



US artist retypes Amis's *Lucky Jim* verbatim

Tim Youd is copying out Kingsley Amis's classic of academic life on the same typewriter it was written on, at the University of Leicester campus that inspired it – the 32nd novel he has recreated

Alison Flood



Tim Youd retyping Charles Bukowski's *Post Office*, at the Terminal Annex Post Office, downtown LA. Photograph: Tim Youd.

American artist Tim Youd has found his own way of getting to grips with Kingsley Amis's campus novel *Lucky Jim*: he is retyping the comic story, word for word, on an Adler Universal typewriter, the same model used by the late novelist.

Youd's own particular brand of close reading began this week in the David Wilson Library on the University of Leicester campus. It is part of an art project to retype 100 classic novels that has already spanned three years, and seen the artist take on works from William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* at the author's home in Oxford, Mississippi, to Charles Bukowski's *Post Office*, typed out in a rented pickup truck in the car park of the post office where Bukowski once worked.

Youd chose Leicester for *Lucky Jim* because Amis had visited his friend Philip Larkin – to whom the novel is dedicated – at the university, while the poet was working there as an assistant librarian. That visit was the inspiration for

CRISTIN TIERNEY

Amis's much-loved tale of Jim Dixon and his bumpy career in the history department.

Lucky Jim is the 32nd novel Youd has taken on, and he is currently 70 pages in. The experience, he says, does make him view the works in a different light. "I've read everything before I retype it, so the suspense is gone. The appreciation happens on a deeper level. I get to examine the structure, the style in the course of the most active form of reading ... I get really deep into it, I can't type as fast as I read, so I have to go slowly," he said. "At its heart, the performance is a devotional exercise. It is an extreme, perhaps slightly absurd dedication to the author's words."

Youd promised that he isn't tempted to skip any of the text. "The key for me is to keep it from becoming mindless. I am doing the performance to get as deep a reading of the work as I can," he said. "When Hunter S Thompson" – whose Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas is part of the project – "decided he wanted to be a writer, he copied out Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises and Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, so that he might truly absorb great writing. I aspire to that same level of absorption."



The artist, who is represented by the Los Angeles-based gallery Coagula Curatorial, types the texts on to a single sheet of paper backed up by an extra sheet, running the paper through the typewriter - which is always the same model the author would have used - again and again, until every word is retyped. Once he has finished, the two pages are separated and mounted as a diptych.

Youd retyping William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* at Faulkner's home in Oxford, Mississippi. Photograph: Robert Jordan/UM Communications

CRISTIN TIERNEY

“I’ve used text and literature in my art for over a decade, so this project is an organic outgrowth of that,” he said. “More specifically, I realised that for all these years that I have been reading, I have been looking at, on a formal level, two rectangles of black text, each enclosed within the larger rectangles of the two pages, so I thought about heightening that formal quality by putting all the words from all the pages into one rectangle.”

While he is in the UK, Youd will also be retyping Anthony Burgess’s *A Clockwork Orange* on an Olympia SM5 at the Manchester Central Library, Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* in St Ives, and Woolf’s *Orlando* at Monk’s House in Rodmell, Sussex.