third Programme. As my research shows, the Oxbridge factor persists through four decades and more of the Booker. In 2010 the shortlist included three Oxbridge graduates, three established writers and an author who was the previous recipient of the Orange, Whitbread and Commonwealth Prizes. Charges of a ‘Booker coterie’ are therefore justified but it should be noted that the British literary community has long been criticised for its closed nature.⁵² Given also that judging panels are made up of ‘members of a white British cultural elite’ (152) it does raise questions about which novels succeed in reaching the shortlist and how these novels are judged within the Booker system.

The increasingly international postcolonial presence on the Booker shortlists might suggest that, although the judges belong to the dominant elite, the broad range of writing which is brought to the attention of the reading public through the Booker system is not biased or limited in any way. The increasing presence of postcolonial literature on the shortlists may no doubt also be attributed to developments in the academy with its focus on cultural studies and postcolonial literature since the 1970s. Todd welcomed this ‘pluralist trend’, embraced the ‘postcolonial as a dynamic cultural force’ and welcomed this development as a positive influence which would enrich the English novel and allow it to ‘transform itself from the moribund state it had entered by the mid-1960s’ (Todd, 1996: 83).

⁵² This is a feature of many professional milieus in Britain. F.R. Leavis identified school, university, the British Council and the BBC as key networking sites for the literary community. (Leavis and Thompson, 1962 (1933)).

This optimism is not shared by all commentators and Graham Huggan in 'The Postcolonial Exotic' (2001) is deeply suspicious of the manner in which postcolonial writing is exploited and manipulated:

In early Commonwealth literary criticism... there was an implicit assumption of Britain's arbitrational cultural role; the 'filial' literatures of the former colonies were urged to refer for guidance to the 'parent stock.' This mantle is now assumed by the Booker and its panel of 'disinterested' (white male) judges: these mostly establishment figures are to determine what carries 'intrinsic' literary value. They are to confer legitimacy, from the 'centre,' on the literature of the 'periphery.' (25)

Clearly, the Booker panel has not always been exclusively male and white, however Huggan is critical of the exchange which takes place between writer and arbiter, an exchange which results in writers becoming complicit with the imperialism they denounce. Furthermore, only those Commonwealth writers who succeed in having their work published in the UK, in English and for the first time in the year of the prize are eligible to enter the Booker which must exclude a wide range of authors. In practice, as my research has shown, many of those shortlisted Commonwealth authors are university and/or Oxbridge graduates (Adiga, Desai, Martel, Atwood, Coetzee, Ondaatje, Okri, Ishiguro, Rushdie, Jhabvala, Naipaul) which suggests a bias towards Commonwealth writers with a certain social and educational background. It is then possible to view Booker sponsorship as a type of 'symbolic violence' to use the Bourdieusian term. Clearly judging panels do not select winners on the basis of their socio-cultural standing but it appears that access to the competition is limited to a certain sector of Commonwealth writers.

One of the justifications for business sponsorship of literary awards is that it provides much-needed financial support for writers particularly at a time when government funding for the arts is being cut. Unfortunately, these cutbacks are currently coinciding with a recession, national and international, which makes this

form of sponsorship precarious and unreliable, a further justification of Bourdieu's claim that writers should avoid becoming dependent on this type of funding partly because it can change with each successive government, depending on their commitment to the arts, but also because corporate sponsorship of the arts 'has nothing to do with the love of art'. This is borne out by the fact that sponsors frequently withdraw from sponsorship arrangements largely on economic grounds. An example of this occurred in 2000 when Booker plc merged with the frozen food company, Iceland. The latter refused to continue sponsorship of the Booker prize as it saw 'no commercial benefit' from the required investment of £300,000 annually to sponsor the prize (Hull and Tuck, *The Telegraph Online*, 2001). Sponsorship of the prize was taken over by the Man Group, one of the world's largest independent alternative investment managers. It was noted that for a relatively small investment they 'attached their name to the Booker Prize and achieved newspaper coverage beyond their wildest fantasies' thus bringing the prize into a new age of 'cultural entrepreneurship' (McCrum, *The Guardian Online*, 2002).

In this context it is also worth noting that the 1980s witnessed a proliferation of business-sponsored prizes a reflection of the commercial thrust of the Thatcher era. It is this uneasy alliance between commerce and culture which, Bourdieu would maintain, results in a devaluation of the literary prize. Many of these awards have since disappeared due to economic pressures and perhaps the fading 'fashionability' for commercial organizations of the literary prize. There is an element of monopoly in the business-sponsored prize 'market' in which the major players – Costa, Orange and, especially, Booker – dominate the acquisition of commercially purchased 'symbolic prestige' to the point where it is not possible for other businesses to enter the market or compete.

Given the established power and prestige of the Booker prize one has to ask what effect it has exerted on literary fiction and the wider literary culture. All of the promotional material associated with the Prize capitalises on its claim to reward serious literary fiction which would suggest that it is concerned solely with literature produced in what Bourdieu would call the ‘restricted’ field. In 1989 Martyn Goff, in his Introduction to *Prize Writing*, notes that the difficulty in choosing ‘the best novel of the year’ varies from one set of judges to the next and that ‘this has led *unconsciously* (my italics) to the slight seesaw effect in the annual choice: Coetzee followed by Brookner followed by Kingsley Amis’ (17) thereby suggesting that there are many factors that influence the judging and that ultimately the Booker does not always choose the best novel per se but the one that the judges manage to agree on. Richard Todd claims that there has been a shift in the nature of contemporary literary fiction and observes that the Booker is in part at least responsible for the formation of ‘a kind of commercial canon’ (Todd, 1996: 71). In Bourdieusian terms this would suggest a shift away from the restricted pole of the literary field towards the commercial pole. The sponsors continue to promote the prestige of the prize in order to secure symbolic profits ‘by avoiding the crudest forms of mercantilism and by abstaining from fully revealing their self-interested goals’ (Bourdieu, 2011 (1996): 142). Norris contends that this alternation between the literary and the commercial is less evident in recent years however my research of all Booker winners from 1969 to 2011 would confirm Goff’s view that Booker winners are split ‘with some sort of rough justice’ (17) between the literary and the commercial.

Furthermore, this trend has contributed to the production of the ‘bestselling literary novel’ and, while Bourdieu viewed this blurring of boundaries as ‘the worst threat to the autonomy of cultural production’ (347), it comes as an inevitable

consequence of a number of developments in the world of literary production. These include the growing importance of Cultural and Postcolonial Studies in the academy; the acquisition of smaller publishing houses by multinational communications corporations; an aggressive approach to marketing and selling books, and the growth of large bookstore chains (Todd, 1996).

The literary book prize is a symbol of the cultural paradoxes which have come to govern every aspect of contemporary life. The Booker Prize is explicitly intended to reward 'literary' as opposed to 'popular' fiction; yet the category of literary fiction has, in the years since the prize was introduced, arguably become more conservative. Very little formal innovation has taken place within it in recent years which would suggest that the 'prizeification' of literary fiction has contributed to a restriction and tightening of the formal boundaries circumscribing contemporary fiction writing.

The blurring of boundaries between literary and more commercial fiction may have implications for the commercial sponsor whose main purpose in the arrangement is their association with serious fiction and the high symbolic profits this association yields. Despite frequent criticism from literary journalists (McCrum et al) the Booker Prize organisers continue to promote the prize in aggressively positive terms – the website headline promises 'fiction at its finest' – yet uses language which conflates art and commerce. This conflation of art and commerce is a classic example of Bourdieu's notion of 'misrecognition' or the act of deliberately concealing one's true motives. In 1989 the organisers promoted the Prize in the following way:

The Booker Prize for fiction has become the ultimate accolade for artistic endeavour of any sort in Britain. The Booker is *it*; the glory,

the television coverage, the leap in sales and of course the £15,000 in prize money.

The following entry in the organisation's website raises, without a trace of irony, the profile of the Prize while reinforcing its fashionably environmental credentials:

...the judges of the 2011 Man Booker Prize for Fiction travelled to Hainault Forest, an ancient hunting forest on the edge of London, to plant saplings. This is the fourth year that the Man Booker Prize has collaborated with The Woodland Trust, in a symbolic gesture to compensate for the trees felled in order to produce the hundred-plus books submitted for the prize each year.

Furthermore, a promotional announcement in 2008 read:

For four decades the prize has been seen as the pinnacle of achievement in literary fiction... It's one of the world's most significant and prestigious literary prizes.

Many of its high-profile judges can be persuaded to endorse the product, such as this offering from Sir Peter Stothard:

It is a great honour and a challenge to chair the Man Booker judges. I have admired the prize for all my editing and writing life – and look forward hugely to a year as a reader and critic with its great tradition.

Assuming, according to Bourdieu, the influence of market forces can have such a destructive effect on the writer and on literature one might expect writers to be openly critical of business sponsorship. When questioned, most contemporary novelists would admit to writing to satisfy their creative impulses, to communicate with a reading public and hopefully to sell their novels, as sales offer both an income and confirmation of an appreciative audience. While Bourdieu may have concerns about the demise or corruption of the literary field this concern does not seem to be shared by the writing community as a whole which appears largely to embrace the prize culture despite its failings and drawbacks. Winning writers' acceptance

speeches usually observe the unwritten etiquette of such occasions as they thank the judges and sponsor, refer to the honour and prestige of winning yet rarely mention the financial reward.⁵³ However there are some writers who respond to the ‘symbolic violence’ with their own form of symbolic struggle as outlined in the next section.

7.8 Prizes and Protest

The rhetoric of disdain evident in journals and the media is variously aimed at the shortlisted writers, for their lack of literary merit, or at the hapless judging panel, for their incompetence or perceived lack of authority in identifying true literary worth. There is a perception that the judges selected for the Man Booker panel, for instance, are better known for their celebrity status than their ability to judge literary merit. Many questioned Stella Rimington’s appointment as chair of the judging panel in 2011 and Nigella Lawson’s appearance on the panel in 1998 may well have caused consternation in literary and academic circles. However, my survey of judging panels reveals that, with the above exceptions, all judges are experienced and respected writers, academics and literary journalists. Interestingly, publishers and sponsors are rarely targets of journalistic vitriol precisely because they are firmly positioned at the money-spinning end of the bargain and are simply conforming to behaviours expected within any business transaction: it goes without saying that publishers will expect to reap lucrative rewards if one of their writers takes the prize. The sales generated by the staging of awards ceremonies can be considerable and the Booker formula is particularly effective in stimulating the market with its clever

⁵³ A.S. Byatt famously declared that she would spend her winnings on a swimming pool for her home in France.

commercial tactics of first releasing a long list, then a short list followed by the practice of withholding the name of the winning author until the evening of the award ceremony. In the past, the notion of diluting cultural capital with economic, social or political capital would have prompted an outcry from the cultural gatekeepers, and sponsorship from large corporations would be treated with suspicion. These days however large corporate sponsors, conscious of publishers' desire for profit and also of writers' desire for prestige and, indeed, need of financial support, have become major players in the cultural drama in which they have little to lose and much to gain in the form of cultural prestige, praise and goodwill.

Writers, on the other hand, attract greater criticism as they are expected to operate in a more esoteric domain and their association with the business world leaves them vulnerable to accusation within a discourse which is locked into the belief that art and money should never mix. However great art has always been dependent on the patrons of the day without whom many great works would never have achieved the recognition they deserved. Commerce has always played an important role but the highly mediatised literary prize, with its tendency to conflate art with business, could have a deleterious effect on literary output. Literature, if defined as an expression of the human spirit which exerts an important moral influence on society and acts as a medium for the debate and dissemination of important ideas, could be under threat if both literature and the evaluation of literature are dominated by a business ethic. Poverty and literature have long gone hand in hand and the number of significant authors whose lives were marked by financial difficulty 'contradicts any comfortable assumptions of a link between artistic merit and economic reward, assumptions that great art must inevitably lead to great fortunes' (Holgate and Wilson-Fletcher, 1998: xiii). It is hardly surprising

therefore that the contemporary writer will be eager to compete for the many prizes on offer, particularly for a prize like the Booker whose value (£50,000) is worth more than twice the national average wage, despite theorists' condemnatory attitudes.

When a writer agrees to enter the prize game they must expect to become media targets. Media commentary relates to their creative work but also to their persona, may be either positive or negative, and too frequently focuses on gaffes, faux-pas and embarrassments. Without scandalous behaviour there would be little for the media to comment on, little gossip with which to titillate 'the general reader' (Todd, 1996: 3). Scandalous reportage concerning writers' behaviour is combined with the rhetoric of disdain in relation to the prize, the shortlists, the judges and the state of the English novel. However, there does seem to have been a shift in emphasis or tone in recent years where reporting is more ironic and more concerned with 'mock-scandal' (English, 2002: 113) resulting in a rather ambiguous situation whereby the prize is both ridiculed yet increasingly hailed as an acceptable form of cultural legitimation. It would appear that cultural prizes persist and proliferate, despite criticism, and there seems to be an acceptance that these prizes have become a legitimate part of cultural life. Thus, book reviewers, book covers and publishers will always refer to the number of prizes won when recommending a book to the public; often the (less informed) reading public appreciate being told what they should be reading so they can enjoy giving the appearance of being discerning readers; book groups frequently select prizewinning titles as their book of the month, and booksellers will exploit the prize as a means of promoting books. It is evident that the awards business exists 'to reward sponsors, to pacify egos, to generate sales and to puff reputations' (Hitchens, 1993: 20), and while such practices are

commonplace in the world of sales and advertising it can cause unease in the world of letters as it contributes to the creation of a false, non-legitimate hierarchy.

Scandalous incidents, reported with relish in the dailies and literary press alike, and in a manner designed to ignite the imagination of the book-reading public (perhaps more effectively than the literary creations on offer), are a staple feature of the prize culture and contribute greatly to its popularity and enjoyment.

Unfortunately, it is precisely this kind of publicity which can compromise a writer as it appears to undermine their literary worth. Buying into the prize culture exposes the writer to ridicule and degradation despite English's claims that in the 1980s even to be shortlisted for the Booker 'was a distinction of greater value – symbolic as well as monetary – than any other prize could muster' (2002:115). It is not entirely clear where this 'symbolic' value springs from and why this should matter to the serious writer yet English further claims that the Booker reaps its authority 'from its status as a kind of cultural embarrassment' (194) making it all the more surprising that writers would agree to engage in the process. Thirty years on, the monetary value of the Booker is now £50,000, accompanied by significant profits guaranteed from huge sales, plus a contribution from the publisher to pay for promotion expenses.

However, this increase in the value of the monetary reward appears to be in direct proportion to the ever more scornful commentary in the press. Commenting on the mediocrity of the judges' choices in 2011, Robert McCrum, literary editor for the Observer, referred to the literary offerings as 'flat-pack fiction' (implying that writers will cynically ignore the intelligence and interests of their reading public and produce the kind of fiction that they believe will appeal to the Booker judges) thus denigrating both writer and judge in one fell swoop (2011:42).

This form of 'journalistic capital' may help to generate sales and contribute to literary celebrity but it does not confer cultural prestige. Journalistic 'prize-bashing' does little to enhance the image of the cultural prize and, by association, serves only to diminish the role and integrity of the contemporary writer. By agreeing to engage in literary competition writers are automatically exposed to criticism and ridicule and in the process risk devaluing their own symbolic capital. Debate and discussion are essential to the process of defining what makes great literature; without a degree of engagement and exchange in the public arena it would be impossible to come to a true understanding of which works are deserving of consecration. Clearly, the Booker cannot always be relied upon to get this right every time and in its forty-four year history it has promoted and rewarded works which provoked a negative critical response (James Kelman's *How Late it was How Late*; Keri Hulme's *Bone People*) and many other novels which have since descended into obscurity (Moseley, 2003). However, there are examples of good literature which have endured and stood the test of time, notably, *In a Free State*, *Rites of Passage*, *Midnight's Children*, *Oscar and Lucinda*, *The God of Small Things*, *Life of Pi*, *Disgrace*, all of which came to the attention of the reading public largely through the prize system. Would they have succeeded without the assistance of the Booker? Would literature be impoverished in their absence? It is impossible to provide answers to such questions. However, the problem with the system of consecration through prizewinning is that there is too often a confusion between celebrity and canonicity. Furthermore, the literary game, the pantomime surrounding the culture prize, leaves both reader and writer suspended between sincerity and irony, belief and doubt, animosity and sympathy, an ambiguity which once again inevitably has the effect of eroding the value of the prize and the prizewinning work.

Perhaps the greatest benefit the prize system offers the writer is the opportunity to express disapproval, dissent or protest. Though there are many memorable examples of writer revolt it is surprising that such a response is not a more frequent occurrence. What has happened to the artist as rebel? Has media attention and corporate patronage eroded artistic integrity and transformed the writer into a conforming puppet? Why do writers embrace this form of recognition especially as the prize money received represents the tiniest fraction of profits reaped by the sponsoring organisation?

Occasions when writers publicly express their dissatisfaction with the prize culture, or use the very public awards platform to challenge injustice or champion an important cause, are all too infrequent, though perhaps strikingly memorable as a consequence. Awards ceremonies are 'rituals of symbolic exchange' (English, 2002: 119) in which the various participants acknowledge, accept and then exploit the rules of engagement. A writer who chooses to flout these rules risks alienation not only from the awarding body but also their fellow writers and, to a lesser extent, their faithful audience. In order for such protest to be meaningful, and thereby guarantee the refusenik a measure of respect within the literary community, the protestor must be secure in their own authority and integrity otherwise they risk being labelled merely difficult or eccentric, and are also unlikely to be invited back to play again.

Some notable examples of refusals highlight the dangers of adopting such a risky strategy. Sartre's refusal of the Nobel Prize in 1964, for instance, caused consternation for the Swedish academy and in the cultural world as a whole. Having already refused membership of the Légion d'Honneur and entry into the esteemed Collège de France, acceptance of the Nobel would have run counter to Sartre's belief that 'a writer should not allow himself to be turned into an institution' and that

meaningful exchanges could only occur between ‘people and culture’ without the intervention of institutions (Nobel Prize website). Having refused all other awards, Soviet as well as Western, he could not, either morally or ideologically, allow himself to accept the Nobel. Although shocking, Sartre’s general refusal to accept any award softened the blow for the Swedish Academy. By refusing the symbolic capital proffered by the Swedish Academy, and in keeping with his own philosophy and the prevailing view of art at the time, he succeeded in augmenting his own literary prestige. His actions however quite possibly compromised both the Academy and the prestige of the Nobel Prize.

While Sartre invoked lofty philosophical ideals to explain his refusal of what might be considered the most prestigious prize on offer, the Austrian writer Thomas Bernhard expressed his contempt for the prize culture in less exalted terms in his memoir *Meine Preise*. The memoir, a reflection of the years from 1964 to 1970, was written in 1980 and published in 1989, the year of his death, yet only appeared in translation in 2010. It shares the themes of his novel/quasi-memoir *Wittgenstein’s Nephew: A Friendship*, which also expresses his contempt for the cultural establishment. His claim that ‘receiving a prize is nothing other than having one’s head pissed upon’ and that ‘honour is a perversion, in the entire world there is no honour’ (Bernhard, 1986: 78) echoing Flaubert’s ‘Honours dishonour; titles degrade’. On account of his refusal to accept prizes, English (2002) seeks to dismiss Bernhard as ‘a traditional (in the Flaubertian sense), artist-intellectual who finds himself out of place and strategically at a loss in the contemporary field’ (221). In fact Bernhard, a principled literary iconoclast, reveals in his memoir that he accepted prizes purely for the monetary reward and not because he respected the awarding body, and frequently used the prize-giving ceremony as an opportunity to express his

contempt for the prize culture. Thus, the Grillparzer Prize ceremony, full of 'tastelessness and mindlessness' infuriates him as there is only the so-called honour and 'no money attached'. For the Prize of the Cultural Circle of the Federal Association of German Industry he is obliged to visit 'repulsive' Regensburg consoling himself with the prospect of a 'gigantic sum of money' (8,000 DM) as recompense for his discomfiture. In his acceptance speech for the Austrian State Prize for Literature he manages to outrage the minister of culture and other dignitaries when he berates the Austrian nation as apathetic and pitiful and his country as a 'perpetual national prison in which the elements of stupidity and thoughtlessness have become a daily need' (Bernhard, 1986). His moral outrage did not, however, prevent him from accepting the 25,000 Austrian schillings, and many other prizes. Confident in his own literary merit, he is anarchic in his approach and, breaking all the rules of the culture game, he takes the money while calling into question the authority of the self-appointed arbiters of literature. Is this not the most appropriate response for a writer of integrity?

English (2002) notes that refusing a prize can no longer be used as a means of reinforcing one's 'artistic legitimacy' and maintains that the 'scandal of refusal' is a mere publicity stunt, a means of 'leveraging success' (121). He maintains that writers today can no longer retreat to that very restricted cultural field where such games are unknown or unrecognised. In order to be taken seriously, writers must engage with all players in every sector of the field and, rather than opting out, they need to adopt a more tactical approach. Occasionally the veneer of respectability is shattered when a prize-winning author refuses to play their role and, instead of offering effusive words of thanks to the patron, uses the platform for their own political agenda. In 1972 John Berger was awarded the Booker Prize for his

‘scandalous’ experimental novel *G.* (which also won the James Tait Black and *The Guardian* Fiction Prize) and then proceeded to cause further offence by denouncing the Booker corporation as a colonialist enterprise built on the back of black plantation workers in Guyana. He shocked the judges and sponsors by donating half his prize money to the London branch of the militant Black Panther movement on the basis that ‘they resist, both as black people and workers, the further exploitation of the oppressed; and because they have links with the struggle in Guyana, the seat of Booker McConnell’s wealth, the struggle whose aim is to appropriate all such enterprises’ (*The Times*, 1993: vii). In addition to his political objections he also raised concerns about the nature of cultural prizes:

You may like to know ... what [this prize] means to me. The Competitiveness of prizes I find distasteful ... The publication of the shortlist, the deliberately publicised suspense, the speculation of writers, the whole emphasis on winners and losers is false and out of place in the context of literature.

(Booker Prize Archives)

English would maintain that Berger’s outburst represents an outmoded response to the prize culture and that such a stance today would only provoke derision.

Nonetheless, in 2011, John Le Carré requested that his name be removed from the shortlist for the Man Booker International Prize. Worth £60,000, the prize is awarded every two years to a living author who has published fiction either originally in English or whose work is generally available in translation in the English language. There are no submissions from publishers, thus removing the commercial competitiveness typical of so many contemporary prizes, and the winner is chosen solely by a ‘carefully selected’ judging panel of writers and academics. (The members of the panel for the 2013 Man Booker International are Sir Christopher Ricks, Tim Parks, Yiyun Li, Aminatta Forna and Elif Batuman.)

Launched in 2005 the Man Booker International has, as the Booker website proclaims in very non-literary, cliché-ridden business jargon, become a ‘major player’ and has ‘literary excellence’ (the corporate world’s obsession with ‘excellence’ has been a running theme in business literature for the last two decades) as its sole focus, rewarding a single writer’s overall contribution to fiction on the ‘world stage.’ It is interesting to note the fusion of the business and theatrical worlds in the language used to market the prize and, with its tendency to capitalise on the ethos and language of the world of sport, the competition has also been referred to as ‘the Olympics of literature.’ Not content with dominance of the UK and Commonwealth literary arena, Booker is determined to extend its influence globally. A number of critics, (Eakin, 1995; Huggan, 1997) have suggested that despite the Booker’s apparent multicultural stance it has done little to promote postcolonial literature but has encouraged ‘the commerce of an “exotic” commodity catered to the Western literary market’ (Eakin, 1995: 1).

