

HEATHER BECK
Jeremy Treglown in Conversation

Novelist and critic Heather Beck continues her occasional series of interviews with editors.

HEATHER BECK: *Before we discuss your work as editor of The Times Literary Supplement (TLS) it would be interesting to know something about your early development. For example, what was your family like?*

JEREMY TREGLOWN: My father was a Methodist minister until I was about thirteen, when he became an Anglican priest. Methodist ministers are peripatetic, so we moved around quite a bit. There was a strong chapel tradition on both sides of the family. The Treglowns were Cornish miners and mining engineers, but my father's mother was the daughter of a minister, Thomas Dickinson, who did a stint as national president of the United Methodist Church. My mother's family, too, were enthusiastic Methodists. They were East London and Essex people - her father was a supervisor at a galvanising works in Blackwall.

My mother worked in a public library as a young woman - very young, that is: she left school at sixteen and was married at eighteen. In 1944, soon after they got engaged, my father, who had become an infantry chaplain, was blown up and blinded. So the Second World War was very much a presence in my sister's and my upbringing. We grew up surrounded by what I suppose would now be called post-traumatic stress syndrome. Our father, who apart from being blinded in the explosion had also lost an arm and suffered perforated eardrums, eventually developed a form of epilepsy: a belated after-effect of his injuries. Reasonably enough, he was prone to what were to a child terrible depressions and rages, though he was also charming and funny and extremely affectionate, if demanding. He was charismatic - a powerful preacher in the pulpit and on the wireless, a builder of new churches. His work, as well as his moods, kept my mother very busy. She read the newspaper to him, drove him or walked with him to meetings and hospitals and on door-to-door pastoral visits, and kept notes about everyone they called on, to look up next time they went. She was, and is, immensely energetic and optimistic, and needed to be.

You said that you moved around quite a bit. Would you mind telling us about where you grew up and your early education?

I was born in Holyhead, where my father had his first job after being blown up. A few years later we moved to South Wales, to Newbridge, a mining village in the Valleys. I went to the local primary school there until I was nine, when we went to Bristol, to Bedminster, a poor area near the docks and Wills's cigarette factory. My parents were responsible for getting the first church built in Withywood, a vast new

council estate nearby. Then Hanham, on the other side of the town, where Dad became the Anglican curate before having a parish of his own in north Wiltshire. Earlier, I'd got a scholarship at Bristol Grammar School, a traditional boys' day school which was founded in Henry VIII's reign and thought rather a lot of itself. I liked it there at first but became unhappy in my teens and made an increasing nuisance of myself. They slung me out in the end.

Did you read a lot as a child?

I learned to read before I went to school. Every week, my mother took my sister and me to the local library to change our books. And both my parents were frequenters of second-hand bookshops. What my father most wanted to be was a poet. He had a few poems published, in *John o'London's* and elsewhere, and he always cared about poetry, made me read it as a child, and liked to talk about it to the end of his life. When I was quite small he got me to read 'Kubla Khan' aloud to him, beating his stump on the chair-arm to show me the rhythm. Both my parents' main recreation was reading. It was a far from silent activity, my father's fingers scratching the braille pages, my mother's knitting needles rattling away, both of them reading bits out to each other, laughing at any jokes or exclaiming against things they disagreed with. They were permissive about our reading as children, in the sense that they thought that to read anything was better than reading nothing.

Were there any particular books or authors that you especially liked?

Standard schoolboy tastes of the time: I read all Richmal Crompton's William books, all the Jennings books by Anthony Buckeridge, all Enid Blyton's Famous Five books, all the Biggles books by W.E.Johns; Conan Doyle, Buchan and so on. I never had much appetite for the more literary kids' fiction that was recommended at school: *Swallows and Amazons* kind of thing. But I was soaked in the Bible and the hymn book, because of church every Sunday, as well as daily school prayers. And I read poetry. After we went to Bristol when I was nine, I was miserably nostalgic for South Wales. I found Wilfred Owen in an anthology and thought he must be Welsh because of his name. At first, I didn't realise they were war poems, and imagined that what he was describing was life down the pit: 'Bent double, like old beggars under sacks, / Knock-kneed, coughing like hags' - all that.

