Sport and the Literary Imagination

Essays in history, literature, and sport

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Chapter One
The Historicity of the Text: A Historian's Reading

> 'All good tales are true tales, at least for those who read them, which is all that counts.'[1]

This book has two main focal points. The *subject* focus is sport, and particularly how this feature of modern society has been represented in creative writing, especially novels. Its *methodological* concern is with the practice of the historian when dealing with imaginative literary constructions of this kind. The book is directed primarily at historians, though it is hoped that those whose business is literary analysis might find in it something of value. In the second emphasis, though, the book attempts to contribute to current debates about the nature of history and what its 'proper' concerns might be. This claim might provoke an initial suspicion among those who detect another book about 'theory'. To allay such fears I should note at the outset that I regard reports of the 'death' of history as premature, just as I see claims that theory is 'killing' the discipline equally exaggerated.[2] Teaching history for over thirty years in higher education, during which time I have worked with a great many historians of different persuasions, has led me to believe that most members of our profession still believe that 'doing' history is about reconstructing the past in as objective a way as is possible, and that whilst the outcome of this endeavour is not a perfect representation of the truth it is

1 Javier Cercas, *Soldiers of Salamis*, [trans. from Spanish by Anne McLean], (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003), p. 161.

2 See Elizabeth A. Clarke, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), esp. Introduction, p. 1; and Keith Windschuttle, *The Killing of History: How Literary Critics and Social Theorists Are Murdering Our Past* (New York: First Free Press Edition, 1997).

nonetheless a worthwhile academic pursuit. In general, I agree with this view from the factory floor. As the historian Jeremy Black has recently put it: 'Far from being postmodernists or pomophobes, most historians get on with research, which they generally approach in an accretional fashion, and treat debates about pomo as self-referential, if not self-regarding, and of little relevance to the practitioner.'[3] I do not, personally, subscribe to the scepticism about 'pomo' to which Black alludes. Some of postmodernism's baggage can, to be sure, seem very strange to the empirically-minded historian.[4] But many of the influences that have come into history from theoretical sources have been invigorating, if only because at long last they have forced British historians out of the epistemological insularity they had inhabited for over a century, and caused them to think about the problems relating to knowledge creation that most other disciplines have been aware of since at least the nineteenth century. In this broader intellectual context I certainly do not believe that the historical method has been shown to be value-less. We in the profession should remind ourselves, however, that our subject is a slippery one, more slippery perhaps than the devotees of pure empiricism have admitted, and that the process of finding out is beset with problems of 'knowing'. Still, in the last analysis, the business of the historian is about trying to figure out what life was like in the past.

3 Jeremy Black, 'Past Lives of the Pomos, Proto-Pomos and Pomophobics', *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 27 August 2004, 24.

4 What seems to irritate many conventional historians is the tendency of their 'postmodernist' colleagues to write in a rather abstract style that prevents their getting down to the 'real' history. This irritation will probably not be dispelled by the recent collection from Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing After the Linguistic Turn* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

1

Since it is sport and the literary representation of it that forms the main subject matter of the book, it is fitting to begin the discussion with some thoughts on the subject. Sport is something that has interested a great many people in the past hundred or so years, and this being so it is not surprising that historians have found their way into it. What is surprising is that it has taken them so long. However, since the 1970s, initially in the United States, there has been a marked surge of interest in the place occupied by sport in society.[5] One consequence of this boom in sports studies is that the subject has gained a certain respectability. From the days when few academics considered sport a matter worthy of serious consideration – when, as the novelist Philip Roth once admitted, 'a certain snobbishness about the material […] held my own imagination in check'[6] – we have now arrived at a point where students of sport are fairly common in the academy. It is now less likely that eyebrows will be raised when the academic study of sport is mentioned.

