DOI: https://doi.org/10.18485/philologia.2025.23.23.7
UDC: 821.111.09-31"19"

"THERE ARE AMERICANS CROPPING UP EVERYWHERE": AMERICAN CHARACTERS IN THE BRITISH ACADEMIC NOVELS IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20th CENTURY

Milica Radjenović[1 2]
Union University
Faculty of Law and Business Studies "Dr Lazar Vrkatić"
Novi Sad, Serbia
https://orcid.org/0009-0000-6583-5349

Ovaj rad analizira kako su prikazani likovi Amerikanaca u britanskom akademskom romanu u drugoj polovini 20. veka. Iako su tipski likovi uobičajeni u univerzitetskim romanima, prikaz likova Amerikanaca u ovom žanru nije analiziran u stručnoj literaturi. Ovaj period je posebno zanimljiv jer je odnos Velike Britanije i SAD postao složeniji zbog sve veće britanske zavisnosti od Sjedinjenih Država. Glavni cilj ovog rada jeste da se prepozna da li postoje sličnosti u prikazima likova Amerikanaca u ovom žanru i da li takav opis predstavlja odraz odnosa između ove dve države. Ovaj rad je analizirao četiri britanska akademska romana: *Prema zapadu* Malkoma Bredberija, *Britanski muzej propada* i *Zamena mesta: Priča o dva kampusa* Dejvida Lodža i *Zanesenost: Viteška pripovest u prozi i stihu* A. S. Bajat. Ovi romani su odabrani zbog svog značaja u žanru akademskog romana i zato što imaju bitne likove koji su Amerikanci. Analiza je otkrila da likovi Amerikanaca imaju mnogo sličnosti i da odražavaju strah Britanaca od američke dominacije i prevlasti. Analizirani likovi često su prikazani kao da žele da poseduju Britansku kulturu, na ovaj ili onaj način. Takvi prikazi mogu se tumačiti kao potvrda moći koju ima britanska kultura jer podrazumeva da Amerikanci mogu unaprediti svoju kulturu tako što će prisvojiti britansku. Međutim, na ovaj način se opet ističe strah od SAD i moći koju ova država ima nad Velikom Britanijom. Ovi zaključci mogu pomoći u razumevanju likova Amerikanaca u žanru akademskog romana i kako je njihov prikaz bio pod uticajem političkih, ekonomskih i društvenih okolnosti u drugoj polovini 20. veka.

Ključne reči: akademski roman, univerzitetski roman, visoko obrazovanje, stereotipni likovi.

1 Kontakt podaci (E-mail): milica.radjenovic@flv.edu.rs
2 This paper was originally presented at the *English Language & Literature Studies: Modern Perspectives and Beyond* conference, which took place on October 20–21, 2023, at the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade.

1. INTRODUCTION

The fifties marked the beginning of a new genre of fiction called university, academic, or campus novels. Although fiction concerning student life had existed for a long time, the novels after World War II dealt with higher education in a different way. These works were about professors and the problems they encountered in their academic careers and private lives. The emergence of this genre in Anglo-American fiction is not unusual if we take into account that the education systems in both countries welcomed larger and larger numbers of students. Universities became more open, which inevitably raised interest in the way they function, as an increasing number of people were connected to them, directly or indirectly.

At the same time, Great Britain and the USA were transforming themselves after the devastation of World War II. Despite many troubles, much-needed optimism was present, and there was a widespread belief that the whole world was on the cusp of a better and fairer tomorrow. Great Britain continued losing its status as a global power, while the USA was increasingly focusing on its superpower rivalry with the Soviet Union, and thus what had once been a great global empire was now just a junior partner of a much more powerful country. The dynamics of this relationship tended to elicit feelings of dissatisfaction in Britain. The British were dependent on the USA and considered it its ally, but at the same time feared its power and dominance. These feelings in turn became reflected in British academic fiction and the way Americans were depicted. In this context, this paper will focus on the following academic novels: Malcolm Bradbury's *Stepping Westward* (1965), David Lodge's *The British Museum is Falling Down* (1965) and *Changing Places: A Tale of Two Campuses* (1975), and A. S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance* (1990). Besides having prominent American characters, the analyzed novels have been chosen because of their significance in this genre: Bradbury and Lodge are considered two of the most important authors of British academic fiction, while Byatt's novel was one of the most successful British academic novels. *Possession* received a Booker Prize in 1990, and it was translated into 16 languages by 1995 (Moseley 2007: 6). Showalter considers this novel to be the high point of academic fiction of the 1990s (Showalter 2005: 112).

2. THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP

When talking about the relationship between the USA and Great Britain, it is inevitable to mention the common language and cultural heritage as ties that hold these two countries close together. According to David Frost and Michael Shea, besides the obvious social, economic, and political ties, this strong connectedness has its basis not only in the common language but also in the two countries sharing similar morals, ethics, culture, inventiveness, and humor. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to claim that because of this closeness the USA had been, for much of its history, just a British clone, and that after World War II, Great Britain, as some have argued, became a mere copy of the USA (Frost/Shea 1986: 4). This supposed reversal of roles is especially interesting in light of it not being uncommon for British intellectuals to regard the States as "the lowest form of modernity" (Schwarz 2001: 165). According to Schwarz, from the 1880s until the 1950s, harshly criticizing the barbarity of "new" countries, especially the USA, was very popular in such circles (2001: 165).

Britain's international policy became inextricably linked to the USA during the first years of World War II, when Britain was dependent on aid from Franklin Roosevelt's "lend-lease" program in order to keep fighting, and its very survival was largely made possible due to the help it received from its international partner (Hopkins/Young 2005: 499). Hopkins and Young argue that the two countries becoming such important partners at a very difficult time created a strong bond, which was made even stronger thanks to the common language, cultural heritage, and shared attitudes and national interests. The relationship between the two countries was often dubbed "special," and thus it was a prime concern for most British governments (Hopkins/Young 2005: 499). Marr claims that Britain has had the same dilemma since 1945: trying to solve the impossible puzzle of how to maintain its independence and dignity as a partner to a much stronger global power, especially because it relies on it in terms of its defense and intelligence gathering (Marr 2007: 9).

After the end of World War II, Britain found itself fundamentally dependent on the USA, so much so that a fifth of its people's food needs came from the States (Marr 2007: 10). The loan that Britain was forced to take from the USA for bare survival suited the creditor because it meant that Great Britain was under firm American economic control (Marr 2007: 11–13). Hopkins and Young (2005: 500) conclude that "Britain had become the world's greatest debtor, the USA was its greatest creditor," and some even viewed the American loan as exploitative because of its interest rate. Dimbleby claims that it was easily foreseeable long before the 20th century that the United States would emerge as a leading superpower; however, the extent of Britain's decline – it lost a sixth of its wealth after World War I and a quarter after World War II – could not have been anticipated (Dimbleby 1988: 351).

Some perceived this "special relationship" as a hindrance to Britain's commitment to its European future, and the national interests of the two countries sometimes collided (Hopkins/Young 2005: 499). For example, the States refused to share the atomic secret even though British scientists were part of the team working on the discovery of the atomic bomb (Hopkins/Young 2005: 500). Furthermore, such colliding interests became obvious during the Suez Crisis. Relying on American aid, Britain was forced to withdraw (Marr 2007: 157–158), and this situation revealed just how weak and dependent Great Britain had become (Marr 2007: XX).

Yet despite many crises and numerous changes that unfolded in the decades following World War II, the special relationship endured, with both countries working closely together on creating a liberal-democratic world order by establishing the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (Hopkins/Young 2005: 500). Frost and Shea (1986: 123) also point out that the exchange of people and ideas has made intellectual and cultural values between the two countries inseparable, claiming that the ties developed through education are the strongest of all. This lively exchange is described by Malcolm Bradbury in *Dangerous Pilgrimages*:

> I was a new graduate, a young researcher and would-be novelist, going off to teach freshman composition and study American literature on a Midwestern American campus, at Indiana University. I belonged in fact to the Sabbatical Generation, the brand-new breed of scholars, students, critics, journalists, poets and novelists

> who used to gather on each side of the Atlantic every late summer to exchange themselves for their counterparts on the other, passing each other in midatlantic. [...] we went on Fulbrights, Harknesses, Commonwealth Funds, Jane Eliza Proctors, Henry Fellowships, the new huddled masses of the travel-grant age. (Bradbury 1996: 455)

It is no surprise that such intense cooperation between the two countries influenced British academic novels. Bradbury also writes about his fascination with American abundance and culture. For him, the USA was the country from which came the best books, movies, music, clothes, cars, comics, etc. (Bradbury 1996: 455). The uneasiness caused by the British dependence on the USA and the loss of its former place in the global hierarchy was made even more complicated by the fascination of many Britons with everything American. Such sometimes contradictory sentiments can be seen in the depiction of American characters in British academic novels.

