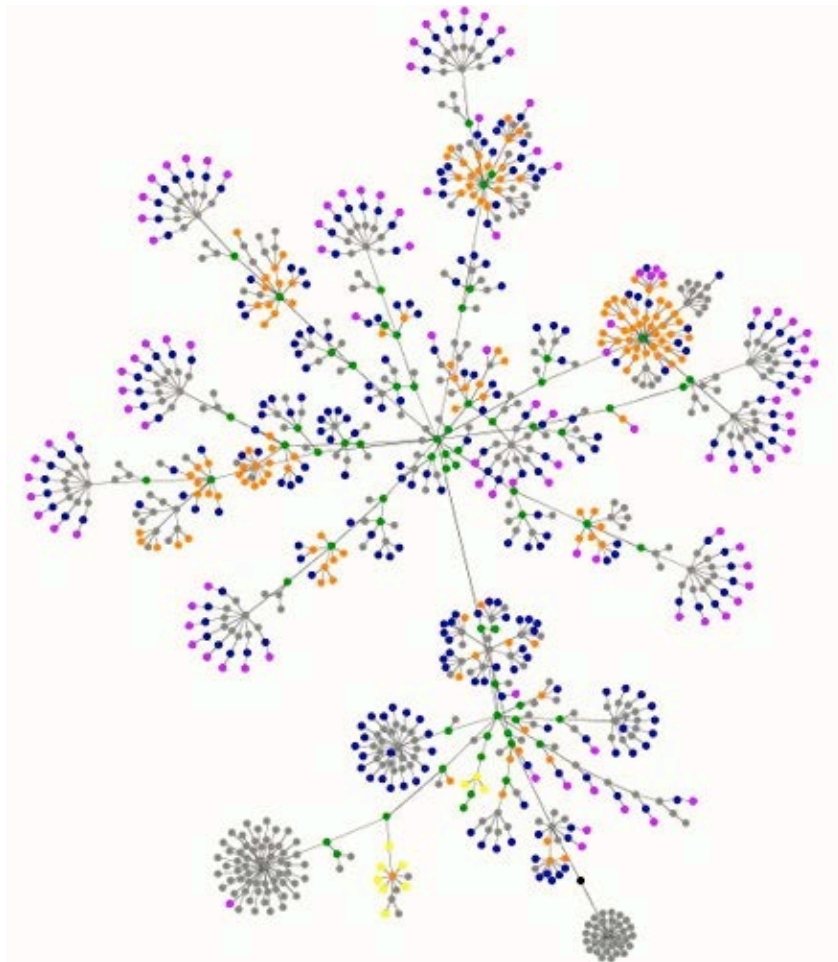


ENCOUNTERS WITH
LITERATURE



Sarah Harrison and Alan Macfarlane

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Preface to the series

There have been many autobiographical accounts of the creative process. These tend to concentrate on one level, and within that one aspect, the cerebral, intellectual working of a single thinker or artist's mind. Yet if we are really to understand what the conditions are for a really creative and fulfilling life we need to understand the process at five levels.

At the widest, there is the level of civilizations, some of which encourage personal creativity, while others dampen it. Then there are institutions such as a university, which encourage the individual or stifle him or her. Then there are personal networks; all thinkers work with others whether they acknowledge it or not. Then there is the level of the individual, his or her character and mind. Finally there is an element of chance or random variation.

I have long been interested in these inter-acting levels and since 1982 I have been filming people talking about their life and work. In these interviews, characteristically lasting one to two hours, I have paid particular attention to the family life, childhood, education and friendships which influence us. I have let people tell their own stories without a set of explicit questions to answer. This has led them to reflect on what it was in their lives which led them to be able to do their most interesting and rewarding work. They reveal the complex chains which sometimes lead to that moment when they discovered or made something new in the world.

I started for some years mainly in the disciplines I knew, anthropology, history and sociology. But after 2006 I broadened the project out to cover almost all fields of intellectual and artistic work. I have now made over 200 interviews, all of them available on the web. Future volumes based on these interviews are outlined at the end of this volume.

How to view the films

The films are up on the Internet, currently in three places.

Alan Macfarlane's website, www.alanmacfarlane.com

The Streaming Media Service in Cambridge:

<http://sms.cam.ac.uk/collection/1092396>

On both of these, the full summary of the interviews are available.

Most of the interviews are also up on the 'Ayabaya' channel of Youtube.

The films can be seen from within a free PDF version of this book by pressing on the image. You will need to download an Adobe Acrobat PDF reader (free) from the web if you do not have it. If you right click on the film, other options open up. The free PDF version can be obtained by going to Dspace at Cambridge and typing Macfarlane Encounter followed by the name of the book, for example 'computing' or 'economics'.

Technical information

Unless otherwise specified, all the interviewing and filming was done by Alan Macfarlane, mostly in his rooms in King's College, Cambridge.

The detailed summaries, with time codes to make it easier to find roughly where a passage of special interest is to be found, were made by Sarah Harrison, who also edited and prepared the films for the web.

The cameras improved with time, but there are occasions when both the early cameras and microphones were less than satisfactory. We have had to wait for the technology to catch up. It is hoped one day to improve this if funding and technology allow.

Introduction

My first serious encounter with literature was at my preparatory school in Oxford, where I came to learn some of the great English poetry and read Shakespeare and other authors. From then onwards, literature became my favourite subject, especially because I was living in the valley where the poet William Wordsworth spent many of his early years. The love of literature blossomed in my last two years at Sedbergh School under the superb teaching of David Alban and I did best in this subject, though it was decided that I should go on to read history at Oxford.

At Worcester College, Oxford, in the early 1960's, several of my best friends were reading English and they often spoke of the inspiring, if daunting, supervisions with Christopher Ricks, a Fellow of the College. I remember seeing him but never talked to him so it was only many years later in 2013 that we had our one full conversation, in the form of the interview in this volume.

When I came to Cambridge in 1971, one of the first Fellows of King's whom I met was Peter Avery, a distinguished historian of Iran and expert on Iranian poetry. I interviewed him in 2008, shortly before his death.

Cambridge was still famous as the recent residence of F.R. Leavis, Raymond Williams, I.A. Richards and C.S. Lewis. During my time at King's College I met the literary critic Frank Kermode, though I do not remember having any serious conversations with him until I interviewed him in 2008. I also met other literary critics, such as Tony Tanner and Chris Prendergast, and also occasionally encountered George Steiner at drinks parties. I finally interviewed Steiner on 16th July and 23rd July 2007.

I had known the literary critic Gillian Beer through visits to London for research council business, and I interviewed her at the start of 2009. Finally, we have collected books over the years, so when Toshi Takamiya visited us several times in Cambridge, when visiting from Tokyo, and we visited his home and seen his collection of medieval and early modern books, we had much to talk about. I interviewed him towards the end of 2009.

George Steiner



16th July and 23 July 2007

<http://downloads.sms.cam.ac.uk/1130599/1130606.mp4>

George Steiner, *After Babel* (1998)

Extracted from Wikipedia - 22.8.2014

Francis George Steiner, FBA (born April 23, 1929), is a French-born American literary critic, essayist, philosopher, novelist, and educator. He has written extensively about the relationship between language, literature and society, and the impact of the Holocaust.

George Steiner's career spans half a century. He has published original essays and books that address the anomalies of contemporary Western culture, issues of language and its "debasement" in the post-Holocaust age. His field is primarily comparative literature, and his work as a critic has tended toward exploring cultural and philosophical issues, particularly dealing with translation and the nature of language and literature.

Steiner's first published book was *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky: An Essay in Contrast* (1960), which was a study of the different ideas and ideologies of the Russian writers Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky. *The Death of Tragedy* (1961) originated as his doctoral thesis at the University of Oxford and examined literature from the ancient Greeks to the mid-20th century. His best-known book, *After Babel* (1975), was an early and influential contribution to the field of translation studies. It was adapted for television in 1977 as *The Tongues of Men* and was the inspiration behind the creation in 1983 of the English avant-rock group News from Babel.

Several works of literary fiction by Steiner include four short story collections, *Anno Domini: Three Stories* (1964), *Proofs and Three Parables* (1992), *The Deeps of the Sea* (1996), and *A cinq heures de l'après-midi* (2008); and his controversial novella, *The Portage to San Cristobal of A.H.* (1981). *Portage to San Cristobal*, in which Jewish Nazi hunters find Adolf Hitler (the "A.H." of the novella's title) alive in the Amazon jungle thirty years after the end of World War II, explored ideas about the origins of European anti-Semitism first expounded by Steiner in his 1971 critical work *In Bluebeard's Castle. No Passion Spent* (1996) is a collection of essays on topics as diverse as Kierkegaard, Homer in translation, Biblical texts, and Freud's dream theory. *Errata: An Examined Life* (1997) is a semi-autobiography, and *Grammars of Creation* (2001), based on Steiner's 1990 Gifford Lectures delivered at the University of Glasgow, explores a range of subjects from cosmology to poetry.

Interview Summary

George Steiner interviewed by Alan Macfarlane 16th July 2007

0:05:07 Born in Paris in 1929; father was of Czech origin but had grown up in Vienna; Mother was Viennese; father left Vienna in 1924 convinced that a form of Nazism was coming and went to Paris; I was educated trilingually in German, French and English; from an early date father sensed English would be the world language; Mother was a brilliant linguist; owe parents everything; opinion of psycho-analysis; Father was an investment banker but determined that I should not follow him; wanted me to be a scholar and teacher which is a deeply Judaic point of view; may have inhibited the creative impulse; Mother hoped that I would take a rather severe physical ailment as a privilege; would not be able to do military service which proved her right; she turned difficulties, like learning to tie a shoelace, into a joy; this attitude has presided over my whole life

06:23:02 Born with a right arm without natural motion; doctors suggested just using the left arm but mother disagreed and I learnt to write with my right hand; she saw no point in compromise which is echoed in my intense opposition to political correctness with regard to handicaps; had a sister seven years older who died recently; this age gap meant she looked after me which was very important during the war and on our subsequent move to the United States

07:52:09 Father was an utter Voltairian, so was my mother; the only prayer she taught me was "I am bad, I could be better, but it really doesn't matter", which has guided my life; we did observe the festivals out of regard to my grandparents and in solidarity to the Jewish community, but not in a religious sense; Father taught me Jewish history and philosophy but in an agnostic way; went first to a French lycée then briefly to the American school in Paris to practice English; we escaped from France in 1940; Father was already in the United States on a French Government mission and got permission to ask family to visit him; left on the last American

ship to leave Genoa before Mussolini closed the harbour and invaded France

09:59:10 On arriving in America father's first words were "Remember we are going back"; Mother and sister were keen to make a go of it but father not content; on the surrender of Marshall von Paulus at Stalingrad he woke me and said we would be going home; sent to a prestigious high school which I hated, then went to the French lycées in New York where I blossomed; had some very good teachers as people of international renown were teaching there before getting university jobs; among them was Levi-Strauss who was helping to teach geography; own interest in Levi-Strauss started then, renewed when I realized he was a distant cousin of Proust, and think 'Triste Tropique' is one of the ultimate classics of French prose; remember Simone de Beauvoir coming to lecture on why we should be interested in philosophy

14:33:10 Became interested in the multiplicity of languages; some teachers wouldn't speak a word of English in order to keep their French pure, others learnt further languages; I was interested in the problem of the relations between language and thought, existence and identity from early on; interest in identity is central and the reason why I have been marginalized by the deep provincialism of English academic life; a monoglot country; from the tip of Manhattan to the northern tip of Long Island there are 128 languages spoken; that part I delighted in and also the availability of all sorts of music and art; incomparable New York Public Library; in school could not accept the lack of irony and ostentatious patriotism which was alien and strange; the Judaism I came from was not committed like the New York Jewish community; the lack of irony reflects the sense of hope in America

18:31:04 Did my baccalaureates and father made it possible for me to go to Yale; went for an orientation week and the first man I met on campus was a boy who had been in the lycées two years before me who advised me not to go there as it was not a place for Jews; first Jew to get tenure at Yale was Hempel in mathematical logic 1948, a subject regarded as marginal; had read about a revolutionary admissions process at Chicago and found myself taking sciences which I fell in love with; Fermi was teaching physics

and Urey, chemistry, and Redfield, social anthropology; able to do my B.A. in one year so that I could go into graduate school when others just starting undergraduate work; went to see the graduate advisor, a mathematician Kaplansky, who said I was technically an idiot having been well trained and memorizing endless formulas by heart, but no spark of creativity; advised not to go into science and utterly heartbroken; instead began to study literature and philosophy with McKeon and Allen Tate although it took a long time to get over the disappointment; some years ago I published a paper in 'Nature' on the French mathematician Galois, creator of modern topology and sent it to Kaplansky who wrote he had no regrets for doing a service to literature

24:37:50 Robert Redfield was not a good lecturer, but the material was fascinating; in order to learn about social anthropology I read Malinowski and Myrdal's 'An American Dilemma'; offered a scholarship by Harvard and from pure snobbery took it instead of staying at Chicago where I was happy; fell into black depression as it was boring, snobbish, old-fashioned; I owe everything to hutzpah (arrogance, insolence); wrote to Hutchins the Chancellor of Chicago asking for one of the two nominations to try for a Rhodes scholarship from Illinois; despite some difficulties got it, left Harvard and went to Oxford; since then Harvard have honoured me with the Eliot Norton Professorship of Poetics

28:05:20 At twenty went to Oxford; at Harvard had taken an M.A. in one year; had had some good courses in comparative literature but was working mainly in the Romantic period which is what I hoped to do my D.Phil. on at Oxford; researching why Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats failed totally in the theatre; had been to England for the Silver Jubilee of George V with my parents; felt great wonderment and bewilderment coming to Oxford; at Balliol we had a Scottish Master, Lindsay Keir, who believed that misery was the right instrument of human education; these were the worst years of rationing (1949-50), there was no coal, there was less bread than during the war; smell of egg powder and whale steak will never leave me; realized that nobody was interested in English in a D.Phil. as it was regarded as an unwelcome American import; my supervisor was Hugo Dyson at Merton who told me he was not interested in research, that the fee

was 8gns a term which was to be spent on having a good dinner together but he would not read anything I wrote; as a result, when the viva came under the presidency of Helen Gardner the room was packed as I had already begun publishing quite a bit in London; failed as knew nothing about how to write a D.Phil.; I already had a wonderful job writing editorials on foreign policy and Anglo-American relations for 'The Economist' but it hurt; the book which would be 'The Death of Tragedy' was in my drawer at 'The Economist'; Humphrey House of Wadham, Secretary of the Board of the English Faculty came to the office and asked if it was true that I had no supervision; said this was a grave dereliction and if I wanted to be taught properly he would take me on; Geoffrey Crowther my boss at 'The Economist' offered to help pay for membership of the London Library and one day off a week to do research; Humphrey House died three days before my viva but already knew that it would pass; Helen Gardner examined it again and had told him; had just married; never wanted to be titled 'Doctor' but it pleased my father; I worshipped Humphrey House, a scholar's scholar; had taken over two years to redo, and then published 'The Death of Tragedy'

37:32:04 Stayed at 'The Economist' for four years and then assigned to go to the United States to cover the debate over the atomic energy act; got an appointment with Oppenheimer at the Institute in Princeton who then said he did not speak to journalists but introduced me to the Plato scholar, Harold Cherniss; taken to lunch and at the table were George Kennan and Panofsky who were all eager to know about 'The Economist'; Cherniss was working on a Plato text trying to fill in lacunae; Oppenheimer came in and sat behind us and queried the sense of trying to fill in blanks; I was irritated by him and argued for the value of so doing; taxi arrived, Oppenheimer asked if I was married and had children, on 'no' to the latter said that it would make housing easier; upshot was my election as first young person in Arts to the Institute for Advanced Study; took it on the spot but 'The Economist' offered to give me a job if it didn't work out; on arrival back a Princeton asked to come to lunch and literally could not move for awe; the world's giants were taking their trays and seeing us, possibly shaking physically, Niels Bohr came over and welcomed us and put us at our ease; André Weil was less welcoming as he believed anything

other than science and mathematics was garbage; stayed for two years and before leaving was introduced to Sir John Cockcroft who was the first Master elect of Churchill College who said they were looking for a director of studies in the arts with a science background; this is how I came to see the beginnings of Churchill College

45:25:00 Among others at the Institute was the medieval historian Kantorovich, the expert on Renaissance art de Tolnay, whole departments of scholars of ancient Greek and Latin; Godel was also there; now I was in Cambridge, at Churchill with the fun of starting a place; we started to teach in Nissen huts but introduced a number of revolutionary things like overseas fellows; there were three students in English, but from the start I knew it wouldn't work; Cockcroft had agreed that we needed new fields such as linguistics, comparative literature; made warmly welcome by Richard Keynes, Richard Adrian, and Martin Wells, who all were ambitious for Churchill to succeed on Cambridge terms which I did not support; lectured to huge audience on how to read a poem after Marx, Freud and Levi-Strauss; invited to apply for an assistant lectureship and questioned about my article in 'Encounter' and failed to get it; Churchill did not worry about this failure and encouraged me to lecture and teach there and would have paid me as a professorial fellow, paralleling what Downing was doing for Leavis; however Leavis's students paid a terrible price as Leavis could not examine nor be a member of the boards that set the Tripos; so stayed on a tiny college stipend with wife having a job in Cambridge but two children; made my living by freelance writing and guest lecturing, many in America which meant being away a great deal; father was already very ill but when I dined with him in New York and asked which professorship in comparative literature I should accept in America he said I should chose but if I did Hitler would have won; offered the Chair in comparative literature in Geneva which I accepted in 1964; father delighted and later died in Zurich and mother died also in Switzerland ten years later; at Geneva taught the relevant texts in their original language as far as possible; wife stayed here and continued to teach as a fellow of New Hall; it haunts me that she is incredibly gifted but totally monoglot which is the irony of our marriage; wonder what the

blocks are to learning languages as there is no correlation with intelligence

57:34:07 Stayed at Geneva for 25 years working for seven months a year which meant I spent five months in Cambridge; students at the graduate level were international and the city itself was multilingual and perfect for comparative literature and at the centre of Europe; kept links with Churchill as an Extraordinary Fellow and now as a Pensioner Fellow but never taught again there; irony was that two years after rejecting me they put 'The Death of Tragedy' on the Tripos paper

59:36:20 Not close to Leavis but to his wife; Bulstrode Gardens was through the hedge to Churchill College and she took on undergraduate supervision and was fabulous with a burning conviction that all human beings should be given the very best of intellectual challenges

Second Part 23rd July 2007

0:06:04 In Switzerland retire at 65, since when lectured in many places but no formal regular teaching; range of subjects lectured on include Plato, Dante, future of the European Union; will be lecturing in Barcelona in October then on to Lisbon to preside over an international conference at the Gulbenkian Foundation on whether science has reached certain limits