Sport is important not simply as a collection of practices – events of various kinds, the institutions and corporations that govern and sponsor them, and the people who are involved in them as athletes, administrators, and spectators. Beyond these relatively tangible and finite features, which have been the focus of much of what has been written over the past 25 or so years on the history of sport, sport also exhibits something that is less easy to pin down. This is the complex of ideas and images that surround sport and which are communicated through (though they do not necessarily have their origin in) the media: the newspaper press, radio, television, magazines and fanzines, books, films and photographs. Each has been implicated closely in sport. Newspapers, for example, have regularly given over a sizeable

5 See Richard William Cox, *British Sport: A Bibliography to 2000*, 4 vols (London:Frank Cass, 2003).

6 Philip Roth interviewed in George G. Searles ed, *Conversations with Philip Roth* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1992), p. 71.

proportion of their contents to the coverage of it.[7] At times of major international sporting events such as the Olympic Games or the FIFA World Cup those who do not like sport complain that it dominates the media, especially the television schedules. Even snooker, traditionally a participant rather than a spectator sport, has in recent years acquired a spectator following because of the clever way in which it has been adapted for television coverage. Through these branches of the media sport is taken into millions of homes, and carries with it many messages. The Olympic Games, for example, with the logo of five interlinked rings might encourage us to think of ourselves as part of a harmonious international community of friendly competitors, in spite of what we know from other sources about the amount of disharmony in the world, not least in the world of the Olympic movement. On the other hand, the World Cup might press home the message that some countries, once proud of their football traditions, have now been caught up and surpassed, much as the early industrialisers were overtaken by those coming later into the field. This message might encourage viewers to draw broader conclusions about the place of their country and its people in the world at large. Equally, though, it might not. Cricket, once considered the 'national game' in England – until this appellation was appropriated at some point in the twentieth century by the game of association football – has been linked with the idea of empire, and later of the Commonwealth. Cricket might have added a layer of cultural bonding to countries with a pre-existing shared background. For example, the attempts made by politicians to smooth over conflicts generated by the game at the time of the 'Bodyline' controversy of 1932–33 certainly underline a perception of the ability of sport to create deeper meanings and loyalties.[8] In fact, several studies of sport have in recent years paid attention to this relationship. In general they have indicated sport's potency as a shaper of identities of different kinds – religious, sexual, regional, ethnic, and

7 On average, in Britain, it has consistently been in the region of 15 per cent. See, for example, *Royal Commission on the Press 1947–1949: Report*, Cmd. 7700 (London: H.M.S.O., 1949), pp. 250, 253.

8 See Ric Sissons and Brian Stoddart, *Cricket and Empire: the 1932–33 Bodyline Tour of Australia* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1984).

especially national.[9] Taking this complex of ideas about sport together, it might be suggested that rather than seeing sport as something which has a fixed meaning, or at least a narrow range of meanings, it is actually something which communicates a large variety of ideas to those who follow it.[10] It is a rich assemblage of meanings, and the process through which those meanings are transmitted is an uncertain one. To put this point slightly differently, how people 'read' sport might vary from person to person and from place to place. But this system of negotiating meaning is important, for even the most active sport follower – s/he who plays, administers, and simply watches (and there are people who do all these things) – cannot 'know' sport more than fractionally by this direct involvement. For the rest, as it is with the process of 'knowing' generally, s/he is dependent upon what s/he is told through the various channels of knowledge that deal in sport. In short, how sport is *represented and mediated* to us is very important for what we understand sport, and by extension society, to be.

It is the process of representation, and the various mediations that accompany it, with which this book is in large part concerned. Historians of sport have been responsible for an immense growth of

9 For example see: D. Smith and G. Williams, *Fields of Praise: The Official History of the Welsh Rugby Union, 1881–1981* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1980); G. Jarvie and G. Walker eds, *Scottish Sport in the Making of a Nation: Ninety Minute Patriots?* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1994); J. Sugden and A. Bairner, *Sport, Sectarianism and Society in a Divided Ireland* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993); J. Hill and J. Williams eds, *Sport and Identity in the North of England* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1996); M. Cronin and D. Mayall eds, *Sporting Nationalisms: Identity, Ethnicity, Immigration and Assimilation* (London: Frank Cass, 1998); H. McD. Beckles and B. Stoddart, *Liberation Cricket: West Indies Cricket Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Jack Williams, *Cricket and Race* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