However, in Booker’s defence, the 2007 chair of judges, Elaine Showalter, sought to stress the worthiness of Booker’s international cause: ‘to recognise the work of a great contemporary writer is also to honour the vitality of fiction and its importance to our lives in the twenty-first century.’ The prize per se is devoid of any intrinsic symbolic value but by aligning itself with a ‘great’ author, by persuading an author to accept the monetary reward, Man plc succeeds in accruing a measure of prestige and honour through its association with, and generous recognition of, both literature and the writer. Literary prizes, after all, not only reward the achievements of the writer; they also stake a claim in the right to judge or to legitimise that writer’s work:

The fundamental stake in literary struggles is the monopoly of literary legitimacy... the monopoly of the power to say with authority who are

authorised to call themselves writers; or, to put it another way... the monopoly of the power to consecrate producers or products.

(Bourdieu, 1993: 42)

Previous winners of the Man Booker International Prize – Ismail Kadaré (2005), Chinua Achebe (2007), Alice Munro (2009) and Philip Roth (2011) – are undoubtedly major holders of symbolic capital, writers who are esteemed by the culturally esteemed. Why therefore did Le Carré refuse to join their stellar company? His response was simple yet dignified: ‘I am enormously flattered to be named as a finalist of the Man Booker International Prize 2011. However, I do not compete for prizes and have therefore asked for my name to be withdrawn’ (Man Booker Prize website). Perhaps the key word here is ‘compete’, for, although Le Carré has been awarded relatively few prizes, those which he has received are amongst the most prestigious: the James Tait Memorial Prize (1977); the Crime Writers Dagger of Daggers (2005), and the British Book Awards, TV and Film Book (known as the Nibbies) (2006). Of greatest significance is the fact that these particular awards are honours (with little or no pecuniary value), rather than mere prizes, and constitute a recognition of his important contribution to fiction. In 1977 the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, one of the few prizes aligned with the academically legitimated hierarchy of literary value, commanded enormous respect in the literary world (and continues to do so) with relatively little monetary reward. (Though insubstantial at the outset there are now two prizes each worth £10,000.) Awarded by peers, the Dagger of Daggers is a highly coveted crime fiction award for which the recipient receives a crystal trophy, and no monetary reward. Similarly, the British Book

Awards, or Nibbies, so called because of the golden nib presented to its winners, again recognises literary achievement without offering any form of financial reward.

Given his huge commercial success, Le Carré perhaps has little need for cash prizes yet he has demonstrated a measure of artistic integrity in distancing himself from the Man International Booker with its concomitant media hype and its obvious associations with competition and commercialism. Leading the life of a recluse in Cornwall Le Carré has disassociated himself from the controversial world of literary prizes. Although officially expressing their deep disappointment at Le Carré's refusal to engage in the prize game, Man plc insisted on keeping his name on the shortlist and no doubt continued to revel in the media attention and publicity surrounding the refusal, however negative, which feeds the Booker publicity machine. Contenders for the Man Booker International in 2011 included Philip Roth (who won), David Malouf, James Kelman, Philip Pullman and Ann Tyler all of whom appeared perfectly content to accept the £60,000 and the media attention that accompanied the prize. This would suggest that the writing community is deeply divided on the subject of prizes with one side denouncing the corruption of culture by commerce and the other embracing, or cynically exploiting, the opportunities it offers. How do these opposing factions reconcile their disparate views? Does the refusal by one writer cast the pall of disrepute on those who accept? Though Le Carré's refusal may have wounded their pride, the collective literary value of the shortlist was sufficient for the Booker International to consolidate its aim to be recognised as the world's most legitimate book prize and one which is recognised in both the academic and the more popular spheres.

Writers could opt to follow in Le Carré's footsteps and avoid the curse of the contemporary writer, a curse which condemns them to chase somewhat indecently

after every available prize, enduring humiliation and degradation in the process.

Writers have talked about ‘celebrity sadism’ and this has been expressed nowhere more poignantly than in Hilary Mantel’s musings on prize-chasing which she refers to as a ‘blood sport’, an activity which has become a necessary evil:

I am a veteran of shortlists. I have served my time in the enclosures where the also-rans cool down after the race, every back turned, the hot crowds sucked away as if by a giant magnet to where the winner basks in the camera-flash.

(Mantel, 2010)

Dealing with the crushing disappointment of failure, and even the unaccustomed giddy heights of success, is something the contemporary writer needs to come to terms with; a new behaviour which never troubled writers of the past has now become an essential component of the writer’s toolkit for survival. Though most writers would rather avoid the prize circus, Mantel claims that it has become even more important now because, as prizes have proliferated and increased, advances and royalties have fallen, and the income that a prize offers cannot be ignored. Prizes attract media attention and however much the writer-recluse might find this objectionable it would appear to be an essential strategy for selling books. Prizes also generate sales, providing income for the writer and a stimulus to book trade generally.

The proliferation of prizes means that relatively more writers may succeed in achieving the distinction of one literary prize or another. This would imply an increasing democratisation rather than exclusivity, and if the majority of prizes are awarded to the deserving then the prize culture may help many struggling writers and encourage them to continue to contribute to the literary canon. This apparent democratisation is however challenged by the fact that there appears to be a tendency for prizes to function as a mark of eligibility for other prizes, resulting in a small

number of writers garnering the majority of prizes in a ‘winner takes all’ syndrome. The British Council’s website featuring Contemporary Writers shows that Seamus Heaney received 23 awards, including the Nobel; Carol Ann Duffy boasts 20 awards, including an OBE and a CBE; Salman Rushdie holds no fewer than 30 awards; Simon Armitage has achieved 18; Ian McEwan has 23, and A.S. Byatt has 11 to her name. If the most prestigious prizes are continually awarded to the same high-profile literary figures then there is little opportunity for the unknown writer to be discovered, resulting in a loss to literature. (There is, of course, no way of measuring this apparent loss.) Opting out of the game, it appears, is not an option for Mantel and many others like her; in over forty years of the Booker, out of 240 shortlisted writers only one, John Berger, has denounced the prize on moral grounds. Salman Rushdie denounced the Booker and its judges but, as John Sutherland noted in 1999, it is not a sensible strategy to attack this ‘well-established London literary community’ and further that pouring scorn on this established elite is ‘not a good game plan if you want to win the Booker’ (Moss, *The Guardian Online*, 2001). In a justification of her position Mantel carefully distinguishes between the ‘writer’, who judges the work by internal standards, and the ‘author’ or professional who lives in the practical world of bills and mortgages and for whom writing is a business which commands a level of financial recompense.

Given Mantel’s defense of the prize, the refusal to compete is still all the more extraordinary for its rarity. Alice Oswald’s decision to withdraw from the shortlist of the prestigious T.S. Eliot Prize in 2011 challenged the poetry community and caused dismay amongst the prize’s administrators in the Poetry Book Society. Oswald’s objections focused on the current sponsor of the Eliot, Aurum Funds, an investment firm specializing in the management of hedge funds. Her claim that

‘poetry should be questioning not endorsing such institutions’ (Flood, 2011) has cast her in the role of the true (romantic?) poet who challenges the norms. Unfortunately, this stance casts a long shadow across the previously highly revered and prestigious Eliot Prize. (Aurum is not the only financial institution sponsoring literary awards. The Booker is of course sponsored by Man plc, an investment management business, and the Sunday Times Short Story award receives backing from EFG Private Bank.) Oswald’s withdrawal was swiftly backed by John Kinsella who also withdrew, insisting that his ‘politics and ethics’ forbade him from profiting from such a questionable source (Kinsella, 2011). Citing ‘linguistic disobedience’ as his *modus operandi*, he passionately espouses the belief, despite Auden’s pronouncements on the subject that ‘poetry makes nothing happen’, that poetry can in fact bring about ‘positive social, ethical and political change.’ Oswald’s and Kinsella’s moral stance and their belief in the power of poetry as protest raised their profile in the media and also raised a number of questions within the writing community about the ethics of accepting prizes regardless of their origins, leaving fellow nominees – John Burnside (who took the prize), Carol Ann Duffy, Sean O’Brien and David Harsent – writhing on the horns of a poetical and ethical dilemma.

The Poetry Book Society, eager to defend their three-year sponsorship arrangements with Aurum, blamed the Arts Council whose decision to withdraw funding from the PBS forced the Society to seek support elsewhere. They were also keen to point out that the prize money is provided from the late poet’s estate, with £15,000 going to the winner and £11,000 for runners up, while Aurum’s support is earmarked for management costs. Leaping to the Poetry Book Society’s defense, the chair of judges for 2011, Gillian Clarke, justified the prize on the basis of its prestigious origins, the lamentable cuts in Arts funding which necessitated the

appointment of Aurum as sponsor, and the great need to maintain prizes particularly for poets: ‘prizes are society’s way to thank poets for the words they write.’

However, her contention that ‘the prize cleans the money’ is both naive and morally questionable (Clarke, *The Guardian Online*, 2011).

7.9 Conclusions

The inconvenient truth is that literary prizes are in danger of becoming, and in some cases have already become, a sub-genre of celebrity culture, an ignoble display of author gossip.

(Robert McCrum. *The Guardian Online*, 2012)

It is clear that the writing community and literary commentators are conflicted about the influence of literary prizes and the effect they exert on writers, readers and literature. Prizes offer much needed financial support, and to some degree, literary acclaim, if writers are prepared to accept validation within the contemporary prize culture. The most problematic elements for the writer, in terms of both ethics and aesthetics, are the sponsors of prizes and the intrusive and controlling impact of the media. Unfortunately writers have always had to depend on external powers and sources to fund and disseminate their works. In the current literary sphere there are many opportunities, temptations and pitfalls and the writer must decide which route to pursue in the interests of promoting their work. Success for the contemporary writer (and perhaps it was ever thus?) lies not only in achieving literary excellence and originality, but also in exercising control over the machinations of the media; this is what will determine how their work is received in their lifetime and possibly for posterity. Confronting the media machine in the twenty-first century is a daunting task.

Chapter 8 - The Writer in the Blogosphere

8.1 Introduction

The first decade of the twenty-first century witnessed a rapid broadening of the ways in which people engage online with individual blogs, websites and a range of media. This development has variously been defined in terms of engagement with social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2009), social production (Benkler, 2006) and mass collaboration (Tapscott and William, 2006). A distinctive feature of this new era in engagement with social media is that users are no longer merely consumers, as in the previous century, but have been transformed into ‘creators’ or ‘prosumers’ (Ugille and Raeymaeckers, 2008) who exploit the many technological aids which contribute to and enhance content creation.

A ‘blog’, a contraction of the words ‘web log’ (‘web’ referring to the World Wide Web) is a discussion or informational site published on the World Wide Web and consisting of discrete entries (‘posts’) usually displayed in reverse chronological order. The term entered the language in the late 1990s (Online Etymology Dictionary) and the growing popularity of blogs in the late twentieth century coincided with the advent of web publishing tools that facilitated the posting of content by non-technical users. Originally blogs were the work of single authors but in recent years the ‘multi-author blog’ or MAB has developed, with posts written by large numbers of authors. The majority of blogs are interactive, allowing visitors to leave comments, and it is this very interactivity that distinguishes them from static websites. In this sense blogging can be viewed as a form of social networking, allowing bloggers to develop social relationships with readers and other bloggers. On

14 January 2012, Matthew Hurst noted that there were over 182 million public blogs (Hurst, smartdatacollective.com, 2012).

According to the Oxford English Dictionary the shortened word 'blog' was coined on 23 May 1999 and references the 'Jargon Scout' article in an issue of the online magazine *Tasty Bits from the Technology Front*. The magazine attributes the shortening of the term to Peter Merholz who posted that, 'For what it's worth: I've decided to pronounce the word 'weblog' as 'wee-blog' or 'blog' for short.' Merholz was simply playing with the language and liked the coinage for its onomatopoeic suggestion of vomiting as '[T]hese sites (mine included!) tend to be a kind of information upchucking' (Merholz, peterme.com, 2002). The term also conjures associations with Joe Bloggs, thereby suggesting that it is an activity open to everyone and anyone, and indeed with the word 'blag', implying the use of clever, or slightly dishonest, language.

Despite fears, doubts and scepticism, the Internet has become host to a range of technologies which facilitate social networking, blogging, the creation and dissemination of news and literature, and the general sharing of information through both visual and verbal means. There is much to celebrate in this new technological sphere particularly its democratic potential but also the marketing and commercial opportunities it offers writers and the freedoms associated with this mode of expression. The Internet facilitates interaction between writers, readers and publishers, and provides opportunities for networking, promotion, participation in creative projects and more widespread peer support. Within the literary sphere the literary website or blog may function in much the same way as the 18th century salon in that it provides a space where writers, readers and literary commentators may express their views and debate matters of literary and public importance. Such

groupings of writers and an attention to literary concerns might suggest a kind of e-coterie or e-salon, yet both terms, perhaps viewed pejoratively or seen to be outmoded, are firmly rejected by both Latta and Wheatley. Latta claims to make 'minimal contacts' with other writers and maintains 'uncertain (to negligible) interest in possibilities of coterie' (Aherne, Questionnaire, 2012).

On the other hand, the unpredictable, unregulated, shifting and often experimental nature of the Internet can create a sense of instability, ephemerality and unreliability, factors which make it difficult for users to establish a stable and trustworthy ground for serious literary debate and the creation of literary worth. It seems, as O'Hara and Stevens (2006) noted, that there is no longer a 'solid base upon which to stand' (xi). Furthermore, the democratic claims for this potential mode of literary expression have also been challenged in numerous studies. Access to the necessary technology is problematic for (and sometimes denied to those living in areas without broadband access) certain sectors of the population both in the U.K. and worldwide, especially in developing countries (Norris, 2001; Van Dijk, 2005). Participation in cultural or literary websites is limited when compared with journalism or entertainment websites (Norris, 2001: 224). A further cause for concern for both writers and readers is the level of Internet surveillance and the extent to which this compromises privacy and freedom of speech. Writers and readers will be justifiably concerned about how data collected from sites is used and will continue to be used in the future. The intrusion of the market and the increasing commercialisation of the Internet conflicts with the democratic and creative aspects of Internet use. However these concerns affect every aspect of our daily life and literary opportunities in cyberspace are generally to be celebrated and embraced rather than shunned.

8.2 The Blog as Literary Platform

The turn of the century witnessed a number of developments including the writer's website, the writer's blog and, of more commercial significance, new opportunities for online publication. While the World Wide Web is largely dominated by commercial and entertainment applications, a number of influential forms of literary and critical writing have emerged over the last decade. E-publishing has allowed authors to produce online versions of novels, and short story and poetry collections. A number of anthology sites publish short fiction, poems and sometimes serialised pieces from longer works. *Rainy City Stories: A Writer's Map of Manchester*, established in 2009, not only publishes short stories and poems but is also an interactive literary cityscape which allows the reader to click on a location in the map of Manchester to read a story or poem set there. Contributions to the website are from both new and established authors. *Writing.com*, established in 2000, is an online community for writers of all interests and skill levels which provides a creative environment for authors including writing tools and opportunities for creativity and inspiration. In addition, it showcases writers' work and offers critical feedback. A significant feature of the web is its capacity for multiplicity and hybridisation.

In her research into participative journalism, Ulla Rannikko (2010) refers to 'the hybridisation of journalism' and the 'multiplicities of places' which enrich the experience of online writing (13). The ease and speed with which writers and readers can connect and communicate with each other bring a freshness and immediacy to the writing and the writer-reader relationship. Rannikko also refers to the dissolving boundaries between journalism and entertainment, a development

which is also apparent in the online literary world where the purely literary rubs shoulders with more popular forms of writing. Writer websites and blogs shift endlessly between reflection, memoir, biography, debate, literary critique and literary expression. The medium, although fraught with problems, allows for a liberating mode of expression which writers in the past – Shakespeare, Donne, Marvell, Sterne, Austen, Dickens – would have appreciated and exploited to the full. I would also suggest that the virtual nature of the Internet combined with its combination of accessibility and anonymity would have encouraged more women writers in the past to launch their work into the public sphere.

The accessibility of the Internet poses a challenge for the contemporary writer as it opens the floodgates for readers, or the ‘former audience’ (Gillmor, 2006: 136), to become writers themselves in a very public manner. Opportunities for participation in the new media pose challenges therefore for the traditional gatekeepers. An outcome of the accessibility of the online world is that alternative sources of writing and literary activity, both mediated and original, are readily available to everyone. The proliferation, overabundance and free availability of this work could result in the devaluation of all online writing.

Many early studies of the internet addressed a range of subject areas including psychology, sociology, linguistic or communication studies (Ebo, 1998; Ess, 1996; Kiesler, 1997, Porter, 1997) yet failed to acknowledge the importance of personal web pages. However, in the last ten years there has been increased theoretical discourse linking blog writing with political influence (Farrell and Drezner, 2008), interactivity (Sorapure, 2003), feminism and post-coloniality (Gajjala, 2001), biography (Zuern, 2003) and journal/diary writing (McNeill, 2003). The study of weblogs is a growing area of academic research and this chapter will

document the diverse theoretical and empirical literature available on the topic with specific reference to the literary or writer's blog. I will present an analysis of some of the more well-established literary blogs in terms of structure and content, and will examine the purpose and value of this form of self-realisation for the contemporary writer.

The most common forms of online writing are the personal blog and participation or, so-called, 'citizen journalism.' The latter has been the subject of a considerable amount of academic research (Bowman and Willis, 2003; Allan and Thorsen, 2009; Tremayne, 2007). Bypassing traditional media, this form of journalism has led to more egalitarian networks which enable individuals to exchange a range of different types of information. Novice and established writers are free to use online platforms to showcase and promote their work in order to challenge 'the symbolic power in media institutions' (Couldry, 2002: 25), thereby gaining control over the tools of publishing and distribution. The Internet provides opportunities for those who feel their work has been ignored or undervalued by the traditional publishing world.

Given the diverse and fragmented nature of the Internet it would be impossible to address all forms of online writing. This chapter will therefore focus on those aspects which are most relevant to this thesis, namely, the writer's website/weblog both as a means of literary expression and because of the opportunities it offers for engagement in the cyber public sphere. While there has been significant academic research into personal blogs (e.g. Couldry, 2010; Lovink, 2008; Tremayne, 2007) the subject of writers' blogs has received little attention. With the exception of Rannikko's recent study on participatory journalism, cyberspace scholars have not ventured very far into the realm of Web-based literary

writing. In France, Pierre Assouline's *République des livres*, examines the influence of the writer and the literary blog as a means of shaping literary taste and a vehicle for legitimating certain works of literature. Already a respected literary commentator, Assouline had little difficulty in establishing an online presence in a medium which has garnered huge popularity and he has done little more than transfer his print persona at *Le Monde* to his online blog. His chief objective, as with all literary commentators, is to use whatever media are available to extend his range of influence. This could be compared with the online presences of literary editors and critics in the U.K. such as Robert McCrum, Boyd Tonkin, Claire Armistead and Erica Wagner.

A further French study was conducted by Philippe Lejeune whose book '*Cher écran...*' charts his month-long immersion in the world of French-language online diaries and which explores the influence of the medium as a writing technology. Lejeune poses an interesting question: 'notre moi, notre intimité ne sont-ils pas façonnés par les moyens d'expression et de communication ?' (our sense of self, our inner life – are they not shaped by the means of expression and communication ?) The blog therefore demonstrates that the technology of writing and publishing can influence the construction and representation of literary and autobiographical works. Comparing the literary blog with its print counterparts reveals that the online form can reinvigorate the diary genre, and perhaps literature in general, in significant ways through innovations in style and form, content and expression and the transformation of the writer/reader interface. Drawing my examples from respected and established literary blogs, I will explore some of the ways that literature finds new incarnations on the Web.

The importance of the Internet as a facet of, or perhaps an alternative to, the public sphere is undeniable and this has been welcomed and embraced by a number of media scholars (Villareal Ford and Gil, 2001). They note that the Internet offers the chance ‘to communicate ... with an international audience of millions’ and further that ‘the possibilities for the internet as a public sphere are unlimited’ (202).

8.3 Blogs and Blogging

The online journal, weblog or blog, has provoked numerous negative responses from critics and academics who view such online ramblings as semi-literate and often objectionable displays of narcissism and exhibitionism. In the context of online discourse, the self-publicising nature of the personal blog is frequently viewed with suspicion and distaste (McNeill, 2003):

Something about the ... blog makes me distinctly uncomfortable. After several hours of reading these journals I often feel sick ... [I]’ve learned too much I didn’t need to know about too many people’s everyday lives – lives without anything particularly extraordinary to recommend them except the diarist’s own sense of importance and relevance.

In 2012, Peter Stothard, Chair of the Booker Prize, warned that blogging was ‘drowning out serious criticism, to the detriment of literature’ (Flood, *The Guardian* online, 2012). His pessimism was countered however by Guardian Books blogger, Sam Jordisan, who argued that ‘one of the best places to find out what’s new and good is on blogs’ (Jordisan, *The Guardian* online, 2012).

Given the vast number of weblogs on the internet there is a growing demand for sites which act as directories and others which provide an evaluation of different types of blog, highlighting either particularly objectionable sites (e.g. <http://www.worstoftheweb.com>) or promoting exceptional and influential examples such

as *The Guardian's* guide to the most influential blogs or listings for the top UK literary blogs. About.com lists some of the more influential sites including *The Complete Review*, *Savidge Reads*, *Booklust*, *Bookslut*, *Buzz Girl*, *Conversational Reading*, *The Elegant Variation*, *Galleycat*, *Grumpy Old Bookman*, *The Literary Saloon*, *Maud Newton*, *The Millions*, *Moorish Girl*, *Rake's Progress*, *The Reading Experience* and *Waterboro Library Blog*. Referring to the advocates, on the other hand, of personal home pages, or blogs, Nicola Döring discovers claims of the 'emancipatory and self-reflexive potential' (Döring, 2002: 1) of many blogs and records the lofty claims of one particular webring:

No one's life is insignificant, no matter where they are, what they do, how old they are ... Anyone's experiences can bring something to our lives – thought, perspective, laughs, tears.

(<http://www.hedgehog.net/op/>).

Blogging, like Facebook, cuts across traditional boundaries of race, class, sex, education, and age, and although many blogs may appear idiosyncratic or unprofessional, paradoxically it is precisely such attributes which define the appeal of blogs for individuals and groups. The raw, heartfelt, unbridled outpourings, so typical of the blog offering, are a reminder that our expectations are too often shaped by the slick commercialism of conventional mass media. It is the striking individuality and blatant disregard for what passes for acceptability or respectability of these blogs, and the absence of media hype which enhance their appeal and contribute to the growing belief that they should be hailed as a triumphant symbol of democratic freedom of expression (Blood, 2002).

Web diarists/bloggers, unconstrained by the demands and limitations of the publishing industry, are not obliged to prove the value or marketability of their 'product' (their life, thoughts, reflections, ideas) in order to be 'published' and,

although such ‘publications’ bear the whiff of the vanity press, they nevertheless have the potential to gain access to a sizeable readership. If bloggers believe that their life experiences are of interest to the rest of the world their confidence is not entirely unfounded as many blogs attract the attention of thousands, even tens or hundreds of thousands, of readers. Some fortunate bloggers, who catch the eye of mainstream publishing, even succeed in translating this online popularity and success into a publishing contract (Magnanti, 2005; Blood, 2002; Slim, 2009, amongst many others).