Did your interests in reading ever lead you to try any creative writing yourself?

Yes, like my father for a while I wanted to be a poet. In my early teens, with my nostalgia for Wales, I thought that being a poet could only mean being Dylan Thomas, which didn't do my writing much good, or anything else for that matter. Later on, I made a brief stab at playwriting and had something done by the BBC. Soon afterwards, Christopher Reid asked me how the plays were going. I said lugubriously

that I'd found I had no imagination and no style of my own. He said, 'You should persist. You could found a school.' It was a good joke, but that school already existed: there are so many of the people Elizabeth Bowen described as 'non-essential writers' around that I decided that if I didn't absolutely have to do it, I'd better stop.

Have your own efforts at writing poetry and drama changed how you approach other authors' works?

Of course. Trying something, however feebly, gives you insights that you wouldn't otherwise have had, especially into what's difficult to do and what less so. It's the best argument for courses in creative writing such as the one I got started here at Warwick: they may not be able to make people into writers, but they definitely make them better readers.

How would you describe your personal tastes now? Have there been any particular authors or intellectual developments, for example, that influenced you?

More and more I read fiction as a route into history: I'm reading Arturo Barea's *The Forging of a Rebel* at the moment, for example, an autobiographical trilogy about early twentieth-century Spain, published in the 1940s. Like a lot of my generation I'm particularly fascinated by anything written or set in the Second World War, including books from Axis countries and invaded countries - Michel Tournier, Natalia Ginzburg, Vasily Grossman - but also of course British and American work on the same theme, including by my contemporaries. Of current fiction, I seem to like more American than British, these days: Philip Roth's amazing recent stuff, especially *American Pastoral*, Richard Ford, Jonathan Franzen. Then there are English-American hybrids like Martin Amis, who's really an adoptive American writer working on English subjects, and Lee Child, a man from Coventry who has gone the whole way, moving to the USA and setting each of his thrillers in a different, vividly described American region and idiom.

As for intellectual developments, I'm less interested in categorisations or schools than in individual works and writers. Imaginative writers, artists of all kinds, want to do something of their own - to write like themselves, in Michael Hofmann's phrase - and not to be lumped together on the basis of what they see as superficial resemblances. I guess like most people my age I've been influenced by Marxism, Freud, feminism, postcolonialism, but in my case more by individuals than -isms: Yosef Yerushalmi on Jewish culture, for example. Most of all by people who respond to the differentness of each book or writer: V.S. Pritchett, especially, whom I've been writing about lately, and, of living critics, people like Seamus Heaney and Tom Paulin. Imaginative writers are still the best critics.

The biggest single influence on my reading, though, in terms of sheer numbers of successful hits, is my wife, Holly Eley, who has read everything and whose taste is almost unerring.

Before you began working on the TLS, you had a series of academic appointments, and, of course, now you're a professor at Warwick. Would you mind summarising your experiences?

I went late to university because I'd screwed up at school. First, perhaps perversely in the circumstances, I went to a teacher training college for three years (1964-7), Saltley, in Birmingham. It was an Anglican college, a good, solid, unpretentious place of a kind that no longer exists. I began to catch up with some reading there, while getting a very practical initiation into teaching, including half a term in a secondary school in Handsworth, already a depressed area. All the houses there were being knocked down: you walked along street after street of façades with empty windows. All that added to my mistrust of ivory towers, but while I was at Saltley I got a scholarship to Oxford and, despite some initial suspicion of the place, soon came to love it. It was a revelation to meet people my own age who were not only enthusiastic about books but really discriminating and knowledgeable: Hermione Lee and Jenny Uglow, for example, with whom my girlfriend and I, among others, shared a flat for a couple of years