10 The work of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz is relevant here. 'The concept of culture I espouse […] is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he has himself spun, I take culture to be those webs.' Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture' in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 5. See also Sherry B. Ortner, 'Introduction', *Representations, 5*9 (1997), 1–13.

their particular branch of the discipline in recent years, but in all the work they have generated relatively little has been produced on the issue of representation and mediation. It has, on the other hand, been explored enthusiastically by academics in the related fields of sociology, media, and cultural studies. Their main emphasis, however, has been on television. In comparison there has been little on the coverage of sport by the newspapers or radio. Considering, for example, the amount of space devoted to sport by the daily and Sunday press, as well as the existence of a large specialist sporting press in Britain since the nineteenth century, it is astonishing that so few single studies, whether contemporary or historical, of this branch of the media exist. If, then, those parts of the media that reach the millions have received scant attention, it should not surprise us to learn that the less 'populist' parts, those which conventionally are not even referred to as 'media',[11] have been yet more neglected.

In this way the present book seeks, in a modest way, to open up new territory. Why has creative writing on sport been overlooked previously? Neglect might in part be a consequence of academic fashion, which like all fashion is often irrational and whimsical. But this in turn might also relate to the power structures of the academy, and the ways in which they either foster or militate against what is studied. A few words of comment and contextualisation are called for here to outline the various tendencies within the study of sport as they exist today, and to explain why opening up new territory might be necessary.

The academic study of sport in the early twenty-first century is an extensive (and sometimes profitable) business that takes many forms. This, of course, mirrors the increasing economic importance of sport in contemporary society, and therefore much of what passes for academic study is in fact a training of men and women for work in the sport industry: either as managers of sport (with qualifications in management, business, accountancy, law and so on) or as sport

11 'Print culture' is commonly used to describe a wide range of non-electronic products, though this term is rarely applied to the serious literature studied by academic literary critics.

professionals with skills in matters relating to the sporting body and the places where it performs. In both of these aspects the emphasis is on practical knowledge rather than academic analysis and discourse. Communications officers, for example, will be taught how to write a press release, how to organise and manage a media conference, and how to put the best possible interpretation on something that might otherwise reflect badly on the organisation that employs them. Subjecting a sportsperson's autobiography or a novel about sport to a close textual reading, as a means of trying to understand its effects, is not considered very 'relevant'. The spirit of Alistair Campbell, rather than of Jacques Derrida, tends to prevail in this environment. Quite simply, autobiographies and novels – literary representations of sport – are thought to contain little that is important to working in the business; unless, that is, the business is the commercial production of life histories, in which case teaching the winning formula might be the chief learning outcome.

In the recent past this provision of 'really useful knowledge' has been grafted on to a longer tradition of studying sport as part of the physical education curriculum. Some of the latter has now moved in to the study of the body (biomechanics, kinesiology, human kinetics), but part of it has maintained contact with a more purely academic interest in the history and sociology of sport. This area, which in spite of recent growth, is still the least prominent of the entire enterprise of sport study, has itself many fractions. Physical educationalists, because of their institutional traditions, often have a critical mass in university and college departments. Historians, sociologists and those from cultural studies rarely have. In their case they are usually to be found as individuals within 'mainstream' departments of history or other such subjects, who have taken up a study of sport because of personal academic interests, but who also have to work their passage in the department by teaching other parts of their discipline. Though they will combine nationally, and sometimes internationally, with like-minded fellows in learned societies, they lack a power base in their own institutions. This has had many repercussions within the academy's political structure. It has tended to reduce the impact of the specialism (sport), to make it harder for the specialism to cut a figure nationally, and thereby to win the respect of quality-monitoring

mechanisms such as Britain's Research Assessment Exercise. This in turn affects the nature of work submitted, with sport historians being inclined either to moderate the amount of time they devote to their interest, or to tailor their interest to what it is assumed will count as more 'respectable' output in the right kind of publications.[12] For a variety of reasons, therefore, some to do with traditions and others to do with institutional pressures, the academic study of sport has taken on different forms, with different relationships to each other as well as to the academic mainstream.