3. AMERICANS IN BRITISH ACADEMIC FICTION IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20th CENTURY

Malcolm Bradbury and David Lodge are two of the most popular British writers of academic fiction. Both authors lived and worked in the USA as a part of exchange programs, and these life experiences influenced their writing. Even before World War II, Marr points out that there was a feeling that the country was becoming "a little more American and a little less British" (Marr 2007: XVIII). During the first post-war years, the USA was often associated with detrimental consumerism (Marr 2007: 80) and regarded as having a negative impact on people's "good taste" and behavior (Marr 2007: 47, 90). Traces of these ideas can be found in Bradbury's first novel, *Eating People is Wrong* (1959). One of the minor characters is the Professor of Sociology, who has just returned from the States. He concludes: "It's like coming back home, looking for England, and finding America again. [...] All the shops are chain stores, all the local societies are ironed out; soon it won't be necessary for us to go to America. It will all be here" (Bradbury 2000: 16).

Bradbury's second novel, *Stepping Westward*, tells a story about a not-so-successful British writer, James Walker, who is offered a teaching position at Benedict Arnold University in a small town in the American heartland. In the story, Walker has written three novels, and even though they have attracted some attention in his mother country, Americans seem more interested in his writing (Bradbury 2012: 22–23). For his generation of writers, it is almost a rule that they should go to the USA at some point in their career, like some kind of necessary apprenticeship (Bradbury 2012: 25). As the novel unfolds, Walker is swept away on a new adventure without his wife and daughter.

What Walker does not know is that he has been offered this job just because Bernard Froelich, a militant liberal, decided to meet a writer he has been studying for the purpose of writing one chapter about him in his new book. He knows that Walker is a liberal, just like himself, and he intends to use this to change the sentiments at the university by having one more liberal in the faculty. In the forward of the 2012 edition of *Stepping Westward*, Bradbury calls Froelich a plotter, while Walker plays the role of the plotted man (Bradbury 2012: IX). Froelich successfully manipulates Walker's decisions

and actions. Walker only later realizes that he has been nothing but a pawn in Froelich's scheme. Here, Walker represents Henry James's American in reverse because he is a naïve and innocent European coming to seek American experience (Bradbury 2012: 45). Unlike before, the New World is the one containing the wisdom needed to survive the changed realities after World War II.

Although Americans are depicted in the novel as resourceful, they are also portrayed as loud, rude, too direct, and even aggressive. They do not seem to be very interested in what the other person might think of them. When compared to them, the British seem too gentle and weak. Walker thinks they are rude so that other people might not perceive them as servile (Bradbury 2012: 130). In the USA presented, there seem to be fewer social constraints regarding etiquette and human conduct than in Great Britain. America is violent and uninhibited, but this unrestrained behavior has two sides: good and bad. Walker describes America as a moral supermarket because you can freely choose to be responsible or irresponsible (Bradbury 2012: 265). He thinks that notions of right and wrong cannot be applied in this society of constant flux (Bradbury 2012: 264). It is interesting that when one American praises the stable morality of Great Britain, saying that in this country the notions of good and bad still mean something, Walker wonders why Great Britain should behave in a way that he describes as spitting against the wind (Bradbury 2012: 153). The USA might not be ideal, but it is more in touch with modern times, while, in comparison, Great Britain seems old-fashioned and unprepared for the changes that have swept the world. These traits can be seen in the two main male characters, Walker and Froelich.