Much of the academic research into online presences concerns itself with the content of weblogs, which can be very diverse (Rosen, 2008), with the motivation of bloggers (Trevino, 2005), or with the structure of blogs (Serfaty, 2004). Academic researchers have also conceived of online diaries and blogs as a space for identity construction and self-presentation (Döring, 2002). In an era when the media constantly control and shape our lives, and broadcast ready-made identities for public consumption, ‘this telling and consuming of autobiographical stories, this announcing, performing and composing of identity becomes a defining condition of postmodernity’ (Smith and Watson, 1996: 7). The specific use of the blogosphere as a creative tool is a challenge to the traditional media and embodies a means of self-presentation for the writer which is both a creative and an autobiographical act.

8.4 The Blog as Diary

But why has this form in particular made the transition from print to online culture so successfully? What does the internet bring to the diary genre, and the diary genre to the internet, that has made this pairing of form and media so felicitous?

(McNeill, 2003:26)

Over the centuries writers have always kept journals and diaries from which an extensive body of literature has arisen such *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*; *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*; *Boswell's Journal*; *Johnson's Diaries, Prayers, Annals*; *The Journal of Fanny Burney*, and more recently, Lewis Carroll, Virginia Woolf, Evelyn Waugh. The writer's impulse to keep a journal no doubt stems from a range of complex and interrelated motives: an urge to impose some kind of order on the disjointed nature of everyday life; the desire to record significant life events for posterity; the need to put thoughts onto the page whether for aesthetic or philosophical purposes, or perhaps a deep-seated urge to 'set the record straight'. Whether confessional, cathartic, therapeutic or literary, the personal journal fulfils the need to make sense of a complex world.

All diaries, whether written by the great and famous or the humble and anonymous are fascinating for the insight they provide in cultural and sociological terms and it is no less fascinating or less meaningful to find the diary genre reinvented and transformed in the twenty-first century into the online blog. The transformation of the 'journal intime' from written diary to online presence is a significant development, typical of the twenty-first century, and one which exerts an impact on the diary as a literary genre. Its online presence, furthermore, marks a shift in the nature of the form from one which was essentially private and monologic to one which reaches out to other writer-bloggers, thereby creating online literary communities, and establishing literary identities in cyberspace. Such modes of expression and creation of literary communities influence and extend the potential for creativity.

The online presence of novelists and poets no doubt delights and fascinates scholars, readers and fans who use the technology as a means of gaining insight into the life of those authors they admire. Writers' blogs are also used in teaching contexts as a means of motivating disengaged students partly through the lure of the technology but also through the more intimate contact afforded by the writer's online life, which is used as a key to understanding their literary output. It is precisely the 'confessional' nature of the diary or blog which attracts readers and fans to these sites: hoping for revelation, scholars and readers sift through the text for clues to the writer's private life and the links between the private person and their literary work.

There are many parallels between the traditional and the online diary or blog. A notable feature is the blog's rootedness in the present and the writer's compulsion to update the blog frequently, often daily. This is a feature it shares with the traditional diary which consists of a series of dated entries, dealing very much with the present moment, as compared with other retrospective autobiographical forms. The regularity of blog entries roots the writing in everyday existence while allowing its author to cut across boundaries of both time and space and make contact with hitherto unreachable, often global, audiences. How can the blog be interpreted as a practice of everyday life? How do temporal structures affect or help to shape the blog entry? How does the blog function 'as a mode of intervention in various social spaces?' (Langford and West, 1999: 9). Because of the software now used by so many bloggers, all blog entries bear the stamp of the date. While some bloggers use the day and the date, and the planned or completed activities of that day, as a means of launching and structuring the entry (as in the case of George Szirtes's blog), often the date has little significance for the blogger or blog entry (as in the case of the Wheatley and Latta blogs). In such examples the blog entry date is only of

significance for scholars in the distant future who will marvel at the wealth of information provided by the blogosphere (should it indeed survive) and will draw parallels between the writers' struggles and preoccupations and the political and cultural spheres, providing glimpses of important historical moments from a multitude of different angles.

Traditionally, the diary is described as a private form of writing, and so the online journal implies a contradiction in terms, perhaps to the point where the online journal must be viewed as a very different form of literary expression. In '*Cher écran...*', an extensive analysis of online diaries, Philippe Lejeune's initial response to online writing was one of suspicion and rejection. While the online journal offers a vast array of possibilities for the writer, the internet environment, is 'totalement opposé ... aux conditions de développement du journal intime, fondé sur une autre conception du temps (le délai, la maturation, l'accumulation) et de la communication (différée ou exclue: le secret)' (totally opposed to the conditions for developing a private diary based on a different idea of time (time lapse, reflection, development) and of communication (disclosure or concealment: secrecy)) (193). The contradictory nature of the genre, private thoughts finding expression through a public medium, can cause confusion for both the reader and the critic: 'as texts that do not fit cleanly into generic categories, they may be misread or dismissed altogether' (McNeill, 2003: 26).

Blog-writing reflects the nature of its own space of production: the format of the printed entry, shaped by the margins of the blogging 'window', unreeling for the length of the writer's thought or desire for self-expression, each entry inscribed one on top of the other, with the oldest entries descending to the bottom of the archive, overlaid by each subsequent entry, creating in effect a kind of palimpsest. The tally

of blog entries to the side of the blog page provides an indication of the age, depth and richness of the archive and although it is possible to revisit these texts, in the way that a diarist might flick aimlessly through a written diary, it is unlikely that the author will do so with any frequency or regularity. The blog rolls on endlessly and sinks into what is essentially a bottomless pit, into the infinite space of the blogosphere, the amount written constrained only by the writer's time and motivation rather than the space allowed. This infinite blogospheric space encourages a broadening of the mind, a creative unreeling of thoughts conducive to philosophical and creative insights. It perhaps also encourages verbosity and a carefree negligence in the area of proofreading and editing. The blog offers the ideal medium for expression of philosophical enquiry, 'to follow a movement so wandering as that of our mind, to penetrate the opaque depths of its innermost folds, to pick out and immobilise the innumerable flutterings that agitate it' (Montaigne, 1999 (1572, 1603): 396). Montaigne observed that it is impossible to keep the mind still or control its restlessness and agitation. In many ways the mind's stream of consciousness is mirrored in the ebb and flow of the online blog.

The public nature of the blog and the fact that it is produced for anyone to read reflect the writer-blogger's need, however vague and undefined, for some form of recognition or acknowledgment. 'I lean hard on the idea of the blog as writing space,' Latta claims, 'its 'public' function being to keep one honest, and dutiful, and with luck, sharp' (Aherne, Questionnaire, 2012). The spatial arrangement of the blog space, with dates, archives, links, biography, gives a surface appearance at least of a very ordered genre, one which is contained, a space in which everything has its designated place. This provides a sense of gaining control over the content of the entries and in a sense superimposing a structure on the disparate and rambling nature

of writing the self. Depending on the blogger's interests it can provide an overview of the flavour of the cultural sphere in the twenty-first century, and, furthermore, provides also momentary insights into or glimpses of the writing life as experienced by those commenting from the margins on the literary 'scene'.

8.5 The Role of the Reader

All diary writers have an imagined reader, even if that reader is the self, or another manifestation of the self. Many print journals were written quite specifically for a reading audience: in particular such public private diarists as Fanny Burney who wrote initially for the sheer joy of writing and in later life for 'posterity'. Anaïs Nin's journals were published while she was still writing, thus exerting an influence on a contemporary audience and provoking a response. Given the immediacy of the online form, bloggers are acutely aware of their audience whose equally immediate responses contribute to and can shape the online diary, making the process both interactive and collaborative, and in the ensuing exchange, helping to create new communities.

Does a blog constitute an invitation to read? Not all writer-bloggers welcome the attention and feedback they receive and deal with it in a minimal way as though the facility represents a rather inconvenient feature of the blogging technology. For such writers the purpose of the blog is not to reach out to like-minded people or to interact with readers but simply to create an online presence (also often maintained through a website and Twitter feed), which for many contemporary writers has become almost obligatory, part of the mandatory public presence all writers are now

expected to maintain. In such cases, it is unlikely that blog content will be shaped or influenced much by reader response.

In the online journal the reader assumes a number of roles: observer, confessor, literary detective and, perhaps most importantly, or most relevant to the media, becomes an interlocutor, a respondent to the writer's 'confessions' and reflections. In a conventional print diary, the writer commits words to the page as a means of catharsis – what Wheatley refers to as 'a venting of pent' (Aherne, Questionnaire, 2012) – for the pleasure of writing, as a means of clarifying emotional states or intellectual dilemmas. The 'dialogue' is between the writer and the page, or the writer and self as projected onto the page or, more abstractly, between writer and some imagined addressee who may only read the diary long after the writer has departed, if at all. In cyberspace, the receiver is very present, often disturbingly or startlingly so, and is only too willing to respond to the writer's semi-rhetorical lines of questioning. Unlike the public interview, live or broadcast, the book signing or the appearance at a literary festival (all discussed in previous chapters), the blog, because of the perceived or projected sense of intimacy holds even greater appeal for the reader. Here in the blog entry are the unreeling words and thoughts of the writer as they sit in the intimate surroundings of their home – perhaps in bed, in their study or at the kitchen table. Paradoxically, despite the very public nature of the medium, the writer succeeds in creating an intimate space affording the reader the sense that they are enjoying a private audience: 'the enchantment of the computer creates for us a public space that also feels very private and intimate' (Murray, 1999: 99). The writer's voice (sometimes literally through audio additions to the blog) and words on the screen are mediated by the thin veil (or what Virginia Woolf referred to as the 'safety curtain' 1940) of the technology; it is not a public broadcast relayed through

the filter of the arts interviewer, it is a more direct discourse in which the writer communicates with ‘friends’ or ‘followers’ within a medium that provides the optimum level of dissemination while preserving the writer’s private space. McNeill likens the encounter to that of the confessional and although writers and their reader-followers may meet, often the rapport is confined to cyberspace, to online existences.

8.6 The Impact of the Technology

The means employed by the writer to express thoughts and feelings has a profound effect on the writer, the writing and the reader. A piece of writing, whether a diary entry, a poem or a scrap of fiction, is both ‘artefact and text’ (Bunkers, 2001:21); it constitutes a process which involves the pen, or the computer, the page, or the screen, the book or the online file, that is, ‘the material traces of a writer in a particular context’ (Sorapure, 2003: 3). Lejeune’s study of online diary writing focussed in the early chapters on an exploration of the material conditions of diary writing and examined how online writers made corrections, reread diary entries, and arrived at decisions about whether to post an entry on the Web or not. Similar writing habits are evident in studies of original print diaries in their handwritten form; the original manuscripts bear the ink stains, scribblings, crossings-out and torn-out pages, all hallmarks of the spontaneous nature of diary writing. While print and online practices share such similarities, the end result is quite different in that the print diary retains the evidence of the author’s revisions but the online diary leaves no trace of previous versions.

In *The Gutenberg Elegies* (1994), Sven Birkerts reflects on and anticipates the negative impact of electronic technologies on our literary culture. Birkerts views

the difference between the written word and the screen text as profound and consequential:

Nearly weightless though it is, the word printed on a page is a thing. The configuration of impulses on a screen is not – it is a manifestation, an indeterminate entity both particle and wave, an ectoplasmic arrival and departure .

(154-155)

While the word on the page is verifiably ‘there’, the text scrolling across the computer screen has potential but not actual locus, a fact, or a perception, which has a significant impact on the writer who experiences a separation from self and text. The reader will respond differently to words presented in different formats, whether etched in marble, printed on a page or projected onto a screen:

The word cut into stone carries the implicit weight of the carver’s intention. It has weight, grandeur – it views with time. The same word, when it appears on the screen, must be received with a sense of its weightlessness.

(Birkerts, 1994: 155)

The words, loaded with the writer’s intentions, are only fully realised through the reader’s perception and interpretation, in which case the mode of transmission must be taken into consideration. What is being questioned here is not only the materiality of the diary but also its permanence, the extent to which it can continue to exist beyond the life of the writer. Despite their tactility or materiality, even print diaries are by no means guaranteed permanence as ‘paper has its own biological rhythm ... it will end up yellowing and crumbling’ (Lejeune, 2000: 110). Furthermore, print diaries are often destroyed, intentionally or unintentionally, by their authors or by others. Online diaries may also be destroyed when removed from the host server but the latest technology is capable, we are told, of preserving everything that has ever been entered onto the internet. Therefore, though seemingly fleeting and ephemeral,

online diaries have the potential to be at least as permanent, if not more so, as print diaries.

An important aspect of the online diary is the range of design opportunities which the writer can exploit. The act of writing for online diarists is not limited to text alone but extends to images, navigation choices, and site structure. Expression is achieved through a range of techniques and media and these choices of self-presentation are evidence of a multi-layered, multi-faceted 'narrative', a creative collage which stands in marked contrast to the linear, two-dimensional nature of the print diary. Segmentation is a common feature of blog pages with separate sections of the screen dedicated to the blog text, biographical information, links, images and reader responses. In addition, these fragments presented by the writer can be reconfigured 'signifying multiple and shifting ways of understanding the self' (Sorapure, 2002: 8). While the print diary may also offer a fragmented view of the writer the complete text is immediately obvious, and is stylistically more unified and linear, the narrative held firmly within the confines of the book covers.

8.7 The Liminality of the Blog

The 'marginal' nature of journals and diaries is explored in Rachael Langford and Russell West's introduction to *Marginal Voices, Marginal Forms* (1999). Often viewed as self-indulgent, unreliable and a 'debased form of literary production' (6) the diary tends to be relegated to the margins of the literary academy. Langford and West defend the diary in its many fascinating guises: an expression of self, an account of everyday life, a historical document, a work of fiction, or any combination of these forms. The personal quality of a diary may draw negative

commentary, casting it as a purely narcissistic form, yet, it can also be viewed as a kind of ‘‘self-constitution’, as Foucault has said of the Classical Greek diary-like *hupomnēmata*, as an essentially auto-poetic activity’ (Langford and West, 1999: 7). Far from languishing in the cultural margins, the diary is found at the intersection of a number of cultural practices and is thus in a position to reveal a great deal about the cultural context.

The online writer’s blog occupies such a position within the cultural sphere. Blogging has become ubiquitous yet, largely for commercial reasons, the position occupied by the individual writer-blogger (as opposed to the blogs written by established media literary critics) is one of marginality. The writer/poet exploits the technology, normally dominated by commercial corporations and the media, not for economic gains but as a means of self-expression and communication with a new and wider audience. It is the very marginality of this practice which makes it all the more challenging and unique and, far from leading to exclusion, positions the contemporary writer at a more challenging and therefore more creative locus:

Margins, after all, are places where distinct domains meet, where crossings from here to there, from sameness to otherness, are constantly being negotiated, and where mutually interdependent definitions of selfhood and alterity are necessarily reformulated again and again.

(Langford and West, 1999: 7)

The extent to which literary blogs are important within contemporary cultural practice can be gauged by the popularity of a number of blogs written by poets and novelists including, *Georgiasam* (David Wheatley), *Baroque in Hackney* (Katy Evans Bush), *Lightbox* (Mark Granier), *George Szirtes*, and *Isola di Rifiuti* (John

Latta). Like other forms of writing these blogs cover a range of topics and differ greatly in tone, style and theme.

George Szirtes's blog, on one level, functions very much as an online diary in which he provides his readers with an account of and a reflection on his daily or weekly activities. A typical post may begin with the announcement that he is to give a poetry course at Arvon. He then provides a description of the course he delivered followed by reflections on whether one can really teach poetry, in this instance, form and poetry. These musings provoke a deviation into the nature of form and why form is important leading to a further interrogation of the arguments he is presenting and their validity. While the blogpost is rooted in the quotidian it expands into reflection, self-questioning, discussion and argument; it is a form which is ideally suited to following a kind of stream of consciousness, chasing up blind alleyways for the sake of it, just to see what they might reveal, an exercise in sophisticated critique and analysis, and even homespun philosophy. The blog returns inevitably to the present moment – the weather, the temperature, birdsong, the naming of birds, Sunday morning jazz – and it is this observation of the real world which lends the writing a kind of structure as the following excerpt reveals:

The first question is whether one can teach anything at all, in the sense of passing on learning and experience. Why not just say to people: *read that?* That is if one's reading is considered to be even faintly comprehensive. I make no comment on that as I have been teaching a long time. The next question is whether the stuff that makes you a poet (the books are there so you must be one, and a few prizes too to suggest some people are willing at times to confirm you in your belief that you are one) – the 'stuff', whatever it is, that makes you a poet, is something you can pass on? And, while on the subject, whether passing it on is what you should be doing for, after all, it might be of little use to someone else, nor do you quite know what it is yourself.

(Szirtes, blogspot, 2012)

John Latta's blog, *Isola di Rifiuti*, by contrast, is far less rooted in the quotidian and reveals little about its author's daily routines and activities. Offering its readers a selection of 'notes, poetics, trouvailles, photographs, malarkey & guff' its content, eclectic and esoteric, includes excerpts from Amelia Rosselli's *Primi Scritti*, reflections on Raymond Queneau's prose, aperçus on a number of admired poets, and Beckettian insights into Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary*. The following is an example of Latta's blogwriting:

Sleeplessness and its hotch-potch of reveries thwarted, bottled up by the foul dirge of onwonted vigilance. Then morning's uncanny blue, sentinel blue. I downed the remaining *Patagoni* in my insomniac stupor. Jonathan Williams quoting Harry Callahan (1912-1999): 'Remember, you push the shutter, don't let the shutter push you.' ... Williams too quotes Goethe in order to admit: 'I continually *quote* because Goethe knew what he was talking about when he said: 'The truth was known already, long ago.'

In Latta's, as in all blogs, the entries are dated giving the illusion at least of some order, some chronological sequence, yet there is little other sense of linear progression and the entries seem to be dictated by the content of the books the author is reading, giving space to little known authors or obscure facts about famous authors. This process of creating a piece of writing through an approach from the edges or 'margins' of literature makes it a striking example of the originality common to many writers' and poets' blogs. Highly subjective, deceptively mundane in its diary format and as a text which is both a complex and innovative literary creation, Latta's blog exemplifies the freshness and ground-breaking nature so typical of the literary blog.

Is it possible to compare the online diaries of Szirtes and Latta with canonical diaries such as those of Pepys, Rousseau or Woolf? The print diary form has been subjected to rigorous examination to determine quality, creativity and literary merit,

and ultimate inclusion in the canon (Wuthenow, 1990). Despite challenges to those very definitions which attempt to exclude ‘non-conforming’ examples of writing, the online diary, or blog, as a very uncertain genre, has yet to enter into the field of academic scrutiny and appraisal. The literary blog’s uncertainty stems from the fact that it cannot easily be categorised; it cannot readily be placed within the sphere of literature or literary criticism; spontaneous response or crafted text, or between autobiography and current affairs. It thereby constantly challenges attempts to define its genre within academic parameters. The blog stands as an uncategorised form of writing, flourishing on the boundaries between popularity and oblivion, sometimes aligning itself with mainstream literary expression, regularly challenging current views of literary excellence and, in its indefinability, is too often dismissed and ignored.

Defying categorisation, the blog nonetheless shares some features with other literary forms. However, its partial affinity with certain literary genres, its hybridity, excludes it from any single form or definition. The contemporary writer in the UK may feel aggrieved at the lack of publishing opportunities within this country and despair of the cliquish nature of many writer-writer and writer-publisher alliances. The blogosphere offers writers a not only a writing space and an immediate publishing tool which can be exploited to their advantage but also an online association with other writers.

8.8 The Blog and the Academic Writer: A Challenge to Gatekeepers

The literary blog challenges traditional definitions of what constitutes a literary work and highlights anomalies within forms normally viewed as immovable

and straightforward. The generic volatility of the blog provides academics with grounds for excluding it from canonical literary categories and the material means of its production provoke further suspicion amongst those who would defend the traditional canon. Nonetheless, the academic world is beginning to show some sign of acceptance of this form of literary expression. Mary Beard's blog, *A don's life*, embodies, in both content and format, the hybrid character of blog writing and prompts a number of pertinent questions regarding the status, function and significance of the contemporary blog as a literary, and potentially, a historical innovation. Interviewed about her blog (Spalding, *The Guardian Online*, 2012) Beard voiced the traditional academic suspicion with which blogging is regarded: 'When I started I thought this was [a] cheap, tawdry, debased form of journalism.' However, it was not long before Beard discovered the joys and complexities of online writing: 'I have come to find that it's a hugely interesting form of journalism.'

How might blogging subvert the norms of writing? To whom is the blog addressed and how does it situate a possible reader? With 40,000 'hits' a day and a global following with visitors to her site in Swaziland, Afghanistan, Benin and Taiwan, Beard does not lack an audience and is continually fascinated by the flexibility of a medium which allows her to 'use the layers of the web to take people to places that would never appear in a broadsheet' (Spalding, *The Guardian Online*, 2012). She found, for instance, that she could provide readers, through links, with the English and Latin texts of the *Res Gestae*: 'You can talk up, not down.'

Though condescendingly labelled a mere 'gossip forum', it is the very irreverent and colloquial tone of the blog which allows the blogger to reinvent that fast-disappearing species: the public intellectual. It would appear that, in its highest form, the blog is the reincarnation of the literary and philosophical essay. Given that

academics have a duty to reinvigorate political and cultural debate, Beard is confident that her online approach provides her with the ideal medium with which to achieve her objectives and notes that, ‘The Greeks and Romans would have loved the world wide web – this speed, this access, this extraordinary reach. Don’t forget it took three months for a letter to cross the Roman Empire.’ Despite the huge audiences and global following, the blog offers, nonetheless, ‘a sort of intimacy’; the implication is that the blog allows its author to connect with a wide-reaching audience which would otherwise be denied them, yet in a manner which maintains a very powerful element of the personal and the informal.

Academic bloggers frequently comment on the appeal of the freedom of expression offered by the blog as they attempt to escape the straitjacket of academic norms. The opportunity for public engagement and the possibility of enhancing reputations has lured hitherto reluctant dons into the blogosphere. The simple act of writing regularly every day helps to clarify thought: ‘I do it to pin my ideas down’ (Corbyn, 2010). Others enter into the blogosphere in order to shed some light on the arcane world of scientific research: ‘I was angry that my profession was so completely invisible to normal (sic) people’ (Corbyn, 2010). While academics receive responses from individuals who share their passion for a particular subject area there seems to be little sense of community amongst UK academics’ blogs reminding us of one scholar’s words of warning:

There is no central organization to the blogosphere. There is no ideological consensus among its participants. Blogging as an activity is almost exclusively a part-time enterprise undertaken for love rather than money.

