

**Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University**

WILLIAM CLARK

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In David Lodge's novel, *Changing Places*—a fictionalized account of his experience when he exchanged his post at the University of Birmingham for a visiting professorship at Berkeley—he contrasts two national academic stereotypes in the persons of the Englishman Philip Swallow, a conscientious teacher but very thinly published, and the globe-trotting, entrepreneurial American Morris Zap, ever attentive to his CV and its swelling list of publications. Today, with the Research Assessment Exercise looming over British academe, it is a dated stereotype—there are now plenty of Morris Zaps in the UK—but William Clark's major book, the outcome of many decades of research, explores the origins of the divide between the ideal of the university as primarily a teaching institution and the rise of the research university, the home of that increasingly familiar species, the academic superstar.

True to Lodge's stereotype, Clark regards the English universities (and especially Oxford and Cambridge) as having maintained at least until recently an older ideal where individual achievement was outweighed by the kudos that inhered in the institution as a whole. True, as Clark brings out with much colourful detail, the English universities (and especially Cambridge) developed an elaborate examination system, the origins of which stretch back to the eighteenth century. The rigour of this academic running of the gauntlet, did not, however, translate into a strong research culture. As Lodge comments in his novel, a promising young English academic, having survived the ordeal of his (and it was generally his) final undergraduate examinations, took the term literally and spent much of the rest of his career wondering what could come after 'Finals'. In an aristocratically tinged culture, the cult of the amateur was pervasive, and the examination was valued as a test of character, quick-wittedness and endurance rather than as a path to further training. Very different was the career path of the Americans like Morris Zap, for whom undergraduate examinations were the gateway to a graduate school which trained them to produce capital that could then be floated on the academic market.

The origins of this graduate school culture of marketable research Clark traces with much lightly worn erudition back to the German universities and particularly the late eighteenth century, on the cusp of the late Enlightenment and the early Romantic movement. Throughout the German-speaking lands, the Enlightenment brought with it a greater emphasis on the need for the state to employ more rational and systematic methods in the processes of government. Cameralist order and bureaucratic rigour were extended to the universities, and professors became subject to systems of state inspection, with their performance (or lack of it) being recorded as the basis for future advancement (or lack of it). Teaching excellence was taken into account rather more than often prevails today, but the German states also looked for other 'performance indicators' (to invoke our unlovely contemporary jargon) including, increasingly, publication and the reception that such publication received from other academics. Once such a form of academic evaluation became established, individual academics

could use the status thus accrued for personal advancement by competing for more desirable posts at other universities. The professors or would-be professors could also make money by taking private students (but so, too, could the coaches which the English system of competitive examinations brought into being). The increasing emphasis on individual prestige was to be boosted by the Romantic movement with its strong Germanic roots, which extended the notion of the heroic individual artist to the charismatically creative professor.

As the title of the book suggests, this notion of 'academic charisma' is central to the work, which begins with a discussion of Max Weber who originally coined the term within the context of the sociology of religion. For Weber, however, the charismatic individual usually had to translate individual charisma into 'routinized charisma' for the religious message to be perpetuated: thus Christ, for example, gave way to the Church. In the case of the university and the charismatic professor, there are differences which the book might have explored in more depth. Such professors owe their posts and much of their prestige to the routinized charisma of their university. Increasingly, the level of such an institutionalized charisma is determined by the number of professors past and present who accrued charisma in the form of highly regarded publications, but without the institution the individual professor would usually be adrift. Universities and their bureaucratic processes largely rely on routinized charisma and take no more kindly than churches to truly charismatic individuals who attempt to refashion the institution in the light of a new revelation.

Nonetheless, the book's focus on the notion of charisma or academic prestige does guide the reader through some of the great transformations in academic life and, particularly, the central one: that an institution, which was and is largely supported by society for its teaching function, increasingly bases its systems of reward around publications principally directed at a handful of other academics. In explaining this transformation, Clark brings to bear enormous erudition, wit, and historical breadth on a number of central academic rituals. Others might seek to study the tribal rituals of distant lands, but Clark shows that both the academic anthropologist and historian can find plenty of material for the study of ritual and custom within academe itself. Part 1 of the book is clearly organized around a study of such central academic practices as the lecture, the examination or the seminar, and the way in which the oral culture of the medieval and early-modern university with its trial by disputation gave way to a written culture which could be more effectively bureaucratically monitored—and which eventually gave rise to the 'publish or perish' culture so familiar today. The sections in Part 2 are less securely anchored around particular topics and tend to dart around in a way that leaves the reader without secure chronological or thematic bearings. Chapter 11, which is cryptically entitled, 'Academic Voices and the Ghost in the Machine', for example, encompasses discussions of Plato, Nietzsche, and Foucault. The author has, however, foreseen such objections and writes, 'In the spirit of the oral, the rest of this essay exudes a flattened temporality anathema to most professional history-writing today' (405–406).

As this remark suggests, there is a strong authorial voice in this work. Some might see this as a reflection of postmodernism but, appropriately for a work in which the

eighteenth century looms large, I was reminded of the eighteenth-century novelist, Henry Fielding, and his determination to let the reader know that the author is in charge and is hard at work moulding the work into a manageable form out of the vast chaos of possible events. Attractively, the work conveys the author's delight in his subject and the many micro-histories that the dusty German archives can yield. Few works include remarks such as 'I love the smell of archives in the morning' (289). With this goes a degree of insouciance towards some of the standard academic conventions, so that the author is brave enough at one point to admit that 'I forget the source' (407)—though this is also combined with a delight in empirical detail such as that embodied in the research-rich appendices, which include information on such points as the cost in groschen of masters' exercises at the University of Leipzig in 1499.

Up to a point, the author's asides and *obiter dicta* humanize the work, but especially in Part 2 one feels that the structure is shaped more by the author's current interests and enthusiasms than the inherent logic of his significant thesis. At times, this reader longed for an editor with a sharp and vigorous blue pencil who could reshape this undoubtedly important and thoroughly researched work into a taunter, shorter, and more thematically hard-hitting book. Perhaps some of the space thus saved could have been used to give a little more background on what else was going on in the eighteenth-century German states which helps to explain their remoulding of the universities, or a lengthier discussion of developments in French academia against which the German universities to a large extent defined themselves (the subject of some telling but relatively brief comments in the 'Epilogue'). It would be churlish, however, to end on such a note and not to salute the achievement of what must have been the work of much of an academic lifetime, which does so much to make more comprehensible the origins and historical baggage of that important modern institution, the research university.

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