2

We come, then, to the treatment of sport in creative/fictional writing, where the subject figures in various ways as a way of life, practice, idea, tradition, or metaphor that the writer plays around with in the course of the narrative. In America this is a fairly well-worked area. The Sport Literature Association has been in existence for some years for the very purpose of studying this process academically.[13] It has no

12 Douglas Booth has recently claimed that a more explicit discussion of methodology would help historians of sport to 'garner intellectual credibility for their field'. While I understand Booth's concern for 'credibility' his insistence on methodology as a means of achieving it could have a counter-productive effect in some circles. ('Escaping the Past? The Cultural Turn and Language in Sport History', *Rethinking History*, 8: 1 (March 2004), 103.)

13 Its journal *Aethlon: the Journal of Sport Literature* has been published biannually by East Tennessee State University since 1982. Other examples of American work in this field are to be seen in Michael Oriard's *Dreaming of Heroes: American Sports Fiction, 1868–1980* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1982) and the special edition of the journal *Modern Fiction Studies* devoted to sport literature (33: 1 Spring, 1987). Sports sociologists inspired by the work of Norman Denzin have become interested in narratives, though this has usually resulted in an emphasis on personal narratives and life histories. See the special issue of *Sociology of Sport Journal* on this theme 17:1 (2000); also, for example, Fiona Dowling-Naess, 'Narratives About Young Men and Masculinities in Organised

real equivalent in Britain. There has been a notable lack of interest here in sport as a theme for the serious creative writer, and consequently a paucity of material on which the literary critic might work. The novels selected for treatment in this book are exceptional, therefore, in the British literary world. Equally, historians of sport in Britain have exhibited a similar disregard for the representation of sport in novels, poetry and drama. For this contrast between Britain and the USA there are three likely reasons, which say much about the relative positions of sport in the academy in the two countries. First, sport writing in America has traditionally been a more 'respectable' occupation; sports journalists have been accorded higher status that their British counterparts, a state of affairs partly accounted for by the emergence from their ranks of distinguished writers such as Paul Gallico and Ring Lardner, and also because established national figures such as Mailer, Hemingway, Roth, Updike and others have taken up sport, either in their journalistic forays or as the subject of their fiction. Roth's treatment of baseball in *The Great American Novel* (1973), a text in which the game provides both plot and metaphorical meaning, has nothing to match it in English literature. Second, and simply, the much greater population of sports studies academics in the USA has enabled bodies like the Sport Literature Association to sustain a critical mass of support. But, third, the greater opportunities available in America for academics to work as reporters, commentators and analysts in radio, television and the press, often at local level, has meant that they themselves have become 'sportswriters', if not necessarily writers of fiction (though some of their readers might disagree). In Britain, where none (or very few) of these factors apply, an added problem (which is also present in the USA) has assumed greater force. This is the academic question of whether the study of fiction is the job of the historian or the literary critic.

This brings us back to our earlier reflections on the nature of history. If we assume that historians *should* concern themselves with 'literary' sources, how then should they use them? Leaving aside for

Sport in Norway', *Sport Education and Society*, 6: 2 (2001), 125–42, and Jim Denison, 'Sport Narratives', *Qualitative Enquiry*, 2: 3 (1996), 351–62.

the time being the controversial matter of how far the writing of history is itself a *fictive* art[14] there appears to be no generally agreed line among historians on this question.[15] The question is partly clouded by some of the structural problems of the academy we noted earlier. The inter-disciplinary implications in the question have been plagued over the years by the influence in British universities of the single-subject department. Although this influence was less apparent in the post-1992 universities (where the multi-disciplinary course rather than the subject had often provided the organising rationale of study) recent developments in British higher education have served to swing the emphasis back to the subject, its supposed distinctive methodologies, and its corporate identity. Quality monitoring, with its discipline-based 'benchmarking standards' and research assessment focus, whilst not positively erecting an obstacle to inter-disciplinarity, has not exactly stimulated the pursuit of it. 'Benchmarking' in particular, which sets out the methods, skills, and content thought to define a subject's uniqueness, can be a conservative influence, turning academics back into the discipline rather than seeking eclectic liaisons with cognate areas. For this reason alone, therefore, it may well be that for some the question 'history and/or literature?' is never even put; each to her/his own becomes the order of the day.