(Drezner and Farrell, 2008: 16)

A social sciences academic, speaking anonymously for fear of losing her job, comments on how she had enjoyed blogging in her own name to a considerable

audience when she was reprimanded by her department for the inappropriate nature of her blog: 'The take was that it was not academic, that it was quite populist and that was a problem ...that if I had time to do extra work then I should be doing grant applications.' Furthermore, a former lecturer at the London School of Economics resigned in 2006 after his blog, which dared to discuss the institution, prompted an argument over freedom of speech. The lecturer in question turned the altercation to his advantage when he published a book in the following year titled *A Blogger's Manifesto: Free Speech and Censorship in a Digital World* (Ringmar, 2007). It seems that the academic world is fearful not only of the disorganized and deregulated nature of the blogosphere but also of the opportunities it offers for freedom of expression. This contentious stance hinders the establishment of a legitimate platform from which academic bloggers could share their thoughts, research and findings. Perhaps the notion of an official, regulated platform would be anathema to any free-thinking blogger. However, the University of Warwick and Birmingham City were among the first universities to provide blogging platforms for its academics and students. Certainly there are concerns about ownership and management of blogs and there is a perception amongst cautious academics that there is a need to develop guidelines for 'best practice' (Kelly, 2008). Many senior academics, particularly in the sciences, are reluctant to release the results of their research through a medium which is notoriously unregulated and intractable. In the last couple of years there has nonetheless been a proliferation in Higher Education blogs and the most prominent and influential of these are listed on The Higher Education Blogs Network. The opportunities offered by the blogosphere can only contribute to a challenge to the traditional hierarchies that stifle academia.

The usefulness of the blog as a means of challenging beliefs and opinions is further reinforced by certain writers (Aherne, Questionnaire, 2012). The sense of entering into important intellectual debate, for which there would appear to be no other outlet or suitable medium, is a theme echoed by many academic and literary bloggers. Beard is typically aware of the controversies it can provoke and of the political dimension to any form of public writing but nonetheless remains fiercely independent:

I blog about anything I fancy with a university, higher education or Classics link. I think the university appreciates it more for being sometimes off the wall. There are confidences you can't betray but if I disagree with something the university has done I will say so.

(Beard in Spalding, *A Don's Life*, 2008)

Blogging satisfies a desire to write and provides space for academics and writers to explore their own thoughts on a topic and offers a medium for such writing which would not otherwise exist; in many cases they 'subsist on the nourriture of the "writing itself"' (Latta, 2012). Thus Mo Costandi, University College London, attempts to describe the *raison d'être* of her blog on neurophilosophy:

I write mainly about the neuroscience research that I find interesting. I want people to read my blog and learn something. I blog because I enjoy writing and the blog is just the medium with which I can publish it.

(Corbyn, *The Higher Education Supplement Online*, 2008)

Curiously for some, the blogosphere functions as a kind of filing system or database 'as a means of keeping a record of what I have read and gathering resources' (Corbyn, 2008). Zoe Brigley is an academic blogger who is also acutely aware of the political dimension to launching oneself into the blogosphere; her blog is an attempt to counteract the often isolationist stance of the academic and to embrace the

importance of sharing research with audiences ‘beyond the usual conferences and research seminars’ (Corbyn, 2008). Many other bloggers negotiate the political minefield with humour and aplomb as in the case of Jennifer Rohn, author of science blog *Mind the Gap*, who acknowledges the fear in certain quarters that bloggers might ‘blow the lid on the ivory tower.’ Her dedication to the medium arises also from a belief in freedom of speech and access, and, committed to the philosophy that science cannot remain the preserve of the elite, she strives in her blog to depict the purpose of science ‘as a human endeavour’ (Corbyn, *THES Online*, 2008). In this way the blog represents an affirmation of the importance of creative, professional and human expression.

8.9 Conclusions

In its early dystopic envisioning, particularly as portrayed in William Gibson’s novels (*Neuromancer*, 1984; *Count Zero*, 1987) cyberspace projected images of corporate hegemony and urban decay, of life characterised by pain and paranoia. Yet the ‘enabling potentialities of cyberspace and cyberculture’ are becoming more evident and are providing significant opportunities for literary expression. Its rich possibilities have been explored and defined by Michael Benedikt (2000):

Cyberspace: ... its depths increase with every image or word or number, with every addition, every contribution, of fact or thought. Its horizons recede in every direction; it breathes larger, it complexifies, it embraces and involves. Billowing, glittering, humming, coursing, a Borgesian library, a city; intimate, immense, firm, liquid, recognizable and unrecognizable at once. (30)

Benedikt would admit that ‘cyberspace as just described does not exist’ (30) and much of his more utopian theory has been challenged (in the same reader). However, Benedikt’s interpretation of cyberspace as ‘an inevitable extension of our age-old capacity and need to dwell in fiction, to dwell. ... on ... mythic planes’ (32-33) points to the important role ‘artists’ will play in defining and exploring its space, that it is a space in which ‘art and self-definition’ will thrive, one which will retain ‘a good measure of mytho-logic’ (33).

Contributing to the journal-writing genre, or journal writing as a literary pursuit, online writer-bloggers have made literature and literary debate a major component of their texts. In addition to publishing their own writing online, writers also feature the work of admired and often little-known writers, past or contemporary, in a bid to extend the literary field. Reciprocal links between blogs connect like-minded readers and writers but can also act as legitimating devices, a means of endorsing, as in book-jacket puffs, respected writers and their works.

A literary blog launched in 2002 and still operating today calls itself the *Literary Saloon*, an offshoot of the literary blog *Complete Review*, which claims to fill a niche reporting on ‘the day-to-day goings-on in and around the literary world’. That it still survives today almost ten years after its inauguration is testimony to its popularity and importance in the literary community. This is a weblog which is updated daily and boasts almost 2 million visitors since its inception.

Such online links form the basis of a ‘virtual community’ of writers consisting of members who, though geographically separated still form an online community through shared interests and passions. ‘A space has opened up for something like community on computer networks, at a time when so many other forms of ‘real life’ community seem under attack’ (Wilbur, 2000: 45). For writers

whose work is confined to print, especially those who are not reviewed regularly, those writers who have not been recognised within the literary prize circuit or do not form part of the A-list at literary festivals, opportunities for engagement with other writers and potential readers are severely limited. An online presence, complete with feedback and often extended debate transforms the humble blog, in its basic form a text-based medium, into an interactive meeting place (albeit virtual), a meeting of minds, and a hub for literary discourse amongst previously unconnected writers and readers. By creating a focal point for all interested parties, the blog becomes a tool for promoting the literary output of the writing community, to exert an influence on literary thought and lobby for recognition of lesser-known authors, and to celebrate the significant literary achievements not recognised by the mainstream ‘real-life’ literary community. Along with Facebook and Twitter the blog is also a useful means of promoting information about readings, performances, and events.

While writer-bloggers would not wish to be labelled as needy, there is nonetheless the fact that creating an online presence expresses ‘a desire for acknowledgement, perhaps praise, for their life or their writing – some assurance that their voice is being heard’ (McNeill, 2004: 35). Katy Evans Bush’s biography on her updated blog announces her willingness to ‘discuss consultancies and freelance projects’. In an earlier blog, however, she appears to adopt a more spontaneous approach to the act of blogging – ‘This is proper *blogging*, isn’t it – just wittering on about nothing, as if you care’ (Bush, 12 January 2008). One of the issues discussed in relation to online diaries is the extent to which the blogger is revealing the actual facts of their own life or projecting other selves. There is a sense that when in cyberspace ‘we can be who we want to be; we (re)present ourselves as we wish to ... we can be multiple, a different person (or even not a person!) ... playing with our

identities, taking ourselves apart and rebuilding ourselves in endless new configurations' (Bell, 2000: 3). It is the richness and ambiguity of this form of expression, coupled with the fact that these interactions are free from the strictures of the usual gate-keepers, which offers so many possibilities for the contemporary writer.

Chapter 9 Overall Conclusions

... the aim is to reinforce autonomy, notably by reinforcing the separation from heteronomous producers and by fighting to guarantee cultural producers the economic and social conditions of autonomy in relation to all forms of power.

(Bourdieu, 1996: 347)

In his postscript to *The Rules of Art* (1996), Bourdieu warns against the media-driven threat to ‘the autonomy of cultural production’ (347). His advice to writers is that they should maintain a united front in the face of ‘all forms of social stranglehold’ (347) while resisting ‘the temptation to remain in their ivory tower’ (348). His later pronouncement that ‘culture is in danger’ (2001a: 75) due to ‘the intrusion of commercial logic at every stage of the production and circulation of cultural goods’ (2001b: 67) sounds a warning cry for all writers. Bourdieu is deeply suspicious of ‘the game of culture’ (1984: 12); however his sociology of literature provides the researcher with a framework and some useful analytical tools, such as cultural capital and symbolic production, with which to examine the activities of the contemporary writer in the literary field. Thus, the discussion in this thesis is informed by different aspects of Bourdieu’s theories.

Throughout this thesis I have shown that the public sphere is a complex space which poses challenges and offers new opportunities for the contemporary writer. I have also shown that contemporary patronage practices may either enhance or impede literary production. Furthermore, I have also examined the different ways in which the writer engages with the public sphere with a view to asserting autonomy, developing a strong and respected literary sphere and ensuring the continued democratisation of both literature and the means of literary production.

As noted before, this is an area which has attracted a limited level of academic interest, and much of this research focuses on one aspect only of contemporary patronage, such as the literary festival (Delanty, Giorgi and Sassatelli, 2011; Starke, 2000), the prize culture in general (English, 2005), or the Booker prize in particular (Norris, 1995; Moseley, 2003). Other isolated examples of relevant research include Wandor's study of the writer in academia (2008); Tilney's appraisal of Southey as poet laureate (1980); Gregory's investigation into slam poetry (2009), and Urquhart's research into patronage practices in fifteenth-century England (1985). Consequently, such studies rarely provide a complete picture of patronage practices and the writer's engagement with the public sphere, and very few are comparative. Furthermore, there is no research available on the role of the writer in residence in the UK. Therefore, a need was identified for more detailed research into the range of patronage practices in operation in the contemporary literary sphere, the different roles the writer can assume in the public sphere, and in particular one which aims to understand the experiences of writers in residence. The thesis also addresses the impact these roles and experiences exert on literary production.

For the essayist and critic Cyril Connolly, the relationship between writing and money was a constant preoccupation, a theme running through his two most important works, *Enemies of Promise* (1938) and *The Unquiet Grave* (1944), and in his editorship of the literary magazine *Horizon*. His question to writers of the day – 'Do you think the State or any other institution should do more for writers?' – could be answered by Bourdieu's warning to all writers and artists that they should beware of the 'new forms of stranglehold and dependence' (1996: 345) which could severely compromise their autonomy and control of literary production. Despite Bourdieu's reservations about the conflation of literature and commerce, writers still need to

make some kind of living. The importance of earning an income is acknowledged by Simon Armitage who finds more subtle and acceptable links between literature, life and money: 'Poetry is connected with the root conditions of being alive, and one aspect of that is survival' (Holgate and Wilson-Fletcher, 1998: 5).

While the thesis was originally conceived as a study of the writer's residency I decided to look at the role of the creative writer in the public sphere in its broadest sense. The writer's appearance in the public sphere – particularly in areas one would not expect to find literature – provides the writer with the opportunity to renegotiate their cultural and social purpose. It is expected that the writer will follow the traditional route of literary production, usually in isolation and away from the public gaze, followed by publication, peer review and sales to the public. When the writer deviates from the familiar and professional publishing route and moves into the public realm, their identity as writers may be questioned by cultural commentators and the public generally. The contemporary writer therefore must be prepared to counter any negative perceptions by acting with integrity, and projecting a forceful, vigorous and enlightening identity in the public sphere and avoid falling victim to the seductions and pitfalls of the media and commerce.

These challenges, though significant and daunting, can also result in new strategies and greater innovation in the literary product. The engagement with the mundane, the quotidian, the substance of everyday life, can have a transformative effect. Over the last twenty years the writer has occupied an increasingly important place in the public realm through readings, festivals, prize awards and the Internet. This has had the effect of affording greater interaction with different groups of people and has also allowed the writer to connect with the public space, to develop more complex interactions with its landscapes, buildings, monuments, streets and

amenities. The creative outcomes of the writer's engagement in the public sphere have resulted in a diverse range of projects and literary expression including word installations, audio-visual displays, and poems presented in public places. These literary manifestations lift the written word from the page and place it in new contexts thus forging literary innovations, reinterpreting the role of literature and transforming our rural and built spaces.

This more open engagement with the public sphere creates new, respected and more social roles for the writer. The acceptance of literary commissions raises the profile of writers and writing; running creative writing workshops allows them to encourage other people's creative expression, and undertaking residencies in a range of settings transforms the writer into public servant, a figure who has a significant role in the education and empowerment of frequently less advantaged sectors of society. Initiatives of this kind help to promote inclusivity and break down unhealthy elitist attitudes in the literary sphere. Furthermore, the placing of poets in health settings, and the use of poetry as therapy, provide the writer with meaningful and financially rewarding roles in society.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – List of Writers Interviewed

1. Sabrina Broadbent
2. Cliff Forshaw
3. Lavinia Greenlaw
4. Romesh Gunesequera
5. Matt Harvey
6. Brian McCabe
7. David Morley
8. Graham Mort
9. Andrew Motion
10. Sean O'Brien
11. Kachi Ozumba
12. Christopher Reid
13. Carol Rumens
14. Miles Salter
15. Fiona Sampson
16. George Szirtes
17. D.J. Taylor
18. David Wheatley

Appendix 2

Transcript of Interviews

1. Sabrina Broadbent

3 October 2009

Have you ever been a writer-in-residence? Details.

No, I haven't. The only thing that's come close to that is I've been an RLF (Royal Literary Fund) writer at UCL. That's a kind of charity which ... A.A. Milne's estate was left to be a beneficiary to writers so you can apply to be a fellow for a year and you just do two days a week in a university of your choice and you see students for an hour and help them with their writing. Not creative writing necessarily, any kind of academic writing. And you get a stipend of £14,000 a year, which was fantastic. So that's what I did. I had a year of teaching part-time at UCL. However, I wrote my novels when I was teaching three days a week in a secondary school. And I wrote them all quite late, in my forties...

Can you make a living solely out of writing novels?

Well I can't, because nobody buys my books... Actually that's not entirely true because for the first two novels I was paid as much to write them as I was to work part-time as an English teacher, and that's OK. They took me three years to write and there was no need for me to work full-time so that was fine. But then the third novel, because those first two never sold much, I didn't get a lot for the third manuscript. So then I thought to myself I have to get myself a full-time job. But there are all sorts of statistics about, something like 5% of writers earn 90% of the income generated by book sales. I'm not in that 5%. I assume that the rest are either supported by a partner... but I haven't got one of those. [Katie Price is one of the biggest publishing successes of the last few years – comment from friend.] But more and more I am sort of withdrawing from the writing world because I don't have celebrity clout. Unless something really startling happens with my third novel,

which is still sort of clinging on by the skin of its teeth to book shelves... then I don't have much hope...

Winning the WH Smith prize was a stroke of luck, an accident, because I don't ever enter competitions or ever win anything. And I just happened to be doing a creative writing evening class and someone walked in and said there's this competition and she handed out the application forms and I submitted my first chapter of my first novel. On the back of that I won and that gives you a leg up, especially because it had the words *WH Smith*. The agent I think thought Oh-my-god this is the biggest bookseller in Britain. She's going to be absolutely massive, but I wasn't. [laughs!]

What types of other jobs have you undertaken to support your writing? Do they influence what/how you write?

I was an English teacher and now I've got an incredibly good job which is being the Director of Schools for Film Club. So it's like, very full-time and well-paid. It's great. We're charged by the Secretary of State for Education to set up film clubs in the 7,000 schools in Britain. We have an amazing website and we do all kinds of activities... state-of-the-art screenings all round the country. We train teachers and we support them. We do a lot of advocacy – talking to the government and the opposition – trying to ensure that film culture is steam-rolled into schools because traditionally it's been ignored. And it's free, so it's great and it's the perfect role for me. It's something we've only been rolling out for a year ... a curated catalogue of about 4,000 movies for 5 – 18 year olds. It's a great job.

I don't think I could have written a novel without being a teacher. I don't really know how people write about the world if they're not in it. And teaching in comprehensive schools in London you really are in the thick of it. In fact my second novel drew a lot

on the world of teaching. It informed quite a lot of my third novel too because I discovered that although teenagers are very infuriating I think they're also a very interesting and hopeful group. They see things differently.

What activities do you get involved in to promote your novels?

With Chatto and Windus they, really because I'm not any sort of key player on their list, the promotion they do is ... well they know I write journalism so they take me out to lunch and ask me for ideas for writing. Then I write pieces which get placed and they are my main form of publicity. I wrote a piece - 'Let's talk about sex' - about teenage pregnancy because I was very much in that world and then I wrote a piece this time about single-parent families. I don't know which came first but I'm able to place these pieces in the papers - well my publicist does. My agent doesn't do anything like that. Chatto and Windus place my pieces in various papers. I've done journalism which has been my main publicity vehicle. The papers sort of like my writing I think because I'm a teacher and they feel that it's an authentic voice and it addresses certain issues. Also they see I'm a single parent and they feel that's also an authentic voice on that issue. But that's been unexpected and really nice for me. And I write in between times as well... But there's nothing else only those tiny little blips like this literature festival [Beverley] and a few readings at local libraries. Mainly nothing like that would have happened...

Do you take part in many literature festivals? Is this something you actively seek out or do you wait for invitations?

This is the only festival I've ever done. I said to my publicist, before this book finally dies a death just four weeks after publication can I just give it a little bit of a push while it's still barely breathing. They said they'd check with a few literary festivals

and they all said no apart from Beverley [laughs]. I'm happy doing workshops. I have a national profile as a teacher and that's been my main occupation and that's used to promote my books. I've taught a few Arvon courses. I know I can teach, I know how to do it, to work a crowd. I understand enough about writing to give most people there what they need. They're always really positive and it's a nice feeling.

Much of a writer's life seems to be taken up with travelling and book promotion. How does this affect your writing in terms of quality and quantity?

I never do any of this. Travelling to Beverley is the first time. I'd be very happy to do more of it... For every successful writer there are 10,000 who don't go anywhere. I wouldn't mind winning a prize and being forced to travel the world to promote it... I wouldn't complain.

Do you write with a particular audience in mind?

No, but perhaps I should. Anybody really. If I were a genre writer I might but I don't really do that. I'm sort of delighted and amazed that my books get published. I don't have any more worked-out notion than that.

Many writers comment on the hugely commercial nature of the publishing world. Have you allowed this to influence what you write? Can a writer be free of this? What is the impact on writers, literature and society?

It has affected me a little. It does in terms of how much money I would get paid for a book because basically they will decide whether it's going to sell or not. And if they decide that it's not going to then they drop the money accordingly. Well, for my first book, I got quite a lot. Somehow that raised the bar and therefore the actual sales looked even worse because the accountant would check... I don't think any of them

have ever made a loss but they've never made a massive profit. The commercial side of it has got far more constraining and pincer-like. I spoke to another very well-known agent at a book launch recently who said what you've really got to understand is that the really hot ticket now is non-fiction. But you meet another agent and she'll say non-fiction is impossible to sell. So, it's basically - no one knows what the bloody hell is going on. I think the whole industry is about to completely transform itself to the point where it will become fairly unrecognizable. Whether there will still be agents in five years, I'm not so sure... It's well known that book shops are going through a crisis. They also want to be transformed. Those books laid out on WH Smiths' tables and shelves - they've all had their place paid for. Otherwise they wouldn't be there. The ridiculous thing is, if you're not one of the ten, twenty, fifty whatever at the front of the bookshop, your book won't really see the light of day. It's kind of a no-brainer really unless you're in a position where it doesn't actually matter financially to you, if that's not how you're earning your living. But it matters a lot to me, because I have to earn a living and pay my bills. But I love writing and will continue.

Have you undertaken any commissions? What is it like to write to order?

No I've never been commissioned other than the journalism. I go on radio quite a bit. I used to do something called 'The Write Stuff' and 'Woman's Hour' would sometimes wheel me on for the odd thing. I have a sort of strange faltering profile in these places. I think it's more to do with being a teacher. I think they find that more interesting than the fact that I'm a writer.

We seem to be overwhelmed with literary events – readings, festivals, slams, book groups, Richard and Judy, literary magazines, reviews, e-zines, prizes – it has never been so good to be a writer. Would you agree?

I have nothing against any of that. I can only conclude that it means that although you said there seem to be more writers than readers I don't think there can be. There are a hell of a lot of readers. Even doing the workshop today – where I'm not a famous, big name writer – people are really interested in how people write. It's like a kind of fascination – they want to know exactly how it's done. I was watching from the gallery yesterday when Iain Banks was giving his talk and you can just see how people are rapt in the whole thing of how a writer does it. I find that rather charming that people have this fascination. Writing is a rather extraordinary act. I like being involved in that in my own tiny way, explaining and demystifying it and also being part of it because it's ...writing is... Actually what makes humans happy is not love or money or a career or any of those things, it's some creative outlet. I think that's what most people lack in their life so for me it's been a great joy to discover that, even late on. I didn't write when I was raising children or pursuing a career. I don't know a woman writer who manages, well maybe one or two, but it's quite hard to be a woman and a writer. As a woman you spend much of your time servicing and pleasing other people and this makes it difficult to find time or energy to write.

Any other comments on the life of a writer in the 21st century?

I did an interview with Borders podcast on this book which of course was another type of publicity. It was interesting, concerning my novel *You don't have to be good*. You might find it useful for this research.

2. Cliff Forshaw

12 April 2009

Could you tell me about the residencies you have undertaken?

I was writer-in-residence for Hydro-Tasmania International in Hobart, Tasmania in 2007. I was also a Hawthornden Writing Fellow at Hawthornden Castle in Scotland. Both residencies lasted four weeks.

What kind of activities did you engage in?

In Hobart I mainly concentrated on my own writing but I also organized workshops for the local community. The Hawthornden Fellowship is different. It's really a writers' retreat and designed to provide a peaceful setting where writers can work without disturbance. There's no requirement to provide workshops or engage with the local community; you just go there to write.

How successful were these residencies?

Excellent. Hawthornden gave me the impetus and time to finish a book and Tasmania gave me the inspiration to start something completely different.

Were there any problems?

None at all. The conditions were really very good and the outcomes very positive. However, both residencies were about the writing, my own writing, and not about engaging with community.

Note: The Hobart residency allowed Forshaw to write poems which were subsequently published under the title *Vandemonium*. Hawthornden provided space and time to work on poems which will be gathered into an anthology and published

by Wrecking Ball Press. Since then Forshaw has been a Hawthornden Fellow for the second time; a Djerassi writer-in-residence in California, and a visiting poet in Transylvania.

3. Lavinia Greenlaw**24 May 2009****What kind of residencies have you undertaken?**

My first residency was with the Science Museum in 1995. The second was with the law firm Mishcon de Reya. At the Science Museum I worked three days a week for a period of eight months. The Mishcon de Reya residency was for a period of one year during which time I was expected to work with staff for one day a week. I was paid £10,000 for this residency.

How did the residencies come about?

Anthony Julius, the deputy chairman of Mishcon, was very interested in poetry and literature generally. In fact he has published a book on T.S. Eliot and anti-semitism. He wanted to be involved in some form of literary patronage and when the Poetry Society launched their Poetry Places scheme, using Arts Council funding, it seemed like the ideal opportunity. He wished to raise awareness of poetry amongst staff and believed also that the drama and language of the legal world would be of interest to a writer.

At the Science Museum, Graham Farmelo, who is both a writer and a scientist, decided it would be a good idea to have a resident poet and to encourage interaction between writers and scientists. I had been involved in a radio programme with Graham and he offered me the residency as a direct result.

What kinds of activities did you organize during these residencies?

