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**‘I Write This Sitting in the Kitchen Sink’: The Novelist as Observer and Journal-Keeper in Dodie Smith’s *I Capture the Castle* and William Boyd’s *Any Human Heart***

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## **‘I Write This Sitting in the Kitchen Sink’: The Novelist as Observer and Journal-Keeper in Dodie Smith’s *I Capture the Castle* and William Boyd’s *Any Human Heart***

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I don’t really want to write any more, I just want to lie here and think. But there is something I want to capture. It has to do with the feeling...the queer separate feeling. I like seeing people when they can’t see me. I have often looked at our family through lighted windows and they seem quite different, a bit the way rooms seen in looking-glasses do. I can’t get the feeling into words – it slipped away when I tried to capture it.<sup>1</sup>

Dodie Smith, *I Capture The Castle* (1949)

We keep a journal to entrap that collection of selves that forms us, the individual human being...a true journal presents us with the more riotous and disorganized reality. The various stages of development are there, but they are jumbled up, counterposed and repeated randomly. The selves jostle for prominence in these pages...I am all these different people and all these different people are me.

Every life is both ordinary and extraordinary.<sup>2</sup>

William Boyd, *Any Human Heart* (2002)

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, Dodie. *I Capture The Castle*. London: Red Fox, 2001, pp.78.

<sup>2</sup> Boyd, William. *Any Human Heart*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 2002, p.7.

This paper examines the function of the novelist-as-observer in Dodie Smith's *I Capture The Castle* (1939) and William Boyd's *Any Human Heart* (2002). The characterisation of the novelist figure as a recorder of everyday events; as a journal-keeper; as observer of life reveals something of the process of creation, as in order to write fiction the novelist must perform such acts of observation. Therefore these examples of fictionalised writer's journals demonstrate the interplay between the everyday reality of the novelist and their creative output. *Any Human Heart* figures the novelist protagonist and narrator as an everyman or nobody, in its panorama of twentieth-century life through the diary of a failed novelist, as Logan Mountstuart observes and at times detects (and even spies) his way through a so-called ordinary life. Like Logan, *I Capture The Castle*'s Cassandra Mortmain uses her journal to filter the way she perceives reality. Her journal enables her to fulfil her dream, becoming what she imagines it is to be a writer, a dream she shares with the young Logan whose career as a novelist proves short-lived, although his journal writing ensures not only that he keeps on living, often in spite of himself, but also provides a fitting tribute to that life. The two figures discussed in this paper both define themselves, even in youth, through their writing, using it to discover truths about the world and different facets of their own writerly identities.

Cassandra Mortmain, the writer-narrator of Dodie Smith's *I Capture The Castle*, sets out to capture the everyday reality of her home-life from within, by literally writing from the kitchen sink: if the kitchen is the heart of home-life then the kitchen sink represents all that is most practical and unsentimental about it. Cassandra's admissions about her chosen workplace – 'I can't say that I am really comfortable, and there is a depressing smell of carbolic soap'<sup>3</sup> – reinforce the harshness of her threadbare existence and the reality she attempts to portray within her notebooks. She writes from the sink because 'this is the only

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<sup>3</sup> Smith, p.7.

part of the kitchen where there is any daylight left'<sup>4</sup> indicating the intention of her notebooks – to provide illumination and understanding of her chaotic life – but also because she has ‘found that sitting in a place where you have never sat before can be inspiring.’<sup>5</sup> This speaks to her willingness as a writer to put herself in unusual positions, to see the world from unlikely perspectives in order to achieve a better understanding of her subject. Her flexibility and position at the heart of the family place her writing style in opposition that of her novelist father, James Mortmain:

Years and years ago, he wrote a very unusual book called *Jacob Wrestling*, a mixture of fiction, philosophy and poetry...once we were settled here he was supposed to begin a new book. But time went on without anything happening and at last we realized that he had given up even trying to write – for years now, he has refused to discuss the possibility. Most of his life is spent in the gatehouse room, which is icy cold in winter as there is no fireplace; he just huddles over an oil-stove. As far as we know he does nothing but read detective novels from the village library.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike Cassandra, Mortmain removes himself from his family and home-life, spending all his time alone in the gatehouse. His writer's block is not conditioned by his solitude as, towards the end of the novel, Cassandra and her brother Thomas imprison him in part of the ruined castle (intending to recreate his experience in prison and so release him from this creative block) to try and force him to write again, and the experiment is successful. However it is the involvement and intervention of his children which finally spur him on, something he had not sought out during his years of inactivity. Victoria Stewart observes the differing approaches of father and daughter to writing, stating that Cassandra's success in writing is down to her