3:28:15 Extremely sceptical about any effective future for Europe; saw turning point as its complete failure to deal with Kosovo and reliance on America to intervene; two tasks left for Europe, one to work out how different ethnic groups, cultures and religions can coexist without assimilation; secondly, young in Europe have never been so without hope in a deep sense and need to experiment with great Utopian ideas even if later proved wrong as with Marxism and Fascism; need an effective Left in Europe which may happen if we have an economic crisis; there are young people who do reject money and are passionately committed to helping others; islands of hope are increasing interest in ecology, concern for animals and children, all the beginnings of a new humanism

9:59:11 Book 'The Death of Tragedy' concerns its disappearance as a literary form; believe it is tied to a metaphysics with idea of divine intervention, a notion that lost its strength very rapidly after the mid-eighteenth century; did not believe you could have an agnostic, secular, tragedy; modernity is agnostic, man's loneliness in a practical world; Weber saw the disenchantment but did not foresee the modern infantile mythologies around sport and entertainment or the rise of religious fundamentalism; latter shows wish for the possibility of divine intervention in a life otherwise without meaning; Carl Jung predicted desire for help from another world; irrationalism immensely strong at present

15:44:13 Thoughts on Carl Jung and Freud and their different attitudes to literature; brought up on Homer; reflections on 'The Iliad'; Shakespeare and Dante, preference for the latter; difficulty with 'Lear'; cutting texts possible with Shakespeare but not Dante or Racine; Shakespeare as a script writer; Keat's letters find preferable to poems; Shelley, Coleridge, Wordsworth

25:19:10 Book on Tolstoy and Dostoevsky developed thesis that the question 'Is there a God?' was central and explains the strength of Russian literature over all others; Samuel Beckett, Musil and Proust very important to me; Joyce and 'Finnegan's Wake'; as senior literary critic for the 'New Yorker' for twenty years, modern fiction poured across my desk; Nabokov; Yeats

29:04:04 Sadness is that I haven't had any printing errors that commit you to immortality; case of Thomas Nash; searching for what makes a poet find metaphor; Plato's analysis; Shakespeare and ability to hear overtones and undertones of words, totality of linguistic usages; study of brain chemistry may teach us more but hope this will remain enigmatic; Llowes' 'Road to Xanadu'; Paul Klee as a child drawing shoes on an aqueduct

35:39:07 Have written poetry as part of French education; at Oxford published verse but realized it was the contrary of poetry; early on painted and drew and may have been a mistake to stop; never learnt a musical instrument but music is indispensable, of

every era and type; recently turning to Haydn for peace and calm acceptance; do not like Handel

38:22:10 Will not go into ideas of God but have written on them in a book to be published in January called 'My Unwritten Books'; seven chapters on seven books I have not written and why; one is on my confession that there are those of us who love animals better than human beings; another on my religious and political positions; one chapter called 'Zion' on the several occasions I could have gone to live in Jerusalem and reasons for my failure to do so; one is on the only time I've written erotica

41:19:05 Musings on regret and envy; privilege of being a teacher; alpha people; Kafka; literary critics; magic of creativity; own rejection by Cambridge English faculty

Frank Kermode



19th February 2008

<http://downloads.sms.cam.ac.uk/1123536/1123543.mp4>

Frank Kermode, *Pleasing Myself; from Beowulf to Philip Roth*
(2001)

Extracted from Wikipedia - 20.8. 2014

Sir John Frank Kermode FBA (29 November 1919 - 17 August 2010) was a British literary critic best known for his work *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, published in 1967 (revised 2000), and for his extensive book-reviewing and editing.

Kermode was known for many works of criticism, and also as editor of the popular Fontana Modern Masters series of introductions to modern thinkers. He was a regular contributor to the *London Review of Books* and *The New York Review of Books*.

Kermode was a contributor for several years to the literary and political magazine, *Encounter* and in 1965 became co-editor. In 1974, Kermode took the position of King Edward VII Professor of English Literature at Cambridge University.

He resigned the post in 1982, at least in part because of the acrimonious tenure debate surrounding Colin MacCabe. He then moved to Columbia University, where he was Julian Clarence Levi Professor Emeritus in the Humanities. In 1975-76 he held the Norton Lectureship at Harvard University.

He was knighted in 1991.

A few months before Kermode's death the scholar James Shapiro described him as "the best living reader of Shakespeare anywhere, hands down".

Kermode died in Cambridge on 17 August 2010.

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Frank Kermodé interviewed by Alan Macfarlane 19th February 2008

0:09:07 Born in Douglas, Isle of Man, 1919; my mother's family was totally obscure and I never met any of them; father's father died young and his mother died when I was very small so I never knew a grandparent and I had no brothers or sisters until I was twelve, when a sister was born; not very close to her as I went away when she was five, and then the war came and I didn't go back; mother was a farm girl from a village near Douglas; she would point it out when we went for walks but never went there; father's father was an organist, probably part-time; there was some Welsh connection with a sea captain called Pritchard, which was my father's middle name; my father was called up in 1915 when conscription came in and I was just the right age to be called up in 1939, so our youths were deeply affected by the two wars; while my father was away in France during the First World War his mother remarried; they had a shop which we would now call an off-licence, and the man she married staged a robbery at the shop and stole the stock, so she was bankrupt; father returned from France with no shop or money, took temporary jobs, and then got a job as a store keeper and stayed there for the rest of his career; he retired after the Second World War, which was a sad time as my mother had dementia and he was diabetic, and died of it at about seventy; they had a stronger connection with my sister as she still lived there; the Isle of Man is my home territory and I sometimes feel quite strongly about it, but not often; I find that when I go there I feel depressed and am always glad to get out of it; I am sure my father never read a book in his life; my mother had a kind of interest in poems; there was a Manx poet, T.E. Brown, a friend of Quiller-Couch and a master at Clifton; now almost totally forgotten as he wrote in Manx dialect; my mother used to recite some passages of Brown's poems when I was young

7:54:08 I was at school in the thirties when everybody was very poor; at my early schools you could tell the difference between those of us whose parents had enough to live on and those who didn't because those who didn't wore clogs; the clogs were issued by

the town; I did not wear clogs and belonged to the leather-wearing classes; I went to the grammar school, Douglas High School; it was a good school with teachers who were quite good at getting pupils through exams; few went to Oxbridge as they couldn't afford it; there were no scholarships; the teachers mostly came from the old Victorian universities, Leeds, Liverpool, some of them were ex-servicemen; one or two boys whom I knew had parents who could support them at Oxford or Cambridge but mine certainly couldn't; I won a scholarship to Liverpool University so I went there; at school I do remember a teacher called Pendlebury who was waspishly bad-tempered, but liked poems and liked you for liking them; there was a very romantic young French teacher who used to croon Lamartine; there was a certain amount of savagery among the teachers; we all got beaten frequently; I was more than a year ahead of the class that I was in, consequently I had finished with school far too early having done what they were there to provide, so they didn't know what to do with me; regrettable as I needed some help at that point; the school did not have a good library; it didn't have teachers who had the time to teach Greek; I should have had a year or two luxuriating in a wide field of study but I didn't; I did try to add Greek and had decent Latin, good English and fairly good French; I read a lot and had a good life, cycling with a friend, Quayle, with whom I discussed books; he went to Oxford but died in his fifties; I was very keen on sport and music without being very adept at either; played football and cricket, but we were a poor school with poor facilities; I did play the clarinet and violin, but badly; certainly my interest in music has been absolutely central; in the early days we had a gramophone at home and I became a fan of Elisabeth Schumann; I had no structured knowledge of music at that time and it was only when I got to university that I was instructed in these things; I became an assistant at the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall, either selling programmes or showing people to their seats, so I got to hear all the concerts for nothing; there were two a week in the season so I got to know the repertoire; I did really know quite a lot about some things, still there is an awful lot of music that I can't claim to know; also, one had one's favourites which would certainly include the Mozart operas, Beethoven, Schubert, so the focus is on Viennese; I used to listen to music when writing but now I find I can't do it

20:20:05 Went to Liverpool to read English; the truth would be that if I could have gone to Oxford or Cambridge I would have done; however, Liverpool did a very conscientious job with good people including the necessary Leavisite; given some idea of what the subject was about and also a lot of hard philology which has dropped out, people here don't do much of it; we had severe Anglo-Saxon and Middle-English courses; we also had to learn a new language so that was where I began Italian, which I have kept up; I think it was a good three years; again, you probably learn as much or more from the best of your friends, which I think was the case with me; as a kind of inspiration of what it meant to be a truly literate person I think my example would have been another undergraduate; the whole period was somewhat overshadowed by the war; I went up in 1937 and I was in the Navy by 1940; they could have called me up earlier but they gave me a year to finish the degree course; the mechanics of my entering the Navy was rather odd; I had a series of summer jobs and one was as a purser on one of the ferries ; the ship on which I was serving was commandeered by the Navy and because they needed people to sail these things they just commandeered the crew; I was given an emergency commission; I remember talking to Alan Ross, who was a war hero in fast motor boats and won the D.S.O., being amazed to learn that I actually received a commission without having had any training whatsoever; it made me a useless acquisition to the Navy for quite a long time; however, I had nearly six years at that; at Liverpool, the part of the course which is the best test of literary ability is one borrowed from Cambridge, namely the analysis of text passages, where teachers exposed their own sensibilities; there is a move to do away with this here; there is a compulsory paper in the Tripos still; I do remember actual episodes; a young man called Arthur Humphreys who had been a Commonwealth Fellow at Harvard, who later became Professor at Leicester, impressed me; I remember a particular poem of Yeats which we tore apart; the most impressive contemporary there was Peter Ure who was a conscientious objector and spent time in prison during the war, where he wrote a book on Yeats called 'Towards a Mythology' which was published in 1946; he refused to go into the auxiliary services until he had served his sentence and then joined UNRA

and had an amazing career in Greece; he rapidly learnt modern Greek and became the head of UNRA for the whole of Greece; during the war I was in Iceland for two years, and he would send me a book a month; the books that he sent were quite a testament of the taste of a serious young man - things like Virginia Woolf 'Between the Acts', Auden 'Letters from Iceland'; later, he and I were appointed at the same time to lectureships at Newcastle; I did not stay there very long but he did for the rest of his life; he died at fifty; given his age he had achieved more than anybody else in the profession

32:08:00 During the war I had a lot of time for reading; I watched a programme last night on Kamikaze on which I have a special interest as I was there; I was never actually under attack; after the European war was over I was in an aircraft carrier which was sent to the Pacific; of course, the Americans didn't really need us; the British fleet that went was huge though dwarfed by the American fleet; the Americans took the brunt of the Kamikaze attacks; film kept me awake as I had not visualized it for many years, had some difficulty explaining to myself why I was there; at the end of the war we went to Hong Kong which had been occupied, to take off people from the prison camps; I was put in charge of this operation; the camps were mixed; Ballard's book about Shanghai is very similar; there were lots of very young children born in the camps so I had this extraordinary gang of men, women and children to look after; I had Japanese working parties; the aircraft carrier that I was in was not a fleet carrier, but a smallish one; we had to find space not only for a full crew but for all these people; we had to find water for them, which was a real headache; we had people at the showers with stopwatches; they were all really ex-civil servants or business people who had been caught in Hong Kong at the beginning of the war; they were all suffering from beriberi, all miserable, and all expected home comforts which they couldn't get; by the time we got to Sydney there was quite a lot of discontent to deal with; I was so glad to see the back of them all; certain colonial habits asserted themselves when they got into a British atmosphere; they demanded so much; I was trying to explain to them that our sailors were going without showers in order that they should have them, but they still wanted more; I was given an insight into aspects of the colonial character

37:55:19 The early part of the war I spent two years in Iceland; we were trying to lay a boom across a very beautiful fjord which had a gap of nearly two miles; seemed a reasonable proposition to lay a boom in order to give the ships which came into the harbour, including the Russian convoys, a peaceful night or two free of submarines; although we were supposed to be good at boom laying we were completely unequal to the conditions; we were a depot ship containing thousands of tons of metal in various forms; every time we got it nearly done a hurricane would come down the fjord and blow it all away; we would then have to wait for another boom to come up from Glasgow which would take about three months; meanwhile we had nothing to do; we got 48 hours leave every two months when you could go to Reykjavik which was an extremely dull town; there was an English bookshop which specialized in the old Everyman library which kept one sane; people did go crazy; there was no leave from Iceland, not even compassionate leave; I remember a man from Hull whose wife and children had been killed and he wasn't allowed to go home, so there was a lot of misery; I was invited to a big celebration in the Isle of Man, the Tynwald Ceremony on July 5th where the laws are read in Manx, with a procession to an artificial hill in the middle of the island; deputies (rather than Prime Ministers) come to this and they asked some fairly well-known natives like me to come and join the party; I had a very good time as I sat at dinner with Mary Robinson, who was delightful; I also sat beside the Deputy Prime Minister of Iceland and told him of my years in his bailiwick; he asked if I would like to come back and I said no

42:29:21 After the war I started a Ph.D. but never actually finished it; I got a job and that seemed to be why you wanted a Ph.D. in the first place; went to Newcastle in 1947; I was extremely ill-equipped for it as I hadn't done any serious work for nearly six years; we were given a tremendous load of teaching; people say they are very overworked now, I can't understand them; John Butt was my boss and a wonderful example of someone who knows how to work and did far more than his share of teaching; I was landed with the Shakespeare course and so limited was the accommodation that

you had to give the lectures twice; that meant you were giving a lecture a day pretty well; John would say in his gentle way that students kept hearing about I.A. Richards but didn't know anything about him, and asked me to lecture on him with two days notice; but you did that kind of thing and everybody worked extremely hard; I had gone immediately back to Liverpool when I was demobbed; I had no money and I had a graduate fellowship; the man who taught me happened to be the only absolutely top class scholar that I ever worked with, Donald J. Gordon; a brilliant career broken up by alcohol; a disagreeable man in many ways; I mention him in my autobiography, 'Not Entitled'; title partly about a prevailing sense I have of not being entitled; Gordon was a Renaissance scholar and that was what I wanted to be; I began on the poet Cowley who flourished about the time of the Restoration, who wrote part of an epic poem called 'The Davideis'; it is adorned by thousands of notes, trying to meet the requirements that epics should be instructive in a universal kind of way; there is tremendous learning packed in the notes and my task was to find out where he got it all from; it was rather disappointing to find much of it was taken from a popular encyclopaedia, as though he had looked it all up on the Internet; however, working on his work gave me a familiarity with books I would never have come across otherwise, such as treatises on marriage in the early sixteenth century, which was enjoyable

48:30:10 I am very unsystematic in my own work; I do take notes but I don't take them carefully enough and sometimes find that I don't know which book they came from; I often thought that I should change my life in that respect, but it is too late now; took notes on a typewriter most of the time, or pen or pencil; not arranged in folders but in heaps; curiously enough, these American colleges which try to buy your work rather like them to be messy so that they can give someone the work of sorting them out; some have already gone to America; I had a big library but it met catastrophe; I lived in Luard Road and then divorced and was living alone there; decided to move to Pinehurst but 2000 of my books were destroyed in transit by a mix-up between the city garbage people and the removers; they got the boxes mixed up and they ground the best part of my library to pieces; I wouldn't have any room for them now, however they were the best of my books;

it happened eleven years ago; the insurance company was generous so I went out with the notion of replacing some of them, but I gave it up; I had an incomplete list but this opened up an appalling prospect of what was gone and what was irreplaceable, annotated things and things with important inscriptions, also manuscript material from important people; you get over it quickly; I remember sitting outside the house in Luard Road thinking this was the worst day of my life, but shortly began thinking of all sorts of things much worse

53:30:06 Was at Newcastle for two years; Gordon went to Reading to a very tiny department where he had a lot of power, so he summoned me; I was glad to join him and enjoyed Reading very much; it was a tiny unit of people with many common interests which they were willing to share; covered the Renaissance specialists so Italian and good mediaevalists; Joe Trapp who became director of the Warburg Institute, now dead, Gordon, also dead, in fact everybody is dead except me; I was there for eight years and then I went to Manchester in 1958; my best books were written in the sixties and seventies; I enjoy writing once I get going but I find it difficult to start something; starting a book seems impossible but even starting a review, I will find all sorts of things to do around the house before starting; never decided on a set amount to write a day, so enormously variable; a book of mine which was important for academic success was 'Romantic Image'; I had been asked to give a lecture when at Reading on a poem of Yeats; I gave a lecture on 'In Memory of Major Robert Gregory' and while I was writing I saw the sort of thing I wanted to say; in the course of the summer vacation I had written the book; this has never happened to me at any other time; I wrote on a typewriter (now on computer), and as many drafts as I need; of course, the facility of correction on a computer mean that lots of drafts are abolished before you get there; I go on changing them to the very last minute; I was changing something in a proof yesterday; I think working in silence is best for me though I have tried music; walking would shorten the time left for writing; I don't drink until I have finished writing for the day

Second Part

0:09:07 After Reading, I went to Manchester; I was invited to the Chair at Manchester but didn't want to go; if they had given me a readership at Reading I would have stayed; I needed more salary as I had two children by then; Manchester was a rather grim place in those days; it was a difficult time from the family point of view because it was before the anti-smoke laws and my children were ill all the time; finally the doctor said we should take them away from the area; went to Bristol until I was asked to go to London; have moved around too much; really wanted to stay at Reading but it wouldn't have remained the same as it expanded enormously for one thing; it was in a big old house when I went there and the upper floors were so unsafe that you weren't allowed to have more than two students there at a time; came to Cambridge in 1974 to King Edward VII Chair; I was offered fellowships at Fitzwilliam and Peterhouse; I was strongly advised by Noel Annan to have nothing to do with either of them, in fact he strongly advised me to have nothing to do with Cambridge because of the bad temper of the English faculty; he wanted me to stay in London and in a way I would have been happy to do that; persuaded to come and Annan and Leach worked out some way of evading the restrictions on having me at King's; I had to take another year at London, and although it was all settled in 1973 I came in 1974; got to know Leach patchily, he was not awfully easy to get on with, though I had a wonderfully good time when we were in New York together; at meetings of the Fellowship Electors he would listen patiently until suddenly exploding; remember a meeting of the electors when Martin Rees had got onto the list two very brilliant young men and Sydney Brenner gave them a terrific grilling; Martin said to him when they left, "You weren't interviewing them for a Nobel Prize"; arrived too late in life to make real friendships at King's; Tony Tanner was in America when I arrived; he had gone to Johns Hopkins and had resigned, but decided immediately it was a disaster so returned; the good thing about King's was that since there was a vacancy in the faculty it didn't seem unreasonable that he should apply for his own job and get it; the snag was that it was far easier to do that since the faculty post was being advertised than to get back into King's; Edmund Leach was a bit stiff about that but it was worked in the end