At Mishcon I placed poems in lifts and other public areas. I also emailed poems to staff and held lunch-time poetry workshops. At the Science Museum I organized a

number of events designed to bring poets and scientists together. I was interviewed about the residency on radio and designed posters with the educational wing of the museum to be sent out to schools.

How rewarding/successful were these residencies for the organizations you worked in and their staff?

I think initially people were surprised to find a poet in their midst. There is a perception that poets cannot produce very much. There is a novelty factor but how much money can a poem make and what results does poetry achieve? However, they seemed to enjoy reading the poems in the lifts and I often got positive responses from people to the poetry emails. Those who attended the workshops regularly grew to enjoy them and definitely grew to understand poetry better and to improve their own ability to write poetry.

How rewarding was the experience for you? Did you have time to pursue your own writing and was that helped or hindered by your role as poet-in-residence?

At the Science Museum I wrote a series of poems based on objects in the Museum and these appear in my second collection, *A World Where News Travelled Slowly*. For me it was a wonderful experience to be in the Science Museum as I have always been deeply interested in science and medicine. Mishcon's generous patronage gave me the time to work on my own poetry and produce the collection of poems in *Minsk*.

There are many different types of residency. What do you think they achieve, if anything?

Residencies are important for a number of reasons. They support artists and raise the profile of literature. They also raise important questions about the relationship between art and life and make us think about the relevance of art to everyone. In a sense they create interesting intellectual complications for everyone. Of course you can't force people to engage nor is it right for the poet to impose their art or vision on others. However, it's good to make art and literature available and accessible. The artist shouldn't always expect a totally positive response; it's just as fruitful when the reaction is negative. Placing poets in the workplace can't do any harm and in a way it opens up a new dialogue; it's a productive and useful provocation. For the poet, dealing with new situations and different uses of language always acts as a stimulus to the imagination and gives you a different perspective on language usage and the world in general. My experience in the Science Museum and Mishcon enriched my vocabulary and my use of language and both found their way into my writing. The poet shares a love of, a need for, precision in language with the lawyer. My poem 'Lord Yarborough's Defence' was written as a result of my experiences at Mishcon de Reya.

Would you undertake further residencies?

Possibly, but because of my work at the University I don't have the same need to undertake residencies.

What advice would you give other writers-in-residence?

Find a place where you feel a real connection between the location and your own poetry. Ensure you have someone in the organization who supports you and what you are doing. Be clear about expectations and outcomes but avoid being too

prescriptive. Sometimes you just don't know how you'll respond until you spend some time in the residency.

4. Romesh Gunsekera**May 2010****Tell me about your residency here with the RSL in Somerset House.**

The RSL residency programme at Somerset House is quite recent. It was launched in 2008 with Ruth Padel taking on the role. I am the second writer-in-residence. The residency lasts a year. Each year a writer is invited to curate a programme of literary talks and events, alongside working on their own writing, using Somerset House and its environs as inspiration.

What kind of activities does the writer-in-residence organize?

The first Writer in Residence Ruth Padel's projects included initiating *Picture This At Somerset House - Writers' Talks in The Courtauld Gallery*, she also worked on *That Mighty Heart: Poets' Visions of London* and *Darwin, Poetry & Science*. I started my residency in November 2009 and worked on several projects including *Picture This...*, *A Flow of Words* and a series of 'salons' around different themes and workshops with schools and community groups.

What prompted you to take up this residency?

I was partly driven by the desire to do other things, to help in schools and encourage teenagers to read and write. It should also help with my own writing; I have my own room and spend more than one day a week here. I find it works because I'm at the editing stage of my novel but it would be more problematic if I was starting a novel. At that stage I need to be away from everything and need peace in order to work.

What other kinds of residencies are there and are they helpful?

The Royal Literary Fund offers opportunities but they usually involve a great deal more work and I'd be less keen on that because of the commitment. This is the longest residency I've had. I spent some time as a writer-in-residence at a university. I didn't have to organise too many events but enjoyed the readings and the workshops.

Do you organise events for the staff at Somerset House?

No. Apart from the writer talks I'm mainly involved with schools. A lot of the kids are underprivileged and I'm trying to inspire and encourage them to achieve.

How important is a residency for a writer?

The funding is important as it's very difficult to make a living from writing alone. It gives you time and space to write while contributing to social, educational or cultural projects. The wackier residencies you mention are not really helpful. You find your energies getting diverted away from writing and they don't seem to achieve very much. Also it's not obvious that residencies will lead to real art. This is not only a problem for writers; it happens in all art forms. Often the work produced is inferior. No doubt poets are in greater need of residencies. Prose writers generally find it easier to write and sell their work.

5. Matt Harvey

2 October 2009

You describe yourself as ‘poet, columnist, enemy of all that’s difficult and upsetting...’ As a performance poet you are very much in the public eye. How does this affect your writing? (Subject matter/style/form).

Well I just should say right from the off that I never actually call myself a performance poet. I raise my hat to anyone who does that and I’ve even been nominated for an award and it would be churlish to refuse that and I can see that I suppose I am really. I perform a lot but... I can’t really explain it but I’ve never been comfortable with the title. I have associations with it that are unpleasant or negative and yet I see myself performing and I realize that I am one. I shouldn’t... I perform and it does really affect the form, subject matter and style. And I am far more inclined to move towards things which will be accessible, gettable and performable. It’s very simple. When I was writing and pre-performing I used to write on probably a wider range of things and different styles and subjects. I would do a wider range of voices as I’ve learnt what basically works. I’ve been doing so much to commission over the last few years, particularly writing for Saturday Live on Radio 4, in a way has really shown me the strengths and weaknesses in terms of my limited bag of tricks and how I quite shamelessly fall back on my bag of tricks because I have to come up with something that I can bear to read. So I go back into a certain way of generating images or running words together that’s impressive. I’ve noticed that I’ve used a little more unconsciously material from earlier in my writing life. It feels a little bit poems by numbers and I’m shameless about that.

You said you were nominated for a performance poetry award...?

Yes myself, Tim Thompson, Zeena Khan (?) and Jacques Francois got shortlisted for this £10,000 prize. Tim won the prize. They weren't making it a competition, the idea was that we were invited to apply for this award and then the PR department announced we'd all do a gig at the Purcell Room. On the back of it, if we didn't get the thing itself, we were all in the running for other grants. We were told now is a good time to apply as you've been shortlisted and in the public eye. And that's what I did.

Writing is a lonely job. How do you reconcile the very public role with the private one of writer? Are there conflicts? What is the split (in terms of your time) between writing and performing?

Well, I certainly notice, if I do a lot of performing, generally writing does suffer a bit. I do like to have a bit of a stretch of time to get on with things and get back to my books. I tend to do a lot of writing on trains. I try to write every day though I don't usually manage that but I do at least open my notebooks and doodle stuff. It's quite a range of stuff that I do. I seem to have so much admin to do it's ridiculous, emails or whatever, arrangements and so on, and that takes up a hell of a lot of time. There are so many events that I need to pull together.

To go back to the point of reconciling... I don't think there's very much reconciling to do from my point of view but writers want audiences, they want readers, and public appearances help you get readers. I certainly feel that I wasn't a very prolific writer to start with, or even a very confident writer, and the only way I could get my work out to people, so that people would actually read it, was if I went out, found a context to read to them and then invited them to buy the book. I didn't have the confidence or tenacity to send stuff out to magazines, journals or publishers, which is

one of the routes to publication. But what I did was formalize and self-publish and that eventually led to publication and books in shops as well. I like the route I've taken though I didn't originally see myself as someone who was going to perform. I wanted to be a writer and then I realized that I could perform well enough. I'm always really heartened when I hear that people enjoyed my work on the page. It is meant to be enjoyed on the page. There are a few things I've written that I think that's really a performance piece, but very, very few. I write mostly for the page. I love to read poetry out loud – it's what I do when I read other people's poetry. I'm always happy when teachers and pupils say they've been reading my stuff.

Writers these days are in the public eye more than ever before. Does this have a detrimental or beneficial effect on writers and the quality of their writing? Are writers something of a commodity?

I don't know. I don't think I've got to that point at all. I think it has a beneficial effect on the quality of their reading [laughs]. So many writers have had to knuckle down and get better at reading their work in public. It could be that they're not so great at reading off the cuff so that have to get good at reading. A lot of us have had to find out how to present ourselves. I've done a lot of workshops over the years. I often get invited to do performance workshops for poets who are already published and doing quite well. I'm good enough to get my work across and keep my audience entertained and over the years I've slowly got better and I just plug away at it. The workshops I run aren't through a particular organization – it's just something that happened. People putting on a poetry event often ask me to do a gig and a workshop and rather than a writing workshop they ask me to do a performing workshop. It was one of those spontaneous things, suddenly it started happening quite a lot.

Too often poets turn up to readings and mutter into the page...

I think people aren't going to put up with it any more. They're no longer happy to be there and in the presence of a poet. And now they're aware that there are so many good poets who make the effort. There are a lot of poets who call themselves performance poets and do little more than read a poem.

You take part in literature festivals – what place do performance poets have in the 'literary world'?

Well, I'm sure we have a place in there somewhere. Remember, I don't do many gigs on what I call the performance poetry circuit. There is a circuit these days. I used to have my doubts about it but I'm discovering that there are lots of performance poets out there doing quite well on this and most of them wouldn't dream of selling a book. They would only have done a CD. That's very different from me. I once made a CD but only as a demo to try and get bookings for festivals. But if someone asks me to I might well make one, one of these days. I don't think people would buy it though. I honestly don't think it's a great merchandising opportunity. I think now and again you think someone might say oh I fancy that and that's a fiver or a tenner but people like to buy books. They will buy books and give books as presents, be pleased to get them, keep them in their loos and actually read them. And I'm really pleased to have sold however many thousands of my books. They're in loos and on shelves up and down the country.

I was asked by the Guardian to write Desk Top Poetry for a couple of years in the Work section. They said we're thinking of some comic verse for the Work section, what do you think? What did they think I'd say? I said yes, it's a very, very good idea. So I wrote quite a lot of verse for them. They'd give me a theme and I'd come

up with a work-related poem. Though I struggled with this and longed for them to give me a more interesting subject. But I ended up cheating a little and used some poems I'd already written or one taken from my collection *The Hole in the Sum of my Parts* and I'd change a title or something. Cheeky. You have to use what you've got – it's the bag of tricks again.

This is perhaps going back a bit but why did you move into poetry for performance?

I like to call myself a stand-up poet which allows me to retreat now and then into imagery and rhyme, standing there chuntering away and being vaguely lyrical. I was particularly inspired by seeing John Hegley. Doing the Edinburgh Festival I had to go under the comedy listings and I used a quote from the Scotsman saying 'One of this country's finest performance poets.' Ok, I'm just acknowledging a discomfort with the phrase but I am one. But I also write some comedy stuff, some articles and I've also written plays for the radio and I've written a kids' book. So I do other stuff around the poetry. I think of myself as a writer – stories and poetry. At the moment I'm trying to sell *Empath Man* as a graphic novel. It went out on the radio in June and that was its first airing. You might even hear the original sketch tonight as I've learnt that bit off by heart. Usually I read from the book but recently I've started committing more stuff to memory, like other performance poets. When I realized I'd do the Edinburgh Festival I knew it would flow so much better if I knew it by heart.

I really do think seeing John Hegley and Ivor Cutler as well was a major influence. John Hegley was very much in the stand-up circuit when I saw him first. Poet, song writer, comedian. He's always been there and I was inspired by him and a number of others. I saw George Danby as well. So, all these people had an influence. I

remember going to see Roger McGough and John Hegley performing together in the Arts Centre in Totness. It was before I was going up to Leeds to do a gig in a community college and it was such a master class. When I got up and did my gig I was so much better than I would have been if I hadn't seen them. One thing I focus on in my workshops is getting people to understand how to fail properly. They must learn how to allow failure. You have to trust your material and let it have a chance to work or not and as long as some of it works it's great. It's when people don't quite trust it that it fails. That's when people start dithering and muttering. They don't quite dare to be there and risk failure. It's a really big thing to risk and accept failure. There has to be a certain amount of failure and success in every single gig we do and it's always going to be about the balance and you tend to succeed more when you fail a little. I'm happy with that now. If things work too well you have to pretend that they're failing. You need to have those times when you do something and the audience just stares at you and you acknowledge that it's not going so well and you think ah well...

How long have you worked in this way?

I've been doing this slowly (slowly, slowly, slowly) doing odds and sods really since 1992. At first it was a bit stop-start and then it became full-time around about 2000. Though, it's such a motley range of stuff that I do to be a full-time, self-employed writer and performer.

Have things changed in that time? How? Better/easier/more competitive?

I don't quite accept that I'm part of that performance poetry scene but maybe I am more part of it than I realize. Perhaps I'm off on one little off-shoot of it. I was invited to take part in a mentoring scheme that was geographically quite challenging

for me because I had to keep dashing across to Suffolk. It made me think that though I pretend I'm not on that scene maybe I am really. I'm just in denial. It seems to me there are many more gigs around the country. Lots of events where folk will pay to come in, lots of places where they have a paid guest poet and lots of people who will now come out for a poetry night. If I put on an evening of entertainment I'd think it would never quite work with just poetry. I actually ran a cabaret for a while – musical, comedy-infused slightly interactive poetry cabaret. And I'd do a collaborative poem with the audience. Gimmicks like the dead poet's slam. I'd always have a comedian and quite a lot of music. And I'd make it a night out rather than a poetry night. So it's variety with a kind of poetry spine. Kind of tricking half the audience that they've been to a poetry night without realizing...

Maybe it is getting more competitive but I think what's happening is that there are more opportunities so it's not really more competitive. More places will actually book a poet now. Maybe also because I've had more commissions recently I'm more in demand.

Is all the poetry you write performance poetry? Should all poetry be written to be performed?

No. No and no. But it does really help when things can be read. I used to read T.S. Eliot out loud for pleasure. It's the kind of thing that mainly only budding poets do [laughs] **(in your bedroom in front of the mirror?)** Not quite – but almost...

Where do you perform?

Festivals, conferences. It started out at mental health conferences – this links with the work I used to do. At first I was invited just to do a slot mainly as a little light relief.

What I did became a lot more poignant in that setting. Themes to do with isolation and connection. It's very hard... That led immediately to another conference – a 'Hearing Voices' conference – I didn't realize I was going in at the deep end. It was really quite cutting edge but it was wonderful. And since then I've been doing maybe four mental health conferences a year and sometimes I may be asked to host them, to MC them, be the chair, depending on how formal it is. Sometimes, it's very much a kind of user-led conference... a Poetry Trust type thing... and that's completely different. There are other conferences. I've done prison libraries, innovation, fundraising conferences – a little bit akin to after dinner speaking. I've done a lot of compering over the years and I'm used to it... a whole range of things. The stuff I do to make a living. I'm going to do one soon on the future of work and that's because they liked my 'Bit, byte, kilobyte' poem – they'd heard it on the radio. And then they were really pleased to hear I'd written lots of poems about work generally and said oh well maybe you could do a few spots. I was invited to a technology and innovation conference because they wanted me to come along, listen in and come up with a poem in the course of the conference like they imagine I do for 'Saturday Live'.

Because you don't actually do that?

I do it the day before which is hard enough. I jot down images and phrases in advance and try out things that might work...it can be very high pressure, no question...

I've even done quite a few weddings over the years. I get asked to do funerals which I'll only do if I know the person and sometimes they know me but if I don't really know them that's a bit awkward really. They ask for a very specific poem and say

will you just come and read that and so I do and it's difficult, especially if it's a funny poem. Very difficult to say no. A couple of times people have asked me very specifically to make a recording of a particular poem and so I've done that. It's good in a way to be in that really, really old-fashioned role of the poet to be present at significant events and add something to that, in that very ancient bardic tradition. Go to places the poet laureate doesn't necessarily go.

I was asked to write a poem for the Open University to mark their anniversary. I was very pleased to do that and that was a strange one because I was originally writing something much more literary and in the end I decided I'd write something specifically to read and perform. I wrote it very much to read off the page. I did something for the Science Museum recently – kudos and the pleasure for me were tremendous. It was aimed at the general public. The idea was ... they wanted a poet to do this but it had to be somewhere between poetry and copy writing. They said we want poetry but we want to have that awareness that we're going to treat it like some copy even though it's a poem. We're not just looking for artistic merit we're looking for someone who can write about this series of ten exhibits/icons ranging from a really old steam engine like Stevenson's rocket to Crick and Watson's double helix model to an original penicillin mould that was sent to the hospital. To describe each one but get it all to flow together. It was really tricky but I was really pleased to do it. It had to be accessible to everyone. It was also meant to be a review of what people had just seen to remind them of that without startling them too much. 'A bird-bottomed space pastry', 'a lunar drop scone'... 'celestial pastry' and once you have the image it begins to flow. And Crick and Watson's double helix was a model about this big and I thought it's a 'magic fairy staircase'. And once you think that ... oh, it

was so interesting coming up with those images. I find that so enjoyable. The hunt is very satisfying. Or the nearly-right image is really great as well.

I was asked to write a poem about a potato for a government sponsored advertising campaign to encourage people to waste less food. They wanted me to write a love poem to a potato. It was such a lovely commission, a delightful thing to do. They liked it so much they got me to do bread as well. Having been paid so much by the OU and then the Guardian and so much for Saturday Live, the potato poem – well, add a nought.

I once did some copy writing for the British Council and they wanted a poet. I realize with hindsight it's because they knew I would be so much cheaper, and when they paid me I'd feel so grateful, but knock off a nought for what they'd have had to pay a copy writer. So...

It's hugely stressful to write to order but sometimes absolutely delightful. I often write better to a deadline. I'd go in there and really work at it and not take five performances to realize that something has to go.

Performing in one place is very different from another – ever so different. The audience, the expectation is different depending on what it is you're doing. The thing is not to imagine you're terrible when people don't respond or to think you're brilliant if people seem to be wild with delight - it may simply be that nothing else very exciting has happened for months. It's important to stay steady with it all and not get carried away. I'm more inclined to get deflated than inflated so I have to remind myself that ...even at the Edinburgh Festival I got such an incredible range of responses. I did the Edinburgh Festival seven years ago with Raw Emotion when we struggled to get an audience as we hadn't done much PR and didn't get any reviews

in. You know you need to get the reviews in, but we didn't budget for that. This time I spent an extra £2,000 to get the PR and it's worth it. You get reviewed and then you have something to staple to your flyer.

Best/worst experiences?

The very first time doing Year 9 before I realized... You expect Year 9 just to glare at you with hostility but if you come out without hostility then you've had a stormer. I've done some poems in some odd places. Too many good and bad. I should get into schools more but be more specific about what I want to do. I like it when I get some very bright sixth formers and we put a sonnet together. I don't think it necessarily puts kids off poetry and some of them really like it. And accepting a gig in Newton Abbott Market Square – well that stays in my memory, and I think maybe that's something I shouldn't have done. And I've done a lot of village halls and that's been mostly wonderful. Once or twice they've been very rude basically...

What are the rewards – financial or otherwise? Is it possible to make a living out of poetry?

Well, it is and it's funny because I think you've mentioned residencies. People say that's the way to make money but I've not really done a residency. I was officially poet in residence at Hastings Festival through Justin ?? and John Mole. I remember when Carol Ann Duffy did her residency at Ladbrokes and some really interesting stuff came out of that. Because she's so prolific and high-quality a lot of that stuff gets lost but it was really good. I think now that I'm a bit more confident about writing to order or commission I'd love to have that kind of residency. It would be a chance to write something interesting, get others to write and maybe just respond to poetry. One of the things I really enjoy about the Wondermatrics Cabarets is inviting

the audience to contribute a line each to a poem. They choose the theme collectively before the interval and I give them pens and thin strips of paper and they can write a line and then someone else will edit it. We stick them together and they become a big venetian blind and I'll read it out. Usually, 90% of the time we're all surprised and delighted at how good it is. You don't need to have a flowing narrative because the brain makes sense of things anyway.

What sort of people attend?

A wide range really. When I was doing the festivals I'd see more, older people. I noticed people buy books afterwards and there was a wide range from teenage right through. But still I often seem to reach the Radio 4 type audience which is a bit older. At local gigs there's always a preponderance of 30/40 plus, always some teenagers and twenty somethings who like it. But there's a whole performance poetry scene which is very young. I was invited to Latitude this year and I couldn't make it but I'll go next year... people turn out to it in droves. So the audience for poetry is growing...

Is poetry losing its elitist image? Are you working to make poetry more accessible? Clearly you enjoy performance but do you also have a sense of vocation or mission – bringing poetry to people who otherwise might not experience it?

It's a bit of both. I think people like to feel that they like poetry. Sometimes when people like a piece they assume it's not really poetry. I once received a review for one of my self-published pamphlets and it said millions of people will scoff at this because it's just not poetry. Millions, wow. It was very snooty. It wasn't even in a poetry review but in the arts section of a newspaper and it just seemed to be very

resentful of the fact that here I was coming along just entertaining people. A lot of performance poetry is not that well-honed and doesn't read very well on the page and it's largely a vehicle for good performers...

What do you think of the role of poet laureate? Would you do it?

Oh I think it's great and if you could do it for a month I'd do it. Well it wouldn't come to me in a million years. It's like being the thousandth in line for the throne. I think it's a great role especially the way it's been reinterpreted by Andrew Motion. I think he's brought it closer to the American version, a bit like Billy Connolly, with really accessible different poets taking it on for a few years. They interpret the role as they want to and it's basically a good idea to have someone holding that baton for poetry. People can bring an energy, a vision, especially poetry which is traditionally part of ritual...it's the whole bardic thing. So I think it's a really good idea. Also, towns having their own laureate, the children's laureate and it being a short-term thing, and it being interpreted by the person as they see fit. I think Andrew Motion took a very decisive step away from the traditional role and I think he did a very good job. I thought the poem he did for Charles and Camilla was brilliant; he re-humanised these distant people.

We seem to be overwhelmed with writing events on all sides – readings, book launches, book groups, Richard and Judy, literary magazines, reviews, e-zines, festivals, prizes, residencies and so on. So many opportunities – it has never been so good to be a writer. Would you agree?

Yeah, well I'd just say it's never been that good to be a writer! Just change the word 'so' to 'that'! There are more people than ever before working as writers. Look at all these creative writing courses and they can't all get their novels published. I think

there's something very strange about all that. There seem to be more books published but I don't know if more are being read. More people are writing it than reading it – like it used to be with poetry. But now there are more people coming to poetry events so perhaps they are just breaking even, which is good. I think writers are still struggling to make a living and this is one of the questions I'm still most asked - do you actually make a living doing this? Apart from – 'What's it really like on Saturday live? Do you really write them there at the time?' And I always say yes I do.

6. Brian McCabe**7 October 2009**

Brian McCabe describes himself as a poet, novelist and short story writer. He has lived off earnings from grants, fellowships and residencies since the early 1980s.

He is currently working at the University of Edinburgh, which he refers to as a residency, and has been with them for three years. He works seventeen hours a week organizing literary events and conferences, giving one-to-one tutorials and running writing workshops. Brian also does some formal teaching on the MA in Creative Writing – seminars, workshops and marking. Most of his work is in the Creative Writing department and some of it is in English Literature. As part of this arrangement he is allowed two days for his own writing.

He rates the success of his activities as excellent and has not experienced any problems.

During his residency he organized a range of different events including the Latina-Scottish women writers' conference which consisted of a series of events in Edinburgh over five days. There was a budget of £10,000 for this project. Brian also teaches on the Lancaster distance MA in Creative Writing.