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pp.8-10.

remaining ‘enmeshed in the life of the home, both the setting and the source for her writing.’<sup>7</sup> Writing from the kitchen sink, Cassandra literally (perhaps unknowingly) participates in the domesticity of women’s writing from experience, what Maurice Beebe terms ‘the sacred fount,’<sup>8</sup> whereas her father’s self-enforced isolation places him within the oppositional ivory tower of the traditionally masculine tormented artist. His status within the family is upheld by make-believe – what Cassandra terms ‘the fiction that he is still a famous writer.’<sup>9</sup> The near-mythical position he inhabits, both for the family and to the reader, is simultaneously enhanced and undermined by his own admission and the equation of his non-existent work with fable; when Cassandra asks him how his writing is going he responds:

You’re too old to believe in fairy tales...it’s time this legend that I’m a writer ceased.<sup>10</sup>

Mortmain’s ‘work’ comes to be defined by its fictionality, and although Simon twice compares him to God<sup>11</sup> the comparison is used to excuse or explain away his eccentric behaviour. In contrast to this representation of her father’s writing and working process, Cassandra’s narrative, told as a journal or writer’s notebook, a version of what constitutes source material. Firstly, she writes to gain the experience of writing – ‘I am writing this journal partly to practice my newly acquired speed-writing and partly to teach myself how to write a novel’<sup>12</sup> – but, through her writing she is able to demonstrate the importance of everyday experience for a writer – ‘I only want to write. And there’s no college for that except life.’<sup>13</sup> It is Cassandra’s role as an observer – of her home and family life; of society

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<sup>7</sup> Stewart, Victoria. ‘Realism, Modernism and the Representation of Memory in Dodie Smith’s *I Capture The Castle*,’ *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Fall, 2008), p.331.

<sup>8</sup> Beebe, Maurice. *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero from Goethe to Joyce*. New York: New York University Press, 1964, p.13.

<sup>9</sup> *Smith*, p.20.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, pp.52-53.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, pp.74;402.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p.8.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p.406.

and the world around her; of the various traditions, customs and culture that define and impose social order – that both inspire her to write and enable her writing to effectively reflect what she sees and thus provide insight. Writing about her reality changes her perceptions, both of it and her place within it. In *The Writer's Roles* (1985), Elizabeth Penfield and Nancy Wicker discuss the writer's powers of observation in conjunction with the uses of the writer's diary, asking:

How then does one develop the ability to bring order out of sensory and intellectual chaos? Keeping a journal, a diary, or a notebook is one way many writers collect details and explore their external and internal worlds...notebooks not only allow writers to record information for future use and to explore personal feelings and conflicts, but they also enable writers to practice the craft of writing.<sup>14</sup>

Cassandra's notebooks, in which she has taught herself how to write a novel, have become transformed into the finished novel, *I Capture The Castle*. Certainly, according to Smith's biographer Valerie Grove, Smith's 'original typescript read 'I Capture The Castle by Cassandra Mortmain''<sup>15</sup> (something her publisher refused to endorse), supporting the self-begetting nature of the novel. Smith's first attempt at autobiography<sup>16</sup> employed the style and voice of an adolescent girl's journal, although written when Smith was in her thirties, suggesting the ease with which she inhabited this character, as she did later with Cassandra, whom Grove states was, 'in most respects, pure Dodie.'<sup>17</sup> Smith's ability to channel different

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<sup>14</sup> Penfield, Elizabeth and Nancy Wicker, *The Writer's Roles: Readings With Rhetoric*. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1985, pp.14-5.

<sup>15</sup> Grove, Valerie. *Dear Dodie: The Life of Dodie Smith*. London: Pimlico, 2002, p.178.

<sup>16</sup> Unpublished notebooks entitled 'An Eye to Posterity,' later revised into four volumes *Look Back with Love: a Manchester Childhood* (1974), *Look Back with Mixed Feelings* (1978), *Look Back with Astonishment* (1979) and *Look Back with Gratitude* (1985). See Grove, especially pp.17-18 and p.296.

