

WRITING A THESIS

a guide to long essays and dissertations

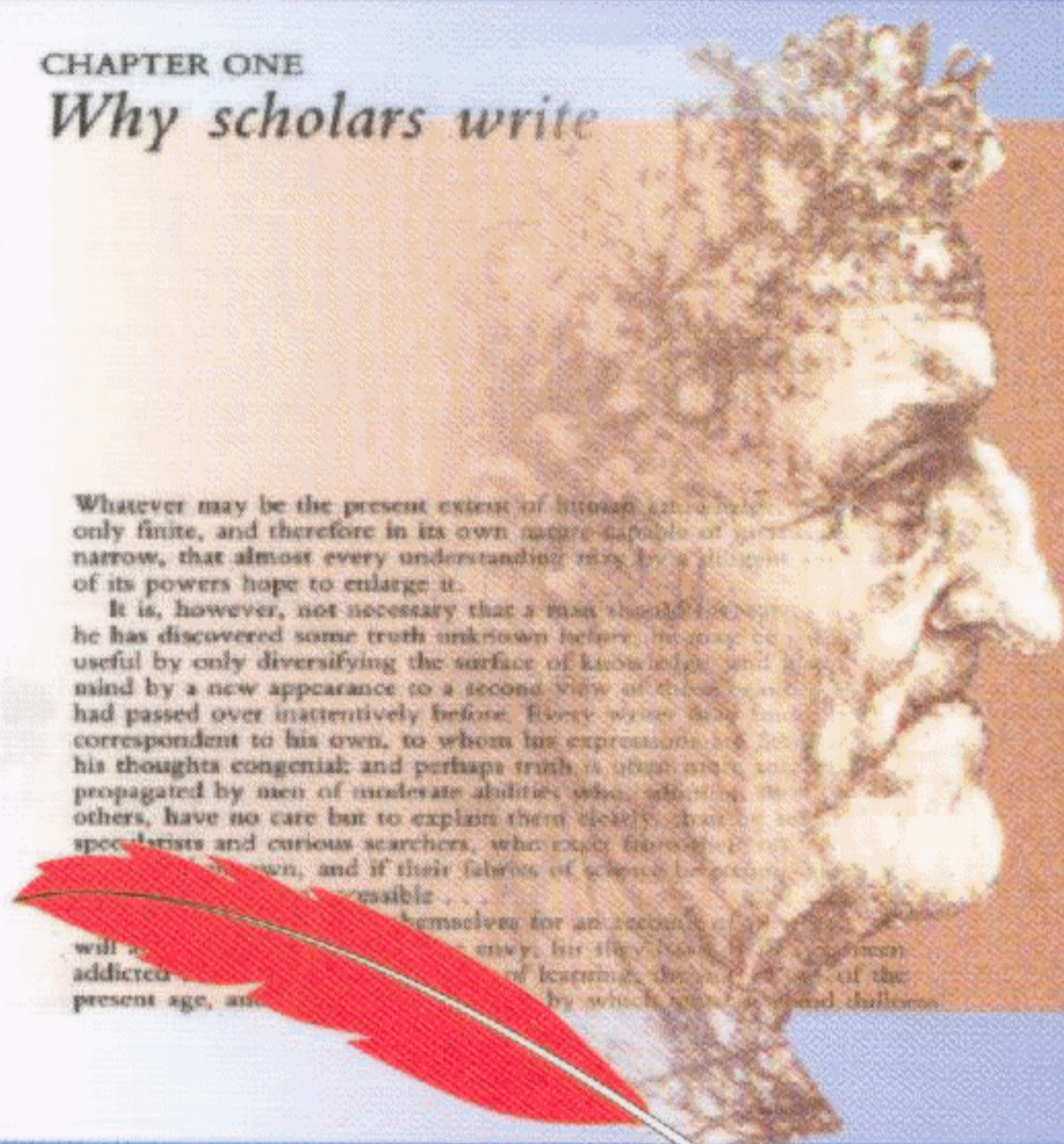
CHAPTER ONE

Why scholars write

Whatever may be the present extent of human knowledge, it is only finite, and therefore in its own nature capable of extension. It is narrow, that almost every understanding may by a diligent use of its powers hope to enlarge it.