Walker might be benevolent, but he is passive and too slow to notice Froelich's web of deception around him. Froelich is ambitious, quick to act, and devoid of scruples. Unlike Walker, he perfectly understands the world of academic politics. He employs every possible tactic to get Walker under his control, and he does this very successfully, even using his wife, Patrice, by encouraging Walker to have an affair with her. It is only too late that Walker realizes that Patrice is part of Froelich's grand scheme. Unlike the British, Americans know how to get things done. Although Walker enjoys the fact that American women are more relaxed when it comes to their sexuality, he seems naïve in his relationship with Patrice. Just like in Lodge's *Changing Places*, which will be discussed later, American women are presented almost exclusively in regard to their sexual attractiveness. Their more relaxed attitude reflects not only their behavior but also their appeal. They are unashamedly using their good looks to attract attention. While talking to Patrice, he notices the following: "She sat and put her head on her hands and looked at him. Like many American women, she sat closer and looked longer than he expected" (Bradbury 2012: 236). Sexuality holds such a central place in American society that one European professor calls the USA a matriarchal society (Bradbury 2012: 43). According to him, because sexuality is pivotal for American society, young women hold all the power, and that is why all the energy of their country goes into producing them (Bradbury 2012: 42–43).

Morace describes Bradbury's attitude towards both America and England as ambivalent: "the one a visionary world elsewhere devoid of historical as well as moral substance, the other an all too solid land devoid of imaginative alternatives" (Morace 1989: 55). While Bradbury's fascination with the USA could be described as ambivalent,

Lodge's enthusiasm for this country is more than obvious in his novel *Changing Places*. His American characters are written with much more sympathy. Their faults are there to make us laugh and amuse the reader. Still, in both *The British Museum is Falling Down* and *Changing Places*, we come across the idea that Americans want to acquire and possess British culture in some way or another.

The British Museum is Falling Down is Lodge's third novel, but his first novel that can be referred to as an academic novel. Its main character, Adam Appleby, is a poor postgraduate student who is still in the process of writing a doctoral thesis. He is aware that his financial situation might get even worse because his wife may be pregnant with their fourth child. Readers follow Adam during the course of a single day, which is full of bizarre situations and people.

During this day full of daydreaming, adventures, and worrying, Adam keeps crossing paths with one unusual man. For example, by chance, he is the one who answers the phone at the telephone booth with an important message for him (Lodge 1983: 83–84). This man is described as a fat American smoking a fat cigar (Lodge 1983: 28). The American, Bernie, is driven in a luxurious limousine equipped with the latest technology (Lodge 1983: 29). While Adam's lack of money is an ever-present force that shapes his everyday life, Bernie seems ridiculously rich. He is confident, direct, and generous. He was sent to Great Britain to buy rare books and original manuscripts for the featured college in Colorado (Lodge 1983: 151). He even had plans to buy the British Museum. He wanted to transport it stone by stone to Colorado, clean it up, and re-erect it. Surprised at the size of it, he realized that such undertaking was impossible (Lodge 1983: 151). The idea of buying the British Museum can be seen as a comic situation that pokes fun at Americans and their supposed lack of rudimentary knowledge, but it implies that the rich and generous American does not see any problem in taking the cultural heritage of Great Britain to the USA. The British Museum is described with deep reverence throughout the novel. At one point, Adam concludes: "This huge domed Reading Room was the cortex of the English-speaking races, he thought, with a certain awe. The memory of everything they had thought or imagined was stored there." (Lodge 1983: 93)

In the end, Bernie becomes Adam's fairy godfather because he solves his money troubles by offering him a well-paid job of scouting for books and original manuscripts for the Colorado library (Lodge 1983: 152). The poor British postgraduate is saved by the generous and wealthy American. Nevertheless, this job implies the USA acquiring British cultural heritage. Adam's dismal financial situation is improved by enabling this rich American library to buy British books and manuscripts of worth. He is more than willing to do this and sees this as a way out of his situation without thinking of the consequences of his actions. It is interesting that Lodge wrote most of this novel while in the USA, during a year's leave of absence from his post as a lecturer in English Literature at the University of Birmingham; Lodge later wrote that he had finished this novel faster than any of his other works (Lodge 1983: 163). While this was admittedly in part thanks to not having teaching duties, he also credited this to his American experience having been liberating and stimulating (Lodge 1983: 163). Although Lodge's experience of the USA was positive, the fear of American influence and power still underlies *The British Museum is Falling Down*. The central place of this novel is the British Museum, which the rich American wanted to buy and transport to the USA. Even though it is there to make

readers laugh, this ludicrous idea depicts the fear of detrimental American dominance of Great Britain.