Other interesting residencies held:

William Soutar Fellowship for four years which involved running a writers' group, arranging school visits to the William Soutar house, and running festivals at the library. He was also involved in organizing *The Word's Out*, Perth's annual literary festival. Brian remained in this residency for four years from 2000-04. He worked two and a half days a week and the remaining time was dedicated to his own work.

Though he admits he did not actually write a great deal at the time he did manage to finish some short stories and start a new poetry collection.

He also went to Canada for a year on a Scottish-Canadian exchange programme for writers. He toured Canada working at a number of different universities teaching, doing readings and writing. During this year Brian also wrote a novel.

Brian enjoys these residencies and doesn't see the point of writers locking themselves away in their study to write. It's good to be useful in the community, and to be seen to be useful. He feels it is important that writers can demonstrate that they have a place in society/the community and that this place is worthwhile and valued. He doesn't see the point of writers being removed from society and living in isolation.

Another residency took Brian to Lavigne in Switzerland. He also won the R.L. Stevenson fellowship and spent six months at the writers' retreat at the Hotel Chevillon at Grez-sur-Loing in France.

It is clear that McCabe succeeds in making a living from his writing with a combination of teaching and residencies.

7. David Morley

16 April 2009

David Morley is a leading British poet, critic, anthologist, editor and ecologist. He has published twenty books, including eleven collections of poetry. His work has been translated into several languages including Arabic.

David is also known for his pioneering ecological poetry installations within natural landscapes and the creation of 'slow poetry' sculptures and I-Cast poetry films.

David's creative writing podcasts are among the most popular literature downloads on iTunes worldwide. Two episodes of his 'writing challenges' are now preloaded onto all demo macs used in Apple Stores across the world

David read Zoology at Bristol University, gaining on graduation a fellowship from the Freshwater Biological Association. He then conducted research on acid rain. David Morley then directed the National Association of Writers in Education. He was elected deputy chair of The Poetry Society (UK) and co-founded The Poetry Cafe in Covent Garden.

He co-edited a bestselling anthology *The New Poetry* for Bloodaxe Books (1993) and edited the British and Irish poetry list for Arc Publications for ten years. David was Literature Officer for Kirklees in Yorkshire, directing the 1995 World Poetry Festival and 1995 National Small Press Festival. Throughout his career Morley has advised British governments on national arts and literature funding, and served on panels for regional and national Arts Councils in England.

In 1996 he co-founded the Warwick Writing Programme with Jeremy Treglown. He is currently Director of the Warwick Writing Programme and Professor of Creative Writing. The University of Warwick awarded him a personal Chair in 2007, and a

D.Litt in 2008. The Warwick Writing Programme is the largest and most comprehensive of its kind in Europe. It is an internationally-acclaimed programme drawing students and staff from across the globe.

The Programme aims to **teach** academic and creative writing using new and established methods; to **lead** international research in writing through creative practice, conferences, and the generation of public debate in newspapers, journals, broadcast media and online; to **show** scientists and business people how to communicate their findings; to **create** positive and permanent links to writers of the Midlands through outreach to schools and a year-round festival of visiting authors and industry specialists, and to **foster** international partnerships with educational institutions and universities (Monash, NYU, etc), writers' organisations and publishers.

David has received fourteen literary awards, including a major Eric Gregory Award, a Tyrone Guthrie Award from Northern Arts, a Hawthorden International Writers Fellowship, an Arts Council Writers Award, a Creative Ambitions Award, the Raymond Williams Prize, and an Arts Council Fellowship. He has also received two awards for his teaching, including a National Teaching Fellowship. A pamphlet of new poems *The Rose of the Moon* was a winner of the Templar Poetry Prize 2009 judged by the distinguished poet Tim Liardet.

David Morley is the Director of the Warwick Prize for Writing. He has been a guest on a number of broadcast programmes including Front Row, Open Book and The Late Show.

He has written criticism, essays and reviews for newspapers and magazines including *The Guardian*, *Poetry Review*, *PN Review* and *The Times Higher*

Education Supplement. He is currently co-editing *The Cambridge Companion to Creative Writing*.

He tutors for The Arvon Foundation, The Poetry School and Maddy Prior's Stones Barn courses. His latest collection of poetry, *The Invisible Kings*, was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation.

In 2002 David was involved in a writing project with the NHS in celebration of its fiftieth anniversary. This involved working with NHS staff to produce new writing either in workshops at Warwick or via email. The result was an anthology of poetry and prose called *The Gift*. The contributors included not only celebrated writers such as Doris Lessing, Fay Weldon, Hanif Kureishi and Les Murray, but also staff in the Health Service. 32,000 copies of the book were published of which 30,000 were distributed amongst NHS staff and the remaining 2,000 were sold with profits being reinvested in the Health Service. He describes the book as 'an act of community, even solidarity.' It was conceived and achieved as a 'serious, entertaining, permanent, meaningful and articulate' tribute to the NHS and those who work there.

What impact has your work had on the University?

I managed to convince them about the importance of creativity in every subject area. Creativity and performance are important in all areas of learning.

What did you learn from the experience?

That it's very important to go at your target without diversion. You have to focus on your goal, be courageous and draw others along the way.

There are many different types of residency. What do you think they achieve, if anything?

The raise the profile of poetry and show how important it is in everyone's life, in everyday life. Obviously some writers just do it for the money, such as it is, because they need it but a residency can only be successful if the poet puts their heart into it. The individual makes the residency.

Do you feel a residency or some form of outreach work can exert a positive impact on individuals/society/culture?

A residency can have that impact. I have produced 19 podcasts and 10 icasts on the art and craft of writing. These are quite possibly the most popular downloads in literature with 4,000 downloads a day. A get letters of appreciation from all over the world, often people in prison who wouldn't normally be able to access such material otherwise.

Can the impact be quantified?

Not financially, no. However the number of people using resources and returning again and again to take part in various writing workshops and programmes is a measure of success.

Writers sometimes complain that residencies and even work at university distracts them from their writing.

Well, that's just bollocks. There's always time to write; just get on with it.

8. Graham Mort

25 April 2010

You have been writer-in-residence at the Aldeburgh Poetry Festival, in Shropshire schools and with the *TES*. Please give details of these residencies: duties, activities, teaching, editing, publications etc.

These consisted mainly of running workshops in community settings, schools, prisons, arts centres etc. For the *TES* I read weekly submissions of work from school children and edited a weekly column publishing a new poet. For the Creative Scientist (Shropshire schools) I was commissioned to write a new work. The Aldeburgh festival also provided a space of time in which to create new work.

How rewarding/successful were these residencies for the participants?

Hard to say from my perspective, but feedback was extremely positive and participation was enthusiastic. I'm a very experienced workshop leader, so I'd say that I was able to maximize my impact on participants.

How rewarding was the experience for you? Did you have time to pursue your own writing and was that helped or hindered by your role as poet-in-residence?

Did you encounter any major problems?

Every residency becomes very demanding and not all residencies recognize the need for writers to respond creatively as well as through providing workshops. In the cases cited here, they provided a rewarding creative experience and in the case of the *TES* it raised my profile as a writer, which is also a valuable part of the process.

What is your view of other types of residencies eg. With football clubs, cricket teams, in hotels? Are they worthwhile or just a little gimmicky? Do they serve any purpose?

I'm skeptical about such efforts to popularize poetry or return it to its ancient community roots, even though I'd like to feel that it was possible. Poetry, like jazz, is a difficult art form and if it is to retain that level of reward for readers, it unlikely to become popular. I also wonder why some poets feel that popularity is important. It's a broad parish that can accommodate a wide range of expression, but my own feeling is that popularity is a kind of chimera and that it actually militates against the way poetry works against the grain of consensus to create realisations through discomfort.

Poetry slams, competitions, open mics, performance poetry – is poetry losing its elitist image and becoming more mainstream?

Again, we'd like to think that it is, but I actually think that poetry slams and open mic events are still relatively small events. I don't think that they are building a mass movement that will reach some kind of critical mass in their impact upon society. I think they will ebb and flow, whilst poetry's public profile remains relatively low.

What do you think of the role of Poet Laureate? Would you accept the role if offered?

As a Republican I object strongly to the infantilizing effects of an hereditary monarchy upon a supposedly free people. I'd like to see the Laureateship divorced from the Crown. I might consider it then ...!

We seem to be bombarded with writing events – readings, public book launches, book groups, Richard and Judy, literary magazines, reviews, e-zines, festivals,

poetry tents, prizes, residencies – so many opportunities for the writer to exploit. It has never been so good to be a writer. Would you agree?

Well, I think that capitalism is a strong force behind these forms of promotion.

Books are still pulped in large numbers and publishing can be ruthlessly selective.

Literature has always worked on many levels – populist and ‘literary’, for want of a better term. It’s great that work of high quality can now achieve a high profile, but the larger publishers are also very active in promoting through those channels and in achieving reviews. The smaller independent publishers form the historical base of UK publishing and I think we should continue to value their stability and integrity in the face of more volatile publishers whose primary aim is to make money.

Are there enough opportunities to encourage serious writers? Should more be done?

I think there are now many opportunities through the growth of Creative Writing programmes at UK universities and also through the Arvon Foundation and Taliesin Trust. These operate independently of commercial pressures and are giving many writers the opportunity to develop their work with expert advice. I think that there have never been more opportunities for writers in this respect.

Do you have any other comments about the creative writer in the public sphere?

In relation to my last remarks about writing programmes, I think this is a new way in which writers are interacting and sharing their sense of creative process with a wide range of individuals and is doing much to demystify the way in which writers work and talk about their writing.

9. Andrew Motion

4 October 2010

You have had a very successful laureateship, introducing reforms in the teaching of poetry in schools, setting up the Poetry Archive and generally acting as champion for poetry at the highest possible level. What would you say were the highlights of your laureateship and then maybe downsides?

The best phrase that I ever came across, which was a description of what it was like but was pretty much a mistake in an American newspaper, which described it as a 'double-edged chalice'. [laughter] And so it is.

A bit of a mixed metaphor...?

Yes hilariously inept but nonetheless quite apt. The difficulties about the role at a personal level are to do with your life which becomes public property. And the way in which everyone, and particularly the media, think that they are sort of allowed to rake around in your life in a way that they previously haven't bothered to do and that can be very tiresome. A larger and subtler sort of problem was to do with the way in which publicness [sic] and the great welter of petitions to write commissions either formally or through some sort of media pressure, which is less formal though no less definite in a way, disturbed the necessary balance between conscious and unconscious activity and the imagination. We know that there are lots of things that are mysterious about art but one thing we do know something about is that there is a sort of feed from the sub-conscious to the unconscious and in any commissioned work there's likely to be an excessive emphasis put on the knowing, manipulating the subject-led part of the mind. Generally speaking this is not conducive to writing good poems. Some people are better at handling that than others and, in fact, John Dryden was a genius for it. But my poems, because they depend on quite an intimate

strong feeling and because I've always thought that the side or back entrance to a place is always more interesting than the front door, for me it did pose quite serious difficulties; so serious in fact that for quite a long period, about two thirds of the way through my laureateship, I went on the record and stated that I was suffering from what is generally called 'writer's block', which broke spectacularly almost as soon as I stopped being Laureate. But we can talk about that later. So, all that on the sort of downside, as it were. On the plus side, it's an honour, and I did feel it to be that. And more practically it allowed quite a lot of things to happen that wouldn't have happened otherwise, particularly around doing good for poetry. This is something I wanted to do.

Was that a responsibility you took upon yourself?

Absolutely. There was no brief to that effect from on high. No, the only thing that the Queen and Tony Blair said to me was that you don't have to do anything. They both said that very same thing.

Was that said in a very direct sort of way or merely hinted at?

No, very direct. Well, there was a slight notion, more in Tony's voice actually than in the Queen's, which made me feel that if I didn't do something it would be a bit disappointing. Because, after all, before me people had done good for poetry. Ted Hughes did good for poetry but he did it in a much more occasional way, if I might put it like that. And I don't mean to imply any sort of criticism of him. But I said yes to the post even though I knew it would be a bit of a nightmare in some ways, because I thought it would give me a chance to do some good for poetry. And I thought the role of ambassadoring [sic] could be very interesting and might be quite valuable. In terms of what it allowed me to achieve, there's no doubt in my mind

whatsoever that I would not have been able to set up the scheme for getting writers into schools which made a big change to the way in which educators thought about how they teach poetry in classrooms. But even more so about the Poetry Archive which now has people reading two million pages of poetry a month, and has logged 200,000 visitors so far. An unheard of figure. I could never have set that up had I not been called Poet Laureate because nobody would have given me the money. It's as simple as that. So when I read or hear people saying oh you know the post of Poet Laureate is tremendously superannuated and useless, that seems to me precisely wrong. If you have the energy and the imagination and a certain practical application about doing such things, then it opens doors, raises money, makes things happen that wouldn't otherwise happen.

I suppose the role in a modern democracy may be viewed as a little anachronistic, inappropriate...?

Well you see that's the other thing I tried to sort out...

In a way you turned the whole thing round and reinvented the role?

Exactly. I hope so. My parting gift, and I meant it to be a parting gift, and it really was again in a very public way, was to say I think you should not expect Poets Laureate to write about royal events any more. If they want to, good luck to them, but don't write off that, because, and I say this in a perfectly respectful spirit, they are bloody nearly impossible to write, those poems. [laughter]

Without descending into some form of satire perhaps...?

Well absolutely. But that would be totally inappropriate because if that's how you're going to write about it then you lose respect...That was the only thing that I felt was

sort of off limits about it, to be somehow disrespectful to the royal family. But politically or socially for instance there is an opportunity. I, quite frankly, I just didn't want to write satires about the royal family, I'm not that sort of poet, but I did want to write sort of socially engaged things. And that changed the role in quite a fundamental way.

And was there a strong reaction to this new approach?

When I wrote my poem against the Iraq war there was a storm of protest and questions were asked about it in Parliament. But quite quickly a lot of voices came to my support and just said do you want somebody who's engaged with the world or not? And then there was a sort of 'oh yeah, I see', you know this should change. And that was the end of that. So I ended it feeling I was very glad to have done it and very glad to be stopping doing it which I think is quite typical of many jobs.

It used to be a job for life, which almost seems like a sure-fire recipe for complacency...

You don't do it for life...

The fact that the role of Poet Laureate has now been reduced to ten years; is that a good thing?

I think it's good for a number of reasons because I think we should really spread the load. In other words, somebody else needs to have a crack at it because you're not the only person who's going to be able to do it well. Because, with the best will in the world, people run out of energy and ideas and other people will have new ones. And because I think that it's very important that the Laureateship is seen to be something that can be attempted in a number of different ways, but may be

fundamentally linked around the idea of what poetry is and how it might be approached. But I've an academic background, I teach in a formal way, I'm a white, middle-class male who went to a private school and I might be a member of the Labour Party but I'm not exactly radical. And it seems very important that the idea is strongly communicated that that's not the only way to be Laureate, as a way of writing poems. So when I look at Carol Ann I feel very excited about the amount of overlap between the ways in which we think about poems, but obviously delighted that she is such a different person than I am. It seems very healthy.

It was quite a surprise, I suppose, to have the first woman Poet Laureate?

Yes, I thought it was going to her when it was going to be me and I was genuinely taken aback when the call came – and of course it wasn't her – and so much so that I had to spend the weekend thinking about it. I really hadn't expected this and I needed a weekend to think about it. I spent the weekend thinking about the things we've talked about today. Could I take it on and what would the price be? It was quite a high price and one that I seriously underestimated.

I believe at the time Carol Ann Duffy was quite negative about taking on the role.

She would have accepted it [grins], she would have accepted it.

It would have been a great achievement for women and for that reason alone she should have been happy to take it on.

Oh yes, of course. And the same thing will apply when her ten years are up. Whoever it is, I'm sure they'll be good at doing it as well and on we go...

To go back to the question of the length of time. The laureateship used to be for life and has now been reduced to ten years. Is ten years still too long?

Well, I have thought about this. I mean, if you go down the American route, they do it for a year with a chance to renew for one more year. One is probably too little. It took me about seven years, from first thinking about it to getting the Poetry Archive up and running. I think ten years is a dignified amount of time and I think ten years and one day would be too long. Everywhere we look we see that in politics, the lives of governments, wherever you turn it seems to be a logical, natural term. Roles need refreshing, they themselves need refreshing, and the whole idea of whatever it is they're doing need refreshing. And you understand about poetry but you're interested in that sort of thing but out there it takes quite a while to nail the idea that there is a new one...

I imagine there was a lot more media attention focussed on your laureateship than ever before?

Yes. Because I sort of went for it and because I was always on the Today programme and always firing off my opinion about the war, poetry and such things. Pestering people, saying, 'pay attention' and 'we shouldn't be fighting this war.' That brings in its wake, in fact excites a lot of interest and the very nice thing about my life is that I still feel able to generate that interest when I want to. But when I don't want to it's not sort of hanging round me.

You can capitalise on the fact, when necessary, that you were Poet Laureate...

Yes...like the work I've been continuing to do for the archive and all the other things that I do. These are hard things for an individual to estimate in themselves but I

notice that when I do readings now that there are quite a lot of people there and it's obviously not going to stop and perhaps it will never stop...

Do you feel you've managed to reach out to a new/different audience that maybe would not ordinarily have been interested in poetry?

Yes. Definitely I feel that. And I think the way I came at it made a difference. The reason I say that is that we may, the likes of you and I, may happen to use quite a sophisticated language when talking about poetry, because we teach it or because we study it, but if we ever forget that it's a very primitive thing then we've made a bad mistake. It's to do with the basic, recurring human appetite for rhythm and rhyme.

I suppose there's always been that ancient tradition of poetry being at the heart of everyday life whether to celebrate harvests, births, marriages, or lament loss... The bard riding into battle alongside the soldier...

Primary school children get that, because they're close to that sort of primitive impulse. And then partly to do with reasons of puberty in boys, blushability [sic] and things, but significantly to do with the way that it's taught, and the way the zeitgeist works, something goes wrong in most people's lives at about the age of thirteen. And so this thing that is really primitive gets billed as being a weird add-on to life when it isn't a weird add-on to life... To use the position of Laureate as a way of reminding people that something has gone wrong and trying to do something about it seemed to me a fantastic opportunity. Which again, not being Laureate, I've still taken because this role on, I still go to lots of schools... I'm no less busy than I was but I don't have the pressure of the role. And I feel that I've been reconnected with things that I write best about, which are the things that I want to write about which, are love and death,

you know. And I've never had a huge range of subjects, on the other hand love and death are THE subjects... so ...

Did you get any specific response from the Queen to your poetry and all those other achievements we've discussed?

I think a knighthood is her way of saying thanks.

I'm curious to know how close your relationship was with members of the Royal Family?

No. I saw her reliably once or twice a year. I always saw her when I got to recommend who got the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry (a duty of the PL). The Queen always says yes, she doesn't say no. It's not quite like winning a prize. It's the Laureate's delightful task to take the person who gets the medal to meet the Queen to receive the medal. The Queen would always say at those meetings, 'I don't read much poetry', and I would always say, or I began to say, 'But you do read', and she did, 'you do read the selected poems of whoever gets the medal for poetry.' Not only did I make sure she got a copy but I made sure she did read it (!!)' 'So you read at least one collection of poetry a year which is one more than most of your subjects.'

[laughter] Which I think she was quite pleased to reflect on. I've always felt that if I'd wanted to play it differently I'd have hung around the palace more frequently. Ted did a lot after all. But I really didn't want to do that and I didn't. He loved all that ... 'it's as deep as England...' that's precisely how he felt about it. I don't have that, so I rather backed off from all of that. If I was ever there it was in connection with an event of some sort, quite purely social, the Queen's Golden Jubilee and so on and so forth. I found myself having the tendency to be irreverent about the whole thing and I just didn't want to be drawn into it. I'm not unkind, and not disrespectful,

why would I be? It's not my style anyway, but I'm definitely concerned to say I'm not quite in this tribe. I may be called Poet Laureate but I'm not in this tribe. And, admitting that made me feel better about myself and solved the problem of getting writer's block which was more to do with publicness [sic] and sort of glare than it was to do with the role...Well, much of my life is like that now. The only writing time I have is incredibly early in the morning because of work and committees and so on...

So, you haven't managed to achieve that balance?

I'm busier. Definitely busier. But I am writing poems again. A very interesting thing happened just as I came into the home strait, which was easily the most enticing commission ever. The BBC invited me to go and interview and then write about Harry Patch. It was an incredible honour to meet him. It was absolutely fascinating. I'd done a lot of work on war poetry in one way or another. My father fought in the Second World War, my grandfather in the first. The whole thing went straight into me like a dagger, I was terribly moved. He looked like a child. I shook his hand and I thought this is the hand that held the rifle that went over the top in 1917. It's just completely amazing. And I could hardly wait to get home and start writing about it. Because of all that, because I've always written out of very strong feeling... the point of telling you this story is for two reasons. One is that it hardly felt like a commission at all – in reference to the balance we talked about earlier, how am I going to do this? and so on – and the primitive wish to write, in terms of balance, was absolutely as it should be. And the other is that it made me begin to realise, with a gradually quickening acceleration, that actually I wanted to write a lot more war poems. And in fact in a month's time I've got this little book of war poems coming out. The second

of these poems is an elegy for Harry Patch. The First World War is about people I didn't really know and the Second World War is about my dad.

Amazing generation when you think about it and mostly didn't speak about their experiences at all.

Yes. My father did, only very reluctantly, and more to my children than to me. And then there's quite a lot about Iraq and Afghanistan. And about 50% of them use soldiers' own words, found words in fact that I've rearranged. I've read a lot of books and articles on the subject. The problem about war poetry by civilians is that, however well-intentioned it might be, there's always the risk, unavoidable really, that you're going to end up looking as though you're aggrandizing yourself by setting yourself up with this subject. Something inherently wrong about it... vulgarising. But I thought, well, the way round that is not to be me. The way round that is to be them. Hence these found things. So there's quite a long poem about shell-shock through the century for which I've taken lots and lots of bits from here there and everywhere...

Yes if you haven't actually been there, you're not, say, Wilfred Owen, it seems presumptuous and somehow wrong...

You can write a good poem about being a civilian at home but I agree with you... but I hope that I've found a way round that problem.

I look forward to reading the collection.

Well, I hope you enjoy it. And then right at the end of this emerging, loose sequence of poems I read an incredibly moving interview with Sally F??, widow of Rupert F? Who was killed in Afghanistan. And it turned out that he'd been to my school. Actually two people from my school have been killed so far and I just knew what

was in his head. Because you can't spend five years in a place like that and forget it. We're in touch with each other now, Sally and me, and so the last poem in that series is about him and a figure like her on the home front. What it's like to have two men in uniform come up your garden path and tell you your man is dead.

And it still goes on...

It bloody does...

On the topic of writers-in-residence, what is your view of the more unusual residencies – golf clubs, pubs, tattoo parlours?

I have rather a split response, to it to be honest, because part of me thinks exactly in line with everything we've been saying, that is, what a good idea to join poetry on to life in this way. Let's make the point that poetry belongs everywhere by having poetry in lavatories and you name it.

Does it trivialise poetry?

