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The most well-worn cliché of recent times has been that our present moment is 'unprecedented', that the COVID-19 crisis represents an epochal shift from a 'before time' to a wholly new pandemic era. Quite to the contrary, the crisis has been felt most acutely not because of its novelty but precisely due to its many precedents. Insecure employment, inequalities in health and life expectancy, and strained and underfunded public services are not new phenomena in any sector of modern society. The university – the focus of *Value and the Humanities* (2020), Zoe Hope Bulaitis's contribution to the series *Palgrave Studies in Literature, Culture and Economics* – represents one clear example of how the 'unprecedented' crisis is marked by its many precedents. For its staff and students, long before the coronavirus pandemic, academia has been a site of ill-health, isolation and economic uncertainty. The pandemic simply cast the longer history of these overlapping crises in a starker relief.

Before 2020, the *annus horribilis*, Britain's University and Colleges Union (UCU) had successfully balloted its members on industrial action both in January 2018 and October 2019. In January 2020, when the virus's impact seemed restricted to parts of China, UCU members at 74 universities had agreed again to participate in industrial action, this time a staggered, 14-day strike. Members had been balloted on the basis of prospective changes to an academic pension, the Universities Superannuation Scheme, and on concerns pertaining to 'pay, equality, workload and casualisation', described as the UCU's Four Fights dispute. The later weeks of this strike action overlapped with the mounting risk of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the strike drew to a close, those striking academics, who had said for at least three years that workloads were untenable and that career prospects were bleak before the pandemic, returned to a workplace in which they had to contend with unfamiliar technologies, new methods of working, and a freshly sharpened sense of precarity. Feeling the coronavirus squeeze on income generated from events hire and international tuition fees, the spectre of insolvency haunted at least 13 universities (Burns, 2020) but appeals to the UK government for a bailout of the university sector were ultimately rejected.

Value is at the heart of this all-too-familiar account of contemporary academic life. The valuation of pension funds, the price of labour, university revenue streams, the cost-benefit of maintaining a casualised class of academics, the human capital fresh graduates add to the economy. It may be a demoralising and redundant survey for many readers but it is important nonetheless to keep this history in view to understand the urgent intervention that *Value and the Humanities* makes. As Bulaitis stresses, 'historicising in the present moment is a political act.' (2) The political act in this case is to approach history in literary terms to mount a resistance to the neoliberal monoculture of the economic model in Higher Education. This account

serves to articulate ‘a kaleidoscopic range of ways in which value is manifested’ (2) in the academic humanities beyond the balance book. In this regard, *Value and the Humanities* arrived exactly at the moment it was most needed: when so-called common-sense wisdom, emboldened by the pandemic, dictated that any claim for the value of the humanities could not be articulated in terms other than the economic bottom-line.

Claims about the perceived wastefulness or uselessness of the humanities naturally predate the COVID-19 pandemic as does the long crisis of university humanities. *Value and the Humanities* recognises this fact by tracing the contemporary struggles around valuation in a distinctively transhistorical way. It identifies the current state of British universities as a product of neoliberalism’s longstanding efforts to ‘have us forget that economic value is just one voice among many’ (14). In this regard, Bulaitis’s work will be of keen interest to readers of the burgeoning field of critical university studies, to which Stefan Collini, Thomas Docherty, and Martha Nussbaum have made recent significant contributions. *Value and the Humanities* is distinguished, however, by its approach that traces and resists neoliberal economism by reading Victorian culture, and in particular Victorian liberalism, as both ‘partly responsible for the current econocratic context’ and vitally as a repository ‘of valuable tools for thinking through the present challenges’ (8). In this regard, Bulaitis’s work will also find enthusiastic readers in the field of neo-Victorian studies.