Lodge's fascination with the USA is also evident in his next academic novel, *Changing Places*. This novel follows the exchange of two professors, Morris Zapp from the States and Philip Swallow from Britain, in 1969. Even though Showalter sees this novel as critical of excesses and pretensions of the 1960s university, she thinks it celebrates the liberatory aspects of this exciting period without being cynical (Showalter 2005: 77). In order to create comic situations, Lodge relied heavily on defamiliarization and stereotypes. The new environment is seen through the eyes of a stereotypical counterpart from the other country. Martin Bruce describes Morris and Zapp as "a study in contrasts" (Bruce 27: 1999). While Zapp, by the time he was thirty, had published five books and became a full professor at the same age, Swallow had published just essays and reviews (Lodge 1986: 15). Philip Swallow does not lack intelligence or ability, but he lacks the will and ambition Zapp possesses abundantly. The narrator concludes that both men are characteristic of the educational systems they passed through (Lodge 1986: 15). Zapp has worked strenuously to become a renowned and well-paid professor of English literature. Compared to him, British scholars seem amateurish and unprofessional. In the USA of this novel, everything is more seriously done – even the student paper seems incredibly professional (Lodge 1986: 141).

Though Zapp is portrayed with more sympathy than Bradbury depicts Walker's counterpart, Froelich, he is, nevertheless, depicted as self-centered, arrogant, assertive, and loud. He seems narrow-minded and condescending in his ambition to never leave North America, and especially in his original intention to never visit the country whose literature he has studied all his professional life (Lodge 1986: 11, 39, 42). It is interesting, however, that Zapp is seemingly influenced by Britain in such a way that he becomes a "nicer" person:

> He cast his mind back over the day – helping Mrs. Swallow look for her husband's book, letting the Irish kid watch his TV, driving O'Shea around to his patients – and wondered what had come over him. Some creeping English disease of being nice, was it? He would have to watch himself. (Lodge 1986: 93)

While Britain is described as old-fashioned, damp, bleak, and impoverished, the USA is depicted as heaven on earth. Philip is amazed at the wealth and liberal behavior of its inhabitants. American society is less restrained and more comfortable. In such a society, there is an array of different people living their lives in ways that might seem incredible to someone coming from Britain at the time. The USA is an opulent and hedonistic society that is less restrictive when compared to Britain. It is a country on the run that does not allow passivity and laziness. Its cut-throat professional atmosphere seems even merciless, especially when compared to the British university system. Thus, it is no wonder that Zapp becomes softer and nicer in Rummidge.

Zapp is also depicted as a man who loves beautiful women and enjoys a hedonistic and materialistic lifestyle. His desire to own transcends the material world. The British fear of American acquisitiveness can be recognized in Zapp's secret ambition to write a book about Jane Austen that would make any other literary research unnecessary:

> The object of the exercise [...] was not to enhance others' enjoyment and understanding of Jane Austen, still less to honour the novelist herself, but to put a definitive stop to the production of any further garbage on the subject. [...] After Zapp, the rest would be silence. The thought gave him deep satisfaction. In Faustian moments he dreamed of going on, after fixing Jane Austen, to do the same job on the other major English novelists, then the poets and dramatists, perhaps using computers and teams of trained graduate students, inexorably reducing the area of English literature available for free comment, spreading dismay through the whole industry, rendering scores of his colleagues redundant: periodicals would fall silent, famous English Departments be left deserted like ghost towns... (Lodge 1986: 44–45)

Zapp's endless ambition prompts his desire to possess and own the whole field of studying English literature. He desires to have complete dominance over this subject. Again, we can sense Britain's fear of American avarice, which is not limited to the material world but is also directed at the intellectual world.

American society is portrayed as seemingly cultivating certain traits in people. Its liberal attitude also reflects how women behave. They are more relaxed and less restrained in their behavior. Philip is surprised when he realizes that everyone swears, including the women (Lodge 1986: 143). American women, just like in *Stepping Westward*, are objectified and described almost exclusively in relation to their sexual attractiveness. Désirée Zapp, just like her husband, is loud, even rude, aggressive, and assertive. Philip dislikes her initially because of these traits, but later engages in a romantic relationship with her. Désirée is, additionally, interested in the women's rights movement, which is emerging at that time. Her depiction could be described as a stereotypical depiction of a feminist, a type which would appear in the later academic novels, including Byatt's *Possession*, which is discussed below.