There is a real danger that it does trivialise it by making the connection too specific. When I was saying earlier that I'm somebody who likes going in the back door or the side door on a particular subject this is partly what I mean. Those placements encourage the idea that the best way of approaching a subject is face on and sometimes that can work really well. Generally speaking I'm very much of the view that the best way to tell the truth is to tell it slant. When we value the 'mighty dead' we value them not because they went at it like a bull at a gate but they managed to saturate the subject in whatever their mindset is. So the great poem about political unrest in the 19th century is the (????) which appears not to have anything to do with it. In fact Keats himself is brilliant about it when he says we hate poetry 'that has a

palpable design on us' and that's an absolutely crucial phrase. It's always been a crucial phrase for me... That is always the danger (manipulation, indoctrination). I think, provided we understand and provided you are able to say to these people who take up these residencies it's a version of freedom, not a yoke, then it should be ok but then of course that's quite difficult to make happen because the people who are saying it's my zoo or it's my pub or it's my football club, they want their money's worth and that money's worth is made manifest in the quite direct relation between the commission and the subject of the poem. And they want a quick return, they want kids to come along and say 'oh I get it' but actually we, as readers, conscious of the eye of eternity, know that actually it might take a while to get it and I keep saying the direct response is not necessarily the best one in fact, reliably, not the best one.

I don't think it results, in most cases, in any great contribution to culture or literature.

No, no. In other words, we're talking about something else. Let's not stop them happening but it brings people into contact with poetry, let them reflect on what's important in life. I'm in the middle of a quite challenging project at the moment. Jamie Oliver has taken on an unused school with a number of sixteen to eighteen year olds who've fallen through the educational net and he's parachuting in various figures to help with the teaching. I'm doing Creative Writing with them. It's the most difficult work I've ever done in my entire life. These are seriously disruptive, upset kids and I have no formal training to deal with this stuff. Twenty in the group, which is quite large, mixed. And it's very dispiriting too because kids who do want to learn get a lot of stick from those who are out of control. But one way of getting their attention, and I did this last week, is to tune in to what the like. I went in there last

week with a young rapper called Didgy Strider (?) and they probably thought they'd met God and they shut up and they listened to him. And he was fairly soft-spoken and it was good to show them that you don't have to make a lot of noise to make yourself heard. The kids loved it. The real value here is that this is a thing in itself but I say you can go through this doorway and you find yourself in the marvelous palace of poetry which has a million different rooms in it. In this room you find sonnets, in this room you find free verse, in this metaphor, irony, and that's what poetry is. So to go back to the residency point, the danger of these rather engineered placements or commissions or whatever, is that they don't act sufficiently well as a gateway to poetry. At their best they do but if done badly they can create a strange closure, a ghettoing...

Sean O'Brien

September 2013

1+ 2. The ground seems to have shifted somewhat from the time when the serious reading public and those who wanted to be serious would take time to consider what writers had to say. Thomas Mann between the wars, and Auden up to the 1960s, for example, seem to have had a kind of authority in public discourse which has now almost gone. The late Seamus Heaney was perhaps the last (though maybe Margaret Atwood retains something of this status) to seem like someone worth turning to for a comment. Things may be different outside the Anglophone world. Gunter Grass and Orhan Pamuk seem to have a greater significance for their societies than their equivalents do for ours.

In a sense this marks the decline of deference as applied to the cultural sphere, and has obvious desirable features, as it has in other areas of life. But there is a babel of opinion now, often unreflective and inclined to *ad hominem* reactions, and a prevalent *knowingness*.

Barthes's essay in *Mythologies* on the writer on holiday observed and foretold the trivialization of literature by lifestyle. The 'personality' of the writer comes almost to outweigh the work (e.g. Martin Amis, Christopher Hitchens, despite their basic seriousness). In the West it seems that moral authority, however we feel about it, has largely moved away from literature (as it has from religion) and into the sphere of journalism, which in turn begins to set the tone for literature.

3. Dundee University; the Northern Arts Writer's Fellowship at the Universities of Newcastle and Durham; British Council Visiting Writer at the University of Odense, Denmark; and at Hokudai University, Sapporo; for Poetry International at the South Bank Centre; Leeds University; Live Theatre, Newcastle upon Tyne.

4. Impossible for me to assess the first part of the question, though I very much like teaching and encouraging writers, as well as organizing events and projects. I hope they were of use to the people I dealt with. All of them were interesting experiences which helped me to get on with my work.

5. I think it depends on what the writer can make of the setting. A poet in the bookies might end up denouncing gambling, which would presumably not be what the bookies had in mind.

6. See 1 and 2. There is, of course, a good deal of activity. What it signifies outside the society of writers and would-be writers is hard to assess.

7. Connolly, though there was never a pram in his hall, was horribly aware of putting off serious work in order to take on journalism. Some writers steer clear of journalism, reviewing and so on. People should do what suits them. I happen to like journalism and reviewing. I have the sense that for many writers nowadays there are fewer long lunches and weekend house-parties and beanos. Most of the poets and other writers I know are workaholics. They just want to get on with it. Poets in particular are often curious about neighbouring art forms – translation, fiction,

drama, opera, broadcasting and film, for example – and tend naturally to extend their interests into them

8. Yes and no. Civilization is expensive. A lot of good writing needs some form of subsidy. Much drama wouldn't happen without it, for example. A merely commercial assessment of value only fosters mediocrity.

On the other hand, I think there are dues to be paid: patronage needs, with exceptions, to be based on evidence of some accomplishment, not just on promise. We also have to beware of the inevitable prescriptive tendency of bureaucracies. And if you count teaching writing in higher education as a kind of patronage, I think it should follow solid publication rather than precede it.

10. Kachi A. Ozumba

5 October 2009

Have you ever been a writer-in-residence?

Writer-in-residence for Beverley Literature Festival – my first residency. Glad to take it on. Very pleased about this as it means he can offer the same level of support that helped him to get where he is. Very happy – giving back and encouraging budding writers.

Can you make a living as a novelist?

I believe it is possible. There are many writers – only time can tell. I guess that many novelists – one day they will succeed in living on the proceeds from their writing. I hope one day to do that. It would be a dream. *Can you?* Well, well, well.

Do you take part in many festivals?

First festival was in Cheltenham 2006, when I won a prize for my short story.

What types of other jobs have you undertaken to support your writing? Do they influence what/how you write?

I run quite a lot of creative writing workshops, for instance at this festival (Beverley) and events, appearances, mentoring. I also teach at Newcastle University. These activities influence my writing. When you are teaching you also learn in the process. Reading through manuscripts makes you explore ways of improving your own writing, you become also much more conscious of this. It shows in my writing – I try to avoid such faults.

Much of a writer's life seems to be taken up with travelling and book promotion. How does this affect your writing in terms of quality and quantity?

The novel was released on 15 September – since then I've done many readings, festivals, and I was a guest at the Cumbria library, Sheffield Festival, Amnesty International. My publisher sets up these events. Most of my engagements for this month are on Fridays, mostly in October. It's very important to take part in these events to promote sales and my author profile.

How rewarding is it to take part in a festival – financially or otherwise?

Financial rewards rarely match the hours you put in. For the Beverley festival I ran a Creative Writing workshop where participants sent their work in advance. I spent a lot of time reading/working through these manuscripts and writing reports. Some are interesting, some very boring, others amazing. But it's work. I believe it's very important – getting enlightened feedback is so important for new writers. And this is something I'm very happy to do.

When you travel around you meet people, see new places, get refreshed. The touring happens at a time when the novel is launched, so a good time to break from writing. You try as much as possible to make your novel a success. The more successful it becomes the more energized you are to write again.

It took three years to write this first novel. I picked the writer I admire most – J M Coetzee. I write a minimum of 1000 words a day. It was a job – like working in an office. If I have a block, I don't try to force the words. Though I am inspired by him, I think my style is different from Coetzee. I have my own style...

Do you write with a particular audience in mind?

When I was writing this novel I was in the UK. I wrote with a Western audience in mind, that is, the UK. This shows in my work in many ways. When I used patois for instance I had to dilute it a little to make sure a UK readership would understand.

Many writers comment on the hugely commercial nature of the publishing world. Have you allowed this to influence what you write? Can a writer be free of this? What is the impact of this on writers, literature, society?

It's a balancing game. I am happy that what I wrote was not dictated by anything commercial. It was something very dear to my heart and the subject of my PhD (Literature of incarceration). I have an independent publisher and they do a great job. With many of these big conglomerates you are lost, you don't get the same attention. My publisher allows me to take risks. If an independent company likes your work they will stick their necks out and try a little more. The next novel I'm working on perhaps is more commercially influenced though it is a subject I want to explore. Contrast/clash of cultures – English and Nigerian – similarities and differences. Imagine two characters, one from England and the other from Nigeria. They are very similar in many ways but from vastly different cultural backgrounds. I want to explore what happens when they meet.

The publishing world and the media have a huge influence on writers and readers. If there is a lot of publicity they will influence readers and get the sales. Like Harry Potter now, the books on the tables in WH Smiths. Fantasy novels are so popular as a result.

Have you undertaken any commissions? What is it like to write to order?

I find that my writing is best when it springs not from that kind of pressure. I like to write spontaneously and when that happens my work sparkles. I don't like the pressure of a deadline. Stories that come from the heart reach out and have greater emotional impact. I don't accept commissions. The spark of inspiration is what makes a work special – this is what happened when I won the prize. The idea just came to me one day on the train and I knew I had to write about it.

We seem to be bombarded with literary events – readings, festivals, slams, book groups, Richard and Judy, literary magazines, reviews, e-zines ... it has never been so good to be a writer. Would you agree?

How many novels are competing for all of these opportunities? It is very competitive. Tens of thousands of novels being published – there's a lot of competition to appear at festivals and to be reviewed etc. If I lived in Nigeria I wouldn't have these opportunities – we don't have this kind of promotion there. I think the more the better. It's very encouraging here. My novel will eventually be published in Nigeria. If it sells well here it will be highly respected in Nigeria.

Any other comments on the life of the writer in the 21st century?

Writing is a very demanding job. For me I think it's only love. Love of writing that can make someone stick through it because it's a path strewn with disappointments. You have to persevere and I think it's the exception rather than the rule that when you finish your novel it just gets snapped up. Persevere, hone your crafts... For me I think that if someone really loves writing they will succeed. I want to make a

profession out of it. It is said make a living doing what you love and you never have to work for the rest of your life. So that's what I'm trying to do. I love writing...

11. Christopher Reid**2010****Tell me about your residency.**

I was writer-in-residence at Norwich School of Art and Design for a period of two months in 2002 and again at York University in 2003. The residency at Norwich was organized by George Szirtes who was a tutor there at the time. It is an Art College obviously but as part of a new curriculum they were keen to integrate different art forms and invited writers to give talks and run workshops. There was some controversy about this residency. The Principal was in fact against it and after my residency they never repeated the experience. Nonetheless, a large number of George's student went on to publish either novels or collections of poetry.

What were the conditions like?

Well, they found me a box room as an office. It was windowless, antiquated and stuffed with filing cabinets they hadn't thrown out. The idea was that the students were supposed to drop in to see me to discuss their writing projects... but of course they didn't. I was contracted to work three days a week and was housed on the campus at UEA.

What sort of activities did you organise?

I was involved in literature seminars for the first year Foundation course. But, as I say, a many of the staff were not particularly interested in what I was trying to achieve. I really felt surplus to requirements while I was there. I also taught on the poetry course two hours a week – Andrew Motion was professor at the time.

I also edited a magazine of student writing while I was there. I remember writers such as Padrika Tarrent, Helen Ivory, Esther Morgan, Ben Borricks who have since gone on to have their work recognized and published.

Did the residency allow sufficient time for you to pursue your own writing?

Well, the whole thing really wasn't about my writing time. However, I got started on a poem that wouldn't have been written if I hadn't been there. Something about the change of location, and the long train journeys opened up a space that I filled with writing. In that period I wrote 13 or so poems which I included in a booklet for private distribution.

How would you rate the quality of your writing as a result of the residency?

Interestingly, I took more risks than others perhaps would have. Perhaps the artistic context had a liberating effect.

Many writers are now gainfully employed as lecturers and professors in academia. How do you view this development?

There is no tradition in this country of accepting the writer in academia. It's as if the academic world doesn't quite understand what the writer can contribute and how this may be evaluated. There seems to be an overwhelming amount of administrative tasks to undertake in universities which make it quite difficult for the writer to function within this culture.

We seem to be bombarded with writing events – readings, public book launches, book groups, Richard and Judy, literary magazines, reviews, e-zines, festivals,

poetry tents, prizes, residencies ... so many opportunities. It has never been so good to be a writer. Would you agree?

Intermittently. I think quite a lot of the activity is distraction. Take for instance festivals and readings ... they tend to use up a lot of creative energy which should be spent writing. Most writers like a quiet life and are really not very comfortable in the public gaze. You feel as though you have to put on a show but there is something dishonest about this. Or this eagerness to please and the need to perform feel very false. You really want to save you energy for better things and the pressure to have a public profile makes you very resentful. However, the more successful you are the more your publisher will insist on you getting out there and making yourself available. It's as if these large publishing corporations want to justify their own existence.

What is the image of the writer in the public sphere?

In terms of the media I think there is a marked lack of coverage of literature, particularly poetry, in the main newspapers. There seems to be an institutionalized contempt for poetry. Film and music reviews dominate because that's where the money is. There was a time when literary editors were respected and had the freedom to express themselves but those days are long gone, alas. Now they are driven by commercial interests. However, on the poetry circuit and from the grassroots there is a very rebellious counter culture.

Performance poetry seems to be enjoying a level of success. Is this a positive development?

These people are just licensed buffoons. They are mocking the art...

12. Carol Rumens

7 December 2009

You have undertaken numerous residencies: University of Kent (1983 – 1985); Northern Arts Literary Fellow (1988 – 1990); Poet-in-Residence, Queens University, Belfast (1991 – 1993) and University College Cork (1994); the British Council, and the University of Stockholm Please give details of these residencies – duties, activities, teaching, editing, publications etc.

The post of writer-in-residence was common in the eighties and nineties: it barely exists any more, which is rather sad. It was designed to give the writer an income and some writing-time, in return for offering the host institution a kind of consultancy, in which the writer was available for two or three days a week to talk to students and/or run a workshop. You were also expected to have some kind of input to the ‘community’ if the local authority was involved with the funding. At UKC, the post was primarily attached to the School of Continuing Education, so I visited various adult writing or literature classes, giving workshops, talks, readings. The other residencies followed a similar pattern, except that my students were younger. I would see them individually, and I also offered a weekly workshop which had a mixed attendance of students and community. These workshops were very good because of the mixture of ages and experience. I also went out and about to various local groups and courses, gave readings, and organized student readings.

During my Northern Arts Fellowship, two Newcastle writers, Jackie Litherland and Peter Mortimer (who also ran Iron Press) were putting together an anthology of Russian poets in translation, and my ‘community work’ was to help with that. It became an anthology called *The Poetry of Perestroika* and it was published by Iron Press in 1989. Then at Queen’s I got up a student publication, a one-off collection of

poetry and prose, called *Brangle*. Later with the help of one of the adult students in the workshop, Jean Bleakney, we produced a second issue, which included poets from beyond the University and Belfast. The idea was to bring together poetry from the UK and Ireland – to represent the ‘archipelago’ if you like and see how the voices worked together.

As these residencies were largely at universities, was the experience in each institution very much the same or were there differences?

The Stockholm residency was different in that I was working with students whose first language was Danish, not English. They wrote English very well, in fact, but the course was extra-curricular. Creative Writing wasn’t taught – and still, I believe, isn’t taught – in the universities of continental Europe. In fact, it wasn’t taught at many British universities in those days. The Newcastle students, for example, were allowed to submit a writing portfolio as part of their English BA if they wished. I think that was also true of the Cork students. It was seen as an optional extra.

However, I stayed on in Belfast after my residency finished, and with Glenn Patterson, the novelist, set up an undergraduate creative writing module at the University. And I continued to run an ‘adult’ class at the Ulster Arts Club.

There was not a huge difference in my activities at these universities, though of course the ambience and atmosphere in each was different, and differently stimulating. I wrote about all the places, and those poems found their way into the various collections. Belfast was the most exciting residency, because there were so many poets and critics there, and such a range of literary activities. I learnt quite a lot about Northern Irish politics, too, of course! Many of the poems I wrote in Belfast and Cork were later published in my Blackstaff collection, *Holding Pattern*.

How rewarding/successful were these residencies for the students/departments you worked in?

You'd have to ask them! I think they were happy with the work I did. And a satisfying number of my ex-students went on to publish collections.

How rewarding was the experience for you? Did you have time to pursue your own writing and was that helped or hindered by your role as poet-in-residence?

There's no question that the residencies were creatively fruitful – at least for my poetry. The peripatetic life is not so conducive to writing fiction, though I can see now that I should have been more disciplined about continuing my novel-writing. I wasn't – but I wrote a lot of poetry. And I learned about life, of course. It has always been important to me to challenge my own tendency to sit at home and write – and not to depend on a partner's income. The independence was very good for me. In fact, I think of my residencies as my own 'continuing education.' I'd dropped out of my own university course, and I went in again through the back door of poetry!

What is your view of other types of residencies outside of academia, for example in supermarkets, betting shops, tattoo parlours and so on? I'm thinking of Poetry Places residencies. Are they worthwhile or do they devalue poetry?

I think on the whole that it's a good thing. It means poetry reaches different kinds of people – people who wouldn't sign on for a writing class, or study for a degree, but who still can respond to poetry if it's presented to them in an honest, unpretentious way. And really I believe everyone can respond to poetry. Not every poet could do those residencies, nor would want to, but for the right person it could be very rewarding on both sides.

There have been various residencies in prisons, and all the writers I know who have worked with prisoners have found the experience tremendously significant, if often painful. Tim Liardet wrote a great collection of poetry based on his experiences in a young offenders' institution, *The Blood Choir*. Of course, poetry in this kind of situation can mutate into social work or therapy. That doesn't matter – as long as the poet can handle it.

I've never heard of a poet in a tattoo parlour – but why not?

Was the Poetry Places experiment a landmark for poets, marking a turning point for poetry and poets, and their place in society? Or was the success short-lived and now largely forgotten?

I don't know very much about it, to be honest. I don't think, though, that it has been a turning-point. Poetry doesn't seem to me to have become more integrated in society. The scheme itself rather fizzled out, although there are a few placements still around – there's one at Tate Modern, I believe. I didn't pursue any of those posts because by that time I was more established as a teacher, and felt I had found my niche. Poetry itself would benefit more significantly, I think, if it were a much more integral part of education. Primary school children should learn poems, and write them, and feel that poetry is a natural, pleasurable part of language-use.

Through organizations such as NAWA, the Arts Council, Poet in the City, amongst others, there seem to be many opportunities for writers to get involved in educational projects and other cultural events. Does this have a detrimental or beneficial effect on writers and the quality of their writing? Are writers becoming something of a commodity?

I support poetry in education, and have done some work for NAWE. I suppose poetry might be thought of as a commodity by some institutions, but I don't think poets are harmed by contact with 'the real world.' If they feel it could be harmful, they shouldn't undertake such roles. I think poets have to be firm, though, and not betray their own ideas of what poetry is, or work in ways that are reductive for them.

I don't like the idea of Arts and Sports being in one government department, and the Arts Council of England seems to be me to have lost its way completely regarding literature. The magazine it churns out is frightening – all gloss and corporate-speak. It's all about style without substance – in fact, its' about style without style. I don't think poetry should be turned into a feel-good, life-style brand. But that's a very different thing from sending writers into schools or community centres.

Poetry slams, competitions, open mics, performance poetry – is poetry losing its elitist image?

Yes, but a lot of what these entertainments produce is a fairly substandard kind of poetry. I think that poetry has various levels, and at the highest level, it's essentially a complex way of using language: it explores ideas through images, and enters areas of the mind and imagination that can't be predictable, and may be more disturbing than entertaining. So I hope it continues to be difficult in a good way – rich and interesting and, while not actually elitist, certainly demanding. At the same time, I believe there is room for different kinds of poem. Music doesn't always have to be classical: folk, jazz, rock and even easy-listening – all the sub-genres – are valid too, and can be very good of their kind. And that is true of poetry.

What do you think of the role of Poet Laureate? Would you accept the role if offered?

I think Carol Ann Duffy seems to have successfully detached it from the requirement to write bad poems about the Royal Family, and that's good. There are not many honours in poetry, so I wouldn't abolish it. I'd have more – a new Laureate each year, as in the USA, for example. I wouldn't object to having the job. It would mean readers, after all.

We seem to be bombarded with writing events – readings, public book launches, book groups, Richard and Judy, literary magazines, reviews, e-zines, festivals, poetry tents, prizes, residencies ... so many opportunities. It has never been so good to be a writer. Would you agree?

That is a very big and varied list. Many of the public arenas you mention benefit novelists more than poets. Poetry readings are certainly a good thing, because poetry is an oral art, and begins in the mouth before it gets onto the page. But to answer your question overall: No. I don't think writers have never had it so good. For example, there is no good literary criticism any more, and that makes it very hard for young writers to learn the craft and then establish themselves in the clamouring democracy of voices. You mention reviews – but in fact poetry is little reviewed these days. *The Guardian* usually manages to review one poetry collection a week. *The Independent* often seems to have given up altogether. Poetry is largely ignored by the press.

The prizes certainly benefit a few poets, but the prize culture means that non-prize-winners are even less likely to be noticed. And there often seems to me to be a degree of underhandedness about these awards, with friends promoting each other, etc. I dislike the culture because it means as soon as you publish a collection, or even a single poem in a magazine, it's in for a competition, regardless of whether you

want it to be. Every year, for example, the ‘Forward’ anthology selectors trawl the magazines, and pick ‘best poems’ of the year. I’ve sometimes been successful and had a poem chosen for the anthology. But it all feels very arbitrary. Why this poem, and not that one? A lot of good writing invariably remains un-noticed. The more innovative and avant garde poets feel particularly bitter about their marginalization by this ‘mainstream’ publicity-orientated culture.

There are fewer major literary magazines than there used to be: I remember the days of the *Listener* and *Encounter*, and when the *New Statesman* and the *Tribune* published poetry every week. There are smaller outlets, yes – little magazines and e-zines, but a young writer is often not tested by these publications. They are easy to get into, and they are easily ignored. Self-publishing used to be called vanity-publishing, and no serious aspiring writer would stoop to it. Editors really edited: they returned your work if they didn’t like it, and they sometimes made helpful comments on the rejection-slip! And to finally satisfy one of these highly critical editors was a real achievement. Magazine-publication was an informal way of learning the trade, and very useful.

What do you think of these contemporary forms of literary patronage? Are there enough opportunities to encourage serious writers? Should more be done?

I can’t help feeling it should not be left to the market. There are writers – novelists as well as poets – who will never sell in great quantities, but who are producing valuable and important work. We need a Writers’ Union that represents, and helps fund, writers at all stages of their careers, as in the old USSR (but without the censorship, course). The Society of Authors works a little like this – there are various awards for young writers, such as the Gregory Awards, and even a few schemes to

help the impoverished. But there needs to be an institution with a wider focus, now that the Arts Council has become the Up its own Arse Council.

Do you have any other comments about the creative writer in the public sphere?

I can't do better than quote W.H. Auden: 'Private faces in public places are wiser and nicer than public faces in private places.' I write a poetry blog for *The Guardian* Online, and one of the posters is always talking about 'po-biz', which he considers to be the lowest form of show-biz. That idea is blood-curdlingly horrible. Luckily, poets are by nature bolshy and resilient, and will go on doing their own thing. What happened to Ruth Padel, a wonderful poet who misjudged the poetry-friendliness, and woman-poet-friendliness, of the media, is a lesson to us to keep our heads down and write, and never take our five minutes of fame too seriously.