9:53:21 Cambridge is mad in a way but it does work, partly because people want it to work; when I first came here it seemed to be expected of me that I should do something about the mess in the English Faculty; of course, I immediately made enemies and as a result was a total failure in everything I tried; then I saw how many vested interests there were in keeping things just as they were; I remember people of whom I have a certain respect like Hugh Sykes Davies, his vision of Cambridge which was admirable in its way, like a Platonic academy with teachers walking by the banks of the river; we discovered that there were undergraduates who had been through their three years and had never been taught directly by a member of the Faculty but by post graduates; a scandal I thought; we did a report on it for the annual faculty meeting and it was ruled out of order, they didn't want to discuss it; so we had lots of disappointments like that; I thought it would be a help to get Christopher Ricks, whom I admired, here, which we achieved; that was like dropping a match into the powder, after which there was bitter enmity on all sides; I knew Ricks well and thought we were not so different in our views about things and that if we worked together we might be able to make some sense of the place, but we couldn't; in the end I packed it in as I got so tired of it all; one issue was Colin MacCabe; he had done his probationary period and it was time to say whether he would be promoted or not; Ricks was violently opposed to him, not without reason; he and I went to MacCabe's lectures and found great improvements in them; Christopher admitted this but he just didn't like MacCabe and a lot of people didn't; I didn't particularly like him myself but I didn't think he ought to be treated in this way; the matter was complicated by the fact that Geoffrey Hill had applied for a lectureship, and Ricks was a great supporter of his; so MacCabe departed to glory and Hill came; it was making me ill, also I was over sixty and could go; then I had an invitation to a Chair at Columbia which seemed altogether more attractive; I only stayed for two years there as I realised then that I didn't want to teach any more; I had never really left Cambridge we had kept the house; I had remarried in 1970; she was a rather brilliant literary critic, Anita Van Vactor, much admired in some American circles but not well-known here;

she did some teaching here and helped Tony Tanner with the American course

19:25:14 On religious beliefs: Church of England, choirboy, I think more as part of social aspiration than anything else; my mother was as religious as any woman of that time was likely to be; don't think my father was religious; I think I am religious but haven't got a religion; do like religious poetry and music; the annual St Mathew Passion, which I heard in London this year rather than King's, it a totally religious work; not angry with God but not very pleased with Him; Herbert is my Anglican poet; meaning of the title of my autobiography - 'Not Entitled' - implies that the wind is against you; I have been very lucky, in fact, but the war meant that six years in one's twenties were lost; also a reference to the poverty of my childhood; think that literary criticism is an important trade, an honourable occupation; I admired Empson; he was important to me though neither of us liked the other; we actually wrote together; later I came to see what a very silly man he was and after that I was able to use him; he affects the tone of what I write still; even more he affects Ricks's tone strangely enough; Empson is the most powerful critical mind in our time; one became habituated to his normal insulting way of treating people; the fact that he was always slightly drunk is what is really behind all that; also, in his last years he suffered from discipleship; far too many of his writings were collected and published when it should have been seen that this was doing him a disservice; Kenneth Burke was something of a crank but had a good head on him, as they say; I had some effect from him; some too from the much despised French theorists, people like Derrida who was quite unjustly treated as a kind of madman round here; the graduate seminar at University College, London, was a happy moment in my academic life; people would come from Cambridge and the whole thing grew and grew; occasionally we would get some novelist to come and they would bring friends; it became quite famous; at that time comment was benign but then everything turned very nasty with the MacCabe affair; apart from Shakespeare, would take the complete works of Milton to a desert island

Peter Avery



8 June 2008

<http://downloads.sms.cam.ac.uk/1107402/1107409.mp4>

Peter Avery, *The Collected Lyrics of Hafiz of Shiraz* (2007)

Extracted from Wikipedia - 20.8.2014

Peter Avery OBE (May 15, 1923 – October 6, 2008) was an eminent British scholar of Persian and a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge.

Avery contributed to English language work on Persian history and literature, such as *The Age of Expansion* and *Medieval Persia* and published *Modern Iran*. One of Avery's best known works is a translation (with poet John Heath-Stubbs) of the Persian text of *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, first published in 1979. Also with John Heath-Stubbs, Avery published "Thirty Poems of Hafiz of Shiraz", reprinted in 2006. His final work, and the culmination of his career, was a translation of the complete lyrics of Hafiz, *The Collected Lyrics of Hafiz of Shiraz*, published in 2007, which was awarded the Farabi prize and is currently the only contemporary complete translation in English. His translations are published with copious notes explaining allusions in the text and filling in what the poets would have expected their readers to know.

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Peter Avery interviewed by Alan Macfarlane 8th June 2008

0:09:07 Arrived at King's January 1958 and Noel Annan was Provost; Gabriel Horn became a Fellow about the same time; Noel Annan was a good Provost and it was a good introduction for me to a King's which has now, alas, faded; remember after the memorial service for Dadie Rylands that Noel Annan said it was the end of the King's that we had known and loved; Annan himself died a few months later; I was an undergraduate at Liverpool University and then went to S.O.A.S. in 1946, but King's was the College to which I was most attached; I had a number of friends here, including Dadie (George) Rylands and Noel Annan; when I arrived in Cambridge as a lecturer it was a delight that within about twenty-four hours I was invited to meet with Annan who asked me if I would like to become a member of King's; it was not in his hands but with the Vice-Provost, John Saltmarsh; received a letter subsequently informing me that I was now a member of the College; some years later the University decided to encourage Colleges to give lecturers fellowships and I became a Fellow in 1964; Max Walters and I were chosen at the same time, largely through the agency of Dadie, Christopher Morris and Tim Munby, friends of mine; now the College lacks the leavening of older and devoted senior Fellows who understood the conventions and traditions of the College and drove it as a community; Gabriel and Dan Brown were my contemporaries; Jaspar Rose was important to me as he had been encouraged to befriend me by Noel Annan; an example of the communal spirit and kindness of the College then; we started a conversation walking across to my Faculty room which is still going on by letter; at first we were talking so loudly in my room that Miss Munrankin, the archaeologist who had the next room, thought we were having a terrible row; he and Jean, his wife, became very important elements in my life; early on Michael Jaffe was also good to me; he came to my lodging and we drank pot after pot of tea while we talked; this was the almost cosy King's I first knew, with high intellectual and cultural standards, a wonderful community to belong to; I now find it difficult to cope with an increasingly bureaucratic college weighed down by too large a fellowship, many of whom just regard it as a postal address and a

place to have lunch whereas we regarded it as home; some, like Michael Jaffe, lived in College; Donald Beves was good to me when I first became a member; at that time Fellows lunched at a table down the side of the hall with another for B.A.'s; we were encouraged to go and eat with the undergraduates; remember Noel chiding me for not doing so; I told him I was shy; Donald Beves and I both came from Staffordshire though my father came from Norfolk and Derbyshire; Beves always used to serve gin and tonic in Regency bumpers; Beves a close friend of Pop Prior, widow of the Professor of French, who had the privilege of using his wine account; she lived in a house in Scoop Terrace where she gave marvellous parties, where she had rather aristocratic Danish female lodgers; she and Donald invented the madrigal singing on the river; we used to watch it from his room which was in Bodley's Court; Donald had a large suite, a man of great hospitality, lovable, loving and decent; the camaraderie I remember seems more or less to have disappeared

17:53:16 Dadie was a great friend whom I had known before coming here; remember when his friend Anthony Blunt was exposed as a double-agent he aged ten years; I never actually saw him act but did see actors that he trained; he always celebrated my birthday with champagne; Jasper Rose was rather unconventional; as a sixth-form boy had been taken by a friend of his father's to dinner at All Souls where they sat next to A.L. Rouse; Rouse's snobbery; Hugh Trevor-Roper and his effect on Peterhouse; Maurice Cowling; Steven Runciman; Jack Plumb; Princess Margaret and the Batesons; responsibility for the College silver

34:59:05 I am very religious; interested in the dignity of the Anglican service; converted to Catholicism in Bagdad, but go to Chapel now; remember a terrible row with Couve de Murville when he was Presbiter, Catholic Chaplain to the University, who said I had no right to go there; asked Sidney a'Gilby when I first came to King's if it would be all right if I went to Chapel; reminiscences of characters in Cambridge; John Saltmarsh, as Vice-Provost would bring every College staff appointee to meet the Fellows; not done now; Christopher Morris and wife, Helen, used to entertain Fellows and students to supper every Sunday; John Saltmarsh; George Salt; Arthur Hibbert; Christopher Morris;

Richard Braithwaite; Morgan Forster; Francis Crick; Dan Brown, Hal Dixon and Kendall Dixon

55:11:00 Sufism is a very great influence in my life; the medieval Persian poetry that I specialize in is Sufi; Sufism with its tolerance and accent above the material could be one of the last hopes of a religious synthesis that would help us to a better life; its essence is love which there seems to be very little of nowadays; chief concern today is with materialism and sex not leavened by love; Sufism rises above this; an important repository of religious aspiration and hope; never been tempted to convert; it is part of Islam but tries to introduce something that is lacking in Semitic religion which is arid, legalistic; theology in Islam doesn't exist, it is law; Sufism is the ameliorative factor; reactionary Muslim regimes are against Sufism; the present regime in Iran has arrested several Sufi leaders and broken up Sufi gatherings, a pattern with any totalitarian-type regime; very attracted by the mysticism of Sufism; is a religious reaction to a cruel world so appropriate that people should be turning to it; it flourished after the Mongol invasion of North-East Iran, an appalling destruction; it was the Sufis who started to revive life; we live in times where these horrible events can be understood in terms of what is happening today

Gillian Beer



26 January 2009

<http://downloads.sms.cam.ac.uk/1112882/1112886.mp4>

Gillian Beer, Darwin's Plots (1983)

Extracted from Wikipedia - 20.8.2014

Dame Gillian Beer, DBE (born 27 January 1935) is a British literary critic and academic. She was President of Clare Hall from 1994 to 2001, and King Edward VII Professor of English Literature at the University of Cambridge from 1994 to 2002.

She was a fellow of Girton College, Cambridge, for 30 years. She was later King Edward VII Professor of English Literature at Cambridge, and later President of Clare Hall. She served as chair of the judges for the Booker Prize in 1997.

Her most intensive literary criticism lies in the field of Victorian studies. *Darwin's Plots* (1983), in particular, related the form of Victorian novels to Darwinist thinking. Its significance as a work was confirmed by the publication of second edition by Cambridge University Press in 2000. She has also written important collections of essays on Virginia Woolf (*The Common Ground*, 1996) and on other aspects of the relations of literature and science.¹

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Gillian Beer interviewed by Alan Macfarlane 26th January 2009

0:09:07 Born near Little Bookham, Surrey, in 1935; never met either of my grandfathers; my parents divorced when I was very small so I had very little knowledge of father's family; mother's father had died young at the end of the First World War; he was a living presence in the household as both grandmother and mother both felt him as loved and there; he had had quite an unusual life; he left school aged twelve and taught himself Greek, and the violin; he got to the position where he was lecturing at the St Bride's Institute for journalists; he went off to the War and died of cancer at thirty-seven, whether as a direct result is uncertain; devastating for my grandmother, mother and her sister; left them extremely poor; he had been a proof-reader at the Daily Telegraph but also ran evening classes in literature at St Bride's Institute; he was clearly a man of great creativity; he was a rather beautiful man; my parents did not live together after I was four and actually divorced when I was seven; I was a small girl during the Second World War so a great many fathers were away and not having a father around didn't mark me out; my father went into the army and my mother went back to teaching; she was a primary school teacher at Lollard Street in the East End of London; she had to take the children out of London to be evacuated; we ended up in Somerset when I was four so I consider myself as a Somerset girl; until I was eleven we lodged with a family where the father was a bricklayer and there were two boys about my age; we were a loose extended family; Fray Bryce, the father, was a very important figure in my life; I lost touch entirely with my own father and never saw him again after I was seven.

5:35:00 My mother made everything possible; I had a very happy childhood; looking back I can see how hard it must have been for her; a young divorced woman, living in a small town on the Devon border; she was full of enjoyment and life; we went for long walks in the country; she always gave me the sense that anything was possible; she never seemed to feel constricted by the constrained circumstances that we lived in; without her I don't

think I would have got to university because the school I went to did not send many people; she was a very good singer so one of my memories was hearing her practice chromatic scales; she was in the local operatic group; she married again when I was fourteen; my stepfather was very musical and had a little madrigal group and male voice choir; my mother went on singing right through her seventies; she has been the most important person for me; I got on well with my stepfather; sadly he died ten years after they were married; he was quite a lot older than she was; when he died there was just my mother and me again; had no siblings; she moved to Cambridge when she retired and had twenty years here; while growing up I was always Mrs Thomas's and then Mrs Bell's daughter; when she came here she was for a month Mrs Beer's mother and then I became Mrs Bell's daughter again; she enjoyed being a grandmother to our three sons

9:23:00 I only remember living in London from a memory my mother gave me; she saw the Crystal Palace burn down because we lived in Sydenham; otherwise I can only remember picking up worms in the garden; Somerset was a bit of a muddle at first because the evacuees were taught in the afternoon and the local children in the morning, which was a bit chaotic; I then went to a dame school and later to the local infants' school; that was a bit fraught as my mother was teaching there; we moved from Martock to Wiveliscombe where I was in primary school; I remember one attractive male teacher who had been in the navy; I took 11+ and did well; we were considered to be living in poor social conditions as lodgers, so I was given a county place in a boarding school; it was then called Sunny Hill school, now Bruton School for Girls; I did not enjoy it much; having gone back as an adult I see that Bruton is a beautiful place, but I never noticed that at the time; it was a terrible wrench as I had always lived with my mother and was used to conversing with an adult; suddenly I was only among girls my own age and I felt deprived of conversation; there was a meagre feeling; we were not well fed; a great many people had boils and chilblains; it was not the fault of the school as it was still a very bleak period after the war; I did have one big event which changed many things; I had a bad accident at fourteen; the school was on a hill and to get from the boarding house to classrooms one went down a very steep

staircase; leaping down this, I fell backward and struck my spine badly; I was off for six months and wasn't well for a year after; that did completely change my life; in some ways it was probably the moment of opportunity because I went home and read whatever my mother could get from the library for me; I had no critical appraising capacity at all; I read a bit of Ibsen, then read all of Ibsen; same with Oscar Wilde; looking back I can't think how I came to choose these particular authors; also read all of Shakespeare; I had not been a particularly academic child but in these circumstances built up this enormous ballast of reading; some still remains in my head, such as 'Ghosts', can still see my mental pictures of that play; it was a curious time; as a child, I had always had many friends, but possibly after the accident had more leisure to read and think; I notice now with our three grandchildren that they are always together, and wonder whether they ever have any solitude.

17:59:12 I do remember two teachers at Bruton very fondly; one was Miss Wilson, the French teacher; she had been at Girton; she was very emotional and I can remember her reading Lamartine with tears in her eyes; she was also quite brisk and comic; she had a great friend, Miss Allen, who was the geography teacher - a terrible teacher, who would set us work at the beginning of the class and then sit looking out of the window, but she was a wonderful drama teacher; I used to be in a lot of plays with her; I learnt a great deal from those two women and they were the delight of the place; after my accident I could not play games and that has been a regret for me; I learnt the piano and enjoyed it; started to sing and have done a great deal of singing; I was in the school choir, and when I got to Oxford I did a great deal of singing and acting; music has been very important for me throughout my life, both listening and taking part; I belonged to a small singing group here in Cambridge for a good many years, called the Palestrina Singers; sang mainly Medieval and Renaissance pieces; I made friends outside the University through it, which was one of the pleasures; have sung a lot of Gregorian chant also; I have always bought pots, starting as an undergraduate, so I have quite a large collection

22:34:20 Nobody from my school had gone to Oxford or Cambridge for ten years; one girl, Virginia Brown-Wilkinson, was the previous one, and I heard about her all the time; it was my mother who encouraged me to try for Oxford or Cambridge; I did not get in to either; I was probably very naive, in a cascade of literature rather than being organised or being good at responding to questions; this was in 1954; the great mercy was that St Anne's had a separate examination about three months later than the others, and I got an exhibition; I was fortunate that over the Christmas vacation it was clear that I had gone numb in my brain; Robert Bolt and Len Smith were living near us (Bolt later a well-known playwright); my mother arranged for me to have a couple of supervisions with them and I suddenly woke up again; I was a third year entry person so went to live in Austria for five months as I had never learnt German at school and desperately wanted to; lived with a family in the hills outside Innsbruck and learnt German, partly through conversation, but also some lessons; I was blissfully happy there; sang a great deal within the family; when family members came they always brought their instruments; after that Oxford was an anti-climax at first; I had thought that I didn't care whether I got in, but after an interview with Dorothy Bednarowska, later my tutor and mentor, I desperately wanted to go there; I wanted to be alongside someone like her; she was so full of wit, light and sharpness; I had had my first boyfriend while in Austria and felt I was coming back to school at first; after that it was wonderful.

27:44:16 I was very fortunate; Dorothy Bednarowska was a superb teacher; she hardly wrote anything but taught like a demon; I went to Hugo Dyson because I did the Charles Oldham Shakespeare prize and enjoyed those supervisions enormously; he was very much part of the C.S. Lewis gang; he was not a great writer but had a probing, playful, thought-provoking intelligence that was wonderful; I heard Tolkien's lectures; one on 'Gawain and the Green Knight' I have never forgotten; he was odd and cantankerous; it was only much later when I had children that we read 'The Hobbit'; I have never got on with the other books; I have kept in touch with a number of my contemporaries; for instance, John Carey and his wife, Gill, who was one of my good friends then; one person who influenced me a lot was Del Kolve

who became a Medievalist and a professor at UCLA; in terms of studying and talking together, he and I did that the most among our contemporaries; Christopher Ricks was also around.

32:08:13 My mother was notionally Church of England during my childhood; later she became a Quaker and much happier there, and did quite a lot of national work in later life; it came initially because we lived in Street in the latter part of our time in Somerset; a very Quaker-dominated place. I think like so many English people I have a joy in the music, without having any belief in the afterlife or the idea of a personal God; I have respect for Jesus Christ as an endlessly thought-provoking man, which has grown; I used to go with my mother quite often to Quaker meetings and I like the Quaker set-up, but I didn't continue going after her death. Clare Hall is a secular foundation, so as President I was never expected to participate in religious ceremonies; Brian Pippard, the first President, would have been appalled if we had had anything like that; at Girton, where I was Vice-Mistress, we were much more Anglican; Grace is not said at Clare Hall as it is such an international community.