But beyond these structural constraints there is a longstanding reluctance on the part of historians to take up 'literature' seriously. It is generally agreed that 'doing history' is different from 'doing literature', whether the latter activity means creative writing or the criticising of creative writing.[16] It is evident not only among historians

14 See Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (London: Routledge, 1997), esp. pp. 51–5; and the same author's piece in *Guardian Education,* 6 February 2001, 15: 'the emphasis now is less on history as a process of objective discovery and instead more and more of an acceptance of its unavoidably fictive nature – that is, its literary constructedness.'

15 Windschuttle, *The Killing of History* raises some interesting questions about the boundaries between disciplines when he talks about 'real historians' and 'genuine historians' (p. 4). Who is a historian these days? Must such a person necessarily inhabit a history department?

16 In a recent article Shani D'Cruze has raised this issue: 'Fiction is not history', she claims. 'Historians have long acknowledged the ambiguous nature of fiction

of sport but those in most other areas of the discipline. To be sure, historians, often when writing in more expansive mood, will refer to works of literature as indications of particular moods or mentalities, acknowledging that the creative writer can sometimes 'capture' the flavour of a period better than the historian.[17] The finely wrought historical novel can, as Robert Rosenstone has observed, bring 'the world alive in a way that historical writing never did'.[18] For example, Tracey Chevalier's subtle treatment of the status, religious and gender hierarchies in seventeenth-century Holland in *The Girl with a Pearl Earring* (1999) would certainly fall into this category. Would Chevalier's work, I wonder, seriously rate inclusion in a course on Dutch history, and if it did, how would it be studied? Historians who take up literary sources and scrutinise them with the same intensity as they would scrutinise their 'historical' sources are indeed few and far between. For those who have departed from the norm and essayed the literary turn, the work of the America scholar Michael Oriard, in two major books on the development of American sport, provides an example to follow. His concern is less the institutional forms in which sport was organised than the ways in which sport was presented to its public as a spectacle and experience. Representation is therefore Oriard's main theme. In analysing the process he eschews the methodology often loosely applied by many historians, which is what I would term 'reflection theory'; in other words the notion that the textual source

as historical "evidence".' ('"Dad's Back": Mapping Masculinities, Moralities and the Law in the Novels of Margery Allingham', *Cultural and Social History*, 1: 3 (2004), 256. Roland Barthes, however, questioned the supposed difference. See *Oeuvres Completes* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1994), p. 417. An interesting discussion of the relationship between history and literature is to be found in Linda Orr, 'The Revenge of Literature: A History of History', *New Literary History*, 18: 1 (1986), 1–22.

17 See, for example, Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001) referring to the value of *Middlemarch* in providing 'better than any modern history of medicine Bichat's tissue theory (for example) and why it held sway until cell theory was established in the 1840s.' (pp. 99–100).

18 Robert A. Rosenstone, 'Confessions of a Postmodern (?) Historian', *Rethinking History*, 8: 1 (Spring 2004), p. 151.

being studied *reflects* an already existing social reality.[19] Drawing from work in cultural studies Oriard dispenses with assumptions about a correspondence between text and practice, and instead sees the experience as something inscribed in the text, and the text itself therefore having a degree of autonomy from the economic and social conditions of its production. In other words the text has the capacity to *create* meaning, as much as to *reflect* meanings construed elsewhere.[20] This approach, making use of inter-disciplinary influences, is one that might be applied to the study of literary sources with potentially great profit by historians, though it has by no means achieved general acceptance.