<sup>17</sup> Grove, p.164.

facets of herself is demonstrated through Cassandra's own reflection of her disparate selves; at one point she observes:

All day I have been two people – the me imprisoned in yesterday and the me out here on the mound; and now there is a third me trying to get in – the me in what is going to happen next.<sup>18</sup>

Like Logan, Cassandra's journal-keeping allows her to reflect on the co-existence within the diary, of past, present, and future selves, all of whom are different. She also recognises the differences between her writing self and the self who experiences life; for example she tells us:

While I have been writing I have lived in the past, the light of it has been all around me – first the golden light of autumn, then the silver light of spring and then the strange light, grey but exciting, in which I see the historic past. But now I have come back to earth and rain is beating on the attic window, an icy draught is blowing up the staircase.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, she separates her thoughts and feelings into those which are pleasant and happy in writing and the past, and her realisation of reality in the cold and unforgiving elements. Although the matter of her journal is taken from her daily observations of those around her, her working of the source material becomes more real for her – at one point she writes 'it is most strange and wretched coming back to the present after being in this journal so long.'<sup>20</sup> For Cassandra the journal becomes her method of coping with reality; it filters both what she experiences and what she observes into a manageable form, one over which she maintains the

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<sup>18</sup> Smith, p.166.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.48.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.306.

control she cannot maintain over life. Often she prefers to write when she should act; when her sister Rose cries Cassandra recognises what she ought to do:

As she only cries about once a year I really ought to have gone over and comforted her, but I wanted to set it all down here. I begin to see that writers are liable to become callous.<sup>21</sup>

In making such observations about herself her writing also observes some of the conventions of the confessional narrative – ‘is it wrong of me...perhaps I ought even to feel guilty’<sup>22</sup> – containing secrets kept from her family. Stewart remarks that the speed-writing Cassandra employs in her journal is like a code, meaning the fact that ‘other protagonists are unable to read what Cassandra has written adds both to the sense of her being a spy or outsider within her own home and to the intimacy between the narrator and the reader, who is privy to the “decoded” text.’<sup>23</sup> It also preserves a strict privacy over her writing that cannot be infiltrated, leaving her free to confess her deepest secrets; this in turn causes the journal to become a tool for self-analysis – ‘perhaps if I make myself write I shall find out what is wrong with me’<sup>24</sup> – and even of exorcism – ‘I had better write it out of my system.’<sup>25</sup> Cassandra also uses her journal as a form of escapism from the bleak reality of her family life, admitting that writing it makes her feel better despite the trials of life:

I think it worthy of note that I never felt happier in my life – despite sorrow for father, pity for Rose, embarrassment about Stephen’s poetry and no justification for hope as regards our family’s general outlook. Perhaps it is

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.13.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p.239.

<sup>23</sup> Stewart, p.331.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, p.225.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p.115.



because I have satisfied my creative urge; or it may be due to the thought of eggs for tea.<sup>26</sup>

The admission at the end of this statement is characteristic of Cassandra's honest and slightly naïve sense of humour. She finds reality easy to depict, as opposed to writing fictions – 'with stories even a page can take me hours, but the truth seems to flow out as fast as I can get it down.'<sup>27</sup> These feelings are emphasised by a comparison of her writing materials at various points in her family's changing circumstances. Her journals are broken down into three notebooks: 'The Sixpenny Book,' 'The Shilling Book,' and 'The Two Guinea Book' – the last of which, along with a fountain pen, are a gift from Simon. Cassandra, although she romanticises her improved circumstances, admits that she wrote more fluently when her writing implements were more humble:

A scarlet pen and a blue and gold leather bound book – what could be more inspiring? But I seemed to get on better with a stump of pencil and Stephen's fat, shilling exercise book.<sup>28</sup>

This speaks to a nostalgia for the more simple past, one that was honest because Rose had not yet had to deceive herself and her family into believing that she genuinely loved Simon and did not only desire his fortune. Although Cassandra is not aware of this truth at the time she writes the above, her writer's intuition knows something is wrong and makes her writing more difficult.

