

opposites, we should pay more attention to ‘how they interact and constitute extensions of each other’.

Throughout, Shilling counters pessimism and the sense of wreckage, suggesting a more variable picture for researchers to work to illuminate. This is a suggestive and stimulating text, which I believe will prove to be a treasure trove for students. It reminds me why I studied sociology in the first place: as a social being, I wanted to understand; as an activist I wanted to make a difference; and as a young woman I believed that both were possible. Part of the attraction of this text is that motivating Shilling’s arguments are questions about equality/oppression, community and individuality.

The 20-year period of the emergence of body studies coincides with the introduction of new managerialism within academia: pedagogy and knowledge production as business projects. Academics may find reading Shilling on the status and function of the body in the workplace unnerving. Increasingly instrumental even coercive working environments, casualization, deskilling, the increase in emotion work are being functionally deployed by and for the economic/political system itself. There is much here for the academic reader to identify with, *as a body under duress*, who has hitherto failed to admit the problem. Experiencing the body as a ‘multi-dimensional medium for the constitution of society’ could lead to some creative alliances/communities across the gulf between academia and society.

As historical defenders of the body/mind split and the gendered ‘rationality’ project, academics have been slow to include their own bodies in the equation. Intellectuality/elite masculinity has been defined in opposition to the body/femininity and as a denial of the body’s exertions and limits and of its vulnerability, fragility and contingency. And just as social theorists were moving towards a less hesitant take on embodiment, along came new managerialism and its body-defying, spirit-crushing, heart-breaking business practices. Nourished by Shilling’s work, academics variously involved in pedagogy and curriculum development; administration and organization; research and writing, may now wish to step up to the table, as simultaneously theorists *and bodies*, asserting their ‘practical embodied consciousness’.

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THE TEXTURES OF PERSONAL AND SOCIAL LIFE

Untold stories. Alan Bennett, 2005. London: Faber & Faber and Profile Books; ISBN 0571228305, xiii + 628 pp., £20, cloth.

Untold Stories is a treasure trove of wit, social commentary and astute observation of the literary and theatrical world and an intimate portrait of

Alan Bennett's life in which we are offered occasional glimpses of his relationship with his partner Rupert Thomas. There is material here for a dozen more plays or works of fiction and Bennett confesses that he has chosen to tell his untold stories in the form of this 'album' as a 'quicker if less face-saving way of doing it'. The book is divided into sections all of which work independently as well as rather nicely in concert.

It begins with Bennett and his father's rendezvous with the mental health authorities in Settle, Yorkshire in 1966 and his mother's descent into temporary madness and the questions this prompted about whether there was any other mental illness in the family. This provides a platform for the family stories of Bennett's childhood in Yorkshire up to the time he did his national service and went to Oxford. They are told in the ways he excels at: through relationships, with his father, his mother and various aunts, beautifully observed, carved through their seemingly insignificant detail into a delicate and robust portrait of postwar Britain. Inside Bennett's family and its social encounters, you catch sight of raw material for the *Talking Heads* series – much of this section and the book is told in recounted dialogue form, the trademark of a playwright. Along with the last section, this is my favourite section of the book. It uses autobiographical forms to expose broader social processes and periods of recent history as well as providing an insider account of what it was like to be in a particular section of the northern British upper working class (his father was a butcher) in the middle of the twentieth century. Bennett exposes the small snobberies in his parents and aunts that mark significant social differentiations; their reserve, keeping to themselves and not being quite part of the life going on around them, the kinds of outings they go on: these small but important marks of respectability accumulate to fracture the working class. As Bennett says of his Auntie Kathleen, her mind unzipped by Alzheimer's: 'Corseted in her immutable gentilities she still contrives to make something special out of her situation and her role in it' (p. 87). This is also a story of social mobility told modestly, not as a celebration with all the tensions and difficulties left in: injunctions from his father about making a fuss and a show, political concerns about social justice which reveal how 'the woman in the van' ended up in Bennett's garden in Camden, things that shape Bennett as a person and show how class is etched in the fabric of a person's subjectivity, and the accommodations that have to be negotiated in upward social mobility. I like this section especially for its insider account of class (shaped by gender and sexuality) as lived detail: Bennett deftly exposes the texture of social life in ways the academic study of social life in sociology so routinely fails to do.