While Lodge portrayed American characters with sympathy, Byatt's *Possession* gives Mortimer Cropper, an American biographer, the role of the main villain. Showalter sees this novel as having a strong element of anti-American satire (Showalter 2005: 112). *Possession* is a complex novel, and at its center are letters exchanged by two imaginary nineteenth-century poets, Randolph Henry Ash and Christabel La Mott. These letters hold a secret about their relationship, which could alter the way their poetry has been interpreted. Maud Bailey and Roland Mitchel are British literary critics who work together to solve this mystery. They feel possessed by the desire to find out what really happened.

Mortimer Cropper is Ash's biographer and an avid collector of any memorabilia connected to him. He works in the Stant Collection at Robert Dale Owen University in New Mexico. The Stant Collection has by far the largest collection of Ash's books, letters, and memorabilia (Byatt 1990: 4). Nevertheless, he is driven by the wild ambition to own everything concerning Randolph Henry Ash. For example, he spends six months persuading the woman who has three letters written by Ash to a child to sell them to him, although they were only valuable because this was the only known instance of him writing a letter to a child (Byatt 1990: 105–107). This restless desire drives him even to dig up Ashes' grave so as to find the box that was buried with him and his wife. Cropper believes that this box might contain the secret about Ash's covert relationship

with LaMotte. Cropper is described as *indefatigable* (Byatt 1990: 4) and *ubiquitous* (Byatt 1990: 35); ruthless and cunning, he can worm his way anywhere with his checkbook and get what he wants (Byatt 1990: 13, 35). When this does not work, he is ready to use other, less acceptable means to obtain what he desires. Other characters fear him as if he has a supernatural ability that helps him achieve his goals because nothing seems to escape his sharp mind.

There is a growing dissatisfaction about so many of Ash's possessions being held in the USA. Blackadder, a British Ash scholar who believes that British writings should stay in Britain, compares this loss of Ash's possessions to a *drain* (Byatt 1990: 35). British scholars in *Possession* feel helpless because they do not have the financial resources to match Cropper's. When the secret correspondence between Ash and La Motte is found out, the British government has no intention of buying the letters so that they can remain in the country (Byatt 1990: 431). The fear of Americans coming to Britain to acquire its cultural heritage is perhaps best summed up in the terrified conclusion of a man in whose house the secret correspondence between the two poets is found: "There are Americans cropping up everywhere. You're all in it together" (Byatt 1990: 351).

Besides having large funds at his disposal, everything about Cropper is extravagant – his slippers, his pajamas, his car (Byatt 1990: 104, 108). He places a lot of value on material possessions. He relishes the fact that his pocket watch used to belong to Randolph Henry Ash (Byatt 1990: 418). His desire is not to understand Ash but to be his lord and owner, as Blackadder concludes (Byatt 1990: 34). Maud notices while reading his biography that he has "the desire to cut his subject down to size" (Byatt 1990: 272) and that his work is as much about Ash as it is about him. Steveker argues that *Possession* criticizes Cropper's biographical imagination as unethical, which is expressed in Cropper not being the one who discovers the "truth" about Ash and LaMotte (Steveker 2009: 28).

Besides Cropper, *Possession* features one more American character – bisexual feminist critic Leonora Stern. Just like other American characters analyzed in this paper, she is represented as loud, aggressive, and self-centered. She is so domineering that reserved Maud Bailey, a British literary critic, perceives even her unopened letter as having an "imperious and accusing air" (Byatt 1990: 152). She describes Stern as *pervasive* (Byatt 1990: 293), *single-minded*, and *zealous* (Byatt 1990: 241). Franken (2001: 89) sees her portrayal as a caricature of a lesbian feminist who follows every theoretical trend there is. Alfer and Edwards de Campos (2010: 146) see Byatt's description of her as deeply satirical. She is described as a large woman who is always dressed in such colorful clothes that she is compared to a Christmas tree (Byatt 1990: 437). Her pushy personality is perhaps best seen when she tries to seduce Maud, who eventually breaks into tears because of Leonora's aggressive approach (Byatt 1990: 343). Her character could be viewed as the stock character of a feminist in academic fiction, since similar portrayals of feminists can be found in other academic novels (Rađenović 2023: 288), yet Leonora can also come across as amusing to the reader because of her directness and blunt attitude, and her portrayal is not completely negative. For example, she agrees that the correspondence between Ash and La Motte should remain in Britain:

> I think the letters should be in the British Library. We can all have microfilms and photocopies, the problems are only sentimental. And I'd like Christabel to have

> honour in her own country and Professor Blackadder here, who's the greatest living Ash scholar, to have charge of the correspondence. I'm not acquisitive, Shushila—all I want is a chance to write the best critique of these letters once they're available. The days of cultural imperialism are over, I'm glad to say... (Byatt 1990: 436)

Also, she takes part in the plan organized to stop him from stealing the box from the Ashes' grave. While there is virtually no way to interpret Cropper other than as a villain, Leonora's character is more complex.