I go backwards and forwards, recapturing the past, wondering about the future – and, most unreasonably, I find myself longing for the past more than for the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p.17.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, pp.33-34.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p.225.

future...I count the blessings that have descended on us; but I still seem to fancy the past most.<sup>29</sup>

In her longing for the past, for what has already been written and recorded in her journal, she expresses a sadness that what she perceives as the climax of the action has already passed – Rose has won her fairytale future. Whilst she was still in pursuit of this goal, everyday life had become exciting as a novel: the sisters' only models for romance are in the novels of Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters.<sup>30</sup> Arguably Cassandra believes that the happy-ever-after of the novel has almost been reached and her nostalgic desire for the past is a desire for what she believes is the now dissipated action. It is also a reaction to a loss of her sister and the subsequent break-up of her day-to-day life, as well as an impending loss of childish preoccupations and even innocence, which cause her to dwell on the nostalgia of the past. By the end of the novel she recognises how much she has learnt and so changed, but equally how much she has still to experience. Following her discussion with Simon on her father's work and their goodbye, she concludes:

I don't intend to go on with this journal; I have grown out of wanting to write about myself.<sup>31</sup>

Her growing maturity is highlighted by an understanding of her father's style of writing, something Stewart suggests acts both as conflict and dialogue with the realist nature of her own journals. Simon's explanation of what he terms her father's 'Enigmatism' proves to Cassandra the inadequacy of her journal form – 'can you always express just what you want to express...does everything go into nice tidy words?'<sup>32</sup> Simon stresses the importance of

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p.32.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p.408.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p.404.

‘creation as discovery’<sup>33</sup> and expounds that ‘art could state very little – that its whole business was to evoke responses.’<sup>34</sup> Cassandra’s decision to end her journal and her story has been impacted by the realisation that it is no longer enough for her to represent reality – or that she now realises the impossibility of representing reality. Whilst she may not adhere to her father’s Enigmatism, she now sees that, although ‘I could never explain how the image and the reality merge, and how they somehow beautify each other,’<sup>35</sup> this process of expressing her feelings is the type of artistic creation she is compelled towards.

Unlike Cassandra, Logan continues to keep his journals throughout his lifetime, recording his involvement in or else his feelings towards many of the most important events of the twentieth-century. Logan’s role on the sidelines of history seem to be governed by what Nicholas Blincoe, in his review for the *New Statesman*, called the ‘inescapable randomness’<sup>36</sup> of human life. Boyd appears to reject notions such as fate or destiny, as these imply a sense of order and of trajectory: writing in *The Guardian*, four years after the publication of *Any Human Heart*, he explains his choice of the journal form for the novel: the journal or diary ‘is the opposite of a shapely narrative, written, as it is, moment to moment. The future is a void: we don’t know if this decision we have taken will be life-changing.’<sup>37</sup> The journals, which intermittently record Logan’s life from 1923, when he is seventeen, until his death in 1991, have been edited, annotated and presented to the reader by an unknown hand, which may or may not be that of William Boyd. Boyd is never mentioned within the novel, only appearing as a name on the book jacket. Boyd’s previous work, the hoax biography *Nat Tate: An American Artist, 1928-1960* (1998) first introduces Logan as a friend and confidant of Nat

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p.402.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.404.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Blincoe, Nicholas. “History as Farce.” *The New Statesman*, 1<sup>st</sup> April (2002), accessed 09/10/13 <http://www.newstatesman.com/node/142656>

<sup>37</sup> Boyd, William. “Nice One, Cyril.” *The Guardian*, 4<sup>th</sup> November (2006), accessed 09/10/13 <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/nov/04/featuresreviews.guardianreview3>

Tate; it is only here that Boyd states he is editing the journals,<sup>38</sup> although, in his acknowledgements he thanks one Gudrun Ingridstottir as ‘administrator of the Estate of Logan Mountstuart.’<sup>39</sup> This name does not appear again within Logan’s diaries or even in the index to the work. In the earlier work Boyd refers to Logan as:

A curious and forgotten figure in the annals of twentieth century literary life. ‘A man of letters’ is probably the only description which does justice to his strange career – by turns acclaimed or wholly indigent. Biographer, belle-lettriste, editor, failed novelist, he was perhaps most successful at happening to be in the right place at the right time during most of the century, and his journal – a huge, copious document – will probably prove his lasting memorial.<sup>40</sup>