Bulaitis argues that in the work of different Victorian liberals, including Thomas H. Huxley, John Stuart Mill, John Ruskin and, most significantly, the poet and education reformer Matthew Arnold, we see a productive challenge to the economic liberalism that reaches its apotheosis in neoliberalism. Where neoliberalism understands the price of everything and the value of nothing, Bulaitis argues that ‘the clearest and most convincing iterations of the value of a liberal education are found in our Victorian past. Therefore, returning to this rich site of discussion can provide useful provocations for the present’ (22). The emphasis on ‘discussion’ and ‘provocation’ is important. Bulaitis makes plain that it is the liberal modes of thought and debate that are being recuperated rather than simply the ideas: ‘I am not suggesting the anachronistic application of one epoch’s ideas and ideals onto another, but I am arguing for the benefit in reviving a mode of thinking that allows for greater agency of individual thought and action’ (229). In this respect, Bulaitis’s work also adds to recent scholarly reappraisals of the relationship between moral and economic liberalism, such as Paul Collier’s claim that ‘there are not two [Adam Smiths] but one’ (Collier: 2018, 28). Like Collier, Bulaitis outlines how liberalism might intervene in contemporary political and economic crises in which economic thinking and self-interest dominate.

Value and the Humanities is primarily a history of the humanities as an institution rather than a discipline. Its emphasis is not so much on the methodological debates of humanities scholarship (no 'method wars' here!) but on celebrating the disciplinary heterogeneity of the humanities across different philosophical, political, historical, linguistic and literary traditions. The work is directed as much by Michel Foucault and Martin Heidegger as Mark Fisher and David Lodge. In each chapter, an illustrative contrast is drawn by reading historically and literarily across Victorian and contemporary accounts of education in policy, public debate and literature. The first chapter considers the question of economic incentivisation in two attempts to reform the education sector. The earlier of which, *Lowe's Code* (1862), is described as 'the first instance in which the British government adopted a system of Payment by Results approach on a national scale' (37). *Lowe's Code* and the debate it elicited is then contrasted to the 2010 *Browne Report*, the UK government white paper that sought 'to reduce public spending and deregulate the "marketplace of ideas"'(58). Bulaitis's argument is that though 'the *Browne Report* makes clear that a university education is an individual's investment and not a public good' (71), the challenges to *Lowe's Code* made by Matthew Arnold and James Kay-Shuttleworth provide 'critiques of economisation in education' that 'can challenge educational norms under neoliberalism' (73).

The second chapter returns to the notorious 'two-cultures debate' in the context of modern government policy that promotes STEM subjects and maligns the humanities. Bulaitis undercuts the dichotomy between the arts and sciences by arguing that the 'direct contest' lies not with 'the scientist and the literature professor' but between 'the policymaker and the scholar.' (85) *Value and the Humanities* achieves this by contrasting the forms of debates ('*who said what how'* (87)) between C. P. Snow and F. R. Leavis and Thomas H. Huxley and Matthew Arnold, who debated scientific and literary value roughly eighty years earlier. This emphasis on the linguistic texture of these pronouncements nuances what has been crudely represented in popular discourse as a debate around instrumentalism. The assertion is that the Victorian debate was marked by shared commitments to articulate the value of a rounded liberal education from a range of standpoints. As Bulaitis puts it, 'in the context of neoliberal monoculture, the existence of a multiplicity of voices and values is something worth fighting for, not about' (95). To achieve this colloquium, Bulaitis argues that we should learn not from the venom of the Two Cultures debate but from Arnold and Huxley who 'subscribe to two alternative approaches to knowledge production that exists in harmony, reinforcing similar ends' (100).

The third chapter will be of most interest to literary scholars. Here, Bulaitis considers the representation of the university in a range of Victorian and modern novels. *Value*

and the Humanities presents the academic novel as inherently resistant to metricised articulations of value whilst able also to defamiliarize academic structures to 'invoke fresh conversations [...] concerning the values of the humanities' (116). Whilst Bulaitis offers a broad view of the academic novel, the key studies are grouped around three themes. The first considers novels about teaching – Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1859) and Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* (1992) – that map principles of liberal education. The second addresses academic research in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871) and A. S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990). The third and final section considers the barriers to accessing education as outlined in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1894), Frank Parkin's *The Mind and Body Shop* (1986) and Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* (2005). The ethos that underpins these readings is that 'markets tell us that such stories have no value, however, the lived experience portrayed in literature tells us otherwise' (166).