I spent most of my time at Oxford acting but scraped a First, which enabled me to go back and do graduate work - a B.Litt. on Restoration poetry. That turned into a graduate scholarship at Hertford College, and then a lectureship at Lincoln College from 1973 to 76. I was married by then, to Rona Bower (now Sulkin). We had met in an OUDS *Romeo and Juliet* - she was Juliet, I was Mercutio. We were very lucky in our Oxford friends: people like Julian Barnes, who was working somewhat resentfully at the *OED*, the director Rick Stroud, Craig Raine and his wife Anne Pasternak Slater, with whom I taught some enjoyable joint classes, Humphrey and Mari Carpenter, later Tim Hilton, Ian McEwan....

From Lincoln I went to a job at University College London in 1976. Karl Miller had recently succeeded Frank Kermode as Northcliffe Professor and on the staff were A.S. Byatt, John Sutherland, Dan Jacobson, Michael Mason, Rosemary Ashton - clever, imaginative, stimulating people. There was no tolerance of jargon or affectation, and there were plenty of jokes. Karl himself couldn't have been more bracing, and I loved his combination of morose comic scorn with a really tender and passionate responsiveness to his reading, and still do. It was a great place to work.

An issue in Grub Street and the Ivory Tower, a book you edited with Bridget Bennett, is the tension between journalism and literary scholarship, the implication being that journalism is often viewed as a poor relation. Did you find any of that at UCL?

On the contrary. That book is more about the many links than the tensions, by the way. While I was at UCL, I wrote regularly for the back half of the *New Statesman* and for other literary magazines like Ian Hamilton's *New Review*, and also for *Plays and Players*, an excellent theatre magazine edited then by Michael Coveney: Geoffrey

Hill's version of Ibsen's *Brand* was one of the productions he sent me to. Sometimes, too, I deputised for Irving Wardle as theatre critic of *The Times*. The department was very tolerant of all that. In academia generally the late 1970s were the period, of course, of a huge upsurge in literary theory, but English departments which had a strong journalistic and/or 'creative writing' side were less prone than others to the more obscurantist excesses. Of course there was something to be learned from structuralism and deconstruction and more still from political approaches. For example, I found Marxism a counterbalance to some of the 'practical critical' aestheticism I had imbibed as a schoolboy and an undergraduate: you know, 'Here's a text, vibrate in front of it.' The Marxist critics I belatedly first read in the mid 1970s were usefully historicist and contextual, and also combined theoretical scholarship with a respect for journalism: its wide readership and engagement with current concerns. Reviewing, after all, is the most practical kind of criticism there can be.

You've described some of your personal literary tastes. When you worked for the TLS, were there any tensions between these and the paper's broader interests?

Much of the value of the *TLS* lies in its diversity and openness to different points of view. The paper comes out weekly, 52 weeks a year, 50,000 or so words in every issue: it's a big operation, and it would be no good if editors only published what they could have written themselves. There were obviously pieces that we decided not to publish, but because the arguments were weak or obscure or boring, not - as the authors sometimes liked to believe - because we didn't agree with them. An editor is an impresario. You're trying to put on a serious high-level entertainment, week after week. You don't have to be the lion tamer or the trapeze artist yourself. You don't even have to be convinced by all your conjurors and jugglers. But you make sure that those acts happen, and that they're done as well as they can be, both in themselves and in relation to each other.

When you first started at the TLS you were assistant editor for two years from the beginning of 1980. How did you become involved?

