

transmuting experience into art, using a life-changing event to trigger the creative process.’ In every case, we register the writer at the desk, gazing out of a window, moving around the house, firing up a start, then pausing to question the process; wriggling against the necessity of labouring to a pre-ordained conclusion, labouring for money. An imaginative flourish will stall into reverie, into reaching for a supporting quote from some respected predecessor in the game: Virginia Woolf, Kafka, Herman Melville, Borges, Wittgenstein. Otherwise, writers must become teachers. Kavenna: ‘Yes, Anthony was also a tutor.’ Josipovici: ‘My frustration went on through my two years of graduate work and my first two years as an Assistant Lecturer in the newly formed University of Sussex.’ Markovits: ‘I’ve been teaching now for about ten years and there’s a line I use on students to describe what seems to me difficult about writing . . . But novels are about things happening, and so when we start writing fiction there’s this gap we have to bridge between the uneventfulness of our experience and the drama that we think is supposed to take place on the page.’

Where then is the truth, the true imprint of experience? Where is the author in all this? W. G. Sebald and Roberto Bolaño tease us with apparent versions of themselves in fictions that behave like reportage, or essays as playful as novels. We make those identifications at our peril. ‘*Real*,’ Bolaño wrote, in *A Little Lumpen Novelita*, ‘only stands for a different kind of unreality.’