35:47:00 At the end of my undergraduate degree I hesitated and was quite drawn to being a nursery school teacher; I find the extraordinary growth of potential in early childhood so enchanting and challenging; in the end I fell into assuming that I could go on with research; I was so lucky that I was in that generation where you went to university free, and I got a state scholarship, and more for my research work; I did the Oxford B.Litt. which was a two year course that almost all of us did; towards the end of my second year I got my first university job, so didn't make very much of that research period; our undergraduate course had ended with 1832 so I spent time reading all the nineteenth century figures in those two years of the BLitt and my dissertation was on landscape in nineteenth century fiction; a chapter of it was published in 'Victorian Studies'. My husband, John, works on Romanticism and is internationally known as a Coleridge scholar, also Wordsworth and Blake; he does also now cross over into the Victorian period; Lord David Cecil supervised my B.Litt.; in one sense he was excellent, kind and encouraging, with sudden insights like telling me to read

Meredith, on whom I wrote my first book; as far as learning to do footnotes or any apparatus was concerned, there was a blank; I don't think it even crossed his mind that I would need any instruction in the precisions of scholarship. It really fell to Kathleen Tillotson, who was the Professor at Bedford when I went there for my first job, to instruct me in that way; she did this wonderfully and I have always been grateful; she was another great model for me.

41:02:01 I did have the feeling at Oxford that the D.Phil. was rather frowned on; Helen Gardner was one of the great forces in my life when I was an undergraduate; went to a marvellous class that she ran on editing Shakespeare; she was a wayward person and would encourage then reject people; for me, she had been extremely supportive and suddenly became aloof and discouraging; it happened to a number of people I knew, particularly young women; it is sad because some of my happiest memories of Oxford are lectures of hers and her class; fortunately it didn't matter to me as she didn't do anything desperate to my career, but she did to one or two people; I went to Humphry House's lectures in my very first term, on Aristotle, and they were very good, but he died that year; John knew his family quite well. I got an assistant lectureship at Bedford College, University of London, which was a women's college set in Regent's Park; the English department was in a lovely Septimus Burton villa with gardens running down to the pond; I was very happy there; Kathleen Tillotson had a regime where she thought you should really teach everything; I didn't teach any nineteenth century until my third year there; she had only recently become Professor there and for me she was a very good presence; I was on a terminable assistant lectureship although I was getting hints that they might be able to find me a job at the end of the third year; by then, John and I had met each other and wanted to marry, so I left London; John was teaching in Manchester and I got a part-time job at Liverpool; I also had a research fellowship in the second year; I loved the department, which was very lively; Kenneth Muir was the Professor, also Miriam Allott etc. an array of people, and very friendly; the Bedford department was a little subdued in comparison; I was there from 1962-1964; the Beatles began to happen while I was there; it was a desperate time for Liverpool

with much unemployment and sadness; it was a strange place because it was tragic in some ways but I remember my students getting very excited about the Beatles and feeling quite chuffed about a new thing coming out of Liverpool; I did teach quite a lot of nineteenth century and also eighteenth century and Shakespeare; didn't teach any twentieth century at that stage but did quite a lot of American literature. John and I had agreed that if I were offered a proper full-time job at Liverpool we would move there; Kenneth Muir offered me a permanent job and I returned to Manchester that afternoon to find that John had received a mysterious letter from Cambridge; he had been interviewed for a job there that he hadn't got but they decided later that they did want to appoint him when another job was coming up; the letter actually came from a college that had heard that the university had appointed him but this was before he was formally approached; it was then terribly difficult to decide what to do; I had been interviewed for a fellowship at Girton just as we were getting engaged and it was made clear to me that I was very likely to get the job; I had to withdraw as John and I were getting married and I wanted to live with him in Manchester. I was pretty confident that I would get free-lance teaching in Cambridge if nothing more; we moved and came to Cambridge, but without a job it was tough; at the end of my first year there, as I was still young enough (there were age limits in those days), Girton offered me a research fellowship; so I started right back at the beginning again; after a couple of years I got an assistant lectureship in the University; in the end, after ten years when we were also having children, I was established; I got my Girton research fellowship on the evidence of four chapters of what became my first book, on Meredith's novels.

51:27:23 I have very much enjoyed teaching, supervising and lecturing, and still do a lot of lecturing and have always travelled a lot; there is always the instant gratification at the end of the hour in teaching that something has happened whereas when you are writing it is a very long haul; it hasn't really felt as if teaching were in opposition to research; in some instances it has provoked research; certainly the work I have done on the twentieth century has come out of teaching, as has some of what I have written on the eighteenth century; I have never found a way of

incorporating into my undergraduate teaching the work that emerged in my middle life, which was more to do with scientific writing in its cultural setting, but that certainly fuelled a lot of my teaching with PhD students. These students have been one of the great resources in my life; so many of them now are long-standing good friends, and the stimulation of their conversation has been invaluable to me; being able to engage with people of different generations in that intimate sustained way over the whole course of a PhD means you really know each other's minds well, and you hope it flowers for both of you in different ways; I have supervised many PhD's; when I started as an assistant lecturer I kept being handed PhD students who other people were tired of, so I had ten while still an assistant lecturer; this was very unusual in the faculty, but I have usually had about six or seven; for PhD work I would expect to supervise in nineteenth or twentieth century; in the past I did supervise eighteenth century work on the novel; at that time I was working almost entirely on narrative so could work in different periods.

Second Part

0:09:07 Until I had young children I hadn't been very interested in fantasy, and how it can provoke and take us through to new ideas; watching children in the borderland between actuality and the imagined engaged me very strongly; bearing and rearing children did make me think a great deal about evolution; made me much more efficient in the use of time; post-structuralism raised so many interesting new questions; the book I did that really changed my life was 'Darwin's Plots' which came out in 1983; I was going to write a book on Victorian fantasy and rapidly realized how evolutionary ideas were troubling these fantasies; started reading more of Darwin and became engrossed with the problem of how we ever have new ideas; the children were part of this as was high theory; I did not know when I was writing it that it would have interest for people beyond literature; because I was writing it all the time in scraps and raptures between household chores, it was a very private composition.

5:51:02 I write in great bursts, I don't write every day; I baulk at writing for some time and things build up and I finally write fast;

I have a study where we live but I used to write in my College room at Girton; we also have a cottage and when the children were young I would sometimes go there for a few days if I had a deadline; when writing the Darwin book there was one chapter that I was having difficulty with, I went to the cottage, took out my typewriter and started to write at once. I am left-handed and people have always had trouble with my writing, especially if done under pressure; my mother gave me a typewriter when I became a graduate student; I always wrote on that, and later on a word-processor and computer. On writing itself, when I look back I can't tell the difference between those pages I wrote with enormous freedom and brio and those that I struggled through; I sometimes think that I write for the bliss of the twenty minutes when I stop writing. With young academics now, people are forced onward into publication after publication without enough time for reverie; I do think that a kind of vagrancy of imagination is really crucial for work that will drive you beyond where you foresaw that you could get to; when I was doing the work on Darwin I came to realize quite fast that when an idea is first proposed it is at its most fictive because it doesn't fit, it is counter-intuitive; that is a very important phase for any writer and for the making of ideas.

12:19:04 'Darwin's Plots' considers the stories that Darwin had to think with and the stories that he generated for other people; about what he imbibed and how he turned or troubled some of those ideas; when he was growing up the idea of design was dominant and he was delighted by Paley; what he needed to find was a way of thinking in opposition to or angle from design, towards production. In the first part of the book I look at his language and argue that the language can't just be skimmed off leaving the ideas intact; he uses familiar metaphors but turns them away from the assumptions of the time; because he wrote in the 'Origin' in a discourse that would be readable by any intelligent, reasonably informed, person of his time it actually left a great surplus of meaning lying around. In the second half of the book I look at some of the ways in which other writers spun out from Darwin, either at the level of structure or allusion, to argue with his ideas; I have done another book 'Open Fields: science in cultural encounter' which is a set of essays on the exchanges between

scientific writing and its cultural setting, including several on Darwin; I have been doing new work on Darwin because of the celebrations, thinking about ideas of consciousness across other organic life and the importance of the arts in Darwin's thinking. Tennyson's line, 'nature, red in tooth and claw', was written before either Darwin or Chambers in 'Vestiges of Creation'; and Darwin could hardly have lived through the 1850's without being aware of 'In Memoriam', so these chimes go both ways; the writers I write about in 'Darwin's Plots' are Charles Kingsley, Mrs Gatty, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, and a little bit about Dickens; you could write about almost anybody after Darwin and relate them to his work because it seeps into the culture, but I wanted to write about people who we could show had read and reacted to Darwin.

18:43:07 Recently I gave a book to one of our twin granddaughters who was under three and was then passionately attached to her toy rabbits and baby dolls etc.; it was a book by Mo Willems, about a little girl and her father who go to the launderette and her toy rabbit gets put in the machine; there is a scene of ecstasy where the rabbit is found and the little girl speaks words for the first time; I noticed that for the children, the finding was the important thing, for adults, the first words; my granddaughter fetched her toy rabbit and very tenderly put it against the page to greet the found rabbit; I could feel what she was feeling but couldn't quite articulate how she imagined these two worlds, within the book and outside the book; I find that so inspiring to be alongside again; I think you can get these fragmentary moments where you recollect how something did come out of a book when you were a child.

23:09:03 'Arguing with the Past' is a set of essays about narrative, subtitled 'from Woolf to Sidney'; I was wanting to get away from the evolutionist metaphor that writing gets more and more complex; also wanting to watch how writers transform their predecessors by reading them; I was not attracted by Harold Bloom's idea of the anxiety of influence as though the past is oppressive and has to be fought with; I was much more interested in the collaborative process that takes place; there are several essays about Virginia Woolf and her reading of other writers;

there is an essay about Samuel Richardson and Philip Sidney, about 'Arcadia' and 'Pamela'; each of the essays was a conversation between books; another way of thinking about how creativity works. I wrote a set of essays on Virginia Woolf - I really like working in essay length - called 'The Common Ground'; again I was very struck by Woolf's capacity to re-imagine the world, and how she reinvents between each book as they are all so different; by calling it 'The Common Ground' I really wanted to express how much Woolf writes for any of us; she knew herself how she was somewhat imprisoned by not being able to register working-class speech without it sounding faintly comic. I have had two especially happy experiences in teaching; I went to the United States and was teaching at a summer school in a small liberal arts college; the group I had were all local people, and 'The Waves' had been set; they hated it at first and then they became fascinated by it and felt they understood it, and that it was their lives; it was an extraordinary process, which I shared in because I had found 'The Waves' difficult at first, where we were all discovering things about ourselves; the other was at the end of a term where we had a seminar on speaking poetry; I said I had always wanted to do a complete reading through of 'The Waves'; six people volunteered, and we read it aloud from ten in the morning until nine at night; it was so revelatory, comic, very moving, and I remember two of the women saying that they now knew what it felt like to be middle-aged, or to be old.

29:58:19 [Reads an extract from 'Orlando']; was at Girton when we changed from being a women's college to a mixed one; it was striking that our life fellows tended to support the change for practical reasons, as we have always been out on the edge of Cambridge, but also because they thought the college had been set up to draw in people who didn't have the opportunities for higher education; thought we should try to encourage students from all backgrounds. When I first went there, Mary Cartwright was the Mistress, a shy mathematician; once she retired she changed totally, became very talkative and travelled the world; Muriel Bradbrook followed; I was Vice-Mistress when Mary Warnock was Mistress; I found Girton a bit difficult at first after St Anne's; the latter was very free and easy and Girton was crusted in gothic ornament and tradition; I became Edward VII Professor in 1994

in succession to Marilyn Butler; I had been the Grace One Professor before that from 1989; curiously enough the King Edward came just as I had been approached to become President of Clare Hall; when I was first made a professor there were so few women professors in Cambridge that inevitably one got enquiries about standing for head of house, and I had said no to everybody because I thought I would never write again if I took on such a post; when Clare Hall came along, partly because it is a graduate college and also it is so international with many visiting fellows, living on site, and no high table, I felt I could do it and learn from it; it is a seven year stint and I enjoyed it enormously.

36:22:01 Christopher Ricks preceded Marilyn Butler, and followed Frank Kermode; one of the happiest times that I recollect with Frank was that he had had a very creative seminar at UCL and started something similar here when he came; he asked me to do it with him; it was on narrative of all kinds; we did have a good time for a couple of years; people of all sorts came; I've always been rather sorry that we didn't go on collaborating; he also read one of my books before publication and gave me some encouragement. I was around during the problem with Colin McCabe's failure to be upgraded to a full lectureship; a lot of people, including me, felt this was not fair; there was a lot of acrimony, which was very sad; it did leave some scars for a number of years; this was some time ago in 1981; the department has always been eclectic and that is its strength. I think there has been a turn in academia in general, from undue modesty to undue boastfulness, under the pressure of the research assessment exercise; I think the new assertiveness has some good effects as it makes you more aware of what your colleagues are doing, and many are doing interesting things.

41:21:02 Our three sons have been a great expansion of the possibilities of life; we are quite close to each other and see a lot of them; one is married and has three children and a lovely wife, they live rather far away in Liverpool; Dan, our eldest son published a book on Foucault and is now a schoolmaster, teaching modern languages; Rufus, our next son, was a social worker for ten years then retrained as a primary school teacher, which he loves; Zach, the youngest, did an art degree and then a degree in

molecular biology, and has now gone back to art. I have been on the Booker judges twice, have chaired the Poetry Book Society, and am now President of the British Comparative Literature Association and the British Literature and Science Society; have very much enjoyed involving myself in those ways

43:48:21 At the moment I am doing a number of different essays around the subject of consciousness, not just between humans and animals, but climbing plants, oysters; Darwin was so interested in questions of intent and will; that goes back to language because human language can't easily get outside the question of intent; I have a book on the Alice books which is about 90% written which I must finish; there is another book that I have been writing for years and have published bits of, called 'Experimental Islands'; it is about the idea of the island and island populations, how it has been studied in fiction and poetry, and also some of the sciences; I find it quite hard to finish things, so closing them down and putting them out I find very difficult to do; I think I feel they could be better if I wait a little, and probably I am rather timid.

46:11:22 Last thoughts on father and his family

Toshi Takamiya



19th October 2009

<http://downloads.sms.cam.ac.uk/1131773/1131780.mp4>

Professor of Literature, Keio University, Japan

Toshiyuki Takamiya and Derek Brewer, *Aspects of Malory* (1986)

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Toshi Takamiya interviewed by Alan Macfarlane 19th October 2009

0:05:07 Born in Tokyo in 1944; my family lived in Hokkaido since the Meiji Restoration; my ancestors were encouraged by the Meiji Emperor to move from Nara Prefecture to the middle part of Hokkaido because of their ancestors' contribution to the Imperial family in the sixteenth century; my father's grandfather was a Shinto priest in Hokkaido, and my father was also given a university education to become a Shinto priest; he was a priest before the Second World War, but after that become a businessman; I knew my paternal grandmother and both maternal grandparents; the latter had also gone to Hokkaido and lived in Otaru, a flourishing port thanks to Japano-Russian trade; my grandfather ran a flourishing trading company importing timber from Siberia; after the War, all the ships and aircraft were confiscated and he became very poor; he decided to send my father to Osaka to start a new business selling seaweed to the Osaka merchants; because of the War there was virtually no food in the Osaka area; salted seaweed was a speciality of Osaka but depended on it coming from Hokkaido; my grandfather could supply my father, and he sold the seaweed to merchants; my father admitted that it was difficult as he was a beginner and not known to the merchants; in Japan it is important to be known; he was once spotted by the Occupation Army using a cryptogram to alter a telegram, and my first recollection of my father was him using a telephone to send a telegram in code which was very curious to me; I went to Osaka with my family at the age of three and my father went on with the seaweed business for only five years; at that point he was summoned to Tokyo by his father, so we all went; he continued to work in my grandfather's trading company; he ran a pawn shop and a tea room among other things; some time later he decided to launch a crammer school in which he succeeded to a certain extent as an educationalist; he launched the school in his early forties and he died as Managing Director at the age of ninety-two; he was a family man and I did not know much about his business attitude; he must have been strong-willed and austere in business matters, and his model was the Japanese Army in which he fought; he was

sent to a top school for military officials in which he excelled in every possible discipline; on graduation he was selected to be a top member of headquarters and was not sent abroad; his motto was study hard which he insisted my younger brother and I should do; in his scolding of us he was a terrible father, a great disciplinarian; my mother was brought up in a well-off family as her father had a successful trading company in Otaru; their house had No performance stage in it so that every summer No actors and musicians came from Tokyo, staying in the house as guests for a month or so; she learned much and both she and my father used to chant No songs and play No instruments; I think my mother must have had a very happy girlhood; my parents married just before the War and I was their first son; she was, and still is, very punctual, particularly for meal-times when she insists that lunch is at noon and the evening meal at six o'clock

11:23:06 My interest in Arthurian legends, magic etc. was not something that developed in childhood; after the War we had no time to enjoy No performances so I don't think I was influenced by my parents' interest in No; I was not given any lessons in Japanese musical instruments; once they invited my father's old mentor from school who was very good at chanting, after which they started chanting No songs endlessly which was really terrible for us; we were forced into a bedroom and had to endure what was for us a huge noise; I was appalled on one or two occasions so I was definitely not influenced by my parents' interest in music or Japanese art; soon after re-entering Keio University for my second B.A. I was asked to accompany the Honshu No troupe to the United States for fifty days as an interpreter, during which we did thirty-five performances; although I did not know anything about No, it was a wonderful experience to learn something about Japanese Mediaeval drama, costume, singing etc.; Donald Keene, the great Japanologist, was the organizer and host; it was the first visit of any No performers to go to the United States and Mexico City; it was a splendid occasion for me to learn, thus my interest in things Mediaeval and Japanese started then

14:47:08 At the age of three when we went from Hokkaido to Osaka there was virtually no ferry service between Hokkaido and the mainland; my father managed to find a small fishing boat on which there was a cat, and I think that I remember it; that was my first memory; I went to my first school in Osaka aged seven; I was not given a chance to go to kindergarten; after two years in that primary school we moved to Tokyo where I was put into another school, and my first difficulty was the problem of my Osaka accent; my pronunciation of 'sensei' caused the whole class to burst into laughter which hurt me for my first month; also they used a different kind of vocabulary with which I was not familiar; it made me aware of the varieties even within Japanese and I became kind of bilingual; even now when going to Osaka I can speak the dialect; I think this realization of different regional dialects has given me a good sense of language; at that stage I was interested in baseball; my father kindly gave me a proper bat etc., and a uniform with New York Yankees logo of which I was very proud; I think I played almost every day with neighbouring kids, and I still enjoy watching it; at Keio University I became interested in rugby; we beat Oxford in the presence of the Crown Prince when I first went with the team as interpreter, but were beaten by Cambridge; we had a wonderful time; in my high school days I used to play badminton; our school was very successful and is still famous for it; in my time we were top of the Tokyo area in an inter-high school championship; I was the player-manager of the team; the school was Azabu High School, one of the most prestigious, but with pleasant, lenient school rules, so we had lots of pranks; it is a day school; I think every member of the school loved Japanese painting; there was a recent graduate from the Tokyo University of Fine Arts, whose father and grandfather were also famous painters, who would joke and laugh in our classes; in other serious subject, like English and maths, we were really supposed to be serious, but the painting class was wonderfully relaxed; he himself became very famous later in life; I didn't paint much myself but loved drawing, sadly I had no artistic talent which I regret very much; my mother was very skilful at painting and embroidery, and also cooking; I had to learn Japanese calligraphy in school but was not good at it, but going to England at thirty-one, I was fascinated by Western calligraphy; I never studied it but learnt to copy, so my Cambridge friends were amazed by a Japanese writing italics