This summation thus negates the final statement made in *Any Human Heart*: ‘there were no obituaries,’<sup>41</sup> for even though Logan’s star had long since waned, his journals provide the reader with a fitting tribute to his life. The 2010 television adaptation of *Any Human Heart* reinforces this sentiment in its final shot – a close-up on a bookshop table display of Logan’s opus, *Any Human Heart: The Intimate Journals of Logan Mountstuart*; Boyd’s name does not appear on these mocked-up copies of the journals.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of *Any Human Heart* is the interplay between the real, historical events and characters, and those events and characters that are fictional. Logan’s meetings and interactions with various well-known historical figures<sup>42</sup> place him, as a fictitious character, within the context of the real-world: thus suggesting the very fine line

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<sup>38</sup> Boyd, William. *Nat Tate: An American Artist, 1928-1960*. London: Bloomsbury, 2011, p.11.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p.5.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p.11.

<sup>41</sup> *Any Human Heart*, p.490.

<sup>42</sup> Including The Duke of Windsor and Wallis Simpson, Ian Fleming, Evelyn Waugh, Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway, Anthony Powell and Henry Yorke, members of the Baader-Meinhof gang, Picasso, Jackson Pollock, Frank O’Hara.

between fiction and reality. He conceivably *could* have existed and fallen into obscurity whilst those he knew – Waugh, Powell, Yorke, Hemingway, Fleming – went on to notoriety. Arguably, by positioning Logan within actual historical events and amongst ‘real’ historical figures, Boyd is commenting upon the nature of artistic celebrity and the status of obscure writers and artists; those who rubbed shoulders with fame and recognition but now seem never to have existed. This is exemplified by the scene in which Wallis Simpson asks Logan to sign their visitors’ book – ‘I picked up the pen, pretended to write my name, but she had drifted away.’<sup>43</sup> That he declines to do as requested by Wallis,<sup>44</sup> and so does not leave a signature as evidence of his presence, creates the possibility that he *could* have been there, he just chose not to leave any proof or trace of his attendance. In his article ‘Nice One, Cyril’ Boyd cites Cyril Connolly and William Gerhardie as influences for the character of Logan. Gerhardie in particular he refers to as someone who had had ‘a huge influence on Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, and Anthony Powell... I began to toy with the idea of writing a novel about such a writer: a minor talent but one who, through the rickety, roller-coaster life he led, would be somehow exemplary of the human condition.’<sup>45</sup>

Boyd seems at pains to illustrate the ordinariness of Logan as both a writer and a human being, which the diary form accentuates as it allows him no foresight, no intuition about the future; it simply records historical events and how they impacted upon Logan, offering no evaluation of the historical moment itself. Despite the upper-middle class upbringing of his family, school-life, Oxford education, and early years as a writer of some renown, Richard Eder writes that ‘ultimately Logan is a stoic Everyman, his inborn snobberies weathered away through years of misadventuring and misapprehending.’<sup>46</sup> Also writing in *The New York*

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p.221.

<sup>44</sup> He is asked not to sign by David Eccles, p.220.

<sup>45</sup> Boyd. “Nice One, Cyril.”

<sup>46</sup> Eder, Richard. “Evelyn Waugh Kissed Me.” *The New York Times*, February 16<sup>th</sup> (2003), accessed 09/10/2013 <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/16/books/evelyn-waugh-kissed-me.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>

*Times*, Michiko Kakutani describes Logan as ‘an average fellow...[who] stays firmly on the sidelines,’<sup>47</sup> which has caused David Christie to associate Logan with another literary character who chronicles the twentieth century from the sidelines – Anthony Powell’s narrator Nicholas Jenkins from *A Dance to The Music of Time*. Christie disparages Logan as a character in comparison with Jenkins (admittedly he is writing in *The Anthony Powell Society Newsletter*, thus facilitating a degree of bias), pointing to Logan’s self-interest as opposed to Jenkins, whom Christie finds was ‘very interested in other people who, in turn, seemed to like him...Logan Mountstuart ended his rather empty life sans partner, friends, or even country, whereas Nick, in *Hearing Secret Harmonies*, is firmly embedded in his society as a respected and productive member.’<sup>48</sup> In Nick Jenkins, Powell designated a character whose explicit purpose would be to observe the world through his network of friends and associates; he is a novelist-narrator of a vast novel cycle whereas what we see of Logan is all relayed through his more limited personal journals: the different forms necessitate alternative handling of narrative viewpoint in relation to additional characters and the events depicted in the novels. Although the diary form is almost necessarily solipsistic, Logan does demonstrate a measure of feeling for his fellow man, reinforcing his status as Everyman. For example, in 1938, writing about the impending war, he reflects that:

I’m sure my German equivalent – the writer in his thirties, with a wife and child on the way – can’t feel any different from me, can’t want to see his cities bombed, his continent ravaged by war.<sup>49</sup>

Throughout the novel Logan’s moderate success as a novelist is matched against that of his oldest friend, Peter Scabius, in whom Boyd sets up a foil to Logan by making Scabius a

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<sup>47</sup> Kakutani, Michiko. “Books of the Times; A Witness to a Century, Just Looking Out for Himself.” *The New York Times*, 14<sup>th</sup> February (2003), accessed 09/10/13 <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/14/books/books-of-the-times-a-witness-to-a-century-just-looking-out-for-himself.html>

<sup>48</sup> Christie, David. “Any Human Heart.” *The Anthony Powell Society Newsletter*, Issue 12 (Autumn, 2003), p.4.

<sup>49</sup> *Any Human Heart*, p.203.

fellow writer, but of a very different type. Logan's literary pretensions are evident from his early diaries but he is surprised to find that his friend also harbours similar ambitions. Although he has already declared his intentions to write, stating unapologetically at his Oxford interview – 'the only reason I want to come to this depressing place is that it will give me time to write'<sup>50</sup> – he subsequently plays down this dream to Scabius:

I said I'd probably end up a schoolteacher and asked Peter what he dreamed of becoming. 'A famous novelist,' he said. 'Like Michael Arlen or Arnold Bennett with his yacht.' This took me back somewhat. Peter a writer? The mind does boggle.<sup>51</sup>

Significantly Scabius prefaces his interest in being a novelist with the word 'famous' which intimates his true desire of celebrity and money, rather than artistic expression. Logan's own success as a novelist in the early thirties is largely concluded before Scabius has even begun his literary career; he makes an inauspicious start as a writer, 'working as a sub-editor on the *Reading Evening News*'<sup>52</sup> in 1929. However, by 1935 he has written his first novel:

*Thursday, 26 September*

At lunch today Peter [Scabius] presented me with a copy of his thriller – or his 'Teccie', as he referred to it with disparaging modesty. It's called *Beware of the Dog*, published by Brown and Almay next week. Just a bit of fun really, he said, not in your league.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p.33.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p.53.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p.121.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p.173.

The novel sells ‘almost 10,000 copies’<sup>54</sup> by the following March, and by 1939 Scabius has written a further two, upon which Logan comments, ‘he is, by all surprising accounts, a far more successful writer than I am. I’m glad to say I do not possess a scintilla of envy for him.’<sup>55</sup> This remark is almost certainly genuine as it is written shortly after one of the happiest moments of his own life, the birth of his daughter. Logan is also fully aware of Scabius’s own unhappy marriage in comparison to his own, ‘I’m so happy...that I think I might explode.’<sup>56</sup> Scabius goes on to have a string of failed marriages and of bestselling novels, eventually being knighted for services to literature in 1977. At this point Logan, who has been living alone and in almost abject poverty, expresses:

To be candid, I felt a pang of envy before indifference and reality closed in again. It was not so much envy, in fact (I’ve never envied Peter’s success – he’s too much of a fraud and an egomaniac to provoke real envy), it was more an impromptu insight into my condition vis-à-vis his.<sup>57</sup>

Logan has, throughout his life, been realistic enough about his own literary abilities in comparison to Scabius’s to feel jealous of his career. Despite the array of famous historical authors Logan meets, he maintains a closer friendship to the correspondingly fictional Scabius throughout his life. Despite Scabius’s success and the ‘newspapers...full of long obituaries and respectful assessments’<sup>58</sup> upon his death, he is in fact ostensibly no more successful than Logan in comparison to the cast of real-life authors who make cameos in the novel: both Logan and Scabius’s failures or successes are thrown into relief by their shared fictionality when viewed alongside the actual authors with whom they share the novel. Christopher Tayler, in his review of *Any Human Heart*, comments on Logan’s mediocrity:

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p.177.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p.204.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p.199.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p.430.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p.459.