It is, however, not necessary that a man should be content with what he has discovered some truth unknown before. It may be made more useful by only diversifying the surface of knowledge, and by presenting it by a new appearance to a second view of those things which had passed over inattentively before. Every writer has a reader correspondent to his own, to whom his expressions are like his thoughts congenial: and perhaps truth is often more easily propagated by men of moderate abilities who, addressing themselves to others, have no care but to explain their ideas clearly than by speculative and curious searchers, who expect themselves to be understood by themselves, and if their fabric of science be extensive, to be understood by others.

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论文写作指导书系

George Watson



SICHUAN UNIVERSITY PRESS

导 言

随着高等教育的发展和教学改革的不断深入，从应试教育转向素质教育已成为目前讨论的焦点；高校更加重视学生的创新思维，强调学生的实际技能和研究方法的培养。为此，论文写作已经成为大学本科生、研究生学习的重要环节。本科生的学年论文、毕业论文，研究生的硕士、博士论文等已成为考核学生学习的重要依据。除英语专业的本科生和研究生需用英文写论文外，也有不少其他学科的研究生直接用外语撰写论文，或将自己的研究成果直接用外语发表，以达到对外交流之目的。学术论文可以说是学术水平最直接的反映。学术论文写作与一般作文不同，除应有创新的观点、充分的论证、流畅的文笔和严谨的文章结构外，还得有符合学术要求的方法与规范，特别是直接用外语撰写论文就更应该符合国际通用的学术规范。

写作在外语学习中被普遍认为难度最大，但这正是外语实际应用中最重要的一种技能。学习外语的目的就是为了交流，而学生的交流能力往往要看学习者动口和动手的能力。不少本科生，甚至研究生，一提到写论文就犯难：通常是因为理不出思路 and 头绪，下笔写几句就感到无话可说，或辞不达意，不能有条理地阐述清楚自己的观点；参考了大量的文献资料却无从下手，不知道怎样合理和正确地引用文献资料；文章写作过程中，不知道论文的格式要求，比如说论文的标题、目录和提要，文章的章节结构，引文的标注，论文的文体与格

式，表格、插图及脚注，引文及参考书目的著录格式等等。所有这些都在一篇论文中都有相应的规范要求。四川大学出版社引进的这套“论文写作指导书系”能很好地帮助论文作者解决上述难题。

WRITING MATTERS 一书的作者 Peter G. Beidler 教授是很多中国大学生熟悉的作者。他那脍炙人口的“WHY I TEACH”一文（《大学英语》第三册，上海外语教育出版社）打动过无数学生和老 师。作者有着长期从事大学英文写作课教学的经验，作为美国富布莱特教授他也曾到中国大学任教。此书有其他写作教材所没有的特点：它不直接给出写作中的规范（a list of Dos and Don'ts），而是循序渐进地引导读者自己动手，在写作的过程中学习、体会，逐步掌握论文写作要点和规范。全书的另一大特点是，作者用一般大学生所掌握的3 000左右的词汇量及生动而又风趣的语言，条理非常清楚地教给学习者怎样提高写作能力。Beidler 教授在书中首先帮助学习者建立起学习写作的自信心。他从多年的写作课教学经验中知道写作对于母语为英语的学生和以英语为外语的学生同样是学习中难度较大的一门功课。他用自己学习和工作的积累及他多年来所教的学生的学习过程，让读者体会到任何人都可以成为一个优秀的作者，都可以写出好文章。他主张学习者要有自己的思想，有自己的创新思维，经过深思熟虑可形成自己的论点。同时，他也主张学习者要掌握文章写作的条理结构和篇章布局。为了让读者体会他所讨论的每一个写作要点，他把书中的每一章节直接写成一篇范文。从如何写好论文、找准题目、理清思路、组织论证、处理不同论点，到引文标注和写作规范，每一个章节都为读者做出了示范。Beidler 教授对大学生写作中常出现的问题直接采用学生的文章加以讲解，一边讲解一边修改，带着读者辟出一条新的路径。每一章节均为一篇完美的文章，这也是本书的一大特点。所以在使用这本教材时，读者不仅仅可以学到每章中所讨论的写作要点，而且还可以把每一章节作为相关要点的文章来赏析。这本书让读者感到学习英文写作可以是一件愉快而又很有收获的事情。它既可以用作写作课的教材，也可以用作一般读者自修提高的学习手