The short section following, called 'Written on the Body', extends the first section and includes family and other personal black and white photographs. It is a subtle portrait of emergent and muted masculinity and

sexuality as Bennett as a young adult walks around his home town late into the night, walks he presents as potential voyages of discovery that don't quite work out for him. This is interspersed with bits of dialogue from plays, which again reveal some of the autobiographical fabric from which they are wrought. This is followed by another short section, *Seeing Stars*, set around Bennett's trips to the pictures which open onto the world of fifties cinema. Following this is a section of just under 200 pages of diary entries for 1996–2004, some of which he has already published in the *London Review of Books*. These are, inevitably, more episodic and while I missed the linking narratives of earlier sections, the diaries are fabulous. They of course reveal his later life as a playwright through ordinary things such as eating sandwiches on the road to Garsdale Head and cycling through Regent's Park, as well trips to New York, Venice and churches and other places of historical interest (he studied medieval history at Oxford); and the way his life is lived between London and Yorkshire, his professional engagements, social networks and friendships with other writers, actors (such as Maggie Smith, Alan Bates and John Gielgud) and TV personalities such as his friend Russell Harty, from his Oxford days. Complete with self-deprecating humour: the Waterstones Literary Diary, which records the birthdays of contemporary figures of letters, is blank for 9 May, Bennett's birthday, except for a note that this was the date in 1949 when the first British self-service laundry was opened. The variety in his writing is worth reading because it documents an interesting life interconnected with other interesting lives, and because they contain astute social and political mini-commentaries (Bennett's politics, in line with his concerns about social justice incline to the left) and because they are beautifully written.

Theatres and Plays follows the diaries and gives the back-story to *The Lady in the Van* and *The History Boys*, both played at the National Theatre, and here we see some of the processes through which autobiography is transformed into drama – 'But are these (M&S corduroy and suede shoes) the proper garments of my inner voice?' (p. 379). 'Always beneath the play you write is the play you meant to write' (p. 405), a sentiment that resonates with writers across a range of genres. Following this is a section on *Radio and TV*, which has a lovely commentary on Thora Hird, and a section on *Art, Architecture and Authors* (Bennett is a trustee of the National Gallery), which has a commentary on the County Arcade in Leeds, combining narratives on architecture with reminiscence.

The final section, *Ups and Downs*, returns to the continuous narrative style of the first section and opens with the homophobic assault on Bennett while he was staying in Italy and the most sustained reference to his sexuality. However, his sexuality is not *the* story as Bennett refuses to simplify for public consumption a fashionable 'identity' as 'badge'.

It ends with a touching but unsentimental portrait of his encounter with cancer told in typical un-heroic Bennett style through observation of life's and death's minutiae. 'But I don't want my life, or what there remains of it, to be all about cancer, any more than I ever wanted it to be about being gay' (p. 602).

Throughout this enormous book there is a delicately woven sense of the Bennett family's social marginality (not that they were marginalized) as a carefully considered choice: of how they didn't quite manage to be like other families, and this forms the vantage point from which the writer plies his trade. *Untold Stories* is a personal, political, cultural and social archive of Britain in the last half century told with humour and elegance and ground through an autobiographical lens. I highly recommend it.

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THE 'TRUE' AND THE 'GOOD' STILL NOT SORTED

Iris Murdoch as I Knew Her. A.N. Wilson, 2003. London: Arrow Books; ISBN 0090723107, 288 pp., £7.99, paper.

Wilson has produced an interesting biography of a woman he knew – the philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch. The title consequentially suggests a subjective viewpoint of his perception of her and gives the book a much more personal touch than usual for a biography. As it is in large parts very autobiographical, it actually can be seen as a true amalgamation of autobiography *and* biography.

Wilson admits that he felt 'handicapped' in writing Iris Murdoch's biography because of having 'known' her and her husband, John Bayley, but points out that this is also a vantage point based on a better insight and understanding of her also as a person. It is a question that arises for any biographer, depending on how well he or she knows the subject. However, Wilson unfortunately creates his own quandary, as he describes his dilemma which spins a thread through the whole book, in at times an apologetic manner – 'I had also lost faith in the possibility of writing biography' – when he debates with himself whether or not he should write Iris Murdoch's biography in a diary-style approach.

Wilson's philosophical excuse-like question is whether 'the human personality was altogether more protean, complex and strange than the simple exercise of biography would usually suggest?' And as he had given the answer already at the beginning at the book that 'a biography of a writer [Murdoch] which came close to understanding the mystery of its