24:52:14 In primary school I was very good at Japanese language and also social subjects like geography and history, but not science; I was the first to remember all the names of prefectures in Japan, also I was very good at reciting text books; I probably have quite a good photographic memory; when I entered Azabu High School I remember in the first music lesson the teacher asked me to read from the text book; he was impressed by my voice and suggested I should be a TV announcer, which pleased me, as I really wanted to be a broadcaster at that time; I wanted to learn an instrument but was prohibited by my father from indulging in such a popular pastime - sport was alright, but not music; he refused to buy me a guitar; only after I entered Keio did I start to learn the piano, but by that time my hands could not follow my more sophisticated ear for music; I had to abandon playing but listen to a lot of music; I was not influenced by my family at all, although my mother had learned the piano and listened to classical music, we had no time to listen; for my twelfth birthday I asked my mother to buy me Beethoven's fifth symphony, which she kindly did, and I still have it somewhere; it was a very good recording done by Toscanini but our record player couldn't play LP so it broke; I still keep it for sentimental reasons; since then I have been very fond of classical music; my interest in mediaeval music came much later; I loved resounding stuff like Berlioz and Wagner; I would spend hours listening to live broadcasts from Bayreuth; I think my high school days were divided into three parts, studying for the entrance exam, playing badminton and listening to music; I was not influenced by any members of my family but had a natural interest in classical music which I am still very fond of

30:37:17 There was a link between Wagnerian themes and later interests; I graduated from the faculty of economics at Keio, and then went to the English department for my second B.A.; already, when studying economics, I was very interested in Wagner; I was given chances to go to the United States as an exchange student, and each time bought complete sets of Wagner which were just coming out under the directorship of Solti; I got to learn the background of the music, his theatrical ideas, and the heroes of his

works; with the second B.A. I really wanted to do something on the mediaeval and discovered Sir Thomas Malory's 'Morte d'Arthur'; my supervisor, Professor Kuriyagawa, was the first Japanese translator of 'Morte d'Arthur' which had just been published; I read the Japanese translation first, and chose it as my B.A. subject; I shared with my supervisor a deep interest in Arthurian paintings by the Pre-Raphaelites, though at that time there were no good colour illustrations in art books; reading the text of 'Morte d'Arthur' I encountered feelings that are reminiscent of the Japanese Samurai; reading the obituaries on the death of Lancelot or Gawain moved me almost to tears, with a Japanese-like emotion which is shared with the English feudalistic society; I did not make any deliberate comparative study between the Japanese and Western chivalric romances, but I think deep in my heart was the basic concept that we can share some sentiment of Samurai and chivalry, the sense of honour and dishonour, shame, is very strong in Japanese Samurai writings, as much as in Malory, and much more than in any French or other Arthurian legends; this kind of sentiment attracted my attention; I also like Tennyson, Swinburne, T.H. White; read Nitobe's 'Bushido' after I started reading Arthurian legends seriously

37:28:19 One of my earliest publications on Malory was on the origin and role of Morgan le Fay on which all sorts of interesting discussion has been done, seeing her as a kind of Celtic goddess; this was picked up in the fantasy called 'The Mists of Avalon'; in the same sense, in the present age of fantasies, following Tolkien; many young Japanese who are pessimistic about the future appreciate the romantic world of the medieval past; I don't know how much shamanism is pertinent in the minds of younger people, but I think that psychologically they go back to the medieval world; I enjoy children's fantasies of Ursula le Guin and C.S. Lewis; my students have read these in translation at an early age and would retain their interest to university; one of my former students who is now a professor of English at Keio was thrilled by Tolkien, and coming to Keio she read Beowulf for the first time seriously; she told me that all of a sudden she realized how bits of Tolkien were taken from Beowulf; this sort of discovery could only happen at Keio where the medieval tradition is very strong

42:27:19 On leaving school, I decided to read economics because, at that period, if you were good at human sciences you were supposed to study economics; thus I chose it but was not interested in it at all; back in the 1960s there was still some influence of 'Das Capital', which I found boring and soon abandoned; modern economic theories, such as Keynesianism, did not attract me either; for my B.A. thesis I wrote something about post-war agricultural problems in Hokkaido where I went to do some field study; I was not very good at theoretical economic analysis so decided to do field research; my shift to literature I find difficult to justify, only that there was no good job possibility available in economics at the time, I wanted to remain in the university; we had a very successful Olympics in 1964 after which all the economic opportunities slumped, which was still the case two years later when I graduated; I did go to see some companies run by Keio graduates and was told frankly that unless I was very keen I would end up as a small cog in a big company machine; I then thought about what subject I could do better than economics; I was very interested in the English language and found I had a good ear for the sound and could speak it well compared to other Japanese students; I really wanted to study English phonetics and do a scientific analysis of the English language, but there was no such course in the faculty; then I happened to attend Professor Kuriyagawa's lectures on medieval English literature which were fascinating; at that time in Keio there was no system for taking a PhD, but I was invited to be an assistant lecturer in the English department; three years later I was given the chance of going to Cambridge, thanks to Derek Brewer; I went as a Fukuzawa scholar

48:20:12 I felt lucky to come to Cambridge for real academic research on Arthurian literature; I came in 1975; Derek Brewer was giving lectures on Malory as was Jill Man, a young scholar from Oxford; Professor Brewer once told me that he was the first person to introduce Malory's 'Morte d'Arthur' into the English syllabus as it had been criticised and renounced by Roger Ascham in Cambridge, since when no one took it up for serious study; Derek Brewer was a man of ideas and generosity, particularly to young students; he listened carefully and gave good advice; he was a man

of practicalities; his launching of a publishing firm was one example; he wanted to be able to publish young PhD's theses which even the University Press would decline; I remember him as a man who liked sophisticated, mature, young people; a Danish student at my college, Darwin, who had been studying Lancelot in all European languages, couldn't get on with him; I now realize that he considered her to be immature; he was a great scholar; there was some criticism that he had not published a magnum opus, but his work on Chaucer had never been done; in the 1950s the philological tradition was very strong, so his literary, social, historical interest, placing Chaucer within his context was novel; his first book on Chaucer was republished and revised extensively over time; I was very much attached to his notion of "Gothic" Malory and Chaucer; there has been a strong controversy between the two schools of Malory scholars on the unity in 'Morte d'Arthur', whether he wrote a unified story from the birth to death of King Arthur, or whether he wrote eight separate romances loosely connected at different times; you can detect all sorts of discrepancies, but Brewer's analogy with Gothic cathedrals, with Anglo-Saxon, Norman, and Romanesque elements as well as a Gothic spire, which appears as a total unity; since he introduced this interpretation there has been no further discussion on unity; even in Tolkien's trilogy one can find discrepancies as he did not think in terms of making a unified story

57:12:03 I didn't see any Western old books bound in leather until the age of twenty-four; Yoshida opened a small pilot shop in Shinjuku where I saw lots of leather-bound antiquarian books, and was fascinated; on my first visit I bought a Robinson Brothers' antiquarian book catalogue of wonderful books and manuscripts which came from Sir Thomas Phillips; last September I celebrated the forty-first year of my Western rare book collecting although I started collecting Japanese books at the age of twelve; I have collected particularly medieval literature and early English books; I have been interested in things medieval and also in the later reception of the Middle Ages in English literature - medievalism - even before the word was used; one of the aims of my collecting these books was to use them for teaching; with real books for my students to see and touch they could learn more about old literature and culture; so I started buying books for my own

collection as well as for recommending to Keio University Library; now Keio has got a very good collection of reference books as well as some real manuscripts, even Caxton's; we should not remain just the guardians but must make them easily available to students if they are interested, so I would always encourage them to go to the rare book room to study them; before that you ought to be well-disciplined so I have been giving classes in palaeography, historical bibliography, so I am very pleased to see some of my former students are very well trained; I learnt palaeography from Professor Kuriyagawa, and also medieval Latin; during my stay in Cambridge I learnt palaeography first from David Dumville; as well as Professor Brewer, I was supervised by Ian Doyle, a Downing man who happens to be the rare books Librarian at Durham; he was wonderful at historical bibliography and I learnt a great deal; I also got on well with Richard Beadle a young Fellow at St John's; Malcolm Parkes from Oxford came to Cambridge quite often; I went to see Neil Ker in Oxford and even went to Pitlochry to stay with him; I was very fortunate in having this kind of network which I brought back to Keio

1:03:23:03 Soon after I started frequenting the Yoshida bookshop I think they brought my attention to a thirteenth century Parisian bible; I was fascinated by it and bought it, or rather twisted my father's arm; although he was very strict about my buying anything for entertainment he was very understanding of my serious academic interests, and has been very supportive; roughly at that time there had been many Keio professors who had been to Cambridge or Oxford for sabbatical leave and on their return had started talking about the importance of manuscripts for research; I therefore found it a good thing to collect manuscripts for my own pleasure as well as for teaching; I started letting my PhD students use my collection for their PhD work; my collection was bought with family money but I think it was wisely spent; I don't claim to be very good at making money, that is why I am an academic now, but I was fortunate enough to have the means to buy the library; also I started collecting medieval and middle English manuscripts much earlier than anyone else; manuscripts are usually associated with Books of Hours and lavishly painted pictures which I couldn't afford to buy and am also not interested in them, but collected plain-looking, shabby manuscripts; it was becoming more

expensive, but managed to buy with expertise and knowledge - by far the most important element in collecting; I got on very well with David McKitterick, now the Librarian at Trinity, and David Hall who used to be at the University Library; every now and then we got together at weekends for book-hunting expeditions; I would drive to Oxford or Hay on Wye, and they were very knowledgeable at choosing the right kind of books; by watching them rummaging through the shelves I learnt a great deal; their emphasis was always on association copies; I absorbed the atmosphere of libraries such as the Parker Library, and it would be wonderful to have that atmosphere in my own but we suffer from the problems of space; there was an occasion more than twenty years ago when I moved out of this place and bought land and a house with an underground library; the designer's estimate for work was such that I thought it could be better spent on manuscripts so decided to stay here; visitors from abroad - Hans Kraus and others - are rather shocked to see how small my house and library are, but by Japanese standards this is huge

1:10:43:00 On teaching, my students always complain that I only give hints at what to do for research and don't give them answers, but send them to the Library; if you give a good question and then explain the answer there is no room for them to do research; in a Japanese university, I think that no one has done that kind of teaching; all Japanese professors in Western subjects would read assiduously, translate into Japanese, and make it deliberately difficult for their students to understand; I don't like that idea; I think my teaching style changed drastically after my three year stay in Cambridge, and my aim became to make students think; in order to enhance this teaching style I invited lots of distinguished academics, particularly from Britain and the United States for lectures; the tradition of such lectures in Japan is to give virtually no feedback from the students; I don't like that idea, so in my own seminar, I would let the keynote speaker talk to a text already read by the students in advance, so that they could make critical observations; even in medieval English literature or bibliographical studies I would hold a small seminar with three or four speakers, one a distinguished visitor, but the others, my PhD students who would read their own papers; the visitor would often be very impressed by the quality of the students' analysis that even British

students would not touch on; they kindly call my method the 'Toshi School' which is unique; I think I learnt this side of the discipline from Patrick Boyde the Italian scholar at St John's, the Dante expert; he emphasised the importance of choosing the right kind of topic on Dante that no Italian scholar would dream of, and put it into a wonderful presentation in which you have to use Italian more fluently and eloquently than an Italian scholar; I would make every attempt to read a paper on Caxton and Malory with minute dissection of the bibliographical matter that no British scholar would dream of; did this at the International Medieval Congress so that many Americans were surprised to see a Japanese talking in a very British way on the subject

1:18:17:06 I have been worried about the lack of interest among undergraduate students in real books; they are content with surfing digital media for information which they then put into their own papers, without seeing the real books; in the last five years before my retirement I started giving my undergraduate students the library guide and also the guide to antiquarian books; all of a sudden some of them got interested in old books and some of them would go to bookshops, finding wonderful books with ascriptions that the shopkeeper was not aware of the significance of; that is a good way to start becoming a bibliophile; I have launched Keio University Society of Bibliophiles by organizing a lecture and a book auction on a very humble scale, because we professors have duplicate copies which the students would bid for; probably one of the future urgent desiderata is to launch the Keio University Book Collecting Prize as has been started in Cambridge; I would like to keep a good book collecting tradition going at Keio; Keio has produced very good collectors in classical Japanese and Chinese literature, and also Western literature, but need to continue this drive; at Darwin I was wrongly charged a fee which Derek Brewer got rescinded, and gave the money to the Tim Munby Memorial fund; the next day I was seen as a hero; even after retirement I shall teach at Keio once a week, but no meetings which is wonderful; very soon we are going to launch a new photo site called timewithbooks.com on the internet; this site will encourage young people to see the books in libraries and bookshops, touch them and smell them, and get pleasure from owning them; this is meant to be for young librarians, booksellers

and even laymen; I would like to make my last mission to encourage people to get more interested in real books, as well as digital media

Christopher Ricks



25 July 2013

<http://downloads.sms.cam.ac.uk/1668149/1670147.mp4>

Christopher Ricks, *Keats and Embarrassment* (1973)

Extracted from Wikipedia - 20.8.2014

Sir Christopher Bruce Ricks, FBA (born 18 September 1933) is a British literary critic and scholar. He is the William M. and Sara B. Warren Professor of the Humanities at Boston University (U.S.) and Co-Director of the Editorial Institute at Boston University, and was Professor of Poetry at the University of Oxford (England) from 2004 to 2009. He is the immediate past-president of the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics.

He is known as a champion of Victorian poetry; an enthusiast of Bob Dylan, whose lyrics he has analyzed at book-length; a trenchant reviewer of writers he considers pretentious (Marshall McLuhan, Christopher Norris, Geoffrey Hartman, Stanley Fish); and a warm reviewer of those he thinks humane or humorous (F. R. Leavis, W. K. Wimsatt, Christina Stead). Hugh Kenner has praised his 'intent eloquence', and Geoffrey Hill his 'unrivalled critical intelligence'. W. H. Auden described Ricks as 'exactly the kind of critic every poet dreams of finding'. John Carey calls him the 'greatest living critic'. He was knighted in the 2009 Birthday Honours.

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Christopher Ricks interviewed by Alan Macfarlane 25th July 2013

0:05:07 Born in Beckenham, Kent, in September 18th 1933, a day of birth I share with Dr Johnson, Greta Garbo and Batman; I know nothing about my great-grandparents; both of my grandfathers were dead before I was born; my maternal grandfather was in the fur trade and was French, with behind that, Polish, so my mother's maiden name was Gabrielle Valentine Ernestine Leontine Roszak, Roszak being the Polish bit; two of those names were in expectation of a bequest, perhaps, or a gift from uncles Ernest and Leon, neither of whom came up with anything, so she dropped those names and became Gabrielle Valentine Roszak and then Ricks; my children amiably thought of it as Vaseline, thinking of names that they could have for my mother who was a very loveable person; I think the fur trade was in France and then came to England; I know almost nothing; the divorce of my parents happened when I was about three; I remember nothing from before the war, but the family rifts meant that there wasn't much talk about families further back; my father's father was also in the rag trade - in women's coats and suits, wholesale, in London - so it may well be that my mother met my father in that sort of professional world; I can't remember my father and mother together; both of them remarried; I can hardly go behind that except for a painter whose name is Ricks who exhibited sometimes at the Royal Academy though he was not an Academician; I would like to have seven of his paintings to leave to my seven children; I have four paintings of his, one of himself looking more amiable than he was likely to have been, and wearing a skull cap, misinterpreted by colleagues of mine in America establishing him as Jewish; I like his paintings and they go for quite a lot of money; he lived in Somerset; Ralph his son, Walter Ricks, my grandfather, married my grandmother who was from Scotland, who was a Bruce; so all the boys had the middle name Bruce; my father was James Bruce Ricks, my uncles Rafe and Donald Bruce Ricks, and I kept that going with my sons by my first marriage; they are David and William Bruce Ricks

4:27:11 The family, despite the rag trade connotation, was not Jewish; there was more than a vein of anti-Semitism on my father's side and there would be real disagreements about how heinous that was - I think it was deplorable; it was sort of impersonal and went with a perfectly honest expression that some of one's best friends were Jews, but it was odious rather than heinous; but there is a point of view which says that anti-Semitism is gangrenous which means that unless it is extirpated you will die of it; I remember that the pubs in London even after the war - the Cock Tavern near where Dad worked off Oxford Street, still had anti-Semitic cartoons on the walls but it also had anti-Welsh, anti-Scottish and anti-Irish ones; I never liked any of that but probably toyed with it at my grammar school

