

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE PROGRAMME

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PURPOSE

Early in 1980 I was authorized by the Council of F.I.T. to undertake a professional experience program in the United Kingdom and Europe. The primary purpose of this program was to complete a study of the history and function of the humanities in tertiary education, with particular reference to the work of F. R. Leavis and the relationships between his literary criticism and his educational ideas. The secondary purpose was to investigate the state of Australian studies in England and Europe, and to consider the relevance of this to the development of the course in Australian Cultural Studies at the Footscray Institute of Technology. Further purposes of the program were to investigate present urban, political, educational and cultural conditions in Britain and Europe and to consider the implications these hold for humanities education in Australia, and to investigate the way in which the physical environment has shaped the European literary tradition, particularly the Celtic and classical elements.

PROGRAM

Before leaving Australia, I had arranged accommodation in Cambridge, where I was granted visiting status in the Faculty of English and was able to use the facilities of the faculty and university

libraries and the university centre. While in Cambridge, I worked with Mr. David Holbrook and Professor Raymond Williams, and attended lectures or seminars given in the faculty by Professor Williams, Professor Christopher Ricks, Mr. George Watson, Professor Frank Kernode and Mr. Howard Erskine-Hills, as well as public lectures by Professor Wallace Kirsop, Professor George Steiner and Professor John Passmore. I was also able to work with Mr. Denys Thompson, one of Leavis' former collaborators. As a consequence, I was able to complete the draft of my study, and expect the final script to be complete and ready to offer to a publisher by the end of this year. This draft will also provide the basis for the submission of a Ph.D. thesis to the University of Melbourne.

During my time in England, I also visited Mr. Eric Robinson and the staff of the Department of Humanities at Bradford College, and held discussions on their courses in urban and ethnic studies, which correspond closely with our own, and on the function of further education in a time of economic stringency; Dr. Michael Barrett-Brown at the Northern College, to discuss trade union education and the education of mature-age students; and the Department of Australian Studies at the University of Exeter, where I took part in a seminar and discussed the possibility of future staff exchanges.

In England I also visited theatres in London and Stratford, studied the Celtic background to Arthurian legend in Cornwall, and had discussions at Oxford with the Oxford University Press in relation to the promotion of Australian books through the Australian Book Review. I was also able to use personal contacts to make a visit to Barnsley, in Yorkshire, and investigate the consequences of technical

change and economic decline. The findings of the English part of my program were reported in an article published in Overland and attached to this report.

In Europe, I attended a conference on Australian studies at the University of Messina, Sicily, conducted field studies in Naples, Rome, Sicily and Southern Italy, and visited and gave classes at the Universities of Venice and Pisa. On a second visit to Italy, I gave a lecture and held a seminar in the University of Turin, and discussed the possibility of future co-operation on their doctorate program in Australian literature. On the way back to England, I was able to make further studies of the Celtic background in Brittany and to trace the urban background of James Joyce's Dublin writings.

#### FINDINGS

##### 1. Urban

The problems of English cities are essentially the consequences of educational and economic deprivation and of the industrial decline which has followed technological change and inadequate planning for transport, housing and public services. These factors bear most heavily on the children of immigrants, and consequently problems are exacerbated by the issues of race which are highlighted by the media and which tend to prejudice public officials, including the police, in dealing with them. The poor, the young and the coloured lack an effective political constituency, with the consequence that their problems attract public attention only when they jeopardise public order, yet the problems are merely the most acute example of the divisions in British society between north and south, ghettos and

suburbs, cities and shires, workers and the wealthy. The immediate causes of these problems are a set of taxation, fiscal and policy measures which have favored finance over industry and road over rail, and have consequently led to a redistribution of capital and industry without corresponding redistribution of population or work. Behind these policies lies the fact that the profits of earlier investment have been concentrated in the hands of financial institutions, leaving the government and the workers to meet the costs. Behind this in turn lies the failure of economic theory to have taken account, except through shadowy calculations of social benefit and social cost, of the phenomenon of disinvestment, or divestment, which consequently is being handled with no more finesse or understanding and with no less cost in human suffering than was the original industrial revolution. As with this earlier revolution, the consequences are seen at their clearest and their worst in the cities.