3

Leaving aside those historians who ignore (or treat very lightly) fictional sources, there is a large group of historians who adopt the 'reflectionist' method, using fictions as 'illustrative' of broader issues. How often for example has the fictional literature of Rider Haggard or Kipling been cited as evidence of popular enthusiasm for imperialism in late Victorian and Edwardian England; or the Grossmith brothers' Mr Pooter been offered as a characterisation of lower-middle class mentalities in north London in the same period? In other words, the literary text becomes a passive mediator of ideas and social mores, the origins of which are to be found elsewhere in society. The force of this

19 There is a clear discussion of this point in Gabrielle M. Spiegel, 'Introduction', Spiegel ed., *Practicing History*, pp. 1–31.

20 See Michael Oriard, *Reading Football: How the Popular Press Created an American Spectacle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); *King Football: Sport and Spectacle in the Golden Age of Radio and Newsreels, Movies and Magazines, the Weekly and Daily Press* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). This point is made very well in Anthony Bateman, 'The Politics of the Aesthetic: Cricket, Literature and Culture 1850–1965', Ph.D. thesis, University of Salford (2005), pp. 6–7.

conventional wisdom then creates the further assumption that the literary text is of a lower order than the 'historical' source, and is in some sense therefore 'suspect' when set against other evidence because it is a product of the imagination. In fact, it is a common practice among historians – grounded, indeed, in the exercises we set first level undergraduates – to place the literary text against its historical 'reality' in order to judge the text's veracity as a source; as if the historical 'reality' is something produced without help from literary or other cultural products. Ian Carter's fine essay on Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *Sunset Song* is a clear example of this technique. It pays very close attention to the text but still insists: 'Novels can give us evidence that we cannot get from other sources, *but we must check the novel against other kinds of evidence before we accept it as an accurate account of what 'really happened ...'* (my italics).[21] This notion was clearly exemplified in a recent comment by Ian Kershaw, reviewing the controversial Hitler film *Der Untergang (The Downfall)*. Kershaw, a distinguished historian of Germany in the Nazi era, enunciated what might be taken as the orthodoxy in the profession on the use of fictional sources:

> I reminded myself as I entered the cinema that feature films, however good they are, amount to artistic constructs which are of their nature incompatible with strict historical accuracy. In this they differ from film documentaries. Factual accuracy is as important to the documentary as to the written work of history. A historical feature film operates differently in that it is not confined by rules of evidence. This does not mean that it is unable, if well done, to convey through its very dramatic power a substantial insight into reality.[22]

Leaving aside the faith that Kershaw curiously appears to place in the film documentary (a form notably artful and fictive, notwithstanding its attention to factual accuracy) his contrasting of history ('confined by rules of evidence') with art (imagination), raises issues about the nature of knowing which have been central to much debate about the nature of history in recent years. Kershaw offers here a clear example

21 Ian Carter, 'Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *A Scots Quair*, and the Peasantry', *History Workshop Journal: A Journal of Socialist Historians*, 6 (1978), 169.

22 'The Human Hitler', *Guardian (G2)*, 17 September 2004, 4–5.

of the historian's predilection for seeing a sharp distinction between on the one hand 'reality' - something that exists and into which 'insight' might be conveyed - and on the other 'imagination'. It is a blurring, if not an absolute breaking down, of the hard-and-fast distinction between these two categories, that this book is attempting.

4

There are of course historians whose attention to literary texts has been serious and detailed, and who have not been deterred by the fear of 'unreliable evidence'. One is Jeffrey Richards, responsible for a considerable body of work incorporating the texts of both literature and the cinema. In his study of public school fiction[23] (a book which provided powerful inspiration for the present volume) Richards examines the public school story and its historical development over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. *Happiest Days* is not heavy on theory (a feature which no doubt commends it to many historians) but Richards draws upon an amalgam of methodological influences to fashion an interesting approach: there is a nod towards the text as 'a mirror to the mind set of the nation', a healthy acknowledgement of the difficulty of ascertaining the influence exercised by popular fiction over the reading public, and, from the work of Joan Rockwell, a readiness to see literature as simultaneously social product and agent of social change. For Richards, then, the public school story is both a repository of contemporary mentalities, giving the historian access to the world beyond the text, and a text that

23 Jeffrey Richards, *Happiest Days: The Public Schools in English Fiction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988). A similarly fruitful analysis of public school culture is to be found in J.A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: the Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology* (London: Frank Cass, 2000). Mangan's reading of the 'sporting prosody' of the schools (see ch. 8) is especially revealing of the workings of creative writing as ideology.

has the capacity to represent the world to readers, and by doing so to shape attitudes of the day.[24] Thus the text *constructs* as much as it *reflects*.