5:41:18 My father went into his father's business; my grandfather died in his forties; almost the only bit of family memorabilia that I have is an obituary from *The Drapers' Record*, and he was clearly respected in the trade; my father didn't like work and had cocooned himself against various unhappinesses that had befallen him; his father died before he had ever really got to know him; back then you didn't really know your father as a child but got to know him later on; one of his brothers, Donald, after whom my brother was named in due course, was killed on a motor bike when young; my father himself got tuberculosis in about his late teens, and then he married my mother, so this was a string of unhappinesses; he clearly went off my mother rather quickly, and her being French was not an advantage; I thought she was very good looking and I remember rather lovely photos of her when young; Dad didn't like working, would go to work and open a tin of chocolate biscuits and eat them doing the Times crossword puzzle, would go out for a long non-working lunch and so on; the firm had been started by Callander, Davies and Ricks (my grandfather), and they came up with the cumbersome compacted name Caldarc, clearly a bad move; Callander was successful, and his son was powerful, perhaps not always entirely scrupulous; Davis disappeared at some point from it, so it was Callander's son and Rick's son who ran it; Callander worked and therefore controlled much more; they made coats which were unfortunately made to last forever, but it was a time when women were thinking they did not want coats that would last forever, so the very thing

that had been their strong selling point when fashion was not very powerful did for them; Dad presided over the gradual dissolution of what had been a successful business which I think left quite a lot of money; I used to hear a figure like £40,000 a long time ago which was then in South American railways, which must have seemed a good buy at the time; my grandmother lived into her nineties, was Scottish and wore a kilt, had great dignity and outlived all her three sons which was a tragedy for her; Donald had died in his teens; Ralph had won a Military Cross and escaped from a prisoner of war camp during the war but had run to seed after and died youngish; my father was in the firm; from very early on my brother Donald and I had been allocated formally but not custodially to a parent; I was clearly my mother's child and Donald, my father's; Donald and I got on perfectly well and went to the same boarding school; it was thought that Donald would become a businessman and there was a business into which he could go; it was thought I was some sort of precocious, brainy little boy, though there wasn't any talk of an academic life, nobody had been to a university; my mother looked after my interests by giving me a subscription to the *Times Literary Supplement* when I was a schoolboy and my father looked after my brother by teaching him to handle chisels; Donald loved doing things about the house; so my father's world was a business world to which he did not dedicate himself; my brother in due course joined the firm hoping to protect it against our father; fortunately it folded after a few more years; it was not protectable, so Donald escaped; he would not have been able honourably to leave it, but fortunately it went bankrupt; he then moved into the Burton group and had a perfectly successful business career still in the world of women's coats and suits; he retired just before sixty; from when he was thirty he counted down exactly how long he had to go and just before sixty his patience snapped, and he left England and went to Scotland with his wife, and fished, enormously; my mother did every kind of job to earn a little bit of money; she must have had alimony but it probably wasn't much; my Scottish grandmother was quite generous to her; my French grandmother who lived with her son, my uncle Jean, until Jean died; Jean was forbidden to marry and there was no way of relinquishing his duties to my grandmother; I think my mother had come to England as a child of eight or twelve; she didn't sound French

except for the affectation using a French form for the Odeon and Gaumont cinemas; there was no money on either side but there was a shabby gentility on my father's side; he had been to Framlingham, a minor public school; I was at a grammar school from eight to eighteen

12:58:08 I do work too much; I don't know what relation that has to my being an irritable person, and I am not exactly impatient, but I am not good at relaxing and don't like holidays; I love going to other places if I have some reason other than enjoying myself to be there; speaking at the Chinese university in Beijing, I liked going there because I gave three talks and was there for four days, so it was worth it; I think I have been determined not to be my father in so far as one determines these things; there is a wonderful moment when William Empson said about King Lear "at this moment Lear decides not to go mad"; I think it is quite wonderful as it is something that happens in the play - you can't go on deciding not to go mad, but its like deciding to get out of a nightmare; so I think my father's very amiable fecklessness - he lived for games, he was happy playing mahjong, bridge would have required too much of him, but chess, draughts, shove-halfpenny, billiards, snooker, golf and a crossword puzzle, that was it; I'm not good at any of those ways of relaxing, if that's what they are; my mother had great sweetness of disposition; I wish I had as sweet a disposition as she had; she was never unkind; my step-mother was often unkind; my father left my mother for my stepmother; I wasn't told that but if you look at the timing of it that is clearly what it was; I was about three and my brother, Donald, four years older; I remember nothing back then but I remember being told things; for instance, when Donald was born; my mother came round from whatever the equivalent of pethidine was back then, and asked whether he was all right; the midwife said that he "doesn't have all his fingers on one hand"; my mother gulped, and the midwife said "but he would look very funny with all his fingers on one hand"; you are no longer allowed to be a midwife and make remarks of that kind, but it was rather wonderful; when I heard it about six or eight I thought how wonderful the English language is; my step-mother's name was Grace Skelton; she was called Gay; she was brisk and curt and had a hard life because Dad never did anything about the house at

all; it was partly that people back then didn't do anything; she cleaned his shoes, made his lunch, saw him off to work; she didn't work; my mother had odd jobs, for instance, she worked on a farm in Berkshire for a while, in the war she worked in a munitions factory and one night made more sprockets than anybody else; they both smoked much too much; my stepmother was very severe and I was frightened of her; from eight to eighteen I was at a boarding school; before the war I remember nothing other than black out; I remember bombs falling in Beckenham in, I suppose, 1940; was evacuated down to Cornwall and still have the bible that was given to me by the family with whom my brother and I lived; in early 1942 when I was eight and a half I went to King Alfred's School, Wantage, and stayed until I was eighteen; my brother joined a bit later and protected me from being beaten into a pulp; it was important not to be too protective of a younger brother because that would mean they were definitely beaten up, but it certainly helped me that he was in the same school; a possible explanation of my step-mother's severity was the difficulty of living, basically lived in the pub where he was much loved and had the ability to get on with everybody, a skill you have if you are a certain kind of gentleman - he would read and write letters for people who couldn't do for themselves

19:38:19 King Alfred's School, Wantage had about fifty boarders and about a hundred to a hundred and fifty day boys, or day bugs as we affectionately called them; it was that or Newbury; we were looking for somewhere that wasn't going to be bombed and was not very expensive; it was a direct grant school, so my Scottish grandmother put up a little bit of money, I think, but I must have had a scholarship there, and I got a good education; I was very frightened and of course prefects beat boys back then, and masters beat boys; everybody got beaten sometime; it doesn't seem to have done me any great harm thought I am not in favour of it; I can't think of any interesting traumatization; we didn't have hazing; I went into the house that wasn't part of the main school; there was still gas light, there was a matron, it was rather Dickensian or perhaps like the Joan Aiken books *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase*, not nineteenth century but twentieth century Victorianizing; there was a White Russian who lived across the road and things like that kind; Wantage was fine; you weren't

allowed into town except on a Saturday morning; you weren't allowed to have much pocket money which was perhaps a good idea; you wore a school uniform; I think we were well taught; the two English masters were very good, Mr Swan and Mr Harrison; Mr Swan had been educated at Cambridge and believed in Dr Leavis, so at fourteen or fifteen he wanted us to read Eliot, Joyce and Lawrence, as well as other things; Mr Harrison was old-fashioned and believed that Milton was a very great poet; I think they liked one another and they certainly showed it was possible amiably to argue or to differ; I was asked to write something for the Sunday Times some ten years ago and I wrote about Mr Swan and Mr Harrison, and word came from Australia where Mr Harrison was living out his retirement; so the teaching was fine; I protected myself, as at the beginning of *Jane Eyre*, by being bookish, and as at the beginning of *Jane Eyre* it doesn't really protect you because they throw the book at you and hit your head, but it was something, and with minor snobberies - I had a golf club and a few golf balls and would go out onto the playing field and hit these golf balls about, and it distinguished me from ploughboys, that's my feeling about it

23:22:23 I didn't know that I needed glasses until I was about twenty-seven; Donald wore glasses from early on but I didn't wear them, and my oldest child, David, who is now fifty-four, realized when he was young that he needed glasses and he would set off for Bristol Grammar School, put the glasses in his pocket and see out the day at school, but he clearly had weak sight; I was afraid of the cricket ball which seemed immensely too hard, I didn't like the football either, I didn't like games though I played hockey; nobody likes being left wing, so I was able to be left wing, a position from which I was ousted by the only person from school that I have kept in touch with, a man called John Barnard, a very good scholar of Augustan literature and an editor of Keats, and a very nice person; I did fencing because I didn't want to be punched in the face with a boxing glove; I didn't have hobbies or collect things though I might have had a stamp album in which I quickly ceased to want to put stamps; I read a lot; I was terrible at drawing and was bottom of the class; I wasn't good at any kind of art or woodwork; Donald was blithely being the opposite, of course; I don't think I had any hobbies, just reading; my mother

wanted me to learn the piano; I did not want to and never practised, and it was the period of my life when I had most persistently to make up scarcely credible lies about why I hadn't been able to practise; I was terrified of my blind piano teacher who could tell whether I was lying from my voice; I begged my mother not to waste her money on these lessons but it was very important to her, perhaps vicariously, if you want to live out, as parents tend to, what one hadn't done oneself; so the 'Song of the Volga Boatmen' I could just about muster; I liked singing, I wasn't good at it but liked it a lot, and of course 'Messiah' was a pleasure to sing; listening to music is important to me; I thought I would sing in a choir when I got to Oxford, and I did at first, probably the Balliol choir though I don't remember quite just what it was; I found myself short of time as I needed to get on with work; my father loved classical music; he had a small but rather good collection of records; he had a huge old gramophone with a great golden horn; we were not to touch it; it was a huge horn on a great square cabinet with a sort of cigar clip to clip the fibre needles; we were never to touch it; you could see him moving into dismay and despair at everything when he ceased listening to classical music because he had loved listening to it; he liked minor composers best; it was clear to him that Peter Warlock was underrated in the mash of those foreign people; we weren't allowed to put it on and once he didn't put it on it wasn't there any longer; radio was important; listening in the darkened dormitory if you were allowed to, to Valentine Dyle reading some dark story, that was all good; we weren't allowed into the cinema of course; had lots of homework, that was all right; was taught by J.M. Cohen, the Editor of Penguin Classics, one of the great honourable popularizers, translator of Montaigne, Rabelais, many great Penguin enterprises; he was as he said on one of the jackets "jerked into school mastering by the Blitz", so he lived out his time at Wantage and after the war went back into the publishing world; he left a report on my brother - he had to leave a report when he left the school on each of the forms, and of the fifth form the entire report consisted of the words "only Ricks is hopeless"; I loved regaling Donald with that to the end of his days; I liked Cohen though I don't remember him very well, he was a force for good

29:52:05 I do listen to classical music, especially to Haydn; I remember my astonishment when about thirty years ago I was talking about favourite composers and somebody I didn't know said Haydn was the greatest composer; I docketed it; Haydn makes me happier than any other, I don't mean he is deeper but I love it; I do listen a lot; I am not really a writer, only a literary critic, sometimes a literary historian and editor; I have no creative abilities at all; I would not deny that there is something creative and imaginative about the immense sum of things, that is the imaginative editorial decisions, to see that this needs to be amended in the Housman manner, that is creative; I think there is a huge difference between what *Paradise Lost* is and what any book about *Paradise Lost* is; in philosophy that is not the case; any philosophy is philosophy; if I turn towards Bernard Williams he is doing the same thing as Aristotle or whoever the philosopher should be; there is a simple continuum there, they are all philosophers, whereas for me, what happened in literary criticism was that the word "discourse" arrived; we are all engaged in a discourse and I think that was very bad for literary criticism, that what I do is a second-order activity, it is a service industry though a service well worth rendering; I think I do render a service to Keats but we are not engaged in "discourse"

32:55:12 I was confirmed at the ordinary age and I pretended that I sufficiently believed, but that was the end of it; at confirmation a little voice said, "come off it", and I realized that I didn't believe any of it; Dad had the irrationality of an angry atheist - in Beckett it would be "The bastard, he doesn't exist"; Dad had a Hardy-esque view that if there was a god he had killed Dad's father, killed Dad's brother, he had given Dad tuberculosis and he'd sent my mother Dad's way, so Dad seethed against the Christian god but basically wasn't interested other than to expostulate; my mother in a characteristically amiable way would have liked to think there was something in it; she must have been brought up as a Catholic because it didn't seem to be a Huguenot family; she never went to church; I of course went to chapel and church in Wantage all the time; Wantage was a very religious place; it teemed with nuns; the rival to us was a [girls] school called St Mary's where they played lacrosse and we weren't allowed to even look at them; so it felt very priest-ridden and black; I never believed what was said

in the sermons; like a lot of people I liked the music, I loved the King James Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, wonderfully well-written, so I didn't mind taking part in all that; there wasn't much question whether one would take part except by a kind of exhibitionist intransigence which I didn't fancy; the Bishops were either too fat or too thin and they all came and gave terrible sermons, telling you that the cross is I crossed out - thank you very much, I have read George Herbert, can you not treat us better than that; I didn't believe any of it; I loved Empson fairly early though probably I didn't read him until I was in the army; I remember being astonished in the barrack room that somebody was reading *Seven Types of Ambiguity*; a bold thing to do when doing National Service, I thought this guy is really going to get beaten up; Empson's anti-Christian crusade has always felt very true to me, and Shelley's remarks and so on; I love Milton, my favourite reading at school, partly out of snobbery, but it is the greatest sort of science fiction book in the language and is very thrilling; C.S. Lewis's attempts to make sense of a plurality of inhabited worlds did fascinate me; I suppose I was at school when I read *Perelandra*, *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Screwtape Letters*, and thought them very valiant but terrifically unconvincing; they were clearly what the religion was up against; you would have to have a Christ on every planet, and no amount of calling your character Ransom made it altogether plausible; my oldest child is a Christian; that was not a horrid shock but it was a big surprise a few years ago; he is now fifty-four; he and his wife, Katy, are living in the Head's house of Sevenoaks School, she is the Head; they also bought a house in the country and I asked David if the Vicar had called; he said "No, but since the subject has come up I should perhaps let you know that I have been received into the Church of England" - to my astonishment as I had given him a healthy upbringing; I didn't know what to say but immediately shook his hand as the right thing to do; I think that Empson is right that it is a loathsome system of torture worship; whether there is a god or not is different from whether the Christian God is the blackest thing invented by the heart of man, which is Empson's view; alone of the great religions it declined to abolish human sacrifice; if you are a believer you say that alone of the great religions it successfully abolished human sacrifice by having a human sacrifice that was not solely human, and was

once and for all; so that is the argument but the doctrine of the Trinity seems to me pernicious in the ways in which Empson believes it to be; I am theologically unschooled and my friends who are Catholics roll their eyes at my ignorance, and I don't doubt reasonably, but you need the Trinity because if God is identical with the son it is masochism, and if He is not identical it is sadism; I think the Holy Ghost is going to condemn the other two to eternal torment; He's been very badly treated and not just for the last few centuries; I have been told that Dante realized the Holy Ghost, but on the whole the religion has been father and son; it has gone binary in practice however triangulated it was meant to be; Milton adduces the Holy Ghost very beautifully but briefly, dove-like sits brooding on the great abyss and makes it pregnant, even that with the odd feeling that it could sit brooding if only now that you were making it pregnant; I am not one of those people who says that I wish I could believe it were true; I will not like the prospect of dying though the prospect of living forever is immensely worse; irrespective of whether it was torment, it would be torment to live forever in heaven as far as anybody can conceive; these are naiveties; I am glad I don't believe because I think it is pernicious, but I don't argue with David about it, for whom the music has swept him into a community of more than feeling

41:23:06 I went to Balliol because Cyril Bailey the editor of Lucretius was the Chairman of the Governors of King Alfred's School; we must have met on some occasion and he and his wife invited me to tea; his wife was a very handsome, generous and good person, who knew as Cyril did that the G in Gemma is hard; Cyril had lovely blue eyes and was able to convey some sort of affinity through his eyes when you were in the company of other people; I knew that he was a great classical scholar; Housman didn't think him great but Housman didn't think many people great; it was a great bit of luck to know Cyril Bailey, and I have always liked old men; he was probably only seventy or eighty; I think he died about ninety; without any ostentation he just had lovely memories; he had been taught amateurishly to skate by Matthew Arnold on a frozen pond, and on the edge of the pond Arnold's wife and daughter saying "do be careful"; later, when Geoffrey Faber's life of Jowett came out, Cyril Bailey said he was

glad the book had been written but could not be in a room with Jowett for one minute and not feel the force of his genius, and on no page of Faber's book could you feel the force of genius; I revered him; I had put in for St John's and was offered an exhibition; I knew no protocol; nobody from King Alfred's School had gone to Oxford as far as I could tell, and nobody in my family had been to university; this is still the case often in America; Boston University has a lot of first generation people going to university; Cyril said I should not go to St John's but to Balliol, and told me to apply; I was offered a scholarship at Balliol and then Poole, the Head of St John's wrote me this absolutely withering note which was very intemperate and wrong of him; he should have said that it was the wrong way to do it, but it was a cruelly frigid letter to somebody of seventeen; that was a shock and I found it very disturbing; E.T. (Bill) Williams must have been Senior Tutor at Balliol and after the interview said that I would be given the scholarship and he wanted to know what I would do about National Service; he then proceeded to tell me that I should do it now rather than later, should go into the army, into the infantry to learn to be a soldier, rather than into the Signal Corps or Education Corps; it was actually very good advice so I then did my two years; going back to Oxford worried me for a while as I appeared to have blotted a gigantic copy book; I was in the army from 1951-53; I did basic training in Colinton Barracks just outside Edinburgh - my Scottish blood was kicking in as that was in the Royal Scots; I told myself regularly that Donald, my elder brother, was in this barracks four years ago and he survived, but I had to keep saying it to myself; I was then picked out as officer material, was sent to Eaton Hall to swarm up ropes and show I could cross a crocodile infested pond, and was made a Second Lieutenant; I was there with Jonathan Wordsworth, collateral descendant of the poet, who after a while was invalided out because he had a varicose vein about the size of my little finger nail; at the time I was rather vexed at his having eluded his duty, but in the event it was a mercy for me because he went to Oxford a year before me and was therefore never competing with me for fellowships, and he would have defeated me; the horse-shaped face of the Wordsworth, and the name, and the knowledge that there were lots of family manuscripts still knocking about, and he had great force of character; so it was fortuitous that he

was already ensconced at Exeter when I needed a job at Worcester; I was commissioned into the Green Howards, Alexandra, Princess of Wales's Own Yorkshire Regiment; it was a second battalion which was lucky because it was almost entirely National Service people; I had a very good Company Commander called Jock Nayber, and when I received an honour a few years ago, a letter came from him saying he hoped I remembered him, recommending that I joined the Green Howards Regimental Association, which I did, whereupon they disbanded the Green Howards; in Egypt I was guarding mounds of rotting potatoes with killer dogs; I didn't train the dogs and didn't guard them effectively; we were saying for the millionth time that we would never leave Egypt, or Cyprus either; we clearly soon going to leave both, but it is important that it is prior to the Suez folly; Suez made me know that I would never vote Conservative, which is foolish because Labour is sometime a stench in the nostril and one can hardly bring oneself to vote for it; it wasn't just the folly of it, but the lying, Selwyn Lloyd, collusion with the French, and it was a horrid anti-Arab feeling which I was very aware of in Egypt the whole time; all those claims that they couldn't possibly run the canal; a hatred of Naguib as well as Nasser; a pretence that Farouk was somehow fun; I disliked all of that; it was pointless being there, but it wasn't ugly or disagreeable; I saw one dead person, somebody who had electrocuted themselves while ironing; I was lucky because others whom I had done officer training with did go to Malaya and Korea, so I was lucky with my Regiment