I may be the only person to have given up tenure to find himself working for Rupert Murdoch. *The Times* and its Supplements were closed for a year in 1979, because of an industrial dispute which soon led to the Murdoch takeover. By the time the *TLS* resumed publication, several of the staff had left, among them Victoria Glendinning and Mary-Kay Wilmers, and Mary-Kay had started up the *London Review of Books* with Karl Miller as editor. John Gross, who was editor of the *TLS* then, had seen some of my reviews, and during the closure got me to write for dummy issues which might have appeared but didn't. When the paper came back, he invited me to take over the arts section, then called 'Commentary', which had previously been edited by Mary-Kay. I asked Karl if I could have a year off from UCL to see how it went, and he generously agreed. So in effect I was swapped for Mary-Kay.

Could you tell us a bit of what your job was like at the TLS working on the Commentary section?

I was hired to expand the arts coverage. John Gross gave me a very free hand. I enlarged the section over all, including art exhibitions and opera and ballet, for example, but I took the brief as especially applying to narrative performance: theatre, movies, some TV. The section increased to three to four pages a week, in the middle of the paper. It wasn't hard to get extremely good people to write for it: everyone wanted the tickets. Subbing their copy was more enjoyable than marking students' essays, and I was sharing a remote, boisterous corner of the office at 200 Gray's Inn Road with Blake Morrison, Antonia Phillips, Galen Strawson and John Ryle. I had a great time. It was much less fun after I became editor.

Did you make any innovations to the section at that time?

Particularly to the theatre coverage. In other papers one or two critics write all the theatre reviews, so the *TLS* had an opportunity to do something unique by drawing on specialists: Shakespeareans, experts on seventeenth-century French drama, classicists. I got Oswyn Murray, a classics don at Balliol, to review Howard Brenton's *The Romans in Britain*, and A.L.Rowse to do *Cats*. James Fenton said in *You Were Marvellous* that we had pioneered a new form of theatre criticism.

After John Gross left the TLS, you succeeded him as editor for nine years, from January 1982 to the end of 1990. What was the appointment process?

It's a long time ago, but my memory is that the first round was handled by the then managing director of *The Times*, Gerald Long. He interviewed some of the people who had been nominated or had applied, and asked a few of us to put in writing what we would like to do with the *TLS* if we were given the job. Then he made a shortlist, which I think consisted of Claire Tomalin, Paul Barker, John Sturrock - who had for many years been the *TLS*'s deputy editor - and me.

Murdoch had only recently bought the company and no one expected that he would take a personal interest in this - from his point of view - tiny appointment. There was a long silence after the first round of interviews, and I hadn't applied in the first place, so I wasn't expecting anything, though I had vague fantasies of being offered a TV station in Australia. I expected Claire Tomalin to be appointed. She was then the books editor of the *Sunday Times*, and had previously been at the *New Statesman*. I think that if she had really wanted the job she would have got it, and would have done it extremely well. Anyway, one morning I got a call from Murdoch's secretary asking me to drop in, he and I had a chat, and he asked me to take it on.

Why do you think he chose you?

Who knows? He tended to give jobs to youngish people and I was thirty-five. He had sent down for some stuff I'd written and presumably liked it. I believe Claire hesitated, despite being encouraged by Iris Murdoch (no relation), and, if so, Rupert Murdoch may have decided she didn't really want it. And, being a populist, he may have thought that the other candidates were too mandarin. Anyway, we got on well in the interview. He began by saying, 'You travel a long way to work.' (I still lived in Oxfordshire.) He had just flown in from his home in New York so I said, 'So do you', and he laughed. We talked about the film *Gallipoli*, which he had sponsored, as well as about my ideas about the *TLS*. Anyway, I got the job. It was a flabbergasting, rather terrifying moment.

What was it like working within the larger context of News International?

I felt I endlessly had to defend the paper, to explain it to the people on the commercial side. They just couldn't see the point of it - I don't mean the publisher, or Murdoch's deputy, Sir Edward Pickering, who were allies for the most part, but the sales and advertising and publicity people who carried so much weight. In my first month as editor I got a complimentary note from Ted Pickering about a funny review in verse by Russell Davies, but that was the only time in nine years that anyone in the company ever praised any aspect of the *TLS* to me - or showed any sign of having looked at it, in fact. When computerisation was coming in, I once had a visit from some News International techs who explained enthusiastically how, with IT, we would be able to get our sports reports in much later on a Saturday night.