## 2. Political

The problem of English politics is that, with the possible exception of the Social Democrats, no party has a constituency outside its activists. There is therefore no consensus which would enable a moderate government to resist the efforts of powerful pressure groups to prevent effective change, which can therefore be promised only by extreme groups which are prepared to rupture the polity in order to shape society according to their own image of virtue. The prospects are therefore either for a continuing lurch from left to right or for prolonged muddle. Neither prospect offers much hope of avoiding continuing social disruption and economic decline. It needs to be

emphasized however that the causes of the British malaise are not unique to Britain, but can be found in all industrialized societies.

At first sight, Italy would seem to be further along a declining road than is Britain. There are similar problems of social disruption and economic difference. Although I did not spend sufficient time in Italy to assess the real extent of poverty or its effects, there are certain important differences to be noted. First, a great part of Italian society is still based on the subsistence economy of peasant culture rather than on industry. Second, Italy has a longer experience of living with uncertainty. Third, the wealthier countries of Europe can no more afford economic collapse in Italy than they can in Poland. Fourth, Italian industry has a record of success. There may therefore be more hope of a solution to contemporary problems being found in Italy than in more advanced countries. Major problems however remain in the form of the divisions between north and south and the despair which leads to urban violence. On the other hand, no-one I spoke to believed there was any imminent danger of a collapse into totalitarianism of either right or left. The most encouraging explanation offered for this optimism was that the experience of the Resistance had gone too deep; the most cynical that the Italian government system was just not efficient enough to support a dictatorship. The style of the government, on the other hand, may well become steadily more authoritarian.

### 3. Educational

The problems of higher education in Britain are very similar to those in Australia - cuts in government spending are reducing the

number of places available to students and the conditions of academic staff - and therefore the quality of education; government economic policies are reducing the numbers of places available for graduates; industry is concerned about shortages of technically-trained employees but overall is unable to employ more graduates. The responses of the institutions have been to argue that education is preferable to unemployment, and to emphasize the need for enhanced scientific, technological and social understanding as a prerequisite for solving Britain's problems. The response of the government has been to plan further cuts in academic places - these have been announced since my return to Australia, and have fallen on those universities, particularly Aston, which have emphasized technology and have the best records in finding useful employment for their graduates. Of the institutions I visited, two - Bradford and Northern - had adopted approaches similar to those that have been initiated at Footscray.

Bradford College Humanities Department offers courses which emphasize the study of ethnic and racial problems, while Northern College has designed a range of courses for mature-age students who wish either to enhance their personal effectiveness in society or to enter new careers. Both, however, differ organizationally from Footscray. Bradford offers a two-year Diploma of Higher Education course which leads to the final year of either a Bachelor of Arts course in management or a Bachelor of Education course. The Northern College courses, which are open only to those who have had no full-time formal schooling beyond statutory leaving age, are residential and lead to a Diploma. So far, the majority of students have continued to further studies, but the Director's aim is that similar proportions of students

should use the course for entry to new professions and for personal enhancement. Race, women's studies, trade union studies and developmental studies are the major specialities at the Northern College.

The important facts behind both these courses are that there is a continuing strong demand for them from students and that the graduates, despite the level of unemployment in England, are reasonably successful in obtaining jobs.

#### 4. Culture

Behind the economic and social problems of both Britain and Italy lie fundamental cultural problems. In Britain, the superficial manifestations of these are the problems of racial minorities, but equally significant are the clash of values and perceptions between the ruling elite and the industrial workers, and the lack of common interest between the politically, economically and intellectually dominant south-east and the provinces and dependent nations of Scotland and Wales. These themselves are divided between those who see their problems as emerging from the central and those who see them as reflecting a more general malaise. These divisions of opinion emerge not only from differing experiences of life but also from the financial and economic centralisation which, despite the continuing existence of important provincial newspapers and attempts at the regionalisation of television and localisation of radio, have led to the dominance of debate by the centre and the consequent fragmentation of culture. This fragmentation, which occurs on both geographic and class lines, is hidden by the very homogeneity of the dominant culture which emerges from the media of both mass and intellectual communication and which generates fragmentation by exclusion.