册，还可以成为英语爱好者阅读赏析的读本。这种让人思考、给人自信、引导人走向成功的书并不多见。

这套引进丛书中 Nigel Fabb 和 Alan Durant 所著的 *HOW TO WRITE ESSAYS, DISSERTATIONS AND THESES IN LITERARY STUDIES* 是一本针对性极强的学术论文写作指南，它在欧洲被以英语作为母语和非母语的大学生广泛使用。此书既可作为高校本科生、研究生和教师自修提高的读本，也可以作为文科学者，特别是文学、语言学学者在用英语写作学术论文时的参考指南。Fabb 和 Durant 两位作者是有多年写作教学经验的教师，他们认真总结了 20 世纪 80 年代以来大学课堂教学的变化，注意到在人文社会科学的学习中，教师对学生学习的考核不再用传统的“对与否”的问答式闭卷考试方法，而更多采用开卷式：在考试中以短论文的方式让学生就相关学习内容阐发自己的见解。许多文科课程还采用让学生写论文的方式来考察学生对学习内容掌握的情况。本科生完成学年论文、毕业论文，硕士研究生、博士研究生完成学术论文和学位论文已经是大学学习的基本要求。在我国也是如此。另外，Fabb 和 Durant 在编写这本写作指南时也考虑到了文学批评与文化批评从 20 世纪 80 年代以来的发展变化、人文社会科学学科在国际交流中所普遍遵循的学术规范。这本书的重点不在写什么，而在怎么写；对论文写作的规范也不是枯燥乏味地列出 what you must and must not do，而是在讲解学术论文写作规范和方法的同时，给读者和学习者留足空间，引导学习者去拓展自己的思路和张扬个人的写作风格。作者在有限的篇幅内用简洁的语言指导读者怎样阅读语言和文学作品，怎样克服对写作的畏惧心理，怎样理清思路和形成自己的论点，怎样论述和使用文献支撑来增强说服力，以及怎样使论文成为一篇规范的学术成果。同 *WRITING MATTERS* 一书的作者 Peter Beidler 一样，Fabb 和 Durant 把重点放在写作的过程之中，强调写作是一种构建，是一种不断完善的构建过程。他们认为写作与交谈不一样，是一种思考的过程。通过这种思考过程，读者可对所阅读的本有更深入的理解，同

时对需要进一步阅读的资料和目的会更加清楚。书中所用的举例和范文均选自英语语言文学本科生和研究生的论文，他们中有以英语为母语的学生，也有以英语为外语的学生。对于学习者来说，这些在论文写作中易犯的共性错误很有启示意义。本书的另一特点表现在其编撰方式上：作者在每一章节结尾对讨论的要点做了一个提纲式的归纳，有针对性地设计了一些练习帮助读者掌握所学的内容。除此之外，书中还为读者留有自己补充学习心得和笔记的篇幅，真正体现了作者在编写此书时一再强调的一个字“enable”，让读者和学习者在实践中学习写作，体会到写作中只有重视过程才会有好的结果。

George Watson 是剑桥大学经验丰富的写作课教师。他的 *WRITING A THESIS : a guide to long essays and dissertations* 一书是在他多年来所作的有关论文和学术文章写作的系列讲座的基础上形成的。这也是一本颇有新意的规范学术论文的读本和指南。全书共 21 个章节，分为两大部分。每一章节同上两本书一样并不是乏味的说教和写作规则的简单罗列。同 Peter Beidler 一样，George Watson 书中的每一章节本身就是一篇漂亮的范文。在每一章的开篇，他均精心节选了一些知名作家、学者谈学术和写作的论述，从 William Shakespeare, Samuel Johnson, Ralph Waldo Emerson 到 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 这些引言给人以非常深刻的启示。在“方法篇” (The approach) 的 10 个章节中，作者从学者为什么要写作谈起，认真讨论了在论文写作时怎样合理使用学术理论、拟定文章主题、怎样谋篇布局和克服写作中的心理障碍等等。在“技能篇” (The techniques) 的 11 个章节中，作者却从另一个角度对引文风格、引文技艺、文稿编辑、初稿处理、参考文献著录、语言学习及应用、论文发表等具体技能一一做了讨论。Watson 认为能写好文章不等于能写出合格的学术论文。在他看来，学术论文写作完全是一门不同的学科训练，不是学习者想怎么写就能怎么写的。学术论文写作有其严格的规范，需要严谨的行文、系统的文献处另、有理有据的论证和条理清晰的结构。WRITING A THESIS 在有限的篇幅中给了读者一个明