The final chapter considers the metricisation of academic outputs in the form of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and its impact agenda that 'primarily rewards research that produces a financial profit' (177). Its parallel with Victorian society outlines how the Victorian invention of the modern museum as a public institution, illustrated through debates around public access to the British Museum, maps 'the birth of the idea of accountability in the cultural sector' (190), that public funds should be spent for the public good. Shifting attention from this nineteenth-century context, Bulaitis details how this liberal conception of the museum as a public good ossified into a broader neoliberal conception of public cultural institutions under Thatcherite and New Labour governments as forces for economic production rather than as an innate or non-instrumental good. It is to Bulaitis's credit that this necessarily entails reflexive thinking about what limits are set by these conditions of knowledge production for a book like *Value and the Humanities:* 'critiques that contest the hegemonic agendas of impact at this scale are incompatible with market-led neoliberal structures, but this need not be a flaw' (227). The value of research such as Bulaitis's is that, by practicing what it preaches, it realises 'the role and responsibility of the humanities to re-imagine and demonstrate alternative narratives beyond the market' (245).

The success of any piece of research lies not only in the answers it provides but also the questions it poses. Bulaitis's work is no exception. In the book's conclusion, Bulaitis notes pathways for future research both to consider how, beyond the British focus of *Value and the Humanities*, academic marketisation is a global phenomenon and to detail 'the student perceptions around life choices and university study from a humanities-oriented perspective' (243). Regarding the student-centred approach, this would also present an opportunity to trace the extent to which debt has become integral to higher education and to situate the university in a wider pattern of neoliberal financialisation

that increasingly figures debt as central to student learning. Some American universities, for instance, have experimented with income-share agreements in which colleges make loans on the proviso that students 'pay back a portion of their income for a number of set years' (Kreighbaum, 2019). For future studies that take up Bulaitis's consideration of the economisation of education, the extent to which education is increasingly shaped by an ontology of debt has to be reckoned with.

Value and the Humanities also presents scope for future work to narrow and deepen the focus of its methodology. Given the breadth of the study, Bulaitis understandably does not have scope to provide a detailed account of the origins of liberalism or neoliberalism as forms of rationality. Nonetheless, this monograph lays the groundwork for research that could consider the material conditions that facilitated liberalism's public debates and how that context might be contrasted to conditions under neoliberalism. In this way, researchers could show how history allows us to understand the economic basis to our own contemporary intellectual debates, such as the spurious charges of 'cancel culture' levelled at student-activist organisers. Similarly, by situating liberalism at the heart of a response to neoliberalism, *Value and the Humanities* invites research that critically judges the value of liberal debate by way of its radical critics, whose work is largely absent from Bulaitis's monograph. For Terry Eagleton, for example, Arnold's educational reforms make 'patronizing attempts to pacify the working class' (2011, 78) whilst, for Edward Said, Arnold's liberalism connects 'the virtues of culture with the coercive, authoritarian violence of the national State.' (1993) Bringing Bulaitis's reappraisal of liberalism into dialogue with this radical tradition would expand upon how a new liberalism might confront neoliberalism and draw on its Victorian inheritance without falling into the traps of its earlier incarnation.

In the spirit of *Value and the Humanities,* I want my review to resist merely being a compressed evaluation of a book that rightly demands that we expand our understanding of how we value ideas. Thankfully Bulaitis's chief contribution far exceeds any narrow appraisal. It lies in its commitment to acts of articulation and advocacy rather than justification or defence. The work is recommended above all else by the absence of any defensiveness in its account of the value of the humanities. Academic readers will find in *Value and the Humanities*, firstly, a robust critique of the economisation of higher education that stresses that history shows us this is not the only way that the academy can work. Secondly, readers will encounter a clear articulation of the value not only of what humanities scholars do but how they do it. Indeed, by reading speeches, acts, white papers, novels and other texts together with a literary emphasis on their forms, Bulaitis's work embodies the value of the processes of humanities research rather than

the outputs. The result is that the book’s readers might come away from it reflecting on their own academic practice and considering how they express the value of their research without unconsciously becoming their own bean counters.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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