13. Miles Salter

20 July 2010

Tell me something about your residency here at HMP Everthorpe.

The residency lasts for two years and requires me to be here two days a week. I've organized Creative Writing workshops which were held in the library but I'm also involved with the literacy programme. I produced a magazine for inmates' writing and organized a drama group for Black History Month during which time the group wrote their own scripts and gave two performances. The authorities were very keen to support this project as this particular group have been marginalized in many ways.

I've also been running a music group but unfortunately that's been spoilt but one very disruptive participant. Everthorpe has around 600 plus inmates and I'm in regular contact with twenty to thirty of these either through the workshops or the literacy classes.

How would you rate the success of these activities?

I'd probably give it six out of ten overall. Working prison can be unpredictable: inmates can be difficult or in some way vulnerable and that often dictates how a session will go. The workshops worked well at the start and I had a very good attendance rates. However, this attendance became difficult due to various interruptions – meetings, visits and so on.

What makes the residency problematic?

Dealing with difficult people and the knock-on effect is challenging. Literacy of course tends to be low and their understanding of literature and poetry is limited. You have to be sensitive and manage tricky situations carefully. The stresses and strains of prison life are not always conducive to producing good writing. Conflicts flare up and they are not always mature enough to handle them. You are treading on eggs – avoiding difficult issues. There also a lot of work to do in making them feel at ease so that they can tackle the writing tasks.

What kind of remuneration to do receive?

The WIPN salary is £12.5K per annum for 2 days a week. This is part-funded by the prison service. I also have £1,000 allowance for materials, producing booklets and so on. I sometimes invite guest writers to talk to my groups.

Apart from your salary, what are the other benefits of the residency?

It gives me time to write and helps build my CV. Also, the culture here and the circumstances of my work are very unusual. As a writer, I find the situation and the psychology fascinating and this has fed into my work.

How beneficial is it for the offenders?

I hope to sow some seeds and set them on a route, give them the tools and skills that will allow them to express themselves. Being able to communicate helps them in dealing with frustrations and difficult feelings. I believe writing has a therapeutic effect even though I'm not a therapist myself. What's interesting is that there's a very strong writing culture in prison. They all write letters and even poems to family and

girlfriends. So many offenders say to me, 'The day I came in I started to write.' They engage in a kind of self-therapy. Writing your own life story is cathartic

How willing would you be to undertake further residencies?

I have mixed feelings. I have a lot of job satisfaction but there are also many challenges. I don't know if I'd be a writer in prison again!

What advice would you offer other writers-in-residence?

Keep time for your own writing. Generally I think residencies are good for both writer and the organization.

14. Fiona Sampson

28 June 2009

Please give details of any residencies you have been involved in.

I was a Hawthornden Fellow which was a wonderful experience as I was fed, nurtured, respected and treated like an important writer. I had a Fellowship at Warwick University where I spent some time working on music and poetry. I undertook work/residencies with a number of Health Authorities. I spent three years in the Isle of Wight, five years with Age Concern in Swindon and four years with the Salisbury Hospital Trust. I also had a number of shorter residencies. In all I spent about 13 years in Health and Social care settings and dealt with hundreds of people. These residencies usually involved working with people two to three days a week. I worked with people with different problems, young people from care settings or sheltered housing; people with drug dependencies; long-term psychiatric patients; people with learning difficulties, and in GP surgeries and hospices.

What kind of activities did you organize?

I led workshops and also held one-to-one sessions. I undertook programming for myself and any visiting media. I designed posters, was interviewed on radio and published a number of books in this area, for instance, *Creative Writing in Health and Social Care*. I also did a PhD in the use of poetry in health settings.

Given the nature of your duties, was there enough time for your own writing?

Sadly not. I was contracted to work with clients say two days of the week but the organizations were not interested in my writing.

How would you rate the success of your activities?

Excellent. People's lives were changed through their engagement with poetry. In a way it was a means of testing the importance of this art form. It wasn't done to further my own career but to show in a very real way how poetry helps you cope – both reading and writing it.

Did you experience any particular problems?

Unfortunately I experienced a sense of isolation as a writer as I was working in a non-arts culture. I was continually in a position of having to justify my position and make a case for the importance of poetry. Lack of communication was also a problem. However, once the benefits were evident a number of medical practitioners were converted to this form of therapy. I was also restricted in many ways by NHS working practices.

Were these residencies adequately funded? Was it financially rewarding?

Generally speaking there were sufficient funds to keep the project going but it was not very well paid. As a freelance there is no career progression and nothing like annual leave or sick pay. The work was of course rewarding in itself but not in a financial way.

What impact did this work have on you?

It was an enormous privilege to work with people in extreme situations, to help them develop their capabilities, to be inspired by their courage in overcoming their problems. Some people might say that this has nothing to do with poetry but I believe it is part of the business of poetry. But it was exhausting and I felt burnt out.

Also I felt I had to be very self-effacing and deny my own skills. I believe writers in prisons and education fare better but the situation in health and social care is different. As a result of this work, along with others, I became a founding member of Lapidus which has grown into a network for people using writing for personal development.

Did you manage to write during the residency?

Well, yes, I did write but despite the residency really. I wasn't encouraged in any way. In addition to writing poetry I also undertook a PhD.

Would you be happy to do other residencies?

Definitely not in health services!

What is your view of the Poetry Places scheme – bringing poetry into the workplace?

I'm not terribly impressed with the majority of those placements. It seems too trivial and in fact could potentially discredit poetry. It certainly results in very poor poetry or a kind of entertainment only, performance art. Why spend this money subsidizing cabaret? I don't see the point of poets playing for laughs to a fish and chip shop queue. Such schemes don't deserve public funding. I'm in favour of more serious schemes which touch a very broad audience and result in real poetry – Poems on the Underground for instance and National Poetry Day. I also think Poet in the City is a positive move as it has a certain glamour, is high profile and raises the image of poetry promoting it as an important art form. As editor of *Poetry Review* I have tried to uncover and promote the best in contemporary poetry even though some literary editors claim that there is no great contemporary poetry. However, I believe people

turn to poetry in many situations and even pop groups use great poetry in their songs. Circulation of *PR* has gone up 50%, by the way, during my editorship.

What advice would you give to other writers-in-residence?

Don't do it! Not if your own life and your writing are compromised. These residencies have a bad image in any case and are not appreciated in literary circles. They drain your energy, you don't meet the right kind of people who can inspire you or encourage you in your work. In effect it's very much a dead end and you'd be better off being unemployed. Impoverished writers are often forced into these roles as community artists but the pay is poor and there isn't always enough time to develop your own work.

15. George Szirtes**21 April 2009****Please give details of any residencies you have been involved in.**

In 2000 I had a three-month residency with Trinity College Dublin – it was their first international fellowship. As part of the Poetry Places scheme I was writer-in-residence in Downham Market. (List of other residencies at end of this interview).

What kind of activities were you involved in?

At Trinity, there was a series of seminars on translation, a weekly lunchtime workshop for students and some public lectures on Poetry and Nationalism. In Downham Market the residency was the equivalent of just over one full week but was spread over a period of about six weeks. It involved visits to Hillcrest Primary School to work with Year 6 pupils and a number of poetry surgeries at Downham Library. I also did a half-day session with regional librarians and undertook two evening readings, one at the library and one in a pub.

They are two quite different residencies. How did they compare?

I was honoured and flattered to be invited to Trinity. It was well paid and these invitations are an opportunity to get out of the garret. It is important for a writer to get out in the world, to make friendships and network. I enjoyed working with the children at Hillcrest Primary and was pleased to encourage the (mostly) pensioners who turned up for the surgeries in the library who were mostly looking for guidance and advice on how to commit their life stories to paper.

How successful were your residencies?

I found it a little disorientating at Trinity to begin with as I had the sense that nobody knew what to do with me. However I soon organized some events which I believe were very well received. Though everybody was very kind I can't help feeling that the Downham residency was a waste of time. As happens so often, you get an arts organization setting up hosts for writers but there is no clear brief and people don't know what to do with you. I didn't do anything useful there and that just fills you with a sense of shame and uselessness. It didn't act as an inspiration for my writing and I didn't produce anything as a result. In Ireland, however, the sense of being off-balance and out of place actually made me feel more productive. I produced a series of 25 poems which were published in *An English Apocalypse* published by Bloodaxe.

What advice would you offer other writers-in-residence?

I think the brief should be carefully defined and agreed in advance. However, I'm not sure those types of residencies are particularly effective. I would rather see funds invested in projects like Poems on the Underground which have more impact, a greatly appreciated and reach a very wide audience.

List of Residencies

British Council Scholarship, Hungary, 10 weeks, 1985.

British Council Scholarship, Hungary, 10 weeks, 1987.

British Council Scholarship, Hungary, 9 months, 1989.

Writer-in-residence, Downham Market, 1998.

Tutor in residence, Paris, WICE, 1999.

First International Writer Fellow, Trinity College Dublin, 3 months, 2000.

Writer-in-residence, John Hewitt Summer School, N. Ireland, 1 week, 2002.

Writer-in-residence, Tonbridge School, UK, 1 week, 2002.

Writer-in-residence, Open University, November 2002.

16. D.J. Taylor

5 October 2009

Have you ever been a writer-in-residence? Details

No, I've never done any residencies.

Can you make a living solely out of writing (novels)?

It's interesting as I've just written a piece to appear in the *New Statesman* this week mourning the death of the man of letters. And in some ways it's slightly disingenuous as I suppose that's what I think of myself as. First and foremost I consider myself to be a novelist as that's what I most like doing. My very first book, a great many years ago now was a novel. But you can't make a living out of the sort of novels I write with the sort of familial financial obligations I have. There probably aren't ten 'literary', well I think that characterization is dying anyway, I mean describing novelists as 'literary novelists'. There's probably not more than a dozen now who can make a living out of that kind of book. The economics are just not feasible any more. You used to be able to do it maybe ten or twenty years ago. [Why?] Because there were backlists in those days, you could write a novel a year, all the libraries bought it and if you did a few other things as well you could make a living out of it. You can't do that now. There are fewer libraries and books don't stay in print as long as they used to. And so my income is made up of, in the same way that an investment manager would have a portfolio, that's what I have. There are the books, there are events like this, I'm being paid for coming here today (Beverley Literature Festival writing workshop), which is great. There's journalism and I find the public appearance side has really increased in the last few years. Festivals are burgeoning. This whole idea of my coming here today to do a creative writing seminar with fourteen short story writers – this is unprecedented, compared to what it

would have been ten years ago. I might add, generally speaking, I fear and shun the academy [laughs], but I've recently taken up a small teaching post at Coleraine University in Ulster, which doesn't pay very much, but it's just one of the many things I do and it all adds up. I go to Coleraine twice a year. But I also do a weekly column in a Sunday newspaper, I do a weekly radio slot, something for a magazine, I write anonymously for *Private Eye* and it all builds up and somehow I manage to educate my three children on it.

What I would like to do is write novels only. This is not a complaint. It's good I can make the money I do with my novels, because they used to make nothing at all. That's all great but you can't live off it. That's the problem – all the great branches of 'literature', writing - but with just one of them on its own, you can't live off it. Twenty years ago, if you were a real top-notch writer you could just be a reviewer and you could live off it. There were enough newspapers, enough opportunities and enough money. There isn't now and that's why you have to have that portfolio approach.

Taking part in book festivals is a way of promoting the sale of your books.

As far as selling books goes, the benefits of taking part in a festival are indirect. You do sell copies sometimes but generally speaking you only sell maybe half a dozen copies, if even that. Sometimes you can strike lucky and make a killing but I find that indirectly it's invaluable. If I get an invitation to attend a book festival I always accept it because I know that ultimately it will lead to something though I don't always know quite what. For example, six years ago, when I was touring *Orwell*, I thought it was a waste of time and I asked myself why am I doing this. But I've come back today, there were the short story writers in the workshop, there's going to be a

couple of dozen people there this evening (at a reading), I've got an invitation to go to York festival next spring. It's exponential. It's always worth doing and you'll always meet people who you will then come across again later. I've found that. People will say, oh I saw you at the such-and-such and I read your book. And so it's often gradual. It doesn't necessarily lead to immediate sales but at some point it will come back and you've got the one thing that a writer has to have and that's some kind of public profile. People seeing you out there, it doesn't matter if ... Fifty years ago Anthony Powell (?) or Evelyn Waugh would be horrified if someone said look this is your promotional tour, they wouldn't have warmed to that idea at all. But these days you've got to do it. Literature is one of the contending media and you either have to play the game or you won't have any profile at all.

Are you therefore being manipulated by the media and the publishing world in a sense?

No, I don't think it is, because so much of it takes place almost beyond the publisher/author nexus. A lot of the stuff I do and all the connections I have, literary festivals for example, have been made by me and are sustained by me, and my publisher is really kind of outside of it. I tell them where I'm going and ask them to get some books there rather than the publisher saying what I should do. Sometimes they call me and say they've fixed up such-and-such but half the time I find that I'm doing it through my connections and then letting them in on the deal to sell the books. Sometimes I'll even do things they don't know about. So the relationships are much more dispersed I suppose than they used to be.

I'm still a hopeless romantic about this. I've been writing books for over half my life and I still find it remarkable that people pay money for them, read them... If you said

to me there are four people in a room there who've read your books and want to talk to you, I think it's marvelous... I don't know much about Freudian psychology but I've always thought of myself as a classic introvert/extrovert in that the idea of having dinner with four people I don't know very well would be terror but if you said go into that room and talk to a hundred people I've never met about literature, well, that's just not a problem. I was encouraged to do public speaking at school at a very early age and once you've done that, you're not frightened any more, you get used to doing it.

A little unusual for a writer perhaps?

Many writers are reclusive but I get a kick out of it. I don't get a kick out of most ordinary forms of social interaction but I do get a kick out of talking to an audience. I've always enjoyed that and don't find it difficult.

A lot of a writer's life can be taken up with travelling and book promotions.

How does this affect your writing in terms of quality and quantity?

I don't want to give the impression that I spend my life in a ceaseless tour on the road but I do accept invitations and so in any given week there'll probably be something that I have to attend. This week for example... The autumn is peak time. Spring, early summer and the autumn are the peak times. Nothing happens in January and February so you can sit in your burrow and write, and then in March you start going places and October is one of the peak times. So, for example, this week I'm here today, on Friday I've got to go and judge a translation prize in London, next week I've got to do a talk about *The Bright Young People*, which is my latest novel, somewhere in London and then the week after that it's the Manchester Literary Festival. So October is very busy. All you do is you simply make sure that the actual

creative periods don't coincide with the gadding about periods. At the moment, I've got to hand in a novel in January. I've finished it, I'm just typing it up and revising it, so it's not creative, hard creative graft, and fits well with the travelling/public appearances. I've got various journalism jobs in the offing but they are easy to pick up and complete...two pieces to do by Friday but that's fine because I know what I'm doing, but I'm used to it and if it weren't there I would miss it. I'm one of those people who complains about the stresses and strains but who actually relishes the deadlines.

Some writers find it very difficult – you have to have the temperament for it. A friend and I used to write a series of fictitious character sketches and we'd alternate. I used to write mine in an hour and poor old Marcus would sometimes spend days and in the end we had to stop because it simply wasn't worth it for him. I was habituated to it. It's easy with practice.

I used to write book reviews on the tube sometimes... but no my ideal life would be to live mostly just with my wife in a little house by the sea and I would just get on with my work. I'd be perfectly happy. She wouldn't be as she'd need social interaction but I'd just need her and the books. But... it's not going to happen. We have three children... school fees ... and so on...

Do you write with a particular audience in mind?

I'd like to think that I do, but I know that I don't. I write the type of books that I want to write for me. I know that's a terrible thing to say but my audience is myself. My quality control is me. It's ... will this sentence do for me? But that's why it's so gratifying to come to events where you meet people who've read your books. Before, I never had any idea there was anybody there at all. You can feel very cut off and so

it's marvelous to meet people who've read them and responded to them. My ideal reader is the cultivated, well-read person who knows what I'm going on about. I don't really conceptualize it in any other terms than that.

Many writers comment on the hugely commercial nature of the publishing world. Have you allowed this to influence what you write? Can a writer be free of this? What is the impact on writers, literature, society?

No, everybody is affected by it and one has to have an historical perspective on this and commerce has always run the market. Why did Thackeray write in monthly numbers? And look at Dickens. These problems are all sketched out even as early as Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891). The same problems endure, but yes, I wrote the Orwell biography because it was the centenary. Previous to that I wrote five novels and they were all pretty much the same novel. People coming from the provinces to the city – deracination – that's my thing. And I then sat down with my publisher and said, 'Alison, I'm going to write another novel. Either another provincial deracination thing or a Victorian one.' The words had barely left my mouth and she said 'Write the Victorian one.' And I did. And you know, it wasn't a chore and I desperately wanted to do it and it was fantastic fun. I didn't do a lot of research. I just read loads of Victorian novels. And because it was a Victorian historical mystery, with the word 'mystery' in the title, it sold maybe ten times as many as my others. And as soon as I'd written it both my agent and my publisher separately took my wife to one side and asked her to make sure the next one's another Victorian one. But I desperately want to get back and write a novel about contemporary Britain. This hasn't been done for a decade now. I know that I probably wouldn't get as much sales for it. I'm just finishing one about Victorian horse-racing – people like that sort

of thing. I'm not sure how much they want to read my analysis of Blair's Britain and then again I've got three lots of school fees to pay.

Everybody, apart from Ian McEwan and three or four others, is facing this dilemma. A friend of mine, and it would be invidious to mention his name, but he's an immensely distinguished novelist, almost a household name and he said to me that he had an idea for a new novel, but he wouldn't write it because it wasn't very commercial. And, horror of horrors, he's actually thinking of taking the job of Professor of Creative Writing in order to earn some money. This is a household name, a man whose books are in libraries, W.H. Smiths', Waterstones... This (the professorship) would be preferable to having to write a novel he didn't want to write.

We seem to be bombarded with literary events – readings, festivals, slams, book groups, Richard and Judy, literary magazines, reviews, e-zines – it has never been so good to be a writer. Would you agree?

Most of this stuff, as ever, is non-literary in origin, I think, in that the majority of book festivals have little to do with literature. All these celebs... the joke was made, I think in Private Eye last week and looking at the advertisements for the Cheltenham Literary Festival and they said there is one actual writer amongst all the photographs. The front of house stuff promotes the celebs, popular stuff, what the Victorians called 'biblia abiblia' – books that are not books. But I think that's inevitable. In the current commercial landscape literature has to be a part of the commercial mediatised razzmatazz. Otherwise we can go out to the margins and die there. There's no way... I don't see ... there's a middle way for books any more. I don't think they expect that kind of de facto respect that they would get forty years ago. They have to sing for their supper, unfortunately. It's very competitive but I still

think that there are hundreds of thousands of discriminating readers out there who in a lot of cases will feel patronized and short-changed by publishers dispensing culture to them. I'm very encouraged by that because the people I meet here for instance, the people in my short story group this afternoon they're intelligent, serious readers. They're not... they don't want to read crap. They've got opinions of their own and don't want to be fed stuff by the three for two promotions. I've been taking an interest in the literary world since I was in my teens, I've just always been interested in it, and half of me is really depressed with the situation and the other half is quite optimistic because there are still quite serious people about. There are some very depressing modern tendencies – book groups I find incredibly depressing, because it's always the same kind of book they read.

Aren't they a possible audience for your work?

They are an audience and it's fine. But sometimes you read responses to your books on Amazon let's say and you just despair. Not because people didn't like your book but because they don't understand about how literature works. I had a woman once complain about the Victorian one. What she couldn't get about it was that the chapters didn't run on one to the next. You get to the end of chapter one and chapter two starts off with something completely different. Christ! What sort of books have you been reading then to get this... [response]... you know, a book is there to provide one thing and if it doesn't do that then it's failed. So, all that annoys me... People are entitled to their opinion and they are also entitled to keep that to themselves. It's great that there are more forums for debate (internet, blogs etc) but sometimes if the standard of debate is so low. It's like newspaper websites – 'We want your opinion' – well why do you want it? Some of the stuff that appears on

Amazon is just so ludicrous and inept that you do just ... but you know we live in an inclusive society. We live in a society where something like 1,500 people are doing creative writing courses which is great and marvelous but that's 1,500 new novels – who's going to publish them? There are probably more people writing [books] than buying them.

Any other comments on the life of the writer in the 21st century?

As I said I spend half my time complaining about the strains and stresses because as you know I am completely freelance, unusually so I think. I have no salaried work [apart from Coleraine?] oh that hardly pays ... only pays a couple of grand a year. I have weekly gigs, but I don't have contracts. I do a weekly column, *Independent* on Sunday, and though they pay quite well there's no job security. I've been writing for the *Independent* and its affiliates for twenty years but I'll last as long as the current editor lasts because that's how it goes. And you have to accept this. I remember one time I had this marvelous job, the easiest money I've ever earned, when a friend of mine was editing the *Sunday Times* book section and they were told they'd have to have a weekly business book review. It was to go in the business section but she would commission it. And I did this and it was money for old rope. It was only a sort of 300 word review every week but in the end the responsibility for commissioning was devolved to the business editor. When he left, the new business editor brought in one of his friends to do the review. What could I do? It was just on a week to week basis – no job security. You just have to live with that. You probably have to have six irons in the fire...I've just always wanted to be a writer. It seemed the most desirable destiny for me. It's a bit of a struggle but we keep going.

17. David Wheatley

15 April 2009

Tell me about your experience as writer-in-residence with Wicklow County Council.

The residency lasted for six months and the number of contact hours varied from week to week. I did 2-3 school visits a week, amounting to approximately ten two-hour workshops sessions. I organized workshops and school visits. I also edited some children's anthologies and helped organize a festival.

How would you rate the success of these activities?

Excellent. I used opportunities to develop local writing; hosted a literary festival; engaged in publicity for the local authority and used the opportunity to develop my own writing.

What were the outcomes?

Stream and Gliding Sun literary festival, featuring Michael Longley, John Banville et al.

What impact did this have on the host organization?

It laid down a usable template for future residencies.

What impact did these activities have on you?

It was all very helpful and I gained lots of material much of which is reflected in my second poetry book.

What do you think writers' residencies achieve?

Residencies should be project specific. The better the project the better the residency will be.

What is the impact of your residency on the local community/the people you engaged with?

Difficult to quantify.

In terms of your own writing, what impact did the residency have?

All experience is good experience. And this residency led to the (eventual) publication of *Misery Hill* in 2000.

Does a residency lead to publication?

Not necessarily...

Would you be happy to undertake other residencies?

Definitely.

To what extent do workplace residencies raise the profile of poetry in the public eye?

A little... it depends on what the writer makes of the experience.

What do you think of the idea of writers working within business organizations?

Is the move 'from the garret to the boardroom' (John Agard's words) the right one? Isn't the world of the corporation the very antithesis of a poet's/writer's vocation.

Not if you're Wallace Stevens, or Dana Gioia.

To what extent do such residencies raise the profile of literature in the public eye?

A little.

Is this impact significant or is it just another passing phase?

It depends on what the writers make of the experience.

What advice would you offer to other writers-in-residence?

Sell them your idea, don't just take theirs. Put your writing at the centre of the project.

What advice would you give to other poets-in-residence?

Sell them your idea, don't just take theirs. Most importantly, put your writing at the centre of the project.

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