Mountstuart's flimsiness as a novelistic character is supposed to make the book more realistic by acknowledging that personality is nebulous in itself. In practice, though, it has the opposite effect. His inconsistencies are a matter of convenience – an excuse for him to meet Hemingway, Joyce, Woolf and all the rest – and for too much of the time, Mountstuart is revealed for what he is: a device allowing Boyd to write about 20th-century celebrities in the pastiche idiom of a contemporary observer.<sup>59</sup>

Whilst these assertions may be true to an extent, I would argue that Boyd does much more with the character than Tayler gives him credit for. As an insubstantial novelist character Logan is certainly used as a device, but one who performs multiple functions: he allows Boyd to comment upon the fleeting nature of literary fame as well as demonstrating the innate ordinariness of literary lives, often elsewhere seen to be a great deal more extraordinary. It also enables him to reflect upon how the significance of personal everyday events, as well as the historically significant ones, impact upon the psyche of a writer; addressing issues of artistic expression in both the private and public sides of the author. The lack of engagement with his society that Christie observed in his comparison of Jenkins and Logan is justified by a statement made by Logan at the opening of his sixth journal, the African Journal. He begins:

**1969**

*Sunday, 20 July*

David Gascoyne once told me that the only point of keeping a journal was to concentrate on the personal, the diurnal minutiae, and forget the great and significant events in the world at large. The newspapers cover all that anyway,

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<sup>59</sup> Tayler, Christopher. "A Bit of a Lush." *London Review of Books*, Vol. 24, No. 10 (23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2003), p.21.

he said. We don't want to know that 'Hitler invaded Poland' – we're more curious about what you had for breakfast.<sup>60</sup>

Despite Logan's decay in regard to his fame, fortune, hopes for the future, and perhaps even what literary talent he once had, he determines to keep on writing. Following his discovery of the deaths of his wife and daughter his cousin tells him 'you're a writer, for God's sake...you've got to keep on writing'<sup>61</sup> – illustrating an awareness of the importance, for the writer, to go on being able to define oneself through work. Significantly, after a period of mental instability following a suicide attempt, Logan resumes his journal (after a gap of over two years) with the declaration: 'so here I am in New York, writing again, working again, fucking again, living again'<sup>62</sup> – placing writing first and foremost amongst his other activities. That he persists in writing until the day of his death underlines the importance of writing to him, his journal is perhaps the one thing that has kept him going through the traumas of his life. In his penultimate and most dispirited journal, the Second London Journal, he acknowledges part of his purpose in continuing with the diary:

I fear it will become a documentation of one writer's decline...these final acts in a writer's life usually go unrecorded because the reality is too shaming, too sad, too banal.<sup>63</sup>

Although Logan has many years of life still before him at the point of writing, and his situation does improve, this self-analysis tallies with Boyd's intention to represent the very ordinary life of a writer: the above affirmation may well be seen to stand for the function and purpose of the novel as a whole.

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<sup>60</sup> *Any Human Heart*, p.376.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, p.281.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, p.302.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, p.398.

Both Logan and Cassandra keep journals in order to record their impressions of the world around them so that they might come to understand more about this world but also about the myriad selves which make up the individual. These two characters define themselves through their writing – Logan throughout his life, although his success as a novelist is transitory, whilst Cassandra acts out her desire to become a novelist within the pages of her notebooks. The diaries they keep represent the significance of interaction between real life and the novel form – which feed each other – and demonstrate the process of turning the raw material of everyday life into fiction: the role of life in creative writing as well as the role writing plays within their lives. The significance of this relationship between everyday life and writing in these novels acts to dispel some of the mythology attached to the process of artistic creation which has held the artist as occupying a position within the ivory tower, distanced from life. This is especially evident in the dichotomy enacted between Cassandra and her father and their very different approaches to the writing process, as both she and Logan establish the premise of the writer as working with and from life – the sacred fount. In showing the very ordinariness of any human life the narratives reveal the practical and unromanticised working life of the writer, leading the reader to question some of the notions they might have about what it means to be a novelist.

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