晰的指南。作者编写本书的目的是指导文学、语言、史学的大学高年级本科生和研究生做课程论文、学年论文、毕业论文和学位论文，但这本指南对法学、经济学及其他社会科学和自然科学的学习者也非常适用。对于对英文写作有兴趣的一般读者来说，这也是一本很有价值的参考书。

四川大学出版社首批出版的这几本论文写作指南虽然原不属于统一系列，但它们有一个共同特点——强调写作学习是能力和创新思维的培养，强调写作学习是在动手的过程中进行的。*WRITING MATTERS* 帮助读者提高文章和论文写作的能力，*HOW TO WRITE ESSAYS, DISSERTATIONS AND THESES IN LITERARY STUDIES* 训练读者掌握学术论文写作的规范，*WRITING A THESIS* 则在更高一个层次上帮助读者提高作为一个学者应该具备的素质和修养。相信这套“论文写作指导书系”会为我们的大学本科生和研究生、英语专业和非英语专业的学生、用英文进行科研和写作的学者和教师，以及爱好英语的读者带来非常实用的帮助。在这套书系的指导下，读者会发现用英文写作其实是一大乐趣。

石 坚

2003年3月 川大花园

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Preface

Writing a thesis used to be something for those experienced in scholarship – or at least something for graduates.

No longer. In the past twenty years it has become a common part of the preparation for a first degree and the extended essay can even be part of ordinary usage in upper forms at schools. That new urge is the occasion for this book, which is meant for graduates and undergraduates alike, and even for those not yet entered into higher education at all. 'The power of instruction is seldom of much efficacy,' wrote Gibbon in the *Decline and Fall*; 'except in those happy dispositions where it is almost superfluous' (ch. 4). But I cannot think this book superfluous. No one ever wrote a thesis by the light of nature; and those who imagine that being intelligent and having something to say are enough have been known to fall flat on their faces when they try. With better warnings, or closer attention to warnings, they might have fared better. A thesis is not a dash for freedom: it can be an entry into an entirely unfamiliar world of restraint and not all beginners understand that by its nature it is a more confining exercise than answering a three-hour paper in an

Writing a thesis

examination room. A thesis needs to be rigorously shaped, for one thing; for another, it needs to be efficiently documented; and though a question written under examination-conditions is always the better for being shaped, no one expects it to be documented in scholarly sense. Writing a thesis is not a self-liberating choice, then. It is more like learning a game with new rules.

This book is about how to write scholarly prose, how to shape it, and how to document it. It is meant to stimulate literary and historical research on the one hand, and help towards disciplining it on the other; and if students of law, economics and the sciences can find profit in its advice, so much the better. It is based on the assumption that a thesis is not a kind of essay – certainly not an over-grown essay – and that those who imagine that an ability to write good essays has prepared them to write a thesis are inviting disappointment. A thesis is a radically different activity: more severely argued, more consistently documented, and more rigorously shaped and lucidly segmented. It cannot afford the loose style or arrangement of an essay: at least not beyond its first draft. It is something else. There is a quantum leap between the two forms, and this book exists to help the student to measure the effort that will be required of him and to train his mind to an unaccustomed task. This is a book for beginners – but for beginners who want to go on.

It begins with some general considerations and narrows as it continues, holding technicality at bay for as long as it can and segregating issues as severely as the nature of the argument allows. There is a well-known dilemma here which the book illustrates as well as debates: to omit the larger theoretical issues is to invite an easy objection that one is indifferent to the most vexed intellectual issues of the age; to discuss them is to attract the opposite complaint that sensible people are no longer interested in the fading theoretical

fervours of the 1960s. I have tried to meet both these objections, contradictory as they are, by beginning the book with chapters devoted to some of the wider motives of scholarship and its more momentous hopes and fears – Part One ‘The approach’ – followed by a second part entitled ‘The techniques’ where more specific problems are signposted by explanatory titles. No need then to assume that the book is best read in the order in which it is presented. It is one of the most essential arts of scholarship to learn how to quarry a book efficiently for what one wants to learn from it; and some chapters here, such as ‘The lure of theory’ or ‘Editing a text’, can be sidestepped by anyone incurious about critical theory or indifferent to the charms of editorship.