51:33:21 At Balliol I liked very much my Tutor, John Bryson; he was a very old fashioned belle-lettrist; he discovered the portrait of Donne with the great flaming red lips; he did it with the help of an art historian but he did it without asking the usual questions; he had the touch of a G.K. Chesterton; Edmund Gosse who was a pathological liar had said in his life of Donne that there was a portrait of Donne in a particular place; everybody had written to this great house and they had always written back saying they had nothing; Bryson wrote and asked for a list of all the portraits that they had; they did so and one was a portrait of Duns Scotus, but it was a portrait of Donne; that didn't happen while I was an undergraduate; in a way it was gathering in some huge gestation

within John Bryson; he was very endearing; he smoked non-stop, stubbing the cigarette out after a couple of puffs - a sign of a febrile intelligence; Bryson was almost always late so the key thing was either twenty or twenty-five past the hour you had to decide whether he was going to come; he wouldn't be there probably before twenty past but I was brought up to be there irrespective, and it was a rare occasion when JNB was on time; I liked very much the system of reading the essay aloud, I think it was good for one's prose; it is difficult to write sentences like "the tactile mesh of the TV mosaic has begun to permeate the whole sensorium" if you have actually got to utter it; Bryson didn't want to listen to the whole thing but he had built in some ability to know when one was getting near the end; you could try to defeat him by varying the length, but he would always say that "it took a little time to get going but the point you made at the end..", and so on; he would sit at his desk and you would hear him opening his letters with a paper knife and reading them while one was reading an essay; at the end he would then say some very penetrating thing; I was very fond of him; he was totally without pretension; he said the point of studying English was that you would have for the rest of your life a body of great things in your mind and they will be a lifetime's resource for you; there wasn't anything about it helping you to be a good teacher or anything like that; it wasn't at all Leavisite, so it was a good thing that J.C. Maxwell had been the Andrew Bradley Research Fellow and had given Leavis's books to the College library; I was lucky in that my cast of mind wasn't at all like my Tutor's; I was going to be reading Empson and Leavis irrespective, and it was very good that there was somebody who simply said "How many other masques have you read?", and that was the right question; Alistair Campbell was the Tutor in Old English; he was very eccentric; he rather knew that he was eccentric so that it was somewhat stylized and therefore less effective, but he was a real scholar; we loved the stories about him which were probably true, that he played golf with two balls and claimed that it was the same as playing eighteen holes; that every year in the summer he went to Frisia and won a huge prize for a novel written in the language, a prize for which nobody else ever entered; Derek Brewer the Master of Emanuel, regularly supplemented his income by winning these religious prizes that nobody else ever put in for; Bryson had wanted to admit only me,

not because I was transcendently good but because the fewer pupils that he had the better; the College said it was not fair to admit one person in any one year, so he took one other person who became the biographer of Noel Coward; until the end of the three years Alistair Campbell never knew which was which; there was this wonderful tutorial system where week after week you study with someone; at the end of three years Campbell would hand back Day's essays to me, and I would have to tell him that I was Ricks, and he was Day; Bryson had a lovely Hilliard miniature, and Leslie Hotson, about whom Freddy Bateson had written something about his detective work on the sonnets; Bryson had the miniature, Hotson entered the room, saw it and said "That's Mr W.H.", and then wrote a book about it; somebody asked Bryson how Hotson knew it was Mr W.H. and Bryson replied "I didn't think it proper to ask"; it's the homosexual world over centuries; I miss that sort of thing in America; nobody ever says something like that

Second Part

0:05:07 I didn't go to a lot of lectures but never missed tutorials in the College; I spent a lot of time reading and re-reading sitting in my room, not reading secondary but always primary things; C.S. Lewis didn't seem to me to be a great lecturer though he was wonderfully well-informed and he cared about what he was saying; I have been at lectures which I thought were extraordinary accomplishments - Quentin Skinner's lectures are just such accomplishments - Lewis didn't seem to me to be like that; he left Oxford for Cambridge though he kept a house in Headington; after my Milton book came out I was going to meet him; there was some kind of tentative suggestion that I should come to tea - it is funny that I don't have any clearer record or piece of paper - and he died; I admired reading him but I think him a much better literary critic than anything else; I don't think him a good poet or a really good novelist, and I don't really think him a good polemicist, the old stories of his having given up certain kinds of argument about miracles when Miss Anscombe wiped the floor with him; I think in a Chestertonian way, some of his best jokes are Chestertonian or even Chesterton - the phrase "Giant the Jack Killer", for instance; I am always interested in people who have a

name that can't be deduced from their initials, and there is something about Clive Staples Lewis being Jack which was a bit disconcerting to me; of the Inklings, Tolkien was the most boring lecturer; he didn't take any trouble at all, and rattled away with an edited copy of *Gawain and the Green Knight* in his hand; I was perhaps a graduate student when Auden was praising Tolkien for his creative achievements; Helen Gardner was a very good lecturer but it wasn't remarkable force of personality at a podium then, I don't think Oxford English was remarkable for that; the only non-faculty person whose name was ever bruted or mooted was Wind, and we were all supposed to go and we would understand iconography and all the visual arts if we went; but I didn't do that; I tended simply to be reading and re-reading and that was fine; I hadn't heard of Isaiah Berlin, but have loved the Berlin stories I have heard since; his remark about George Steiner "Very interesting phenomenon, very common on the Continent, very rare in England, genuine charlatan"; a wonderful remark which is in a way anti-British because we don't even produce genuine charlatans; another remark when he was leaving one of George Steiner's lectures he was heard by a friend to remark "I enjoyed that, perhaps not quite in the way intended"; that's the world of Geoffrey Madan's *Notebooks*; I knew Berlin very slightly because later on I knew Jim Griffin and his wife, Katherine Griffin, where there was a family connection with Isaiah Berlin; I quoted the Joseph remark earlier "Oh good there will be more room in the car"; Joseph: "Not more room, surely, simply less of it occupied"; Berlin would say "Quite unjust", and then you'd know that there was going to be an even more damaging story; another Joseph story - A young man comes, taps on the door, welcomed by Joseph who has an appointment with him. Joseph says, "Would you like to take tea?" The young man says "That's very good of you Professor Joseph. I have just come from London, that would be wonderful". Rings for the College servant. The servant appears and Joseph says "There will be tea after all"; there is the crystallizing of a whole civilization in there. Isn't it wonderful that you can do that much with the words "after all"; young people should not be treated like that, one's juniors should not be treated like that; from the junior to the senior it would be forgivable; I didn't know about Austin either; the real loss is that nobody said to me that there was a philosopher called

J.L. Austin, that I cared about Empson I should have gone to hear him; one of the few essays I have written about a philosopher is an essay on Austin; I think him a wonderful writer, perverse about literature and the arts and needing to be corrected, but simply wonderful

6:27:17 As an undergraduate I was dedicated to reading things that were on the syllabus; the syllabus course ended in 1830 or 1832; I did the extra paper which took you into the Victorians; if you did badly in this paper it didn't count, but did if you did well, but it required extra work; of course, there was no study of any living writer; in the event I was pleased to do that; you are back in a time when Victorian studies were condescended to; John Bryson edited Matthew Arnold but you have no standing but as a Renaissance or Augustan scholar; clearly the professorships had to go to people who had worked, either like Helen Gardiner, on the Renaissance, or be editors of Pope and so on; that was serious scholarship; David Nicol Smith supervised me briefly for a while as a B.Litt. student, also by Herbert Davis who was a very fine Swift scholar; once to David Nicol Smith I mentioned P.M.L.A. and he said I shouldn't bother too much with those magazines; it was a different era and you did it by consulting your own wonderful library; it was anti the professionalism; in a funny way, it and Leavis agreed; Leavis detested that world of belle-lettres scholarship, but at the same time they were both opposed to the professionalization of literary study; when I started my B.Litt. I didn't know what I was going to do; if my Latin had been good I would wanted to have worked on Gower; I thought, and still think him a wonderful poet; Lewis had written very beautifully about him in *The Allegory of Love*; I toyed with that in the knowledge that the B.Litt. is a training in sources, authorities and methods, and didn't have to be an original contribution to knowledge; it is, I think, a very good degree as it postpones the decision as to what you actually want to write a book about; that I did on Augustan poetry; I looked at various literary kinds after Pope practised them, so what was the fate of pastorals fifty years following, or epistolary satire; so it had no point other than for me to have a training in sources, authorities and methods; it gained a degree and only that, and I have never published anything from it; then I got the Worcester job; I was very lucky in that my opponent for

the job was John Jones, an immensely gifted lawyer turned literary critic, who was at Merton; I was very lucky in that the first words of his first book about why late Wordsworth is underrated - *The Egotistical Sublime* - the first words were "This is a book of some pretensions in that it seeks to minister to truths which too often lie bedridden in the outhouse of the soul"; now this was a bit of luck because any Fellow of Worcester picking up this book because their reaction would have been "not, I think, for our young men"; it was a quotation from Coleridge but you had to read on a bit to know that; he and I dined the same night, at that rather macabre ceremony at which people in the running for the same fellowship are having dinner at the same time while the College is appraising them; they weren't sure that somebody who was a lawyer and had become a literary type was quite the right thing or who had written those first words; I was lucky with that, and I never, of course, thought I would leave Worcester; one of the happiest days of my life was when I heard; that was in 1958; I had two years at Balliol and after one of those gained the Andrew Bradley Junior Research Fellowship; that was very good; trying to destroy the Master was the sport at the time - David Lindsay Keir; there were wonderful Keir stories; Keir never listened though it was clear something wafted in; he would say "This is very promising Smethurst.." and so on, and actually what he had just heard was that Smethurst's work had been not good at all - (not the Smethurst that you and I know); on one occasion he did listen and the undergraduate was offered a rebuke for doing little more than offering a received opinion; he said, "This will not do" whereupon the undergraduate said, "It ill-becomes you, Master, who in your preface to your Constitutional History of England said that your book makes no pretence other than to offer a.."; that is the Oxford undergraduate at its best, rounding on the Master by quoting his own words back at him

13:20:18 In 1958 Harry Pitt was certainly there; I had talked to my friend Paul Streeten about whom I might like at Worcester as I didn't know anybody in the College; Paul said I would like Harry Pitt very much, and I did; through Harry I met James Campbell and I liked and admired him; not the best-dressed man in Oxford; I enjoyed Worcester; I wearied of giving that many tutorials, I think I did fifteen hours a week; there were various

reasons why I left; none of them was pique or petulance or a quarrel; I looked round at dinner one night and every single person dining that evening who had come after me I had voted against; I didn't dislike the people in question but the College was committed to the idea that a good College man, rather narrowly defined, was somebody who would be particularly good with the weaker young men; it is true that we were sort of third choice; the Etonian link was very powerful through Masterman and through my predecessor Colonel C.H. Wilkinson; Etonians who didn't want to go to the House or Trinity would come to us, and they would leave the college not knowing how to spell Othello because they pronounced it Orthello; there were people who would say they could not be here next week "because it is Henley"; it was like being a Victorian governess; but there were not many of those; I lost 3% ever year, I realized, so that after ten years, 30% of them I didn't want to have a conversation about Swift with; I couldn't vary it; with the tutorial system you can't do things that are not in the syllabus; there were lots of characters in the college but I am not sure about Oxford and Cambridge characters; Richard Sayce felling David Mitchell during the tea break of a governing body meeting because Mitchell had referred favourably to something French, Richard Sayce's subject, but Richard took it that he was praising the Maison Française who had evicted Richard from his house; you don't often see people felled; my colleague in English was a man called David Evans who an object of contumely from many of the Fellows; he was a lecturer and there was a lot of patronage of him; I remember at lunchtime somebody turned to him and said "You have a Labour face", and it was very good because it was so true; David Evans, with his Welsh face and glasses... but these funny submerged things; one night combining, there was a lot of praising of themselves for not having appointed Maurice Bowra, not on the good grounds that he was much less important as a classical scholar than you might have thought, but that they were quite right to have appointed Armitage Noel Bryan-Brown who was one of the most boring people on the planet; David Evans made the mistake of saying, "If you mean that he is a prep school master manqué, I agree with you"; after dinner Evans was taken aside by David Mitchell who told him not to speak like that of a colleague in the presence of the servants; it was everything that people dislike of Labour,

dislike of Welsh people; David Evans said to Richard Sayce, knowing about the etymology of the name Sayce in relation to sassenach, "When did the Sayce's leave Wales?"; Sayce said, "Has it ever occurred to you that there are advantages in minding your own business"; I have tried to think about what Oxford and Cambridge are like, that is what they are like; that was all part of the hurly-burly of the college; you were supposed to love it; David Mitchell said to me after drinking a lot of sherry, "Do you love this college?"; it had to do with insecurity and all that stuff

20:04:03 The book about Milton is exactly fifty years ago so for my 80th birthday Boston University thinks it might have a Milton occasion; that was based on giving university lectures; I love lecturing; Karl Miller describe me as "culpably" enjoying it; there could be too much showbiz and enjoying oneself, but not at all to enjoy it, you shouldn't do it; I was lecturing on Milton and Jacobean tragedy and things like that; Freddy Bateson was then the most important person to me; he was teaching the B. Litt. and I went to his classes; he did two huge things for me; one was very early on to ask me to be the reviews editor for *Essays and Criticism* which is the sibling for *Past and Present*; Freddy had founded it from his own efforts, basically to educate the Oxford English faculty and to encourage those who didn't have a morbid horror of the printing press to print some good things; he offered me that when I was really very young and he asked me not long after to edit Tennyson; he asked me before whom I would like to edit in the Longman's series and I knew that there were lots of Tennyson poems that had either not been collected or published, and I knew it from the writings of Tennyson's grandson; that was a wonderful opportunity and he was a very good and generous person; I wept more at Freddy's funeral than at any other although he died at a ripe old age, but I was so fond of him; he brought forward a whole slew of people - Roger Lonsdale editing eighteenth century poetry, Alastair Fowler and John Carey both editing Milton; a great thing he did for Oxford English, and he was bitterly condescended to by the Faculty; he was never allowed to examine; I was never allowed to examine; for ten year in the Oxford English Faculty I was on one occasion allowed to examine in the Pass school; the line was that a balanced board meant that every individual member of it was balanced, so Freddy

Bateson was denied it on the grounds that he was not; it made for mediocrity in the examining board; my favourite examining story was when John Hale, the historian of Italy, at one point said "And what will you be doing now?" and the woman whom he was interviewing drew her knees back and said "I do think I should be getting back to London" - twelve people in funereal garb, men of immense ugliness, and she thought she was being propositioned; I try to explain to my American students that they are in the position of people who can't ever go bankrupt or ever invest any time or money or energy, because you are judged at every stage, in every subject, in every semester; that is itself based on the aggregate of the five essays you wrote in the semester; its as if you were having your annual salary repaid every day; whereas, the Oxford system allowed you to invest three years, either wisely or foolishly; I thought that was a much better system; I teach in America because I married Judith Aronson thirty-seven years ago; my first wife, Kirsten, had left me for the Regius Professor of Greek - he was professor at Bristol at the time and moved to Cambridge, left his wife and took mine, hence the term husband-in-law; I, not altogether wisely, also put in for a professorship at Cambridge and came here; I went to America after eleven years in Cambridge because Judith, who is eight years younger than I am, had parents who were still alive and mine were not; my work was more portable than hers because she is a graphic designer; she is American; she was the room mate of a student of mine at Worcester whom I taught almost fifty years ago - Steven Isenburg's wife, Barbara; I was in New York at the time when the marriage was falling apart and met her; then a few years after the split Judith and I married; so the going to America was not the almighty dollar; I wasn't happy in Cambridge really because there were terrible rows, but I would never have left Cambridge, had done Jury service, been Chairman of the Faculty Board, I could have simply looked at my fingernails for the next twenty years; I was aware that if I went to America I wouldn't have to retire at sixty-seven, and I wanted to go when I was nearer fifty than sixty and Judith nearer forty than fifty; so I don't regret it though it has been strange to see one's children become Americans - they were three, five and seven when we went there

27:07:22 In America you do not have the tutorial system and do have continuous assessment; the main thing that is really bad about it, though oddly much less corrupting than it ought to be, is simply the teacher being the examiner; American undergraduates are astonished to reflect upon this; it is a price ring and suits both teachers and taught to have nobody else coming in to judge how well you taught; it has led to this huge escalation in grade inflation; it is an immense part of the sexual harassment world; it is not just this person who is teaching, this person is giving you an A or B and can affect the whole of your future; I bring it up whenever there is a discussion in the faculty; people say we see what you mean but have no intention of changing it; the prominent people in any Ph.D. are the people who have worked on it, in America; your first and second readers are your first and second members of your committee; in Cambridge, these are the very people who are precluded from judging it; it is a terrible system; the standard of the students has more to do with the standing of the university; pretty every student at Boston University would rather be somewhere else; now that is not simply a bad thing because at least they do not think they are god's gift to scholarship; Oxford and Cambridge people spend the first year congratulating themselves on having got in; if they got in, why should they be expected to learn, as they have given proof that they don't need to learn anything; it went on at Harvard - 300 years of unremitting self-congratulation take their toll; the B.U. people would rather be somewhere else except that Boston University is a very good second-rank university which is in some respects first rate; I think economics there is now very good, and philosophy was very good when Hintikka presided over it; they would rather be somewhere else except that Boston University has given them a good deal in terms of scholarships; they like the city of Boston and its quite good enough; most of the faculty would rather be somewhere else and that's less good; I think the best members of the faculty are those who have been somewhere else; my first week in Cambridge Massachusetts, Judith and I were having drinks across the road, and some well-dressed lady asked me what I did - "I teach". "Harvard University?" "No, Boston University". "Fascinating..." and she was already moving across the room to talk to somebody else; it is the place that I have most enjoyed teaching, especially seminars and lectures as

against tutorials; I think people are weary of giving tutorials; the Cambridge director of study system is radically different from the Oxford system; I taught everything from Chaucer up to the Great War then, so I was a general practitioner in the college and a consultant in the faculty, and I thought that was a wonderful combination, but I think people weary of it