The management may have thought it wasn't their role to comment on editorial matters, but that didn't prevent them from making very clear that they wanted the paper to break even. Sales were slowly drifting down, as they had been for most my predecessor's editorship and for the last five years of *his* predecessor's. The classified advertising had more or less vanished during the 1979 closure. There was new competition from the Arts Council-subsidised *LRB*, as well as, internally, from the *THES*. The *TLS* lost money, it has almost always lost money - literary magazines usually do - which can be a nasty feeling for an editor, particularly one working for News International. So I found the corporate atmosphere deeply discouraging and frustrating - not in the editorial office, far from it, or in my rare dealings with people at the very top, but pretty well everywhere else in the organisation.

Did they ever interfere with the topics to increase sales?

Not until the very end of my time, when an Australian bully was brought in as publisher of the Supplements, and began to treat his role as that of editor-in-chief. We had a quarrel over the prominence of a brilliant lead review by Miroslav Holub, the

Czech poet and immunologist, about the cultural history of sexually transmitted diseases. (This was 1989, so the issue was topical.) The Australian claimed the piece would put readers off. It seemed as though he had been sent in to pick quarrels with me and a few other people on the Supplements, and I had soon had enough. Whether or not coincidentally, a General Election was coming up. And, whether or not coincidentally, Peter Scott left the *THES* around the same time.

Before then, nobody had ever interfered directly with the *TLS* while I was editor - it was just that we were all the time made to feel that we weren't doing much right. I believe things have improved a lot, since then.

Did you ever make any decisions you regretted as editor?

Yes. I was firmly told that the company expected some kind of correlation between the number of pages in the paper and the number of columns of advertising. Our advertising was low, at least by News International's standards, so I reduced the number of pages, and therefore the length and number of reviews - not massively, but we went down to what was usually a 28-page paper. That was a bad mistake. One of the things readers want from the *TLS* is a lot of reading. Ferdy Mount put it up to a minimum of 36 pages, and circulation immediately rose.

One other move I came to regret was an attempt at a European collaboration with the cultural sections of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Le Monde* and some other continental papers, under the title *Liber* and under the very illiberal overall direction of Pierre Bourdieu. This went down badly with the management, and they were right: it was a stodgy, pretentious product, though an ambitious one.

There was another decision which, as I only found out from Derwent May's recent book, helped to seal my fate on the top floor at Wapping, though it's one I don't regret in the slightest, which was to give the whole front cover of the *TLS* to a letter signed by scores of writers, protesting against the *fatwa* on Salman Rushdie just after it was declared.

The TLS has had an interesting succession of editors. Would you mind characterising some of the differences between Arthur Crook, John Gross, you, Ferdinand Mount and Peter Stothard?

Derwent May's centenary history has sections on all the editors before Peter Stothard, but I think Derwent underestimates the extent to which the paper's institutional strength reduces the impact of individual editors: members of the editorial staff and regular contributors continue, while editors come and go.

Differences? Mainly, all the others are better editors than I was. I get on very well with all of them, though we actually don't have that much in common apart from caring about books and journalism, and the fact that John Gross and I both began as university teachers. John, like Alan Pryce-Jones in the 1950s, was among the most

cosmopolitan editors the paper has had, and possibly the most intellectual. Arthur Crook is a printer's son who joined *The Times* as a clerk when he was sixteen. He's the last surviving link to the first real editor of the *TLS*, Bruce Richmond, for whom he worked. Arthur was an adroit operator and the *TLS* was at its most dynamic under him, in the 1960s. Ferdy is an Etonian, a novelist, a former head of Margaret Thatcher's Policy Review Staff and a shrewd political columnist. He brought stability, and helped to distinguish the *TLS* from the *LRB*, as well as increasing circulation. Peter is a journalist through and through: the first person to have moved from editing *The Times* to editing the *TLS*. Yet, interestingly, under him the paper's emphasis has become more literary, less political.