Another indication of how creative literature might be handled by the historian is to be gained from considering the work of Arthur Marwick. Marwick has consistently taken up fictional texts as worthy of serious historical study. He is perhaps best known in recent years for his vigorous and unqualified defence of conventional historical method against what he sees as the vapid notions of 'postmodernists'. Some might regard his idea of the historian's art (or *science* as he would aver) as unduly conservative, and he certainly makes a clear distinction between history and literature.[25] To the notion, associated with the writings of such analysts as Paul Ricoeur and, in particular, Hayden White, that history is a form of story-telling in which the narrative strategies available to the historian determine to a degree what s/he is able to say, Marwick notes 'the total misunderstandings of such philosophers as Paul Ricoeur who insists that history is essentially the same as novel writing, and then draws absurd conclusions from this illegitimate contention.'[26]

Marwick has, however, no inhibitions about enlarging the corpus of historical sources. On what might constitute fit material for the historian his vision is panoptic, including films (documentary and feature) and novels. In contrast with the sledgehammer technique on display in his more polemical work Marwick's treatment of fictional literature shows immense perception and sensitivity, and provides a model to be followed even by some of his professed antagonists. Articles published over the past twenty years reveal a capacity for close textual reading which bring out the insights to be gained into a

24 Ibid., pp. 1–3, and Joan Rockwell, *Fact in Fiction: The Use of Literature in the Systematic Study of Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974). 'My basic premise is that literature neither "reflects" nor "arises from" society, but rather is an integral part of it' (p. vii).

25 Arthur Marwick, *The New Nature of History: Knowledge, Evidence ,Language* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 11, 262.

26 Ibid., p. 263.

society and its mores from novels like John Braine's *Room at the Top* (1957), the 1959 film of which is regarded by Marwick as having wrought a profound historical effect on its times.[27] Here, then, is certainly not a historian who sees literature as merely 'reflecting' the conditions of its existence, nor of the cultural as something which is understood by being 'read off' from prior economic and social developments. The meaning is in the text, which in turn has the capacity to change meaning.[28] There is, nonetheless, a sense in which even Marwick's rigour has its limitations. For one thing, literary evidence still tends to be 'ghetto-ised'; it is assigned to the area of 'arts/culture' whilst for other subjects - race for example - conventional sources are deployed, as if the subject is too serious a matter for creative writing to be of much value. Also, there is a tendency to prioritise 'history' in its relationship with 'literature'. Marwick's establishing of his historical model of change, for example, before proceeding to the analysis of literature, rather underlines the latter's junior position in the relationship. There is, moreover, a residual sense of the literary text being treated as a historical document that can be pinned down and dissected on the laboratory table where it yields interesting information but assumes the role of a passive object in the historian's hands.[29] Nonetheless, in spite of these reservations, with Richards and Marwick we begin to approach the notion of what I would call the 'active text'.

27 Arthur Marwick, 'The Arts, Books, Media and Entertainments in Britain Since 1945', in J. Obelkevich and P. Catterall eds, *Understanding Post War Society* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 185; 'one of those occasional products that illuminate a whole moment of change, and is, indeed, *in itself a component of change.*' (My italics.)

28 See in particular: Arthur Marwick, '*Room at the Top, Saturday Night and Sunday Morning,* and the "Cultural Revolution" in Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 19 (1984), 127–52; 'Six Novels of the Sixties – Three French, Three Italian', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 28 (1993), 563–91.

29 These features are evident in Marwick's *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c. 1958-c.1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).