Some of these remarks began as lectures to undergraduates reading English at Cambridge or to graduate students in English and Modern Languages there and they have profited in all sorts of ways from their earnest and sceptical attention. Disagreement is the liveliest form of flattery as they knew and the only useful form; and close attention is not to be confused with assent. It is out of their attention and disagreement that this book has grown and flourished and I dedicate it in gratitude to my Cambridge pupils. And my thanks are due also to Renford Bambrough and Christopher Ricks for letting me share their seminars and their advice.

G. W.

St John’s College Cambridge

October 1985

PART ONE

The approach

An equal expression of what the world knows and what the world does not know will not be read by the world.

Walter Bagehot

CHAPTER ONE

Why scholars write

Whatever may be the present extent of human knowledge, it is not only finite, and therefore in its own nature capable of increase, but so narrow, that almost every understanding may by a diligent application of its powers hope to enlarge it.

It is however, not necessary that a man should forbear to write, till he has discovered some truth unknown before; he may be sufficiently useful by only diversifying the surface of knowledge, and luring the mind by a new appearance to a second view of those beauties which it had passed over inattentively before. Every writer may find intellects correspondent to his own, to whom his expressions are familiar, and his thoughts congenial; and perhaps truth is often more successfully propagated by men of moderate abilities who, adopting the opinions of others, have no care but to explain them clearly, than by subtle speculatists and curious searchers, who exact from their readers powers equal to their own, and if their fabrics of science be strong, take no care to render them accessible. . .

If we apply to authors themselves for an account of their state, it will appear very little to deserve envy; for they have in all ages been addicted to complaint. The neglect of learning, the ingratitude of the present age, and the absurd preference by which ignorance and dullness often obtain favour and

rewards have been from age to age topics of invective and few have left their names to posterity, without some appeal to future candour from the perverseness and malice of their own times.

I have nevertheless been often inclined to doubt whether authors, however querulous are in reality more miserable than their fellow mortals. The present life is to all a state of infelicity every man like any author believes himself to merit more than he obtains and solaces the present with the prospect of the future: others, indeed, suffer those disappointments in silence of which the writer complains to shew how well he has learnt the art of lamentation. . .

It frequently happens that a design which, when considered at a distance, gave flattering hopes of facility, mocks us in the execution with unexpected difficulties; the mind which, while it considered it in the gross, imagined itself amply furnished with materials, finds sometimes an unexpected barrenness and vacuity, and wonders whither all those ideas are vanished, which a little before seemed struggling for emission.

Sometimes many thoughts present themselves; but so confused and unconnected that they are not without difficulty reduced to method, or concatenated in a regular and dependent series: the mind falls at once into a labyrinth of which neither the beginning nor end can be discovered, and toils and struggles without progress or extrication. . .

It is one of the common distresses of a writer to be within a word of a happy period, to want only a single epithet to give amplification its full force, to require only a correspondent term in order to finish a paragraph with elegance and make one of its members answer to the other: but these deficiencies cannot always be supplied; and after long study and vexation, the passage is turned anew and the web unwoven that was nearly finished.

But when thoughts and words are collected and adjusted, and the whole composition at last concluded, it seldom gratifies the author, when he comes coolly and deliberately to review it, with the hopes which had been excited in the fury of the performance: novelty always captivates the mind; as our thoughts rise fresh upon us, we readily believe them just and original, which, when the pleasure of production is over, we find to be mean and common, or borrowed from the works of others, and supplied by memory rather than

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invention.

But though it should happen that the writer finds no such faults in his performance he is still to remember that he looks upon it with partial eyes and when he considers how much men who could judge of others with great exactness have often failed in judging of themselves, he will be afraid of deciding too hastily in his own favour, or of allowing himself to contemplate with too much complacency treasure that has not yet been brought to the test, nor passed the only trial that can stamp its value.