Among the differences between recent past editors, broadly speaking, are that Arthur Crook and I are left of centre, politically, John Gross and Ferdy Mount on the right. I found it politically very hard to edit the paper with the *LRB* coming out, because - like several, though by no means all, of my colleagues - I was much more in sympathy with the *LRB*'s line than with that of *The Times*, let alone of the government itself, which was Conservative throughout my editorship. Although I happily published several interesting Tory writers, the balance of political coverage in my time was towards the left - not unlike the *TLS* in the 1960s.

Did you make any major changes when you took over from John Gross?

As I say, a magazine is its contributors and staff. I gave editorial jobs to Alan Hollinghurst, Redmond O'Hanlon, Anna Vaux, James Campbell, Isabel Fonseca and Adrian Tahourdin: appointments which worked out very well. Four of the six are still on the staff. I wanted to go still further than John Gross already had in varying the diet of book reviews. We published longer poems ('The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy' in full, for example), and more freestanding articles and diary pieces. I got Christopher Hitchens to do a regular column about America, and introduced Hugo Williams's 'Freelance' and the 'NB' page, which Isabel Fonseca edited. I also ran a series on libraries which I wish someone would revive: Anita Brookner was particularly memorable on the erotics of the Bibliothèque Nationale, as was John Ryle on his discovery of the old colonial library in Zanzibar. I had the paper redesigned, too.

Having said all that, the extraordinary thing about the *TLS* is its continuity over a century. There were always, in fact, freestanding articles and miscellaneous pieces - even signed pieces. Although people thought we were being new-broomish with our arts coverage in the 1980s, if you go back to the earliest issues before the First World War, you find that they routinely covered art exhibitions and theatre.

You said earlier that as editor, your role at the TLS was primarily to orchestrate. Could you give an example of that?

Clever and experienced assistant editors have their own areas of responsibility.

There's an assistant editor who deals with fiction, one who deals with poetry, one who deals with art history, and so on. I tried to get more dialogue going, for example by introducing editorial meetings for advance planning when the publishers' catalogues came out in the autumn and spring. Review copies arrive a few weeks before publication, but that's too short a time in which to commission a serious long piece. So we began to identify, several months ahead, the most important forthcoming publications - ones it might be difficult to find the best reviewer for unless we got in before the competition and set up the piece well in advance. These meetings were a way, too, of loosening up some of the fiefdoms, and especially of giving junior people and part-timers more of a say.

Until 1974 reviews in the TLS were anonymous. What were some of the advantages and disadvantages of anonymous reviews?

I've written about this in *Essays in Criticism*, in a piece about F.W. Bateson and the *TLS*. It was of course John Gross who changed the policy, but Bateson had been among its most vocal critics for many years. One argument for anonymous reviews was that people could learn on the job. T.S.Eliot's famous essays on Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists were first published as anonymous *TLS* pieces when he was a young unknown. He later said that if they had had to be signed, he wouldn't have been able to do them: readers might have said, 'T.S. Who?' I don't think this is much of an objection. Nobody has ever minded unknowns tackling big subjects if they do it well. Secondly, there was the argument that, under anonymity, people who were friends or colleagues or sat on the same committees as each other could review each other frankly. Bateson was right to say that this was dishonest, but you can see how some specialists in narrow fields might have preferred - and might still prefer - that sort of protection. Essentially, though, anonymity was just a continuation of nineteenth-century journalistic tradition, more a house style than an intellectual position. Once the name of the reviewer came to be seen as part of the meaning of any review, the policy was bound to be changed.

When you were editor, who were your main contributors?