It is interesting to note that Cropper and Leonora are not represented as more professional or hard-working when compared to Maud Bailey and Roland Mitchel. In the context of this novel, British scholars might have fewer resources, but their academic work is depicted as even more serious when compared to the work of their American colleagues, who are portrayed as more resourceful.

4. CONCLUSION

The representation of American characters in the 20th-century British academic fiction examined here clearly reflects the complicated relationship between the two countries after World War II. While Great Britain and the USA were close allies, the British nevertheless felt uneasy in this "special relationship." American characters in the analyzed British academic novels are surprisingly similar – they are typically direct, confident, hedonistic, ambitious, and often loud. American scholars and professors are portrayed as competitive and hard-working. They seem more energetic and capable when compared to their British counterparts. In Lodge's *Changing Places*, British scholars are presented as incompetent and unambitious, whereas the Americans Froelich from Bradbury's *Stepping Westward* and Cropper from *Possession* are manipulative and ruthless. They will do anything to achieve their goals and fulfill their ambitions, and they do this with incredible ease and cunning, leaving the British characters feeling overpowered by their abilities. In general, despite the American characters' behavior at times crossing the threshold of acceptable moral boundaries, their characteristic know-how and confidence are usually described with a mix of envy and admiration in the analyzed academic novels. In comparison, despite some sympathetic traits, the British scholars and professors typically come across as naïve, insecure, and less resourceful.

The British characters presented in this period of academic fiction also regard with a mix of envy and fascination the opulence of American society and the opportunities Americans have when compared to those that are available to them in their own native country. For them, the USA is a land of plenty. Of course, it must be taken into account that these novels were published during a period when there was a greater disparity in wealth and position between these two countries. The analyzed academic novels also exhibit the apprehension Great Britain felt at being so closely connected to a country that was so much stronger and richer than itself. Correspondingly, there is a strong implication of this partnership being far from equal and the tendency of the American characters to seemingly "hold all the cards" and have a head start because of their wealth or knowledge can be interpreted as a metaphor for the relationship between the two countries.

The British fear of American dominance is most obviously embodied in these period novels in the desire of the Americans to possess British cultural heritage. For example, Bernie from Lodge's *The British Museum is Falling Down* comes to Britain to buy rare books and original manuscripts, and, at one point, he even considers buying the British Museum and transporting it to the USA. In Lodge's *Changing Places*, Zapp has the ambition to write a book about Jane Austen that would make any other research in the field useless. He wants to intellectually possess one of the most famous British authors. In Byatt's *Possession*, Mortimer Cropper's ambition to own everything connected to a famous British poet is depicted as a form of cultural imperialism. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the portrayals of Americans in the analyzed academic novels are closely connected to the anxiety many British felt about their country no longer being a global power and that they lived in an economically weakened country with diminishing influence in the world. Their desire to still feel superior in some sense to their former colony can be seen in the depiction of Americans as being less moral and even uncultured. Here was at least one arena in which Britain might claim to maintain the moral high ground and cultural hegemony. That so many American characters want to possess British culture in one way or another could be interpreted as confirmation of the power British culture still held – with the implication that Americans could advance their culture only by taking from the British.

The representation of American characters in British academic novels in the second half of the 20th century is strongly reflective of the relationship between the two countries during this period. Given that the American and British higher education systems worked closely together through numerous exchange programs at this time, it is no surprise that such interconnectedness has left its mark on the genre of academic fiction. It would seem that the depiction of American characters was strongly influenced by the British fear of American dominance and its ever-growing influence in this period. However, this fear was at the same time accompanied by a fascination with American wealth and its way of life. This combination of apprehension and strong interest helped to create many vivid characters in British academic fiction.