Samuel Johnson, *The Adventurer* nos 137 – 8 (February – March 1754)

A thesis is a first attempt to be a scholar.

Why, then, do scholars write? The answer, which is not always entirely obvious to a beginner, is to declare a discovery that what the world needs and will take note of – usually by publishing it. The scholar declares a discovery the world has some use for. His activity is not merely decorative, that is to say, or self-educative – even though the thesis is nowadays rightly seen as a prime educative device. Nor is what he writes to be judged by its sincerity, since a view can be thoroughly sincere and thoroughly useless. Unlike a student essay, a thesis exists *for others*. In intention, at least, it is to be used by somebody else. If it succeeds, it will have an existence beyond the interests of its author and some one will be grateful for it who knows and cares nothing of its author.

It is here at the start and before the topic is chosen, that the thesis diverges from the student essay, or from class-teaching and ordinary literary and historical conversation. It exists, or tries to exist, in its own right. It is not an expression of personal enthusiasm, however much its origins may lie there and it is not at least in its purpose self-revelatory. It is the product of a workshop, not of a playground. Even if it is never published, it ought (ideally speaking) to be publishable at

least in part and even if in the event it is not publishable it ought at least to look as if it is trying to be that. It seeks and welcomes the discipline of other minds.

That discipline is bracing as well as humbling and scholars – even as beginners – necessarily write in some awareness of other minds. They expect even crave the criticism of others. To be criticized after all, however sternly is to be noticed and to be noticed in that world is to succeed. A thesis asks to be criticized and it is built with a view to stand criticism much as a ship is built for the open sea. What scholars properly and rationally fear is not criticism but neglect that what they write will be seen as so obscure so trivial or so trite that no one will criticize it at all.

The scholar writes then to attract attention to a view. He cannot, like the author of a student essay, reasonably expect any interest in himself as person in the first instance and it is wise to assume no such thing. An essay or student paper can be written for a captive audience – often an audience of one. A thesis by contrast is a first attempt at something radically different in that it aspires to interest those who know and care nothing for its author but who care about his theme. Like a poem or a novel it struggles to exist for itself and in its own right.

Writing is a craft, even an art; and like other crafts and arts – carpentry or music, for example – it is learnt in stages. To write a thesis often marks the apprenticeship of a scholar: a period of transition where, though still a student, he is eagerly and hopefully demonstrating a claim to be something more. That is the sense in which it is almost necessarily an ambiguous exercise. Being a student, its author is accustomed to the attention of a teacher and usually to a sympathetic attention. But he is also and for the first time writing for the world or for some little part of it. And that is something he may

be unaccustomed to doing or even trying to do. The revelation that the world can be indifferent to a work composed laboriously and out of sincere conviction may be a harsh one and often is. It is always hard to realize that intensity of conviction of itself validates nothing. It can all too easily be seen as worthless :worthless not because it is false , since many false views are of vital importance in scholarly debate ,but because it is trite. That realization may be called the hard landing of the apprentice scholar :to be told that his view ,though earnestly and even passionately held ,is of no interest to others. The student ,as opposed to the scholar ,is not used to being spoken to in that way. He is used to being encouraged. The scholar by contrast ,is entirely used to it. He is told it by implication every day of his life :when an editor or publisher returns a manuscript ,when a letter of enquiry goes unanswered ,or when a new and influential study by another scholar treats his own work as if it had never existed.

Like other kinds of authorship ,scholarship is full of hard landings. It is not by nature a sympathetic world ,or under any obligation to be so. It encourages ,if at all ,by criticism ,it tests theses to destruction. None of that will deter the enthusiast for learning ,who by definition will already know what it is to test-to-destruction the views of published scholars ,and this book is written for just such enthusiasts , and by one.

Research can be fun. But it is fun only to those who know what it is and how it is run ,and it makes no sense to enter a profession ,or even to try to enter one ,without noticing in advance the conditions that prevail there. Most people associate with authors the epithet ' struggling ' ,and a struggle is what authorship necessarily is , especially at the start. No one will be interested in your views merely because they are yours. They will have to be presented lucidly ,in correct formal dress ,in a total awareness of the climate of opinion they