When Deborah McVea and I first publicised our recent online '*TLS*' Centenary Archive by saying that it would identify thousands of previously anonymous reviewers, we were accused of exaggerating. In fact, more than 6,000 people wrote for the paper in its first seventy-odd years, and around a thousand in the 1980s: one piece each, ten, a hundred. So it's hard to talk about my main contributors. How 'mine', in any case? The paper is a collective, the decisions are often arrived at in a collaborative way: that's one of the things I liked about it, and tried to encourage. Derwent May's book mentions A.S.Byatt, Geoffrey Hill, Adam Mars-Jones, Paul Muldoon, David Nokes, Tom Paulin, Craig Raine, Lorna Sage, among the main UK literary contributors while I was editor, but several of these were brought in earlier. I think I may have given Hermione Lee, Redmond O'Hanlon and A.N.Wilson their first *TLS* commissions, and also the painter and excellent art critic Julian Bell. I certainly took on several new political contributors: Robert Reich, for example, later a White

House aide in Clinton's presidency. And of course we also published important West and East European and Third World writers: Umberto Eco, Miroslav Holub, Chinweizu.... Joseph Brodsky appeared a lot in the *TLS* in the 1980s - he mainly worked with Alan Jenkins, though I sometimes had to help translate his English into English.

So the paper's scope wasn't just primarily Anglo-American?

No, and part of what we tried to do in my time was develop its internationalism. The *TLS* has always reviewed a number of foreign books in their original languages. I've mentioned *Liber*, one aim of which was to address the issues of cultural formation that divide European countries, but which was destroyed partly by those very divisions. It was a pity. There's a need for a truly global literary review: a critical version of the Frankfurt Book Fair. Given more resources, the *TLS* could be that.

When you left the TLS, you returned to academia. Would you mind discussing your reasons for this?

Time to write, security, wanting to read more old books than new ones. Literally hundreds of new books come into the office of the *TLS* every week and they can drive you crazy after a bit. I like teaching and always vaguely assumed that I would go back to it. I just don't have Ferdy Mount's gift: writing in the morning and then calmly editing the paper in the afternoon. I wrote next to nothing while I was editor. But I loved the best parts of my time at the *TLS* and learnt a huge amount from being there, and think it has made me better at my present job than I would otherwise have been. I've been extremely lucky in having been able to cross a divide that I've always thought less significant than it seems to some people on either side.

What are your current writing projects?

I've just finished an authorised biography of V.S. Pritchett, entitled *V.S. Pritchett: A Working Life*, to be published by Chatto and Windus in October 2004. If ever there was somebody who crossed divides, and who found a way of writing about literature which wasn't academic but has a lot to offer to scholars as well as readers of other kinds, it was him. Apart from his criticism, he was of course a wonderful short-story writer, autobiographer and travel writer. He started in his early twenties and was still going in his eighties, and he worked seven days a week, just taking Sunday afternoons off, so the book has involved a lot of research. The Berg Collection alone, in the New York Public Library, has fifty-six boxes of his manuscripts and typescripts and letters, plus six as yet uncatalogued boxes of cuttings of his journalism, and that's literally not the half of it.

Your interest in crossing divides leads me back to thinking about the

range of opinions published in the TLS. For example, under your editorship the paper published a lot of writing about post-structuralism that posits the 'death of the author' and so forth, but with your own biographical writing you're very much interested in authors as subjects. How can you maintain these two very different views?

As I said earlier, the *TLS* doesn't only publish things the editor might have written himself. I don't see any problem. There are important things to say about the limitations of biography. It would have been daft not to have given space to them, and to other theoretical claims and approaches. Besides, the paper's line on the vogue for author-killing was far from one-sided: some critics of the *TLS* in the 1980s said it should be renamed *The Times Biographical Supplement*, because of the prominence we gave to reviews of life-writing. To me it's self-evident that books are written by human beings and that what they've experienced will find its way into what they write. But I certainly don't think literary biography is the only way of writing about writing.