32:09:17 Freddy Bateson mattered to me because he wrote a book called *The Scholar-Critic* because he thought it essential for people to be literary historians and literary critics and editors; he thought it very bad that these had been apportioned out; so he was an editor of Pope and the Cambridge Bibliography but also the author of a critical biography of Wordsworth, and of a book on English poetry in the English language which was partly linguistic, partly what then was rightly thought to be literary theory; editions last best; nothing lasts forever - the word definitive should never be used; there are things that are authoritative or have the authority; Harford and Simpson *Ben Jonson* was an authoritative edition; it will never be entirely superseded because the decisions that it took will always have something to be said for them as against subsequent decisions; my edition of Tennyson has been out of print for a long time; I have just been told that Longman has been bought by another publishing house and that the fate of that series of annotated English poets which Freddy Bateson was the general editor of is rather uncertain; I would quite like to get somebody young to update my Tennyson; it would be worthwhile work, though not a huge job; when I originally did it the manuscripts at Trinity were under permanent embargo; Hallam Tennyson gave them to the College in perpetuity that they not be quoted or copied but could be read; now the College should never have accepted the conditions, but it was a wonderful benefaction; Sir Charles Tennyson, the poet's grandchild, and the then Lord Tennyson besought the College to abolish the conditions; it needed a change of librarian - Philip Gaskell came to the College - so my edition was rendered obsolete in the year in which it was published; on every other page it was noted that sources could not be quoted but now this was not the case, but it had to wait for the selling out of that edition and then my doing the work; I would like to think that the edition of T.S. Eliot's poems which is nearing completion - I

am doing it with somebody else and there have proved to be contractual problems about that matter; it was not a competition between my co-editor and me but between my co-editor and Faber & Faber; that has been in the last couple of months a matter of sleeplessness for me and it is still not resolved; I think editions last best so I am really pleased to do the Eliot; Eliot is not a greater poet than Tennyson but there is no annotated edition of Eliot at all; he didn't wish there to be such a thing; his widow, for a long time did not wish there to be such a thing; she changed her mind fifteen years ago; at some point Eliot had sent a solicitor's letter threatening to sue me unless I withdrew something, so it was rather wonderful and generous that she invited me to edit *Inventions of the March Hare*, fifty unpublished early poems; that I am pleased with because it is the kind of thing which has a good chance of never being superseded; we have a better edition of Jane Austen than R.W. Chapman did, but only in certain respects; in literary criticism terms there is a very beautiful remark by Eliot one year on into *The Criterion* where he sums up what he has been trying to do; he says that it should be the task of a literary journal to exhibit the relations of literature, not to life as something contrasted with literature, but to all the other things which together with literature are the components of life; it is a wonderfully truthful wise formulation; literary criticism is as much a part of life as anything else; the relation of literature to all the other things which together with literature are the components of life; I do very much like my book on *Keats and Embarrassment*; it is not an interdisciplinary book because I have no disciplinary power or cognisance when it comes to understanding Darwin on the expression of emotion in man and animals; but it uses Darwin, Sartre and so on, a whole lot of people who have cared about blushing, in order to think about something which to me is important, irrespective whether Keats had ever written poems about it; it is characteristic of a great artist to write about things which are important whether they get written about or not; of the books, in a way I am most pleased at that; when gratitude is ever expressed to me as it was in China recently, it was for the Milton book; it is close reading in the interests of something which was then very puzzling to me; I knew and still know that Eliot and Leavis are great critics; Leavis is the greatest of the critics who is not himself a creator; there are

an immense number indictments of him which are justified, but its very extraordinary to be not a poet or a novelist and to be that penetrating; to know what's unignorable; the questions he raised must really not be ignored; on the other hand, Milton seemed to be one, so a bit of a problem; Milton is a delight to me to read and these are great critics, so there is something that needs to be sorted out; that meant for me saying that Eliot and Leavis are right about what Milton is like in certain respects; you disagree partly with their description of what is the case and partly with their principles; it is the same with the Keats - if these lines from Keats are terrible, why are they so memorable? - now one answer could be that there is no relation between lines being good and being memorable but there is a little bit of a problem with that; so what's so wrong with being adolescent? If people are right to say it is very adolescent, why do they mean by that it therefore doesn't have anything wise about it, as if Keats's own dismay about his adolescence were not a genuine struggle; I think that one has to start with some sort of puzzle; recently Geoffrey Hill's relation to T.S. Eliot is for me deeply puzzling; Geoffrey's best poems are profoundly indebted to Eliot; they wouldn't have been written without Eliot; they are not pastiche Eliot but they are precipitated by Eliot in a wonderful new efflorescences in the way in which Tennyson if precipitated by Keats, or Wordsworth by Milton; why then does Geoffrey Hill repeatedly speak ill of Eliot as poet, including poems which his poems draw upon? I like to start with something which is really a puzzle; I am not good at middle tissue; if I had to explain to somebody why Donald Davie is a better critic than I am - now he never did any valuable editing so I am not going to yield to him in every respect - but his critical writing is very good at a middle tissue; it's not simply instances of illuminating and analysing, and not a large general proposition or narration; there is a middle thing that he is very good at doing, and I have never been good at doing it; if the essay is one's natural form it doesn't matter so much, but it matters with something claiming to be a whole book; I am very aware of the people who have got that ability to have something that saves it from just being an anthology of instances or a general proposition of general grand theory; Trilling was very good at that; there is a tissue that connects the minute instance imaginatively analysed and the general proposition about the fate of pleasure; its not just

here is a proposition that something happened to the fate of pleasure in the romantic period, here are some instances of Wordsworth not being quite sure what he wants to do with pleasure

44:29:13 I now work almost entirely on a computer; it is true that editing is terrifically helped by it; if I need to change a note on Eliot I can just change it, and its not messing about with lots of bits of paper; I think that scissors and paste is still best for an immense number of things; I tend to give talks from notes rather than writing them out; I write straight onto the computer and use it only as a glorified typewriter; the word spread sheet strikes a chill into my heart; there is no substitute for having for a long time jotted things down; I have been putting together Keynesiana that have to do with Eliot - Keynes reading Eliot on the BBC in 1936; then there is a certain point at which there might be enough of it to form a pattern; almost everything that I do has been incremental; I remember exactly where I was in Beaumont Street in Oxford when I realized Tennyson's use of passages which he had written for quite other poems; now the phenomenon had long been recognised, Sir Charles Tennyson had written about it, but I had done a lot of editorial work and had built up many more instances - this which turns up in *Ulysses* is written for a different poem, and so on; suddenly I realized that they were all about time; that is not a revolutionary thought, but I thought they are passages that themselves are preserved through time, they have not yet reached their due time; then I realized that it was true not only of Tennyson; then you have got the subject for an essay but you haven't got the subject for a book, though more and more you get books that dilate it, which you think would have been a good article; I have no doubt that what I do is worth doing and I don't actually doubt that I'm good at it; I don't think I have any genius at all; I think it has become an indispensable service; the fate of literature, unfortunately, is now in the universities; in previous times its fate had been in the church or in a political party or in money; the patron of literature is the university; without the university there would be no interest in writing by dead people at all; I really believe that; now its not true that only university people care about past literature its that there is a point at which the past literature is simply not going to be around; what is the

crucial patronage without which literature is in terrible trouble; now it is the universities, so that anything bad which happens in universities has an effect which it didn't have when literature had other patrons; it doesn't really have other patrons now; there are a whole lot of other things; there is an Arnoldian side in that Arnold seems to me to be a great writer because he knows that what you should do is to relate it to what is at present the case; since it is not going to be the case in fifty years time its no good saying that the enemy is always one thing; for Eliot, the great enemy is illusions of feeling; he writes about Stendhal and says that Stendhal's scenes are a positive humiliation to read in their understanding of human feeling and human illusions of feeling; that the world of the newspapers and everything else is a world which makes people pretend that they feel things that they don't; maybe it would be good if they feel those things but they are never going to feel them if they don't already feel them; its Beckett, its Swift, its Eliot, and so on; of course, that hasn't always been the case, it is not about cynicism even, its just that knowing what you actually feel - Eliot says intelligence of which an important function is the discernment of exactly what and how much we feel in any given situation; now opposition to Steiner would for me turn largely on the illusion of feeling; I think that the feelings to which he appeals and to which he proclaims are illusory; it might be very good if one had that gigantic concern for this that and the other, but it is not realized, I think, in anything that he has written; half of the talks I hear the congratulations are all the students, the students are all wonderful; no they're not; it was terrible in China because I heard the young Chinese students are behaving exactly like the American ones; everybody who was in the Shakespeare plays was told they were wonderful; there were eighteen prizes given out afterwards and I think there were only eighteen people in it, so everybody got a prize; surely is there not a point at which we have to say you tried very hard at this, but actually it didn't work; 'Timon of London' didn't actually work if you meant it to be a new angle on 'Timon of Athens' because you hadn't thought what it would be to move it from Athens to London; so it has to do with illusions, or a lot of it does

53:57:18 The practice of criticism turns on the relations of philosophy to literature were anciently vexed, it then turns on a

different form of which is that whether Terry Eagleton, as it were, is genuinely a philosopher; there are partly ancient questions about what the relationship between the arts and philosophy is which would not be so different as between the arts and theology; that is, it is clear that if things are going well these are complementary and collaborative enterprises, but it is also clear that one is tempted always to claim to be superior to the other; literature and literary studies are always having to acknowledge the danger of a takeover by history to one side or by philosophy to the other; I think history and philosophy to be the most important constituents of a college of liberal arts; history will say this is the case and philosophy will say this is the truth, but basically, literature is in the position of trying to define its responsibilities; it is in some ways continuous with the claims of history and in some ways continuous with the claims of philosophy; while still feeling that these have some claims, there is a certain kind of autonomy, itself a troubled concept; so for me Dr Johnson is the greatest critic because he was the most intelligent anti-philosopher in the English language; he is not just non philosophical he is anti-philosophical; the lexicographer is committed to believing that you quite soon reach the point at which further philosophical cogitation is not going to be valuable; the lexicographer will tell you the difference between an untruth and a lie, but you quite quickly reach the point at which understanding that more deeply is not a philosophical question but historical, political, and so on; the cast of mind is not just kicking the stone and I refute it thus, and so on; Aristotle was a philosopher so one is not going to deny it, but for the Poetics we have less of his art criticism and so on; that ancient contested thing and Leavis versus Wellek was the really important case of it; Wellek was not a philosopher but was a philosophically inclined historian of literature and theorist of literature; what happens then with the arrival of French theory; what characterises a philosophy - it has to be more fully articulated, it has to be more cogently concatenated, it has to claim to cover the whole lot, and it is the opposite cast of mind to that which thinks that principles are again and again like proverbs, that is the difficult thing; there is isn't a philosophical question about he who hesitates is lost versus look before you leap, but understanding the difference between them and why we don't have a proverb which says don't look before you leap or he who

hesitates is saved, which is the implication; so it is a different cast of mind and I think it is much truer to how writers have written their work, and much truer to the achievement which is War and Peace, King Lear, and so on; for Leavis it would have to do with scientism, but it isn't actually the physical sciences which turned out to be a kind of enemy from within but resistance to science; we have got to look as though we are not a soft option, we know we are not a soft option but that is not understood; what we will have to have is technical terms, without which the general public is not impressed; Christopher Hill used to say that literature was what historians read in bed, and he's very well read and writes wonderfully about Richardson and Marvell; it is part of an age-old story; the Cambridge quarrel was presented as a quarrel about post-modernist theory; I don't believe that it was; I think it was about the claims of a particular person called Colin MacCabe, and particularly the claim that he should be promoted to a lectureship without entering into open competition with other candidates for such a lectureship

59:24:17 I suppose that when anybody says anything it is either to supply and substantiate an opinion where there wasn't one at all or to amend an existing opinion; that is, you could think that there isn't out there any account of Christina Rossetti that needs to be contested as potent and mischievous; so why is one speaking at all? One would like to think that one has noticed something that other people haven't noticed; being very rudimentary about it, the scholar makes the claim that he or she knows something which you may well not know; the critic supposes that he or she may notice something you hadn't noticed; they are complementary activities but they are very different; the critic needs to acknowledge that there are kinds of fact that he would need to know about a poem; so I suppose that one is saying something in order either to supply or to contest an opinion; I don't see any other reason for saying anything at all; anything is a guess, but..; it is a wonderful formula by Leavis; he himself was prone to have a small yes and a large but; he has warm and authentic praise for Tennyson but he thinks that Tennyson's weaknesses are not only bad for Tennyson but bad for all poetry that supposed that Tennyson didn't have those weaknesses; he makes a great many concessions about Hopkins - Hopkins is strong in these respects,

but he did pay a huge price for isolation, and so on; it is all a yes but..; in a variant of that I tell my students, one question - is this true, another is - what truth is there in this, which is a very different question, and we need both; we need not to think that they are the same question; in America getting students to ask the question what truth is there in this, is itself very difficult because they move very quickly to a vote, verdict and sentence; one of my convictions is that art exists to give us pause; there are many other things that art exists to do but being given pause is particularly valuable just now where everybody can spare you a micro-second of attention, where even the President of the United States of America is carved in mid sentence because of what a sound bite is; our sick hurry, our divided aims, everything is against the background of what the prevailing danger and threat is, to resist the age when everything becomes tyrannous; what they want to do is find out what the age is doing and go along with it; if nobody is reading any longer give up reading if everybody is only committed to texting, and so on; I think it is true that there has to be something one believes either needs to be said; there isn't an opinion out there about the poems of James Henry; I edited the poems of James Henry because nobody reads his poems, his poems are disparaged in the entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* because he is thought to be a highly eccentric classical scholar; but I think him a very fine poet; I edited him purely by fluke in that I was struck by the name James Henry and it not being the name Henry James; I took down a copy of his poems in Cambridge University Library and found that he had presented them, privately printed in Dresden in the 1850s and 60s, and the pages had never been cut; there was a kind of Henry Jamesian pathos about that for me; here I am simply wanting to give people some poems - By what mistake were pigeons made so happy - that is a wonderful opening line for a poem, an extraordinary vision of life and so on; he is a minor poet of real power on a lifelong anti-Christian crusade; if I write about Eliot it is that I think there is a potent and mischievous belief that pretty well everything in Eliot is vitiated by his misogyny and anti-Semitism; I don't believe he was a misogynist and I do believe that on occasion his poems, as he was occasionally in his life misogynistic, but I try to set that in a context of making it clear how difficult it is to talk about prejudice unprejudicially; it is true

that one has got to be supplying or contesting, and I don't know what else one could be doing really; everything is revisionist; we talk about revisionist history but what is non-revisionist history? Its like people talking about a heuristic probe, what is a non-heuristic probe since heuristic means probing; it is the position of a lot of art; April is the cruellest month - which is either saying April, and not what you thought, November is the cruellest month, or April is the cruellest, and not what you might have thought, the tenderest month; it is contesting something as every poem or every work of art contests something; it might contest vacuity; there are a lot of writers about whom there isn't really a valuable appreciative force out there; nobody has had an idea about Charles Doughty for nearly a hundred years; if you are going to write about Doughty you have got to create or justify a belief; you have got to make good; you have got to give up the belief that you can prove, and you have got to halt the belief that you can make good, and in a world that thinks that all you have is an opinion, you resist the subjective, objective antithesis, you say with Empson - I will not use those words except when quoting somebody else; something terrible happened when the human race or the English language agreed that was it; that there were only two possibilities, it is subjective or objective; you try inter-subjective; that won't work for various reasons; the meaning of a word is not a subject of an opinion or an objective fact; it is a body of agreements built up over a very long period; so the belief that there are things that can be proved is essential, and the belief that there are things of the greatest value that cannot be proved but don't leave us with anarchy and caprice and whim; I can give reasons for thinking that this is an unjust accusation against Eliot; that the line - Female smells in shuttered rooms - if you believe it is misogynistic it is that you yourself have yielded to misogyny; the word smells is entirely neutral; it is not odours confected by the cunning French to disguise the good old hearty female stench which is unquestionably trading in misogyny; it might be dramatising it; the answer is it isn't actually; Dr Johnson is right on this as in almost everything; you are trying to - improve opinion into knowledge - and that itself is was revision of - elevate opinion to knowledge; he published it as that and later he revised it; the word elevate is not right; it has an illusion of feeling in it; you are not going to elevate it, you are going to

improve it, and you are not going to elevate it to you are going to improve it into; and it is knowledge - it is not truth, its not fact, but it is knowledge; the great things in Leavis seem to me to be an accession of knowledge; "Sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep steady thy laden head across a brook"; Leavis simply says that the step across from one line to the next - "And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep steady thy laden head" - the internal rhyme is wonderful as it settles itself in the second line, that you are enacting and feeling something; you feel what it is as a gleaner with things on your head, in autumn when it might well be slippery to step across the brook; it is wonderfully experiential without being clever corporeal mimicry; I do feel very grateful for the critic who explains to me why and how that has worked upon me, while not thinking that that activity of explaining it is of the same order as Keats's doing it; it is not a smaller gratitude but a gratitude different in kind

1:10:59:13 I think the case for principles in itself is something; lecturing in China, I was to give the first talk, and it was clear to me that the first talk ought to cover a whole range of things and not be what I most like doing - here is how Hardy first had that stanza and here is how he revised it - I love doing that sort of thing; you couldn't start with that at the beginning of a conference so I did talk about principles, and it was important to me to think, as with Eliot, its the principles that have their application not only in literature but elsewhere; the great statements of principle such as Benjamin Disraeli saying, "Next to knowing when to seize and opportunity, the most important thing in life is when to forgo an advantage"; it is not a philosophy, it is not a theory, it is open immediately to the acknowledgement that there will be a great many cases when that isn't, and so on, but it is a wonderful formulation which is not formulaic; the way to get things done is not to care who gets the credit for doing them; now these seem to me to be very profound statements of principle exactly because they are representative but not universal; trying to find something that is not the single incidence nor the universal insistence is a great thing to be able to do; the corollary of that, I regret the way in which the notion of tolerance has been evacuated so that in America now it means not disapproving; whereas I thing tolerance requires disapproval in order to be tolerance, that is, to

tolerate something is to disapprove of it but not to realize one's disapproval in any of the unjust, dishonourable, bad ways; that is, I speak against this but I do not deny the person tenure; so tolerance in America now means not disapproving and we have lost a very important social concept; I don't need a philosophy of tolerance though I believe that philosophers can give one; I need to be very clear of what the principle of tolerance is; its not that I would do nothing to try and oppose what you stand for; I will oppose it, but will not oppose it in the ways that can be fairly described as intolerance of it; there is a kind of gestalt thing; it has to do with what is this up against; I go back to my mother's midwife; what is the background against which this remark is to be understood at all; every letter in the Boston Globe believes that there is nothing to be said for anything other than the position that it adopts and that no price is paid for that position; I am working on the great Victorian judge and controversial public figure, James Fitzjames Stephen; I am a co-editor of an eleven volume edition of his works; I will edit the volume on the novel and journalism; Stephen to me is astonishing; he will say, here is somebody who fled the field of battle, you didn't execute him at the time, what should you now do? Should you as A and B have said deport him to Australia, and Stephen says, you should do such and such but there are disadvantages; if you do that you will gain A B C D E, but be perfectly clear you will lose F G and H; it is completely in the spirit of the age; the spirit of the age says if we do this we gain everything and we lose nothing; its how politics talks, its how universities...just anything is like that now; again, perhaps that goes back to the thought about being given pause, and its clear there are moments in history or ones individual life where the last thing one needs to be given is pause; my not liking the wholeness the theory claims; you can't hold both this theory and that theory; the pretence in literary studies has been that you can, that is, that half of the theoretical works have a dash of Marx and a dash of Freud, as though they were commendable views of the world; these are put together with something else and that shows they are interdisciplinary; it doesn't; it just shows there is somebody scrabbling around like the meal service in an animal house

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