Nevertheless, official English culture does not suffer from the Australian fault of confusing gentility with urbanity. Consequently, at its best, it has a scope and a bite lacking in Australia, and at its worst its philistinism descends to destructivity only in the hands of such antipodean owners as Rupert Murdoch, who are able to use the same English establishment that they both ape and despise. Television remains open not only to ideas but to the expression of quite alien codes. Examples which are unlikely to appear on Australian screens include the Jimmy Boyle story, about a Glaswegian crook, two series on Ireland which attempted a lengthy and historically informed analysis of the troubles, and Bread and Blood, a chronicle of the human disasters of the early agricultural revolution. Yet, while these programs provide valuable perspective on important contemporary issues, they do not challenge the individualist perspective which characterizes the dominant ideology. The most important challenge to the prevailing ideology comes from the theatre. Nevertheless, this remains heavily subsidized by tourism, and tends to concentrate on spectacle and on the past rather than exploring the present or giving a voice to the excluded. The most successful plays I was able to see were "Duet for One", which gave dramatic effect to middle-class dilemmas of role and career, but saw them from a woman's perspective, and productions of Shakespeare and his contemporaries which established their continuing relevance, particularly to the issue of power and political expediency, but in a manner which reinforced the attitude that rulers are callous but life does not change rather than in such a way as to suggest that alternatives may be available. Other popular successes on stage during this period included plays by Pinter and Miller which similarly elicited pity or

resignation through the shock of recognition, but impelled the audience to acceptance of the human condition rather than to thought about it. By contrast, "The Romans in Britain" attempted to demonstrate that rulers and soldiers can never be trusted, but by concentrating on the public issue it failed to achieve the integration of private and public which characterizes Jacobean drama. The only production I was able to see which managed to achieve this in a contemporary setting was a Royal Court production of Chekhov's "The Seagull" which translated the action to a setting in Ireland at the time of the troubles. This production managed to convey not only the personal problems of the characters, but also the feeling that the calamities of their individual lives arose from a collapse of their class and society for which they shared the responsibility. The Irish setting, while still historical, had a pertinence which prevented the action being safely distanced by time or place.

##### 5. Australian studies

Courses in Australian studies are being conducted in England at Exeter University, and in Italy at the Universities of Venice, Turin and Pisa. In addition, at most Italian universities there are students engaged in the study of Australian literature for their doctoral awards, usually in faculties or departments of American and Commonwealth literature, and these students can be expected to provide the staff for a major expansion of Australian literature teaching in undergraduate courses in the next few years. The general pattern of Italian universities is that students present for their doctoral award at the conclusion of some five years of graduate study, but new research doctorates, equivalent to the Ph.D., are presently being

introduced, and at least Venice and Turin universities propose that Australian literature be one of the approved areas of study for this purpose. The proposal at Turin is that students should spend one term of their time at a host institution in the country whose literature they are studying, and that a member of staff from this institution should visit Italy to take part in the final examination of the candidate. There is a good chance that F.I.T. could be invited to be one of these host institutions.

The scholarly standard of Australian studies in Italy is very high, but there is great difficulty in obtaining suitable texts. Both the National Book Council and the Australian Book Review should be able to assist in overcoming this difficulty, but there is also a need for direct exchange of publications and ideas between Australian and Italian institutions. There is however in Italy a limited knowledge of the writings, in English or Italian, of Australian-Italians, and of the developments of Italian languages in Australia. F.I.T. could make a contribution to both Australian and Italian studies by carrying out studies in this area.

#### 6. European literature

From the Arthurian cycles to Joyce's Ulysses, the background and constant factor of European literature is a settled country marked by relics of the past, whether the crumbling mediaevalism of Tintagel or the seedy tenements of Dublin, studded as they are with monuments to alien rulers. The central fact on the other hand of Australian literature is that of land resistant to human ambitions which nevertheless we can understand only in European terms.

The consequence is that the sense of alienation in European literature is characteristically expressed in terms of loss, in Australian in terms of futility or rootlessness. In both cases this sense reflects the contemporary romanticism which distrusts the present, prefers the supposedly simpler past. This sense accounts for the flight to conservatism which has occurred in both continents, with its corresponding facile optimism. This optimism is however no more glib or shallow than the cynical pessimism or fatalism which characterizes much intellectual discourse in England and France, reaching its ultimate in non-genetic structuralism, with its distrust in the possibility of a subject, and consequently its surrender of all human responsibility. On the other hand, the genetic structuralism found in the work of Lucien Goldmann, or Raymond Williams' most recent work, with its emphasis on the experience of social and cultural migrants and of the dominated classes, suggests ways in which the social sciences and humanities can comprehend the realities of contemporary industrial society in a way which may open means by which humans can gain control of their future. This task is the central function of vocational education, as opposed to mere job training, and is one that will be achieved only by returning the humanities and social sciences to the centre of intellectual discourse.