Critiquing the campus: academic practice as literary subject in the contemporary university novel
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Abstract

The contemporary university novel is uniquely situated to observe and respond to the current state of crisis widely acknowledged and discussed throughout the university community, and it is capable of offering a considered and credible critique on the function, the value and the purpose of the university. The unique nature of this critique has caused it often to be discredited; in this study, these novels are examined in order to find, instead, what they may contribute. -- To date, the major studies of the university novel have been comprehensive in scope and bibliographical in effect. My study, as a result, is able to assume the existence of the sub-genre and focus on a very select group of novels to show that they constitute a viable mode of academic critique, where academic practice becomes the target, rather than the producer, of extended criticism. Indeed, the sometimes unflattering representations of the university to be found in university novels amount to a coherent and pervasive fictional inquiry into the nature and function of academic practice. -- To prove this, I briefly examine the recent boom in scholarly examinations of the current state of the university in order to establish a background for the positions the novelists explore in their books. Alvin Kernan, Robert Lecker, Bill Readings and Robert Scholes (to name a few) have all recently written on the current "crisis" in the university. Their books locate a corresponding response inside the university community (to the issues raised in the novels) and prove that the novels, like the non-fiction, are positing viable critical responses to important questions concerning the state of the university. -- To examine these responses, I identify core images in a very select and contemporary group of novels. The conflicts between competition and idealism, corporation and community, uncertainty and truth, the creative critic and the creative artist, and solitude and civility are issues found in the novels and critical studies alike and provide the structure for my project. The novels include A.S. Byatt's Possession, Malcolm Bradbury's Mensonge, Michael Frayn's The Trick of It, Christine Brooke-Rose's Textermination, David Lodge's Nice Work, Richard Russo's The Straight Man, Ishmael Reed's Japanese by Spring, Robert Grudin's Book, Jane Smiley's Moo and Carol Shields' Swann. -- What these novels have in common is most interestingly a clear sense of the value and purpose of the study of literature, of education and of the university. In the non-fiction works written on the state of the university, it is widely held that we are losing or have lost touch with the university's value and purpose, but the university novel posits a clear sense of idealism. This sense of idealism and possibility marks an important, often unremarked, evolution in the sub-genre and it is suggestive of the ultimate value of the university novel as a unique means of access to the preoccupations and anxieties of a community in crisis.

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have seen its most notable products: "... there can be, or should be," he observed, "few passages in life with greater capabilities than that when a man is for the first time almost his own master, for the first. The purpose of what follows is to show how the capabilities were explored in the novel, how the fictional representation of English university life was developed from an initial stage of crudeness and vulgarity, through a middle period in which humor and the doctrines of university reform were strangely mingled, to the final achievement of a serious and mature statement of the very. MA The Contemporary Novel: Practice as Research at University of Kent, listed on FindAMasters.com - a comprehensive database of Masters, MSc, MA, MPhil & MRes courses in the UK & Ireland. This is an innovative and exciting programme in which you focus on writing a full-length, literary novel of between 90,000 and 150,000 words. Visit the website https://www.kent.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate/232/contemporary-novel-practice-as-research. About the School of English. The School of English has a strong international reputation and global perspective, apparent both in the background of its staff and in the diversity of our teaching and research interests.