REFERENCES

Alfer, A. and A. J. Edwards de Campos. 2010. *A. S. Byatt: Critical Storytelling*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

Bradbury, M. 1996. *Dangerous Pilgrimages: Transatlantic Mythologies and the Novel*. New York: Viking.

Bradbury, M. 2000. *Eating People is Wrong*. London: Picador.

Bradbury, M. 2012 [1965]. *Stepping Westward*. London: Picador.

Bruce, M. K. 1999. *David Lodge*. New York: Twayne.

Byatt, A. S. 1990. *Possession: A Romance*. New York: Random House.

Dimbleby, D. 1988. *An Ocean Apart*. New York: Random House.

Franken, C. 2001. *A. S, Byatt: Art, Authorship, Creativity*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Frost, D. and M. Shea. 1986. *The rich tide: men, women, ideas, and their transatlantic impact*. London: Collins.

Hopkins, M. F. and J. W. Young. 2005. The Anglo-American 'Special Relationship'. In P. Addison *et al.* (eds.) *A Companion to Contemporary Britain 1939–2000*. Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 499–516.

Lodge, D. 1986 [1975]. *Changing Places: A Tale of Two Campuses*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Lodge, D. 1983 [1965]. *The British Museum is Falling Down*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Marr, A. 2007. *A History of Modern Britain*. London: Macmillan.

Morace, R. 1989. *The Dialogic Novels of Malcolm Bradbury and David Lodge*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press.

Moseley, M. 2007. Introductory: Definitions and Justifications. In M. Moseley (ed.) *The Academic Novel: New and Classic Essays*. Chester: University of Chester, 3–19.

Rađenović, M. 2023. *Prikaz žena u anglofonom univerzitetskom romanu u drugoj polovini 20. veka*. Novi Sad: Univerzitet u Novom Sadu. Available at: https://nardus.mpn.gov.rs/handle/123456789/21495 25 [22.4.2025].

Schwarz, B. 2001. Britain, America, and Europe. In D. Morley *et al.* (eds.) *British cultural studies: geography, nationality, and identity*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 157–169.

Showalter, E. 2005. *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and Its Discontents*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Steveker, L. 2009. *Identity and Cultural Memory in the Fiction of A. S. Byatt: Knitting the Net of Culture.* Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

SUMMARY

"THERE ARE AMERICANS CROPPING UP EVERYWHERE": AMERICAN CHARACTERS IN THE BRITISH ACADEMIC NOVELS IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20th CENTURY

This paper analyzes how political, economic, and social circumstances that shaped the world after World War II influenced the representation of American characters in British academic novels in the second half of the 20th century. Its primary goal is to find similarities in the depiction of Americans in this genre as the second half of the 20th century unfolded. Britain's global role changed significantly during this time, while its relationship with the USA became more complicated because of its increasing dependence on the States. The author examines how this new relationship was reflected in British academic novels of the time, which displayed not only a fascination with the USA but also uneasiness, as Britain was forced to be a junior partner in this alliance with a much more powerful country. Since the American and British higher education systems worked closely together through numerous exchange programs at this time, this lively exchange of ideas and people is reflected in the academic fiction. The text also examines the differences in the representation of scholars and professors who are from Great Britain and the USA. The paper analyzed American characters in four British academic novels: Malcolm Bradbury's *Stepping Westward* (1965), David Lodge's *The British Museum is Falling Down* (1965) and *Changing Places: A Tale of Two Campuses* (1975), and A. S. Byatt's *Possession:*

A Romance (1990). The novels were chosen because of their significance in the genre and because they feature prominent American characters. The study concluded that these works mirror the British anxiety over the abovementioned disparity and their interest in the booming American society. The analysis revealed that American characters have many similarities and that they reflect the British fear of American dominance. The analyzed American characters are often depicted as wanting to possess British culture, one way or the other. The author argues that such portrayals can be interpreted as confirmation of the power British culture has, with the implication that Americans can only advance their culture this way. These conclusions underscore that it also causes anxiety for the British characters because they fear the American dominance. This paper provides valuable insight into the depiction of Americans in academic fiction and shows that such characters have many similarities. However, this analysis can be expanded by analyzing a larger number of novels. Also, further analysis can include novels belonging to the 21st century.

KEYWORDS: academic novel, campus novel, higher education, stock characters.

ARTICLE INFO:
Original research article
Received: September 2, 2025
Revised: November 28, 2025
Accepted: December 8, 2025